

**The Dilution of Avant-Garde Subcultural Boundaries in Network  
Society**

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# **The Dilution of Avant-Garde Subcultural Boundaries in Network Society**

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## Summary

This dissertation identifies the diluting effects that network society has had on the avant-garde subcultures, by first building a framework through which to understand the social structure and spatial production of the historical avant-garde, and then comparing this with contemporary avant-garde movements. The avant-garde is a cultural tradition that originated in modern 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe and North America, that critically responds to hegemonic power structures and mainstream cultural assumptions. I use the term “avant-garde subcultures” because my research focuses on the entire social group of the avant-garde. Most scholarship on the avant-garde has overlooked the importance that social relations, in particular supportive actors, and collaborative spaces have served in the creativity of the avant-garde. During the past twenty years, as society has shifted into a dependence on networked interactive technologies, the boundaries which protect these avant-garde spaces and social relations were diluted. As a result, avant-garde subcultures have entered a phase of recursively repeating themselves and culturally stagnating.

I begin by reviewing the historical avant-garde and subcultures, building an overarching theory that explains that avant-garde is a type of subculture. Using past scholarship that maps the conceptual lineage from early bohemians to 1970s

punk rock, I synthesize a set of traits which all avant-garde subcultures exhibit, and which can be used to build their genealogy. I then extend this genealogy to contemporary art practitioners, to prove that the avant-garde tradition continues to this day.

Next, I develop a philosophical understanding of the importance of space for hegemonic power structures, based largely on the work of Henri Lefebvre. I explain how avant-garde subcultures produce spaces of representation in the cafes, bars and night clubs they inhabit, which challenge hegemony by being different from normal values and aesthetics. I reference first-hand accounts of these spaces of representation, to show how they enable the collaboration and creative thinking that is most often associated with the avant-garde. The avant-garde protect these spaces through a set of cultural boundaries: fashion, slang, esoteric knowledge, accumulation, and physical space.

Manuel Castell's concept of network society depicts how hegemonic power structures have become pervasive, and thus can overcome the boundaries of avant-garde subcultures. As a result, avant-garde subcultures have increasingly become retrogressive and fluid. Some avant-garde practitioners, such as tactical media, have evolved methods for addressing these problems. While these are effective in continuing the avant-garde tradition of introducing difference, there are no adequate methods for producing new spaces of representation. I examine Eyebeam, an arts and technology center, which has since 1997 provided a space for many contemporary practitioners. While unique in its circumstances,

Eyebeam has adopted several processes which have enabled it to overcome the diluting effects of network society, thereby providing a potential model for building future spaces of representation.

## **I. Introduction: The Dilution of Avant-Garde Subcultures**

Although avant-garde subcultural spaces still exist, in the past decade their production has become complicated by digital media. The avant-garde considered here is a cultural lineage that began in the early modern cities of Europe and the Americas and continues to this day around the world. Its artworks challenge societal norms and values, and it encompasses a variety of groups and media practices from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today. My research focuses on the social structures of the avant-garde, which, as I will explain, operate as subcultures within larger society. I consider the spaces in which these subcultures congregate to be a vital element in the development of their social and cultural capital, and essential to their phases of incubation and evolution. These spaces serve as sites for socializing, establishing a subcultural identity, and engaging in the economy of subcultural capital. Historically this occurred in cafés, bars, clubs, shops, and other physical locations, but in the past decade, it has transitioned to either a completely online activity or a hybrid mixture of physical and virtual elements. This has resulted in three new problematic phenomena which I will discuss in detail: 1) the dilution of boundaries with the resulting ease of access to the subculture's esoteric knowledge and practices; 2) the increased speed of recuperation of subcultural products into mass culture with the resulting dilution of subcultural identity; and 3) the shift to a fluid and fragmented social

membership. By explaining how these phenomena complicate the processes of producing and preserving avant-garde subcultures, I am able to then suggest methods to counter them while continuing to integrate digital media into avant-garde subcultural practices.

Digital media has borrowed extensively from the theories and practices of the avant-garde, and therefore the future of the avant-garde is of importance to its own research and development. For example, the writings of Oulipo and the cut-up techniques of Bryon Gysin and William Burroughs are considered predecessors to interactive fiction (reference). Ubiquitous computing research cites the Situationist techniques of *dérive* and *détournement* in discussions of space and interactivity.<sup>1</sup> The concept of *détournement*, a practice of subverting the semiotic meaning of a mainstream product, which I will discuss at length in this dissertation, had influence on some practices of computer hacking <sup>2</sup>. Avant-garde subcultures continue to have a large impact upon digital media, as noted by the research of Fred Turner into Google's intensive participation in Burning Man. Turner shows that Burning Man provides a space for networking (their former CEO Eric Schmidt was selected in part for his attendance at the festival reference) and for conceptualizing new technologies. Turner explains Burning Man "as a key

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<sup>1</sup> Paolos, Eric, Ken Townsend, and Antony Anderson. "Urban Computing Workshop Proceedings.pdf," 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Wark, McKenzie. *50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International*. Reprint edition. New York; London: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012. 32



cultural infrastructure for the Bay Area's new media industries.” (reference) This is unsurprising, as my research will show the role avant-garde subcultural spaces play in providing a place to escape everyday life and in becoming inspired by new forms of creativity.

Although Burning Man is an example of the benefits of the avant-garde for digital media, it is important to distinguish it as a festival held by subcultures, and not what I consider an avant-garde space. I draw a distinction between spaces such as festivals temporarily occupy, and spaces that, like the cafés and clubs of the avant-garde, are used by participants on a daily basis. The latter, which I refer to as *spaces of representation*, provide the structures necessary to accumulate social and cultural capital, necessary for the evolution of the subculture. Burning Man and similar festivals exist as temporary spaces, and enable an experience of a subculture, but are left behind after the festival finishes. In contrast, avant-garde subcultural spaces foster community and acquire art through performances, exhibited work, works being created on site, and various other forms. Each of these spaces serves as the nexus of what I consider a thought community, a small group of people engaged in shared intellectual activities. For example, Fumistes performed at bars in the Montmartre neighborhood of Paris, Dada was founded in a café in Switzerland, and the heart of American punk was around the Lower East Side clubs like CBGBs. Henri Lefebvre's theories on space help explain the different purposes that festivals and avant-garde subcultural spaces serve in society. Lefebvre explains that festivals throughout history have served as an important release of pressure from everyday life: they are something

which we look forward to all year, and they enable us to endure the aspects of everyday life we do not enjoy. Yet, as Lefebvre explains, producing changes to everyday life requires engaging in this change every day, not on a temporary basis. Similarly, in order for the avant-garde to develop habits which contradict the everyday life of mainstream society, they require a consistent space to inhabit.

My research shows that when occupying spaces of representation, avant-garde subcultures introduce change on three dimensions: the personal, the cultural, and the societal. Avant-garde subcultures produce personal change by providing what J. Patrick Williams calls spaces of non-normativity, that give individuals agency to express difference from the mainstream (reference). I use the works of avant-garde theorists (Burger, Poggioli, Mann) to explain the role recuperation serves in the cultural changes that avant-garde subcultures bring about. I have already mentioned some of these with regards to digital media; another aspect would be the recuperation of aesthetics into the mainstream, such as that of punk fashion being featured by the MET Museum in a fashion exhibit entitled Punk: From Chaos to Couture (reference). Regarding societal changes, it is difficult to credit avant-garde subcultures with any specific societal changes, although they are often progenitors of certain values. While I would personally argue that avant-garde subcultures have effects upon society, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to make such a claim.

Although I am avoiding the societal dimensions of changes introduced by subcultures, it is important to understand the methods by which subcultures counteract cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony is explained by Antonio Gramsci as the method by which power is maintained through mainstream media and culture. Gramsci explains how culture enables the propagation of the elite's belief systems and values throughout society. I consider those cultures which broadcast values and information that contrast and subvert mainstream media and culture to be engaging in a counter-hegemony. By broadcasting any non-dominant perspective, subcultures are countering those in power, and inciting alternatives to them. It is in this counter-hegemony that subcultures take on a political structure, even when the politics of different subcultures can vary greatly. Hebdige, draws largely from Marxist theories on class to situate his study of subcultures, and I do not agree fully with his assertion that subcultures exist in opposition to capitalism<sup>3</sup>, but I am rather of the opinion that counter-hegemony introduces difference. As my section on recuperation will describe, the generation of difference can prove lucrative within capitalist society.

A second aspect of the politics of subculture which I will investigate is their establishment of what Lefebvre terms spaces of resistance. Lefebvre describes the processes by which the production of space ingrains power structures within it, focusing on the methods by which urban spaces develop a dependence upon the

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<sup>3</sup> Muggleton, David. *Inside Subculture the Postmodern Meaning of Style*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000. 5

political systems which maintain them. Lefebvre provides a political dimension to space, explaining the implicit hegemony in city planning. Yet, resistance can develop in what he terms spaces of representation, sites that enable the expression of a specific set of values. In this manner, subcultural spaces represent a set of values that oppose hegemony, even while serving as sites of entertainment and leisure. For example, while the Mudd Club was a cultural spot for trendy NYC nightlife, by being queer friendly they also revealed an underlying value system that was in contrast to that of mainstream society. Assuming that Turner is correct, and festivals are important for new media giants like Google, an important question is why people are attending festivals, while not developing and engaging in subcultural spaces in their own cities. I suggest that festivals provide the spectacle of being in a subculture without the difficulties of incorporating resistance into daily life.

The importance of space for avant-garde subcultures has received very little attention by academics in cultural studies. In *What Comes After the Hipster*, Robert Sloane provides an answer that mentions space: “subcultures generally need physical spaces to grow in, because they involve a way of life, not just a set of tastes shared over a communication device. Otherwise, they are more accurately described as ‘taste cultures,’ which may be a better term for the hipster.” Sloane distinguishes subcultures such as punk from the more recent cultural phenomenon of the hipster by their lacking a “way of life”, which I understand to be an encompassing politics and value system. Sloane correlates the production of a “way of life” to having a physical space. However, there

remain many urban spaces available to occupy, but these spaces are being abandoned in preference for those spaces afforded by what Sloane calls communication devices, which I understand as virtual and hybrid spaces. Dougal Sheridan's article *The Space of Subculture in the City: Getting Specific about Berlin's Indeterminate Territories* engages the avant-garde subcultural practice of occupying abandoned spaces from an architectural perspective. Sheridan notes the creative transformations that the various occupying art groups had on an abandoned factory, and its subsequent benefits to the neighborhood. Yet, none of these authors engage in understanding the spatial practice of the avant-garde, an element I develop, and which I believe has been negatively affected by the dilution of boundaries in network society.

Digital media theory, with its breadth of encompassing disciplines, is ideal for investigating avant-garde subcultures and their spatial practices, and then identifying the affect of digital media upon them. While cultural studies have discussed changes in subculture in the postmodern era (Muggleton, Gelder, Bennett, Williams), and pointed to space as an integral part of subculture (Sloane, Tucker), I find that digital media theories of virtual and hybrid spaces are relevant to the conversation and have often been ignored. In particular, I utilize theories of absent presence (Gergen), online social networks (Boyd, Marwick, Turkle) and network society (Castells) to show qualitative differences between physical and virtual or hybrid spaces. My aim is to connect the phenomenon noted by these digital media theorists to the loss of boundary, of establishing definition and difference, in contemporary subcultures. I explain

that it is this loss of boundary which produces the contemporary subcultural phenomenon of fluidity and temporariness (Muggleton, Bennett.) In addition, I explain the increased speed of recuperation caused by distribution networks moving to online spaces. In doing so, I rely on firsthand accounts of contemporary practitioners' strategies and struggles working in the digital era, from the more theoretically disciplined (FFFAT Lab, Paper Rad) to the more youth-focused subcultures (Seapunk, Vaporwave, Health Goth), as I consider both groups successors of the avant-garde tradition.

In the next chapter, I provide a literature review of the theories and concepts that I base my argument upon. I commence with an overview of cultural theorists (Hebdige, Hall and Jefferson), contemporary youth studies (Bennett, Gelder, Muggleton, Williams), and urban geography (Lefebvre, Graham) to establish subcultures as social formations with a set of shared traits and cultural practices. I agree with Williams' symbolic interactionist perspective on subcultures, which establishes the important relationship between those inside a subculture and the outer mainstream.

For this reason, scholarly work around describing subcultures as criminal organizations, taste cultures, countercultures, and youth cultures, while inaccurate, has had an impact upon subcultural identity. I acknowledge that there exists a great diversity between different subcultures, and that my own field of expertise is on those engaged around avant-garde cultural practices. This position is interdisciplinary, as it frames social structures (subcultures) within an art

historical perspective (the avant-garde). I develop this position utilizing the cultural lineage of the early avant-garde art of Montmartre to the punk musicians of London and New York City (Gendron, Marcus), extending it into contemporary-era cultural practitioners such as Paper Rad, The Yes Men, and FFFAT Lab. By synthesizing the work of avant-garde theorists (Bürger, Călinescu, Foster, Poggioli, and Mann), I develop a set of four traits of the avant-garde (Against Primacy, Provocation of the Public, Elitism and Alienation, Death) that I utilize to prove the theoretical link between the historical avant-garde and these contemporary practitioners. Meanwhile, I acknowledge that the term avant-garde was developed by the very institutions of art which many of its practitioners were themselves opposed to, and thereby it is a component of the recuperation of these cultural practices into mainstream culture.

Having described avant-garde subcultures, in Chapter 3 I shift to the role of space in the production and preservation of subcultures. I use Lefebvre's theories of spaces of representation to explain the cycle by which cultural groups produce spaces based upon their values, and how these spaces develop the groups' identity. I use firsthand accounts from avant-garde subcultures to illustrate the importance of their physical sites to them. Next, I compare spaces of resistance with Foucault's concept of heterotopias, incorporating other scholars' work of heterotopias of resistance (Kohn) and third spaces (Soja). I ground these concepts of spaces of resistance and heterotopias in the discipline of urban geography, explaining how they function to counter hegemonic spaces (Gramsci, Lefebvre.) In doing so, I suggest that avant-garde subcultures produce spaces

that not only critique society and everyday life, but further contest hegemony. As Foucault explains, such heterotopias require spatial boundaries to distinguish them from their enclosing bodies, a subject that I set up for the following chapter. Next I introduce Castell's theories of network society to explain the effects that digital media have had upon society. I engage the work of theorists in online social networks (Boyd, Marwick) to show that there are differences in the structures of communities when they utilize digital media. Using the work of Gergen, I provide an understanding of absent presence, in which participants are partially elsewhere, and the effect that this has upon engagement in physical space. In each of these I rely upon accounts of avant-garde practitioners to illustrate these effects upon their communities.

Chapter 4 examines the boundary as a fundamental component of avant-garde subculture and its dilution by digital media. I explain Pierre Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital, which are the primary forms of capital generated by avant-garde subcultures. I extend the theory of subcultural capital by sociologist Sarah Thornton, to show the underlying hierarchies within subcultures, and to explain the traditional system of recuperation, in which a few people profit by exchanging social and cultural capital for financial capital. Then I review five different forms of boundary (Slang, Fashion, Accumulation, Esoteric Knowledge, and Physical Space) that avant-garde subcultures use to protect their capital. I explain how each of these is important in facilitating the evolution of subcultures, therefore enabling the advancement of new cultural ideas which the avant-garde are often credited for.



In Chapter 5, I contrast these boundaries with the contemporary avant-garde to show how the properties of network society (realized abstraction, access, absent presence, and homogenization of culture) have diluted these boundaries. I begin by examining the recuperation of Seapunk, a contemporary subculture, by hip hop star Rihanna. I investigate Seapunk's peculiar reaction to the recuperation, by following the argument made by artist Jacob Ciocci that Seapunk "ride[s] the wave", essentially enjoying any fruits from the attention, while abandoning the genre and starting another one. This strategy of riding the wave addresses two noted phenomena of contemporary subcultures: fluidity and retromania. Fluidity is a phenomena noted by subcultural scholars, in which contemporary subculturalists (Muggleton, Bennett) no longer adhere to a specific group style such as punk or hippie, but select styles that express their individual selves. Retromania is a theory proposed by music critic Simon Reynolds to describe contemporary culture's fixation with the past. I use Reynold's work to launch into an investigation of the hipster, which I conclude is more of a societal shift than a subculture. Instead, I find that successors of the avant-garde are still operating, but as internet subcultures, meaning that they gather and share work through online websites such as Tumblr and Instagram. Finally I return to the forms of boundary discussed in Chapter 4, using specific instances from contemporary culture to explain how they have been affected by network society.

Having established a theory of boundaries, and having explained both their importance to avant-garde cultural production and their dilution in network

society, Chapter 6 examines potential future directions towards remedying the dilution of boundaries. I look at the work of practitioners in tactical media who have become adept at a swarm approach to countering hegemony, both utilizing news media to disperse their work, and open-source to share their tactics. I suggest that while tactical media provides new methods for coping with network society, it does not manage to produce new spaces of representation. However, many tactical media artists themselves have been engaged with Eyebeam Arts and Technology Center in New York City. I suggest that Eyebeam itself is a model for producing spaces of representation in network society, and I investigate how Eyebeam has confronted the diluting properties of network society. I conclude with the direction of future work, which is to further research other spaces of representation and formalize methods for producing them that do not require large monetary resources.

## II. The History of the Avant-Garde and Subcultures

On March 15<sup>th</sup> 2013, a crowd of approximately 75 attended the Vaporwave *SPF420* house party in Austin, Texas as part of the annual music festival *South By Southwest (SXSW)*. Vaporwave is an internet-based subculture whose members consider themselves the digital-age version of punk rockers. Unlike the gatherings of their predecessors, Vaporwave gatherings had been exclusively held online up until this festival. In fact, until the SXSW festival, Vaporwave was an exclusively online subculture, with its members meeting and hanging out together in chat windows, sharing music through streaming sites such as Turntable.FM and growing a community of friendships and shared values online. Even after SXSW, Vaporwave continues to prefer the online space; its founding members are self-professed introverts,<sup>4</sup> and its members claim an anti-IRL stance.<sup>5</sup> SXSW has grown to be one of the pre-eminent festivals for emerging

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<sup>4</sup> “SPF420 Are Internet Stoner Punks Who Want To Change Live-Stream Clubbing | THUMP.” Accessed January 5, 2015. [http://thump.vice.com/en\\_uk/words/spf420-are-internet-stoner-punks-who-want-to-change-live-stream-clubbing](http://thump.vice.com/en_uk/words/spf420-are-internet-stoner-punks-who-want-to-change-live-stream-clubbing).

<sup>5</sup> “SPF420 Are Internet Stoner Punks Who Want To Change Live-Stream Clubbing | THUMP.” Accessed January 5, 2015. [http://thump.vice.com/en\\_uk/words/spf420-are-internet-stoner-punks-who-want-to-change-live-stream-clubbing](http://thump.vice.com/en_uk/words/spf420-are-internet-stoner-punks-who-want-to-change-live-stream-clubbing).

music, and the entry of Vaporwave into the festival, with financial sponsorship from Sailor Jerry Liquors, is a sign that the subculture has caught the attention of the entertainment industry and has developed from being an obscure subculture to being an emerging trend. Vaporwave is significant to this dissertation because it is a subculture in the avant-garde tradition. In contrast to previous avant-garde subcultures, digital technologies such as instant access to unlimited music, audio editing softwares, and global shared live streaming and chat have enabled Vaporwave artists to discover each other, form a social group, and put together music festivals while physically being located all over the world. The aesthetic of Vaporwave is similar to that of other emerging genres such as Witch House, Seapunk, and Health Goth, a detoured pop-music that has been manipulated into what the Chicago Reader compared to “outmoded computer renderings in toxic DayGlo colors.”<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that each of the aforementioned genres have also been very short lived, with artists hopping from one genre to the next in quick succession. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, this succession between genres yields an ambiguity of naming, that for these groups is an intentional effect. Due to this ambiguity, I will use specific names, such as Vaporwave, when referring to an individual group, and use *internet subcultures* to refer to the larger group.

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<sup>6</sup> “Vaporwave and the Observer Effect.” *Chicago Reader*. Accessed May 19, 2014. <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/vaporwave-spf420-chaz-allen-metallic-ghosts-prismcorp-veracom/Content?oid=8831558>.

Vaporware cites itself as a new form of punk, and in regard to their aesthetic they are correct. One of the key producers, a woman who goes only by Liz, describes Vaporwave as “our current ‘punk scene’. The digital rebels. The ones who ‘steal’ others’ music, just to manipulate it and chop it up a bit. That is so fucking punk. It’s like how punk bands only knew how to play power chords.”<sup>7</sup> Understanding the traits by which Vaporwave qualifies as an avant-garde subculture, but also the ways in which Vaporwave is different from previous subcultures, is one of the goals of this dissertation. Vaporwave claims itself to be a descendant of punk and their aesthetic has been associated with the Situationist *détournement*,<sup>8</sup> where mainstream culture is edited to convey alternative and oftentimes subversive messages. Similar to the historical avant-garde, Vaporwave appears to want no part in the institutions of entertainment and art, but to produce a radical space of their own, on their own terms.

One key difference between internet subcultures and their avant-garde predecessors, like the Situationist International, is in the former’s lack of engagement in physical spaces. This dissertation investigates the reasons

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<sup>7</sup> “Interview: SPF420 | GUMBALL.” *Gumballmag*. Accessed May 19, 2014. <http://gumballmag.com/music/interview-spf420/>.

<sup>8</sup> Debord, Guy, and Gil J. Wolman. “A User’s Guide to *Détournement*.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/usersguide.html>.

why avant-garde spaces have become disrupted in network society, by examining the social structures and spaces these groups produce, and their relation to mainstream culture. While previous internet subcultures favored online to IRL presence, Vaporwave has made it a primary aspect of their aesthetics, making them one of the best examples to investigate the phenomenon.

The Vaporwave community started in 2011 on *Turntable.FM*, a website where people could gather in shared virtual spaces and take turns playing music for each other. When *Turntable.FM* was shut down because they were unable to make a profit while following the music industry's regulations on music streaming,<sup>9</sup> the Vaporwave community migrated first to *YouTube* and later to *TinyChat*. In this migration across virtual space, Vaporwave is quite different from past avant-garde subcultures such as punk, which often occupied and fought for their spaces such as *ABC No Rio* and *924 Gilman*. It is my contention that online spaces do not provide the same affordances, nor do they have the same critical value as physical spaces do, a fact that I will discuss throughout the dissertation, but to which I do not believe there are clear answers.

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<sup>9</sup> "Turntable.fm Shuts down for Good as Founder Launches New Social App." *The Verge*. Accessed May 20, 2014. <http://www.theverge.com/2014/3/19/5526484/turntable-fm-founder-shuts-down-his-music-startup-and-launches-new>.

In this chapter I combine sociological texts on subcultures and critical texts on avant-garde to develop a critical understanding of subcultures engaged in the avant-garde, the traits shared between these groups, and the role of social networks and spaces in their practices. I acknowledge some of the problematic aspects of the term avant-garde and explain my reasoning in using it as a modifier of particular subcultures. By positioning subcultures as cultural phenomena that exist as smaller units of the mainstream culture, I establish the relationship between subculture and the mainstream as being interwoven cultures within the same society. This is based upon the theory of *communications interlock*, that mainstream culture and subcultures are interlocked through various communications mediums, influencing each other in an assortment of manner. This communications interlock has existed since the beginning of the avant-garde subcultures, and continues to this day with internet subcultures.

I leverage the cultural lineage established by Bernard Gendron in *Montmartre to the Mudd Club* and by Greil Marcus in *Lipstick Traces*, each of which connects early bohemian groups to late 20<sup>th</sup> century punk. However, to extend this lineage to contemporary cultural practitioners, and to contextualize these groups as avant-garde within the academic discourse on the term, I create a framework based upon Foucault's understanding of genealogy. Genealogy is an alternate form of history that privileges the emergence of particular traits throughout history, over a

linear perspective of history. For example, Richard Hell was influenced by Charles Baudelaire, an author who had died a century prior to Hell's work. While there is a direct lineage between Hell and Baudelaire, it is one passed through culture rather than historical sequence. Therefore, constructing a linear history of the avant-garde that spans its entire existence would not accurately portray the passing on of avant-garde knowledge and practices. Instead, I synthesize the work of several avant-garde theorists to derive a set of traits the avant-garde all share, thus unveiling some of the continuity that exists between these disparate avant-garde subcultures. I rely upon these traits throughout this dissertation as a kind of litmus test to understand what the avant-garde is, and therefore to understand how it has changed.

One method of understanding the changes within the avant-garde is by examining its members. Yet thus far there has not been any discussion about which people should be considered in avant-garde social studies. The social structure of the avant-garde is comprised of a variety of people. I consider not only art world celebrities such as Picasso or Jarry, music icons like Johnny Rotten or Charlie Parker to be part of this social structure, but I also consider the assortment of fans, producers, and unknown people who surrounded them to be of importance. Further, I broaden the scholarly scope on the avant-garde from its traditional focus on art history and criticism to include the avant-garde's enmeshment



within society. Thus I assume a sociological perspective on the persons, spaces, and practices that are engaged within it.

A similar strategy of perspective is the study of what Bernard Gendron describes as *secondary aesthetic practices*, those “aesthetic activities by artists not originally considered part of their ‘real oeuvre’ but that had considerable impact on the way the real oeuvre was originally received.”<sup>10</sup> These are actions by the artists themselves that support their work, but are not their masterpieces. Gendron provides the example of Toulouse-Lautrec’s posters for the Moulin Rouge,<sup>11</sup> likewise Burroughs’ letters to Ginsberg<sup>12</sup> could be considered as a secondary aesthetic practice. In the latter, the Burroughs letters provide more context and understanding to Burroughs’ writing and its intent. Similar to secondary aesthetic practices, I am interested in the social and spatial practices of the avant-garde: those places and social networks which are not part of the real oeuvre, but were essential in their production. For instance, I am interested in how the Beat Hotel in Paris (as a space) and its proprietor Madame Roucheau (a non-artist member of the community) were integral to the Beat authors. While

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<sup>10</sup> Gendron, Bernhard. *Between Montmartre and the Muddclub: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. Pr, 2002. 18

<sup>11</sup> Gendron, Bernhard. *Between Montmartre and the Muddclub: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. Pr, 2002. 62

<sup>12</sup> Burroughs, William S. *The Letters of William S. Burroughs, Vol. 1: 1945-1959*. First Paperback edition. New York: Penguin Books, 1994.

they have not been given much attention from the institution of art, I will show that the people and spaces of subcultures to which avant-garde artists belong, are crucial components to what enabled these artists to produce artistic masterpieces. In part, this lack of awareness of their importance has enabled the ease with which they have been disrupted by network society.

I have not found an existing academic study which incorporates these theories of space and social structures into an analysis of the avant-garde. Therefore, I have engaged in a transdisciplinary strategy using the research of two different fields to develop my own theoretical framework. While studies of subcultures have primarily been conducted within sociological disciplines, the theoretical discourse of the avant-garde has mostly occurred within comparative literature and critical theory. One difference between the two disciplines is that subcultural studies utilizes statistics, interviews, and personal experiences for their analysis, while critical theorists develop and expand upon philosophies largely derived from the cultural works of the artists. In combination, sociology provides an understanding for the people and places of the subculture, while art theory adds color, showing why these people and spaces were important to the cultural work that these subcultures produced.

Subcultural sociological studies centers around how subcultures operate within larger society (Hebdige), how individual members feel as members

in these subcultures (Muggleton), and what cultural behaviors they partake in (Thornton). They focus upon the social elements exhibited by the subculture such as their slang, style, and their social constructions of themselves and others. However, the political dynamics of gradually becoming a celebrity within the scene, of interacting with, or attempting to disrupt the commercial market, and the philosophical stance of their works are not being included in their discussions.

Critical theorists on the other hand, often begin by engaging the problematic term *avant-garde*, as it is applied by an institution, onto the artists. The theories of avant-garde are thus caught between defining the connections between these similar artists on the one hand, and exploring what it means to be engaged in this activity on the other. In my own studies, I have found many accounts of people who consider themselves punk or bohemian, but I have yet to find a person who self-identifies as avant-garde. Theories of the avant-garde are important for understanding the relation of avant-garde to larger cultural systems, yet ultimately, avant-garde theorists tend to focus on the big names in art and overlook the social networks that helped make their work possible. In this chapter I use a sociological perspective to show the relationship between subcultures and their parent cultures, and to display the traces, or historical connections, between different avant-garde subcultural groups. I then use key critical theorists of the avant-garde to synthesize a set of traits that these different groups share. This strategy proves that the traits of the

avant-garde found in early bohemian culture continue into contemporary subcultures.

There has been significant critique of the term avant-garde from within the institutions of art. The basis of the critique stems from Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde*, which states that "the [avant-garde] attack did make art recognizable as an institution and also revealed its (relative) inefficiency in bourgeois society."<sup>13</sup> Bürger argues that latter avant-garde movements (which he calls neo-avant-garde) are building upon politics which have already been recuperated by the institution of art, and therefore must work with the understanding that their work is part of these bourgeois institutions.<sup>14</sup> To Bürger, the avant-garde are *historical* because their critique of the institution has been recuperated.

Yet, Bürger's analysis fails in its evaluation of the neo-avant-garde, because it does not consider the integration of new politics, but rather sees them as more perfect reproductions of the historical avant-garde.<sup>15</sup> As

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<sup>13</sup> Bürger, Peter, and Jochen Schulte-Sasse. *Theory Of the Avant-Garde*. Translated by Michael Shaw. 1 edition. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1984.57

<sup>14</sup> Bürger, Peter, and Jochen Schulte-Sasse. *Theory Of the Avant-Garde*. Translated by Michael Shaw. 1 edition. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1984..57-60

<sup>15</sup> Bürger, Peter, and Jochen Schulte-Sasse. *Theory Of the Avant-Garde*. Translated by Michael Shaw. 1 edition. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1984.57-58

Evan Mauro argues in *The Death and Life of the Avant-garde: Or Modernism and Bio-politics*, the problem with Bürger's perspective is that it remains locked in the "anti-commodification critique of the 1960s."<sup>16</sup> Mauro argues that we must recognize that avant-garde struggles have changed to "contest global capitalism's extraction of surplus value and its organization of social reproduction, from occupations, anti-austerity and anti-privatization strikes, struggles against intellectual property regimes, right down to local phenomena like urban agriculture initiatives and community support networks."<sup>17</sup> Like Mauro, I consider the avant-garde to have evolved their critique to remain current with the world they are engaged in.

Duchamp's *The Fountain* is an example of this evolution of avant-garde critique. Originally questioning bourgeois assumptions of artistic value, it was later recuperated into an institutional art piece, where it has since been détourned yet again. Duchamp's *ready-mades* are everyday objects that are conceptually modified in an attempt to remove the aura around art and the artist.<sup>18</sup> Yet, considering the replica of *The Fountain* (the

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<sup>16</sup> Mauro, Evan. "The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde Or Modernism and Biopolitics," n.d.129

<sup>17</sup> Mauro, Evan. "The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde Or Modernism and Biopolitics," n.d. 135

<sup>18</sup> Saltz, Jerry. "Idol Thoughts: The Glory of Fountain, Marcel Duchamp's Ground-Breaking "Moneybags Piss Pot." Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2006-02-21/art/idol-thoughts/>.

original having been lost) was sold in 1999 by Sotheby's for \$1.7 million,<sup>19</sup> it is clear that the artwork has been recuperated into the institution of art, and achieved an aura of high value which it originally attempted to combat. It is recuperation like this that Bürger refers to in his claim that the avant-garde is historic. However in the year following the Sotheby's auction, and undoubtedly prompted by it, Cai Yuan and Jian Jun performed *Two Artists Piss on Duchamp's Urinal*<sup>20</sup>, a live performance in which the artists urinated on *The Fountain* while it was on display at the Tate Modern. By using the fountain in its original function, and by covering it in their urine, the artists attacked the aura the piece has acquired. *Two Artists Piss on Duchamp's Urinal* as a performance is itself recuperable, and therefore Bürger is partially accurate in asserting that the avant-garde is historical, yet I believe the argument is more complex than Bürger's engagement with it. Avant-garde critique may continually be in the process of becoming historic, but as this example shows, it is not a static critique, but an evolving one.

The avant-garde, as I understand them, are important to society in part because they are an evolving continual cultural critique of hegemony. The avant-garde inherits past strategies and approaches, while altering others

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<sup>19</sup> Ingalls, Christina. "'Fountain' by Marcel Duchamp." Accessed January 5, 2015. [https://ospace.otis.edu/cingallshonors/Fountain\\_by\\_Marcel\\_Duchamp](https://ospace.otis.edu/cingallshonors/Fountain_by_Marcel_Duchamp).

<sup>20</sup> "Cai Yuan and Jian Jun Xi - The Global Contemporary." Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.global-contemporary.de/en/artists/53-cai-yuan-a-jian-xi->.

when appropriate. It is tempting to emphasize the politics of the avant-garde such as André Breton's membership in the communist party. Indeed, many members of the avant-garde engage in political actions and activism at the same time, or following their time in the avant-garde. Yet the avant-garde as a whole has operated not as an organized political body, but in a more ambiguous manner: producing a space of differentiation from, and a critique of, mainstream society. This production of differentiation is by necessity one of the avant-garde's most social aspects. It requires the congregation of several people, sharing knowledge, social support, and engaging in critique. Only a group of people can maintain a social consistency and presence to produce the social structures that operate in contrast to the rest of society. Unfortunately, these social structures and non-normative spaces are overlooked in the art historical and critical theory narratives of the avant-garde. In the next section, I turn to sociology to provide a framework for understanding the processes by which subcultures produce difference and interact with society.

### **Subcultures are a Cultural Phenomenon**

Subcultures are smaller social structures within an enclosing parent society, and they are a *cultural phenomenon*, meaning that they use cultural cues to distinguish themselves as separate from the mainstream. While oftentimes these cultural cues are noticeable by the mainstream,

such as the punk hairstyle, and they are most often intended as intra-subcultural communication. In this section, I will examine the relationship between subcultures and the mainstream to show how they affect the other. I will explain that subcultures have developed traits that are partially derived from the mainstream perspective of them, including some of the sociological studies which have sought to define them.

While subcultures are affected by the mainstream, at the same time the mainstream appropriates subcultural aspects into itself. For instance, Pablo Picasso and Claude DeBussy, while initially lacking mainstream appeal, are now embraced by a majority of western culture. Recuperation is an important aspect of the effect avant-garde subcultures have upon society, and I will discuss this in detail later in this chapter. To protect themselves from recuperation, those within the subculture set up boundaries between themselves and the mainstream. I will be addressing subcultural boundaries in Chapter 4, but for now it is important to understand that while these boundaries exist, they remain porous. One aspect of this porosity is the changing membership of those inside an avant-garde subculture. J. Patrick Williams, author of *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts*, describes this relationship between subculture and mainstream as being a communications interlock, a



network of shared connections and meanings that exist between the two.<sup>21</sup> Williams explains the significance of communication interlocks in his definition of subculture, citing the modern primitive subculture as an example which solidified into a more defined subculture only after the publication of a high gloss photography book entitled *Modern Primitive*.<sup>22</sup> Williams describes how such books provide outsiders with opportunities to discover and eventually join the subculture.<sup>23</sup> Communication interlocks foster subcultures by raising their self-awareness and formalizing their aesthetics and values to their public image.

Similarly, Sarah Thornton's sociological study on raver culture entitled *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* posits that mainstream media plays a key authorial role in subcultures. "Contrary to youth subcultural ideologies, 'subcultures' do not germinate from a seed and grow by force of their own energy into mysterious 'movements' only to be belatedly digested by the media. Rather, media and other culture

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<sup>21</sup> Williams, J. Patrick. *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts*. 1 edition. Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2011. 41

<sup>22</sup> Vale, V., and Andrea Juno, eds. *Modern Primitives: Tattoo, Piercing, Scarification- An Investigation of Contemporary Adornment & Ritual*. 1st edition. San Francisco, CA: Re/search, 1989.

<sup>23</sup> Williams, J. Patrick. *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts*. 1 edition. Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2011. 40

industries are there and effective right from the start.”<sup>24</sup> Thornton shows how moral panic about drug use in raves increased their attendance and helped to solidify them as their own subculture, separate from the older acid house parties. Thornton also contends that subcultures construct a myth of their origins, which does not adequately credit the mainstream media. I believe that Thornton is partially correct in her assessment, yet she pays only minor attention to those who joined the subculture prior to any mainstream attention. Often such groups operate without any self-identifying name such as “Ravers” or “Modern Primitives”. Mainstream attention solidifies and labels the subculture, yet clearly the subcultures have to have existed before in order to receive this recognition. This is another example of the difficulty involved in studying subcultures, and I will return to the problem later in my discussion of genealogy.

Subcultural members are often heavily engaged in these communications to the mainstream. Some are promoters, such as Rodolphe Salis, founder of Le Chat Noir, who advertised his café performances to the public. Others have careers that incorporate their subcultural aesthetic expertise, such as Peter Christopherson, who was a designer at the trendy Hip Gnosis while performing with Throbbing Gristle. A large number of the

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<sup>24</sup> Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996. 117

recent subcultural theorists are themselves former members of subcultures (Thornton, Duncombe, Muggleton). Thus, subcultures play a critical role in society through this communications interlock.

This relationship between public awareness of subcultures, and subcultures' own sense of identity, as described by Williams and Thornton, extends beyond media exposure and includes the popular conception of what a subculture is. As I will show, this notion of a subculture's traits is a communications interlock: the subculture is aware of its perception by the mainstream, and performs to it.

The earliest mainstream mentions of bohemian subculture occurred in the fiction books and society articles of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, both of which displayed a flair for dramatizing the truth.<sup>25</sup> In these early accounts, subcultures were associated with criminals and vagabonds, and considered to be of no particular benefit to society. Fictional stories popular in the 17th century portrayed subcultures as part of a large and organized criminal system complete with apprenticeships,<sup>26</sup> internal economies and

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<sup>25</sup>Gelder, Ken. *Subcultures Cultural Histories and Social Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2007. 5-8

<sup>26</sup> Gelder, Ken. *Subcultures Cultural Histories and Social Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2007. 8

patrons.<sup>27</sup> As Gelder suggests, this is the origin of the term “underground” to refer to subcultures.<sup>28</sup> Popular fiction continues to relate subcultures to criminal activity; the punk aesthetic is for example heavily emphasized in Hollywood’s criminal youth.<sup>29</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, the bohemians, the first avant-garde subculture, had risen to prominence in the modern cities of western civilization. The bohemians and the bourgeoisie appeared around the same time in the modern era, and were populated from the same middle and upper classes.<sup>30</sup> Yet, while the bourgeois were accepting of social and class structures, the bohemians distanced themselves from those of their social class through dress, use of slang, and outrageous behavior. Even before the word bohemian entered into common usage, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century French royalist sympathizers *Les Incroyables* reacted against revolutionary prudencies by wearing outlandish clothing such as “tight-fitting square-cut coats with huge lapels” for men and Grecian semi-

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<sup>27</sup> Dionne, Craig, and Steve Mentz, eds. *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*. New edition edition. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006. 33

<sup>28</sup> Gelder, Ken. *Subcultures Cultural Histories and Social Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2007. 5-8

<sup>29</sup> Carlson, Zack, and Bryan Connolly. *Destroy All Movies!!! The Complete Guide to Punks on Film*. 1st edition. Seattle, Wash.: Fantagraphics, 2010. 4

<sup>30</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. 5

transparent robes for women.<sup>31</sup> Bohemians of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century such as Les Jeunes-France were rowdy drinkers who affected a medieval style and bragged of drinking wine from skulls.<sup>32</sup> Both these pre-bohemian subcultures flaunted nostalgia for a past society, and combined this with decadent behavior. Being provocative and against modern society are early traits consistent with avant-garde subcultures, which I will discuss in 1.3.2.

Bohemians were also known for their association with the lower classes, street performers and vagabonds. Journalist Félix Pyat, the first to call artists “bohemian”, used the term to describe vagabonds claiming themselves to be artists.<sup>33</sup> Bohemian is French for “gypsy” or “vagabond”, and by the mid-nineteenth century, bohemians were popularized as romantic, though naive, characters in books such as Murger’s *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* (*Scenes from a Bohemian Life*). Murger’s bohemians were petty criminals, but they committed crimes only to support their

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<sup>31</sup> “Les Incroyables et Merveilleuses: Fashion as Anti-Rebellion - Decollete.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.blastmilk.com/decollete/guillotine/fashion/incroyables-et-merveilleus.php>.

<sup>32</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.26

<sup>33</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.16

lifestyles.<sup>34</sup> This romanticized affiliation with the lower classes continues to be a trait in avant-garde subcultures, and is in part responsible for Hebdige's idea that subcultures are a class-based phenomenon.

Charles Baudelaire, although believing bohemians to be lazy<sup>35</sup> and himself a hardworking artist, was considered to be a bohemian by the mainstream. Siegel calls Baudelaire the 'quintessential bohemian', stating: "Here was the real heroism of his life: not his aspiration to a self-contained dandyism, but his acceptance of the bohemian need to live for the multiplication of sensation, with all its attendant sordidness and degradation. His discovery would loom ever larger as successive artist movements found themselves retracing the same paths."<sup>36</sup> Baudelaire dedicated himself to the fulfillment of living life as art,<sup>37</sup> and after Baudelaire, bohemians and subcultures in general have acquired this trait.

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<sup>34</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.47

<sup>35</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999 118

<sup>36</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.124

<sup>37</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.120-122

An additional subcultural trait, detached coolness, developed in the jazz musicians and beat poets in New York City following World War II. John Holmes describes the poets as follows: “In this modern jazz, they heard something rebel and nameless that spoke for them, and their lives knew a gospel for the first time. It was more than a music; it became an attitude toward life, a way of walking, a language and a costume; and these introverted kids... now felt somewhere at last.”<sup>38</sup> This attitude that Holmes refers to was a detached coolness, part of a self-segregation from the rest of American society.<sup>39</sup> Sidran notes that this cool was related in part to the popularity of heroin amongst be-bop musicians.<sup>40</sup> Yet, detachment as Holmes describes it is performative, it is showing the world that you do not care.

Traits such as criminality and detachment appear in different subcultures and their members to varying degrees. However, there is a communications interlock in which the subculture are themselves aware these traits are expected of them. It can be argued that members are attracted to subcultures for some of these traits, or that they perform these

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<sup>38</sup> Holmes, John Clellon, Seymour Krim, and Ann Charters. *Go: A Novel*. Reprint edition. New York : Berkeley, Calif.: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2002.161

<sup>39</sup> Gelder, Ken. *Subcultures Cultural Histories and Social Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2007. 77

<sup>40</sup> Sidran, Ben. *Black Talk: Roots of Jazz*. New York: Da Capo Pr, 1981.111

traits as a signal of having become a member of the subculture. In this way, subcultural studies has helped to develop what subcultures are.

By the late 60s, jazz music and the subcultures of the avant-garde had become widely thought of as culturally positive aspects of society. Gendron credits the Beatles with championing this transition of avant-garde aesthetics into mainstream culture. The Beatles were jazz enthusiasts who successfully navigated into unprecedented cultural success. In addition to their teen fans, *The Baroque Beatles Book*, a classical interpretation of Beatles songs, gained them a more conservative and older audience. Their later album *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* introduced jazz-based avant-garde themes to their audience, and also garnered attention from high cultural institutions.<sup>41</sup> According to Gendron, the success of this album encouraged the release of more experimental sounds in mainstream music, and signaled a stage in which avant-garde moved closer to the mainstream. By the late sixties, pop and rock music had replaced jazz as being the more avant-garde of music genres.

By the late 1960s, subcultures were growing in prominence and popularity, prompting academics to attempt to refine their terminologies of them. In

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<sup>41</sup> Gelder, Ken. *Subcultures Cultural Histories and Social Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2007.199



his article *Towards a Generic Concept of Counter-Culture*,<sup>42</sup> Keith A. Roberts suggests using the term *counter-cultural* for groups that present intra-cultural conflict and present a self-sufficient ideology. Roberts is building on Milton Yinger's work in distinguishing contra-cultures from subcultures, wherein subcultures, such as the Shakers, were different in structure and political ambition than contra-cultures such as for example the hippies. Another label for avant-garde subcultures was youth cultures, which was established by the edited collection *Resistance Through Rituals*, a book by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson from The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Hall and Jefferson sought to frame the rise of subcultures amongst teenagers and young adults as being a phenomenon resulting from lower and middle class social issues such as the draft of the Vietnam War and the expansion of education. This misperception of subcultures as being youth based continues today. I believe that the CCCS overlooked the communications interlock between older and younger groups within subcultures. For instance, early British punk was in part formed by post-Situationist members of King Mob, who by the time of punk were older. Nevertheless, the idea that subcultures are a youthful pastime has continued in popular perception, even within the subcultures themselves. I will return to this soon, but for now I want to focus on another member of the CCCS, Dick Hebdige, whose book

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<sup>42</sup> Roberts, Keith A. "Toward a Generic Concept of Counter-Culture." *Sociological Focus* 11, no. 2 (1978): 111–26.

*Subculture: The Meaning of Style* would become one of the most influential books on the subject.<sup>43</sup>

Like his contemporaries Hall and Jefferson, Hebdige focused on the British subcultures prevalent in 1979: punk, mod and skinhead. Punk had already become a prominent style globally, and Hebdige aimed to explain the meaning of their subcultural style from a Marxist perspective. “The punk ensembles, for instance, did not so much magically resolve experienced contradictions as represent the experience of contradiction itself in the form of visual puns (bondage, the ripped tee-shirt, etc.)”<sup>44</sup> According to Hebdige, by styling oneself as visually different, these subculturalists were calling attention to some of the hidden differences and problems of society. *Subculture* gave political gravitas to the behaviors of subcultures, although the book would later come under criticism for not engaging in ethnographic studies to validate Hebdige’s readings. Regardless, the work of the CCCS has provided a critical foundation and a set of new terms (youth culture, counter-cultural, contra-cultural) for understanding avant-garde subcultures in relation to the mainstream, that continue to be referenced in contemporary subcultural studies. Whereas CCCS theorized on why subcultures were rising to prominence,

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<sup>43</sup> Mattson, Kevin. “Did Punk Matter?: Analyzing the Practices of a Youth Subculture During the 1980s.” *American Studies* 42, no. 1 (April 1, 2001): 71

<sup>44</sup> Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen, 1979. 131

contemporary subculturalists have discussed fluidity, i.e. why subcultures no longer have the same social cohesion that they had before. I will address fluidity at length in chapter five, where I suggest that fluidity is a phenomenon caused by network society.

As mentioned before, many within academic subcultural studies are themselves former members of the subcultures they study, which suggests that they themselves engage in a fluidity of identity. Curiously though, many consider themselves now as outsiders from the subcultures they once were a part of. In this section I examine the distinction between belonging to and leaving a subculture, and argue that subcultural practices should hold a wider scope than solely fashion. I consider understanding the larger scope of subcultural practices important because it counters the framing of subcultures as a youth movement, which one grows out of,<sup>45</sup> and shows the serious influences subculturalists continue to have, despite no longer exhibiting themselves as subcultural.

One example of someone I consider to still be subcultural, despite his claims to being a *former* punk, is NYU Professor Stephen Duncombe. He continues to hold the values he formed while a punk. Duncombe describes

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<sup>45</sup> Many scholars frame subcultural studies as youth movement, notably Hall and Jefferson's *Resistance Through Rituals*, but including more contemporary scholars such as Hans Skott-Myhre's *Youth and Subculture as Creative Force: Creating New Spaces for Radical Youth Work*.

his youthful escapade into punk culture as the predominant reason for his becoming interested in social activism: “And so it was punk rock that taught me my first, and probably most important, political lessons. I learned the importance of community. Alone, I owned my problems: I was alienated, I was bored, I was too sensitive to injustice. But as a punk I found others who also had these problems, and since we all seemed to share them, we reasoned that they must not just be ours, but society's problems.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, Duncombe owes his engagement in activism to his years as a punk. His implication is that punk itself was not the activism, but the impetus towards such. Subcultures within his perspective are a training ground for youth, forming the foundation for later engagement with society.

Since leaving punk, Duncombe has continued to engage in a form of art activism which engages the public and attempts to provoke a thoughtful reaction.<sup>47</sup> In his book *The Cultural Resistance Reader*, Duncombe frames his own practice, and that of many others, as cultural resistance, a “culture that is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/ or change the dominant political, economic and/or social structure.”<sup>48</sup> Duncombe’s term “cultural resistance” is similar to

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<sup>46</sup> Duncombe, Stephen. *Cultural Resistance Reader*. verso, 2002. 4

<sup>47</sup> Duncombe, Stephen. *Cultural Resistance Reader*. verso, 2002. 4

<sup>48</sup> Duncombe, Stephen. *Cultural Resistance Reader*. verso, 2002. 12.

Hebdige's "subculture", in that it identifies groups by a cultural production that critiques hegemony. However, Duncombe differs from Hebdige in that he does not believe that these subcultures were always consciously producing a critique. Duncombe also distances the importance of longevity from the valuation of subcultures, instead focusing on the moment in which they occurred and the strategies and practices they utilized.<sup>49</sup>

The lack of longevity in avant-garde subcultures is often a point of criticism. Bauman summarizes this opinion as follows: "[The subculture's] existence is transient and always in flux. They inflame imagination most and attract most ardent loyalty when they still reside in the realm of hope. They are much too loose as formations to survive the movement from hope to practice."<sup>50</sup> Bauman believes that subcultures are excellent at igniting the passions which produce expressive culture, but unable to orchestrate any defiance to hegemony. Yet, I have found both in my research and in my personal experience. The values, experiences, and an overall resistance to hegemony frequently stay with the individual long after their supposed departure from the subculture. This is corroborated by Duncombe who states that Bauman misses something important: these inflamed

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<sup>49</sup> Duncombe, Stephen. *Cultural Resistance Reader*. verso, 2002. 11

<sup>50</sup> Bauman, Zygmunt. *Intimations of Postmodernity*. Routledge, 2003. 137

imaginations change the person.<sup>51</sup> Such moments can provide a transformation that continues long after a person has disengaged from the subculture because of a change in style or taste. I will return to this notion of transformation in the third section of this chapter, when I discuss Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*.

The concept of leaving a subculture is often associated with ceasing social involvement in of the group and no longer dressing according to its fashions. However, both of these are sometimes necessary, such as when one must normalize their appearance in order to gain employment. The misperception subculture is predominantly a youth based is thus due to outside factors: most adults are no longer able to present themselves in non-normative fashions. Their fashion does thus not determine their values. Being subcultural is a much greater endeavor than the change of outward appearance. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, subculturalists must engage in various initiation processes, display esoteric knowledge and distinct cultural tastes, and work to become accepted by their chosen subcultural community. Reasons for joining a subculture are often complex, but typically involve finding a group that agrees with one's sense of self. It is unlikely that all the elements that lead to joining a subculture in one's late teens or early twenties disappear, even though some might.

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<sup>51</sup> Duncombe, Stephen. *Cultural Resistance Reader*. verso, 2002. 10

For this reason, I suggest that subcultures should be understood by five separate dimensions: social, belief, performative, cultural, and experiential. The social dimension are the collected members of the subculture, and through communications interlock, the mainstream consideration of their subculture. The belief dimension of a subculture are the values which they espouse. For example, it was the belief systems of punk that attracted Duncombe to it, and which interested him in becoming an activist. The styles and manners which Hebdige describes, such as ripped clothing, are performative, internally conveying shared identities and externally establishing a boundary. As mentioned above, the performative dimension is prevalent in youth cultures who, due to their age, are often experimenting with styles, and who often also have greater freedom in how they can appear. The cultural dimension are the shared aesthetic tastes that form in the subculture. The fifth dimension, experiential, is the unique experience of being member of a subculture, bonded with a social group over shared beliefs and cultural tastes, of engaging in unique moments with each other.

I suggest that by analyzing being subcultural within these five dimensions, we can better evaluate the lines by which a person is or is no longer a member of the subculture. While they may no longer engage in the most prominent of aspects, the social and the performative, many continue to maintain the cultural tastes of the subculture, and retain many of the same values. As previously noted, subcultural experiences are transformative,

and the experience of being a member of a subculture is distinguishing. Similar to Duncombe, Hugo Ball wrote *Flight Out of Time* to contest his time with Dada, to show how he had changed. Yet in his later Catholic life, Ball continues to relate his beliefs back to Dada. In my understanding, Ball remains a Dada member, if only on the experiential dimension. Therefore, although many argue that they are no longer part of the subculture, I believe that they in some dimensions continue to be subcultural. Further, I assert that it is exactly these remaining subcultural elements of a person who returns to mainstream society that are one of the values that subcultures bring to the mainstream.

In conclusion, subcultures have always been a cultural phenomenon that is both recognizable, and yet not fully definable. In this dissertation I am interested in what I term avant-garde subcultures, a set of subcultures which manifested at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as bohemians, and has since influenced later subcultures into present day. In the next section I summarize the work of two authors, Greil Marcus and Bernard Gendron, each of whom have traced the transmission of subcultural values and aesthetics across a series of avant-garde groups. Marcus and Gendron delineate a century-long tradition of avant-garde subcultures from bohemians to punks. Unfortunately, neither extends into contemporary art movements and subcultures. Therefore I must develop a system to extend Marcus' and Gendron's avant-garde lineage, which I do by synthesizing a set of avant-garde theorists' work to define a set of traits which map both



onto the artists Gendron and Marcus discuss and onto contemporary artists and subcultures.

Marcus' *Lipstick Traces* describes the connection of various subcultures throughout the 20th century.<sup>52</sup> Gendron's *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club* takes a more academic perspective on primarily the same history, focusing on the interchange between high and low culture occurring in the avant-garde.<sup>53</sup> I will use Marcus' and Gendron's methodology to construct a history of the avant-garde that connects it to more recent music-driven avant-garde subcultures such as punk. Both Gendron's and Marcus' lineages of the avant-garde contest the argument made by Bürger that the avant-garde is historical, providing a narrative for their evolution into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Marcus' *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, establishes the intellectual and cultural connections between 1970s punk, particularly the *Sex Pistols*, with preceding avant-garde subcultures including *Dada* and the *Situationist International*. Prior to *Lipstick Traces*, the avant-garde influence on punk was unrecognized by most academics and cultural historians. *Lipstick Traces* is relevant as a title, as

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<sup>52</sup> Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990.

<sup>53</sup> Gendron, Bernhard. *Between Montmartre and the Muddclub: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. Pr, 2002.

it alludes to oral knowledge, the method of dispersion Marcus argues is prevalent in avant-garde subcultures.<sup>54</sup> By focusing on oral traditions, Marcus identifies what he terms *traces* which are the knowledge and strategies shared between different avant-garde subcultures. Marcus' methodology of categorizing disparate avant-garde subcultures by the affinity of their actions requires an alternative perspective than that of traditional art history. In comparing the *Sex Pistols'* (at the time) shocking utterance of "Fuck" on national television<sup>55</sup> with that of *Dada's* recital of poetry some 60 years earlier, Marcus shows an alternative methodology for understanding the connection between these groups. "The happenstance of specific words in common is an accident, but it might suggest a real affinity. The two men are talking about the same thing, looking for words to make disruption precious, that may not be an accident at all. If the language they are speaking, the impulse they are voicing, has its own history, might it not tell a very different story from the one we've been hearing all our lives?"<sup>56</sup> In Marcus' view the traditional historical perspective obscures the affinity between both groups, and the impulse towards disruption of everyday life, signifies that the Sex Pistols

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<sup>54</sup> Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990.4

<sup>55</sup> Hornby, Nick. "Say Something Outrageous." *The Guardian*, September 15, 2007, sec. Music.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/sep/15/greatinterviews1>.

<sup>56</sup> Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990.4

and Dada have more in common than might be understood by the art or music institutions.

Gendron's book begins at Montmartre and finishes at the Mudd Club in NYC, concluding that punk and no-wave are the heirs of avant-garde. Where Marcus focuses upon the affinity towards disruption inherent in both punk and avant-garde, Gendron centers on the interplay of practices between the avant-garde (high culture) and popular music (low culture) which occurred throughout the 20th century. This is similar to Williams' communications interlock in that both focus on the cultural exchange between different segments of society. Gendron pays special attention to American Jazz music as an avant-garde practice which became integrated into popular culture after World War II.<sup>57</sup> He illustrates how mainstream artists incorporate avant-garde practices to add a slight edginess to their style, and avant-garde artists use the grandeur of the pop star to reinvent themselves as art stars.<sup>58</sup> Gendron's work is more academically rigorous

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<sup>57</sup> Gendron, Bernhard. *Between Montmartre and the Muddclub: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. Pr, 2002. 121-139

<sup>58</sup> Gendron places the NYC *Mudd Club* and their *Art After Midnight* events as the epicenter of this trend of merging pop and art. Andy Warhol is a progenitor of the art star, using his association with pop musicians such as Lou Reed to gain notoriety outside of traditional art circles. This practice was enhanced by other artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Laurie Anderson, and Jim Jarmusch, each of which were avant-garde artists in their own rights, but also performed with musical groups.

than Marcus', yet he also develops a history based on shared traits of avant-garde subcultures.

Marcus' and Gendron's work links the intellectual concepts of a variety of artists from symbolism to punk, creating a history that focuses on their shared cultural traits rather than on the disciplines in which they work. In doing so, they have developed a cultural history with which to understand the connection between these disparate artists. However, many of the historical avant-garde groups they discuss were openly hostile to each other, while others were ignorant of their avant-garde heritage. In the next section I address two issues encountered when extending the lineage of Marcus and Gendron to contemporary groups such as Vaporwave. First, I need a method to narrow the historical scope of a specific avant-garde, to distinguish where one ends and the other begins, which I do in the next section. Second, I need a set of traits by which to qualify subculture as avant-garde, which I do in later in the chapter.

Gendron's method for constructing a lineage between avant-garde groups is based upon Foucault's *genealogy*: "Genealogies are interested less in the narrative of events than in patterns and structures. In this case, I am interested in elaborating the patterns of aesthetic notions and tensions that underlie the practices operating at the interstices of avant-garde

culture and popular music.”<sup>59</sup> By focusing on an emerging pattern of traits across the groups, Gendron’s use of genealogy unveils the connection between disparate avant-garde subcultures without needing to illustrate the various ways such connections came about.

In *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, Foucault establishes the term genealogy as the study of phenomena which are related by their symptoms, rather than by a sequence of events. “Genealogy retrieves an indispensable restraint: it must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality. It must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history - in sentiments, love conscience instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles.”<sup>60</sup> Foucault provides a framework for understanding history in which singular events are associated by similar (at times even sentimental) shared traits. Foucault’s genealogy enables a macroscopic view of subcultures and the avant-garde. It does not seek the root, or original cause, as some prime version of it, but rather finds all instantiations to be equally valid. It is therefore particularly suited to

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<sup>59</sup> Gendron, Bernhard. *Between Montmartre and the Muddclub: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. Pr, 2002. p6

<sup>60</sup> Foucault, Michel, Paul Rabinow, and Nikolas S Rose. *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. New York: New Press, 2003. 349

incorporate those actors of individual movements who were not themselves engaged in producing art, but who were participants in moments in the wider framework.

In his construction of genealogy, Foucault utilizes Nietzsche's critique of *monumental history*,<sup>61</sup> "a history given to reestablishing the high points of historical development and their maintenance in a perpetual presence, given to the recovery of works, actions, and creations through the monogram of their personal essence ... barring access to the actual intensities and creations of life."<sup>62</sup> The institutions of art are focused on monumental history, on the works and creations of the person rather than the intensities of the moment when it was created and experienced. As Foucault explains, monumental history destroys the initial intensity that gave birth to the creation. The Museum of Modern Art's exhibitions on Dada masks<sup>63</sup> or The Metropolitan Museum of Art's display of punk

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<sup>61</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Translated by Peter Preuss. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980.

<sup>62</sup> Foucault, Michel, Paul Rabinow, and Nikolas S Rose. *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. New York: New Press, 2003.365

<sup>63</sup> Kimmelman, Michael. "'Dada' at MoMA: The Moment When Artists Took Over the Asylum." *The New York Times*, June 16, 2006, sec. Arts / Art & Design. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/16/arts/design/16dada.html>.

fashion<sup>64</sup> lack the raw emotional energy of the moments in which they emerged. The New York Times article on Dada claims “I’m sure you had to be there” and calls the punk fashion exhibit an embarrassment in replicating style without sentiment. These examples illustrate Foucault’s point, that monumental history destroys intensity. Genealogy, in contrast, retains the intensity of the moment by refusing to extract it from its context, from the people and space in which it happens. Each aspect stands on its own to be included or not. It does not matter if the person later disavows their past activities, as Hugo Ball did with Dada. Nor is a single artifact given more weight than another. In genealogy, each moment is an instantiation within the overall history. With a genealogical perspective, time is no longer an accumulator of value; instead each moment retains equality in the overall history. Criticism in a genealogical perspective is not linear, but acknowledges the influences that later works have in reframing our understanding of the avant-garde subculture as a whole. Thus it is possible to understand the relationship between the declaiming of Futurism and the singing style of punk as a related practice where the former influenced the latter, and the latter reframes our understanding of the former. The framework of genealogy illuminates the

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<sup>64</sup> N.L. “Punk Fashion and the Met Ball: An Embarrassment.” *The Economist*. Accessed December 1, 2013. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2013/05/punk-fashion-and-met-ball>.

hidden connections between ravers and bohemians by focusing on the traits which they share between them.

Genealogy studies the emergence<sup>65</sup> of moments in which a recognizable pattern resurfaces. “Emergence, the moment of arising. It stands as the principle and singular law of an apparition. As it is wrong to search for descent in an uninterrupted continuity, we should avoid accounting for emergence by appeal to its final term.”<sup>66</sup> Emergence examines the entire body, not privileging the beginning or end as something greater. The concept of emergence entails that of *threshold*, a quantification that separates between those which surpass a particular level of qualification and those that do not.

A problem with genealogy is how to determine which aspects should be included within its body, and which excluded. Why, for example, is the Metropolitan’s Punk Fashion exhibit not part of the punk genealogy? In the Economist article *Punk Fashion and the Met Ball: An embarrassment*, the reason given is a lack of authenticity, the exhibition was a poor simulacra of punk fashion, rather than a true punk production. Compare this with Vaporwave’s claims to be the new

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<sup>65</sup> Emergence is also a term used in computer science within the discipline of artificial intelligence. Emergence or emergent behavior, by contrast, is usually understood as a process or behavior that emerges at a macro (global) level of a system, but that cannot be reduced to the behaviors and properties of the component parts of the system (Wolf and Holvoet 2004)

<sup>66</sup> Foucault, Michel, Paul Rabinow, and Nikolas S Rose. *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. New York: New Press, 2003.357



punks, based on their aesthetics, appropriation of pop culture, and lack of musical talent.<sup>67</sup> Using authenticity as a metric, I would have to agree that Vaporwave is the emergence of punk, but only in the broad use of the term punk to refer to punk's own predecessors in the avant-garde.

In this section, I have presented a genealogical approach to connecting the avant-garde subcultures used by Marcus and Gendron. In the next section, I delineate a set of avant-garde traits which I have synthesized from the writings of avant-garde theorists. I consider subcultures which match these traits to be part of the avant-garde tradition, and will illustrate this by referencing examples of these traits from both the historical avant-garde and contemporary practitioners.

### **The Five Traits of the Avant-Garde**

In this section I use the work of four theorists (Matei Călinescu, Paul Mann, Peter Bürger, and Renato Poggioli) and their descriptions of the avant-garde to determine a set of cultural traits shared by all avant-garde subcultures. While these traits are not comprehensive, they are indicative of avant-garde subcultures from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century until the contemporary era.

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<sup>67</sup> "Interview: SPF420 | GUMBALL." *Gumballmag*. Accessed May 19, 2014. <http://gumballmag.com/music/interview-spf420/>.

### First Trait - Against Primacy

In *Five Faces of Modernity*, Matei Călinescu explains that modernism has as its root the adverb *modo*, meaning “right now” or “recently”. Beginning to be used in the late Middle Ages, the word “modernism” shows a cultural shift where western civilization began to view itself as separate from its past. Călinescu traces this notion to Bernard of Chartres’ maxim of a dwarf standing on the shoulders of giants.<sup>68</sup> The giant represents the accumulation of knowledge throughout history, which, having been acquired and studied, can be leveraged and expounded upon by the current generation. Călinescu’s metaphor thus provides an example of *primacy*, the belief that each generation is greater and wiser than the ones that came before it. The modern era sees itself as being more important than previous eras, by the logic that everything it does is added on top of the knowledge it has accumulated.

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<sup>68</sup> Călinescu, Matei, and Matei Călinescu. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987. 16

Jeuneau, Edouard. *Nani Gigantum Humeris Insidentes" Essai D'interprétation de Bernard de Chartres*. Vivarium-an International Journal for The Philosophy and Intellectual Life of The Middle Ages and Renaissance, 1967.

The philosophers of the Renaissance not only viewed themselves as the cumulating point of knowledge, but they also created a theological lineage between themselves and antiquity. Călinescu quotes Petrarch: “history seemed to proceed by dramatic ruptures, alternating periods of enlightened grandeur with dark periods of decay and chaos.”<sup>69</sup> Antiquity is seen as an era of light and knowledge, a time of Greek classicism and philosophies. From Petrarch and his contemporaries came the idea that the Renaissance arose out of the Dark Ages and that a return to an era of illuminated knowledge had begun. For Călinescu, this viewpoint means that contemporary humanity considers itself to be conceptually superior to the past; historical and ancient knowledge is referred to and then added onto. This concept of modernity also frames current human endeavors as preparation for future generations. The modern individual is expected to exemplify the social qualities and intellectual knowledge passed down from previous generations, and pass these onto future ones.

Renatto Poggioli points to several key figures of the enlightenment, particularly Francis Bacon, as entertaining a belief in primacy “that the

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<sup>69</sup> Călinescu, Matei, and Matei Călinescu. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987.<sup>21</sup>

moderns were ... more mature and ‘ancient’, more expert and sage.”<sup>70</sup> Modern civilization valued refinement and sophistication, using antiquity to prove their enlightenment. Neoclassical architecture employed ancient Greek and Roman styles in the facades of institutional buildings in an attempt to legitimize such places as the descendants of these ancient civilizations. Meanwhile, books such as Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*<sup>71</sup> promoted a viewpoint that the dispersing of high cultural values through art and literature were methods of bringing sophistication to the masses. Primacy extends to cultural creators whose works are expected to improve on previous artists.

Paul Mann explains that even the question of relating the avant-garde to modernism reveals a bias that will “emphasize aesthetic issues, whereas studies that argue for the distinction between them tend to emphasize ideology.”<sup>72</sup> For example, Poggioli argues that what characterizes the avant-garde art is a myth of the new, the ambition to go further in provocation and shock than previous artists. However, as I will soon assert, the avant-garde are not defined by a myth of the new, but by a

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<sup>70</sup> Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge [etc.]: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982.212

<sup>71</sup> Arnold, Matthew, and Jane Garnett. *Culture and Anarchy*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

<sup>72</sup> Mann, Paul. *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.10

reaction to primacy. According to Mann, Poggioli's use of modernism enables him to position the avant-garde as an expression of alienation from concrete social and cultural conditions, and to overlook the interconnectedness between the avant-garde and society. Mann views the avant-garde as ideologically more similar to the modern era than their stance often suggests, and is more nuanced than simply striving towards the new or unknown. While it is true that some groups such as the Futurists did strive to be new, this same reaction against primacy has taken different forms in other avant-garde subcultures.

Bürger writes that “the concept of the new is not false, it is too general and nonspecific (...) it provides no criteria for distinguishing between faddish (arbitrary) and historically necessary newness.”<sup>73</sup> Within the avant-garde there is a notion of legacy and a strong sense of competition between different subcultures. Yet, there is no explicit mention of innovation, where one is improving on the techniques of the other. The inner critiques between avant-garde subcultures tend towards either: 1) not being passionate enough (Mension on the Surrealists) or 2) being stuck in a program of idiocy (Breton on Dada). Each avant-garde subculture varies their tactics by which to challenge primacy, but none present such tactics as escalating any form of progression.

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<sup>73</sup> Bürger, Peter, and Michael Shaw. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minneapolis, MN; Manchester: University of Minnesota Press ; Manchester University Press, 1984. 60

Despite the variation between groups, I find that the critique of primacy consistently appears as a trait in avant-garde groups, appearing under different aesthetic guises such as savagery, infantilism, or debauchery. In savagery, the concept of civility and acceptance of the status quo are openly questioned. Meanwhile, in infantilism a childlike innocence or a whimsical disdain for logic is affected to create alternative and surreal concepts. In debauchery, behaviors deemed reckless by society are engaged in, for the thrill and pleasure of the moment. I will discuss examples of each of these in the avant-garde, and show that each time, this behavior is used to attack societal notions of primacy.

### *Savagery*

In early 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris, the first generation of young men was sent by their families to the cities to gain a University education. For men coming from middle-class households, this education was considered an investment to improve the social standing of the whole family.<sup>74</sup> Yet many of these newly-educated men, introduced into a society to which they did not belong, had trouble fitting in and finding suitable work. In the 1830s, a subculture of rabble rousers who felt there were no prospects for them in

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<sup>74</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.126

modern society emerged, ironically calling themselves *Les Jeunes-France* (The Young France). “[They] affected an exotic dress and manner partly inspired by medievalism. They grew beards, gave parties with outrageous and wild fare, claimed to drink punch from the skulls of their mistresses, surrounded themselves with poisoned arrows, animal traps, catapults.”<sup>75</sup> Rather than the sophistication their families expected, these young men were ridiculing the perception of their medieval past.

Savagery manifests in the avant-garde as a performative gesture against society’s notions of primacy. Note, for example, the punk fashions borrowed both from the Native American Mohawk hairstyle and various ‘primitive’ body modifications (piercings and tattoos). More extreme examples of savagery include attempting to incite riots (Futurists and Situationist) or even bleeding and defecating on stage (Viennese Actionists and Punk).

Savagery is a method of showing disregard for the morality of society. G.G. Allin, one of the most notorious of punk musicians, stated during a national talk show: “Somebody like me who can do whatever they want, I never have to pay taxes, I, you know fuck who ever I want, I can go here, I

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<sup>75</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.26

can go there ...That's the only way to fucking live.”<sup>76</sup> Allin’s performed savagery was a method for him to flaunt the notion that success comes from being civilized. Allin claims to get everything he wants whenever he wants it, precisely because he rejects modern civilities and behaves as a savage and vile person. Of course, an actual savage has no conception of himself in the context of modern society. But the savagery of punk is a presentation of self (Goffman) and despite appearances reveals an understanding of what the mainstream reaction will be.

### *Infantilism*

Similar to savagery, many avant-garde members counter primacy through infantilism. *Pataphysics*, Alfred Jarry’s science of the impossible, shows Jarry not only engaging in childlike logic, but seeking to amplify it in his work. “If an adult male, as the saying goes, ‘is nothing more than a child who has grown up’, is it not almost certain that he grew up as a child, and that this tends only to exaggerate his childish tendencies? His imagination becomes attenuated in a more capacious skull. His nervous system shrinks in proportion to his body’s growth.”<sup>77</sup> Jarry is not seeking refuge in

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<sup>76</sup> Phillips, Todd. *Hated: GG Allin & the Murder Junkies*. Documentary, Biography, Music, N/A.

<sup>77</sup> Jarry, Alfred. *OEuvres completes*. Paris: French and European Publications Inc, 2013. 473- 474



infantilism, but attempting to find a source of creativity and power by embracing it. He considers modern notions of adult behavior a constraint to the imagination. Jarry's most well-known work, *Ubu Roi*, was developed from his childhood stories in which he ridiculed his elementary school teacher. *Ubu Roi* recast the teacher as a ruler from a mythical land, and through its infantile and surreal story structure, provided a cunning critique of French and their military.

Jarry's strategy of infantilism differs in aesthetic from Allin's savagery, yet both operate as rejection of societal primacy, and both claim to benefit from doing so. Rather than "standing on the shoulders of giants", these artists are closer to Oscar Wilde's "We are all in the gutters, but some of us are looking at the stars."<sup>78</sup> In other words, art does not preserve and build upon a great society, but provides an escape from it, to something more passionate and spiritual, not in the religious sense, but rather as something relating to the soul.

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<sup>78</sup> Wilde, Oscar. *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Kila, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2004.

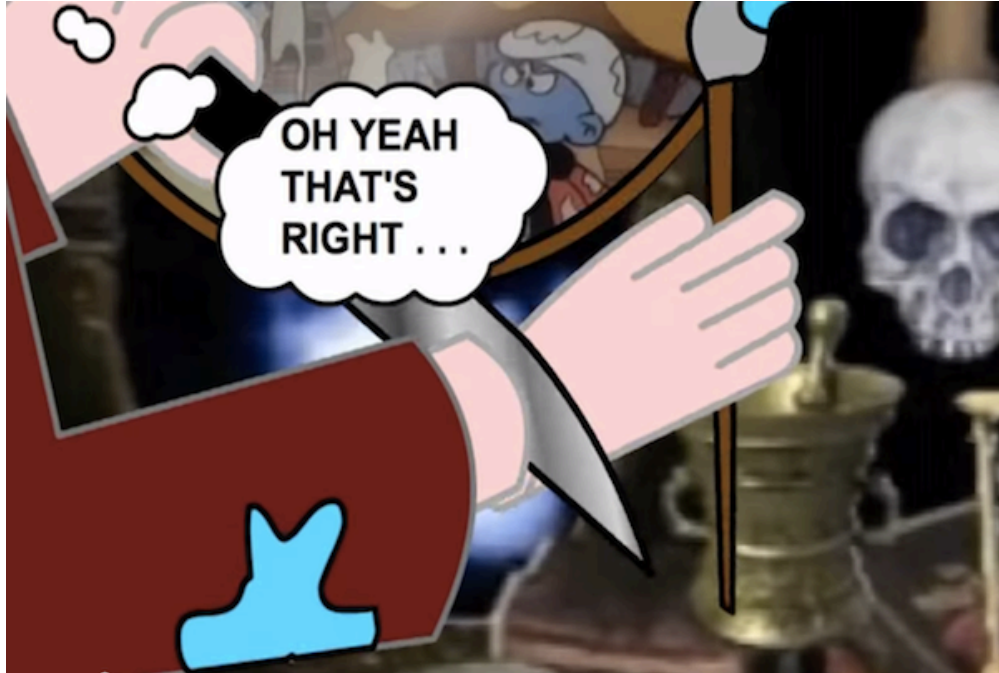


Figure 179 Still from Paper Rad

Infancy exists in contemporary avant-garde groups such as *Extreme Animals*, whose cartoon videos feature an aggressive infantilism. Consider *The Urgency* (see still above) which overlays their own drawings of an artist cutting off their hand with footage from the children's show *The Smurfs*' character Painter Smurf looking on angrily in the background. "Oh yeah that's right", claims the person removing their hand, blue ink (smurf blood) appearing on their sleeve. *The Urgency* plays with infantile aesthetics to make a dramatic statement about the difficulty of artists operating within the commercial art world.

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<sup>79</sup> Ciocchi, Jacob. "THE URGENCY DVD/DOWNLOAD – Jacob Ciocchi." Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://jacobciocchi.org/2014/06/the-urgency-dvddownload/>.

## *Debauchery*

Avant-garde subcultures often describe the use of drugs and alcohol as a method of leaving the doldrums of everyday life. Baudelaire's *Be Drunk* claims "So as not to be the martyred slaves of time, be drunk, be continually drunk!"<sup>80</sup> In *Junky*, Burroughs describes his use of heroin as reorienting all of his priorities around getting high. He argues that "the American upper middle-class citizen is a composite of negatives. He is largely delineated by what he is not."<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile, the junky is only defined by his next score. Consequently the use of drugs provides a less alienating existence for Burroughs. The debauchery of the avant-garde is not that condoned by society, the alteration of perception, and a continual escape from everyday life.

An important note to make here, is that the debauchery of the avant-garde is not a dependence on drugs or alcohol, but rather the performance of debauchery to extend their personal experiences beyond the realms of what civilized society would permit. We therefore can find similarities to

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<sup>80</sup> Baudelaire, Charles. *Paris Spleen*. Translated by Louise Varese. Slight Moisture Damage edition. New York: New Directions, 1970.77

<sup>81</sup> Burroughs, William S. *Junky: The Definitive Text of "Junk."* New York; Berkeley, Calif.: Grove Press, 2012. 44

Burrough's writings on drug use to Andy Warhol's film *Blow Job* which depicts a man's face as he receives oral sex. Each is expressing the wonders in illicit pleasures, claiming that outside the boundaries of accepted behaviors is found a more intense life.

### Second Trait - Provocation of the Public

"Don't know what I want but I know how to get it

I wanna destroy the passer by

Cos I, I wanna BE anarchy!"<sup>82</sup>

*Sex Pistols - Anarchy in the U.K.*

Unlike Allin, the majority of punks never committed egregious crimes, despite their many songs calling for destruction. Although often portrayed as violent in the mainstream, punks and their avant-garde predecessors use violence in their work as a means to provoke. For example, Breton's statement "The simplest Surrealist act consists in going out into the street, revolver in hand, and shooting at random, as much as one can into the crowd"<sup>83</sup> is dramatic and horrendous. Yet, Breton never

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<sup>82</sup> "*Sex Pistols – Anarchy in the UK*. Accessed December 8, 2013. <http://rock.rapgenius.com/Sex-pistols-anarchy-in-the-uk-lyrics>.

<sup>83</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. 4

committed any crimes of this nature. Instead, his statement is an attempt to raise the notoriety of the Surrealists through provocation. In this section I will discuss how avant-garde subcultures utilize antagonism and provocation in their work.

Poggioli depicts the avant-garde as being the front line of culture, attempting to destroy the alienation of modern society through critiques on the institution of art. Yet, when the avant-garde stops operating in the cultural sphere and becomes political, they are quickly destroyed. Poggioli points to the demise of futurism as the result of regimental practices that increasingly restricted artists as the movement became aligned with the Italian Fascist party.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, the provocations of the avant-garde resulted in jail time or fist fights, rather than being sent to the shooting gallery. Were the consequences graver, fewer artists would likely dare practice their craft. According to Poggioli, the avant-garde is an artifact of a modern democratized society. In fascist and communist regimes the critique which the avant-garde subcultures offer is stifled<sup>85</sup>. Yet communism had very strong avant-garde traditions (and state support for

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<sup>84</sup> Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge [etc.]: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982.284.

<sup>85</sup> Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge [etc.]: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982. 106

them) in both Constructivists and Supremacists.<sup>86</sup> Avant-garde subcultures require, if not support by the state, its disregard for their acts of provocation. The moral panic and outrage they provoke are intended to result in publicity, but not prison sentences.

### *Antagonism*

Bürger views such provocation as a method to make art relevant to everyday life. “The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men.”<sup>87</sup> He points out that these groups are not trying to simply change the style of art, but are instead attempting to make art relevant in everyday life. While this is a social gesture, since the avant-garde is in fact trying to engage the public, it is one that, through the rejection of the avant-garde by the public, leads to alienation. The avant-garde uses antagonism both to transform their own lives into art, and to make art a part of everyday life for the larger public. For example, the *Hydropathes* were a group of artists in Montmartre that incorporated a

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<sup>86</sup> Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge [etc.]: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982.103.

<sup>87</sup> Bürger, Peter, and Michael Shaw. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minneapolis, MN; Manchester: University of Minnesota Press ; Manchester University Press, 1984. 49

style called *fumisme* into their work. *Fumisme* was a nihilistic, cynical, and mocking stance, and had an “ideology of laughter-laughter at any price, including the sneer and renunciation of the ideal-fertilized the group’s most remarkable productions.”<sup>88</sup> Mocking the audience built a reputation and this was crucial to the success of the *Hydropathes* and later Montmartre cafes.

### *Provocation*

Unlike the *Hydropathes*, not all avant-gardists were satisfied with the crowds that attended their performances. Those that wanted to engage a larger public utilized a different form of antagonism: provocation.

Provocation is an aggressive form of antagonism, wherein the artists create acts that the public will respond to. Marinetti, for example, considered the booing of an audience to be a sign that it was critically thinking about the art.<sup>89</sup> Provocation from the avant-garde is sometimes associated with terrorism, because both seek to shock the public by creating spectacle and striking at unexpected times upon unprepared audiences. This ambiguity

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<sup>88</sup> Cate, Phillip Dennis, Mary Lewis Shaw, Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Society of the Four Arts, and Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art. *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1996. 104

<sup>89</sup> Goldberg, RoseLee, RoseLee Goldberg, and RoseLee Goldberg. *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. London; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011.16

between artist and terrorist has continued into present day with graffiti artist Banksy being labeled an “art terrorist”<sup>90</sup> and Steve Kurtz being detained by the FBI.<sup>91</sup> Yet, in both these recent examples their art was provocative, but not engaged in terrorism.

Goldberg describes the use of provocation by the Futurists as follows: “F.T. Marinetti thought of provocation as the best way to reach an audience. Marinetti: go out into the street, launch assaults from theaters and introduce the fisticuff into the artistic battle.”<sup>92</sup> Futurist provocations go beyond the subversion witnessed in the *fumisme* of the Hydropathes. Provocative acts are not simply a refusal or negation of good manners, but instead an offensive move against the public. Provocation becomes a method to increase the number of encounters between the artists and the unwilling public. In her book *Dada and Surrealist Performance*, Melzer notes the role of provocation in the historical avant-garde: “They [Dada] and all those in the later dada-surrealist group who consciously concerned

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<sup>90</sup> “Elusive ‘Art Terrorist’ Banksy Makes an Indelible Mark on the British Museum - This Britain - UK - The Independent.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/elusive-art-terrorist-banksy-makes-an-indelible-mark-on-the-british-museum-6145232.html>.

<sup>91</sup> “Cleared - the Artist the FBI Branded a Bio-Terrorist | US News | The Guardian.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/artblog/2008/apr/23/clearedtheartistthefibra>.

<sup>92</sup> Goldberg, RoseLee, RoseLee Goldberg, and RoseLee Goldberg. *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. London; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011.16



themselves with the use of the theatrical medium, posed as a primary condition for the restoration of a type of primitive theatrical communion, a change in attitude on the part of the public. The passive consenting spectator must give way to a hostile participant, provoked, attacked and beaten by author and actors.”<sup>93</sup> Provoking the audience was not just a matter of aesthetics, but a necessity for engaging them with art on a deeper level. The audience is either repelled by the performances or finds the challenge enjoyable. What can the avant-garde expect of their audience? The effort is to arouse the audience, so that they are no longer passive consumers, but engage critically with the art. As Simon describes in *Entering the Mosh Pit: Slam Dancing and Modernity*, despite the “violence and chaos”, people are rarely hurt, and generally appear to “have a good time.”<sup>94</sup> The discomfort provides a sense of value. At the end of the experience they have endured something together which creates a closer knit group.

One notorious publicity stunt created by *Lettrist International* members Michel Mourre, Ghislain de Marbaix, Jean Rullier, and Serge Berna is

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<sup>93</sup> Melzer, Annabelle Henkin. *Dada and Surrealist Performance*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.43

<sup>94</sup> Simon, Bradford Scott. “Entering the Pit: Slam-Dancing and Modernity.” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 31, no. 1 (1997): 149–76.

*Assault on Notre Dame*.<sup>95</sup> Dressed as Dominican Monks, they stood up in the Easter Mass at Notre Dame, where Mourre delivered a poem that included the lines “I accuse the Catholic Church of infecting the world with its funereal morality of being the running sore on the decomposed body of the West. Verily I say unto you: God is dead.”<sup>96</sup> At this point the Swiss guards charged the group with swords drawn, attempting to kill them on the spot. They managed to flee the guards and the ensuing mob from the church, being rescued by the Paris police. The provocation made headlines in France and was written about in the *New York Times* and *Time Magazine*.<sup>97</sup>

For Mourre,<sup>98</sup> the act was not simply an attempt to get attention, but an attack against God, whom he claimed at the time to hate. In his book *In Spite of Blasphemy* he writes: “To my feverish mind the cry of revolt which we decided on at a table in the Mabillon was like a message to the Church, to the world, and I found it quite natural to put on my monk’s habit again before mounting the pulpit. For me the habit of Saint Dominic was an

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<sup>95</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001.38 .

<sup>96</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001.42

<sup>97</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001.23 .

<sup>98</sup> “Religion: Schizomaniac in Paris.” *Time*. Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,859091,00.html>.

exasperating symbol, an object of reproach. By profaning it I hoped to be rid of it.”<sup>99</sup> *In Spite of Blasphemy* is a redemption story of a lost man who wanders through the army, Dominican monkhood, and eventually in league with “the disillusioned and embittered failures of Saint-Germaine-des-Prés.”<sup>100</sup> With Mourre’s denouncement of his avant-garde past, *In Spite of Blasphemy* functions as a recuperation of the *Assault on Notre Dame* by the Catholic Church. Archbishop Maurice Feltin, whose mass Mourre interrupted, even recommended that all church libraries own a copy.

The question is why the avant-garde engages in provocation as its strategy, rather than in other methods of engaging the public. In the next section, I will discuss the isolation of the avant-garde as being one caused by both their alienation and elitism. As I will show, feeling alien to the mainstream, and considering themselves superior to it, creates a distance that is not easily overcome.

### Third Trait - Alienation & Elitism

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<sup>99</sup> Mourre, TR Fielding. *In Spite of Blasphemy*. First Edition edition. Lehmann, n.d.

<sup>100</sup> Mourre, TR Fielding. *In Spite of Blasphemy*. First Edition edition. Lehmann, n.d.

While Mourre rejoined the Catholic ranks and his book was stocked in the Church's libraries, Berna, the author of the poem read in the assault, continued with the *Lettrists* and later with the *Situationist International*. Mourre's and Berna's work has different, but related origins. Where Mourre felt painful alienation from society, Berna was an intellectual elitist who wished to mock the poverty of everyday life. The difference between Berna and Mourre illuminates one of the more curious phenomena of the avant-garde, that although as a group they believe themselves to be superior to the public, they suffer from alienation at the same time.

Although Mourre primarily felt alienated and Berna was elitist, they each were a mixture of both to some extent. Mourre's choice to give a speech to the public as a figure of authority, a speech that shows disdain for the church and its followers, requires his thinking of himself as better than the congregation. Meanwhile, Berna was alienated from society as a self-professed failure and a petty crook.<sup>101</sup> In Berna's leaflet for the *Lettrists*, calling for a meeting of failures, he writes: "They portray us as DUDS, and that is what we are. We are nothing, we mean it, NOTHING AT ALL, and

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<sup>101</sup> In his book *The Tribe*, Lettrist and Situationist member Jean-Michel Mension refers to Berna as a crook several times. Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001. 28

we intend to be of NO USE.”<sup>102</sup> Alienation for Berna was not something to wallow in, as it was for Mourre. For Berna, it was a sense of identity.

According to Poggioli, alienation is the defining aspect of the avant-garde.<sup>103</sup> Avant-garde subcultures engage in style and behavior to identify themselves as being on the fringe. As cultivators of esoteric knowledge, their passions produce a difference from others, resulting in elitism. Poggioli writes: “Thus the artist and the intellectual are naturally led to form their own group, taking up positions of distance or detachment from the traditional culture of the society to which they belong, originally at least.”<sup>104</sup> Poggioli thus describes this elitist distance as causing alienation, as well as the overall negative attitude the avant-garde feels towards the public.

While the relationship between elitism and alienation that Poggioli describes is accurate, it is not the sole source of alienation for avant-garde subcultures. These elite members of the avant-garde often describe how in their their youths they were outsiders, poor, or bullied. Isidore Isou

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<sup>102</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001.78-79

<sup>103</sup> Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge [etc.]: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982.102

<sup>104</sup> Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge [etc.]: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982.118

(founder of the Lettrists) and Tristan Tzara (of Dada and Surrealism) were both Jewish,<sup>105</sup> and both experienced religious and ethnic intolerance outside of their roles in avant-garde subcultures. Poverty was another large factor for many. The Lettrists were youth in post-war Paris with no opportunities to join society,<sup>106</sup> similar to the punks in the economic crisis of 1970s London.<sup>107</sup> Alienation is intensified by elitism, but for many of the avant-garde subculture members, it was an aspect of their lives that they were not only familiar with, but had no option against.

In the case of the avant-garde, elitism is not simply a reaction to being outcast. Many of the avant-garde are intellectuals. Alfred Jarry, Guy Debord, and Richard Hell each were well-read young men. Prestige amongst the avant-garde subcultures had to be earned from their peers, through rites of passage, secret knowledge, and social skills. Therefore, the sense of being elite was not based on fictional aspects, but on a set of values shared with their larger subcultures and differing from outsiders. Poggioli compares the structures of avant-garde movements to the

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<sup>105</sup> Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990.102, 213

<sup>106</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001. 38

<sup>107</sup> Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990.14

cenacles,<sup>108</sup> a mystic tradition in Europe that “were decadent by tradition and symbolist in atmosphere”.<sup>109</sup> Like the avant-garde, cenacles had particular traditions of esoteric knowledge for their selected members.

Education and knowledge were intentionally employed by the avant-garde as a method of establishing boundaries between themselves and those not as invested in their studied areas. Yet, this is not always explicitly the case. The open-source movement in art, as championed by the *Free Art and Technology* group (F.A.T.) displays a desire to be inclusive by opening their knowledge base up to a wider public. Writing about *F.A.T.*, art blogger Regine Debaty states “[what] makes F.A.T.’s work so invaluable is that everyone can get what they are doing<sup>110</sup>”, equating the release of license over the art with an improvement to society. However, Debaty’s statement is not true - in fact nobody can do what *F.A.T.* does, because value in the art and cultural world revolves around being the first to produce the new piece of art. Further, producing such art and technology requires an elite skill set and access to the latest technology, which many

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<sup>108</sup> Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge [etc.]: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982 38

<sup>109</sup> Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge [etc.]: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982 21

<sup>110</sup> Quaranta, Domenico, and Geraldine Juárez. *The F.A.T. Manual*. EINDHOVEN: Stichting MU, 2013. 17

do not have. The efforts of F.A.T. to be open-source end up calling attention to their education, talent, and access to technological equipment.

Elitism enables avant-garde subcultures to restrict access, and to increase their alienation to society. This elitism permeates the avant-garde, causing factions within the groups themselves. Guy Debord is famous for having expelled all founding members of the *Situationist International* while bringing in others, slowly changing the tone of the group from prankster to serious theorists.

#### Fourth Trait - Death, or Recuperation by the Mainstream

When an avant-garde work is recuperated, it experiences a process which Paul Mann terms *theory death*. To Mann, theory death means to historicize the avant-garde, to talk about it as if it has happened and is now finished. Mann relates this type of discourse to an obituary, a form of intellectual dissection where the various components are analyzed. Through this process, the avant-garde theories are compartmentalized, commodified, and they lose their ability to be novel or shocking.

Siegel describes this phenomenon similarly, but shows that it is embedded within the avant-garde from the beginning. “Beholders of every new avant-garde style experienced discomfort and distance in the presence of new



work, but at least some part of the audience – or some part of each viewer was aware that these initial reactions would evolve into acceptance and appreciation, both aesthetic and economic.”<sup>111</sup> Siegel brings up an important distinction not mentioned by Mann, that the process of death is also to some extent initiated by the audiences of the avant-garde. Audiences seek out an art that is beyond the central tastes of culture, expecting an art that is new and challenging. By promoting this art amongst their social groups, the audience increases in size, to such a point that it becomes mainstream. Through this process of being fans, the audience takes part in the recuperation of the avant-garde.

According to Mann, the avant-garde’s primary purpose is to generate new discourse within society. Each new generation of avant-garde subculture extends that discourse further, while former groups are recuperated. In his review of Mann’s book,<sup>112</sup> Radin points out that Mann frames the avant-garde as a part of bourgeois culture. “This is an important point for Mann: it is ‘so-called’ bourgeois culture that sets up these oppositions, that sets up difference in order to resolve it, that sets up resistance in order to

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<sup>111</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.308

<sup>112</sup> Radin, Robert. “The Recuperation of ‘The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde.’” *Diacritics* 28, no. 2 (July 1, 1998): 41–51.

establish its power.”<sup>113</sup> Death according to Mann is the process of being recuperated back into the bourgeois culture from which the avant-garde emerged.

This creates a dilemma for theorists, as Philip Auslander writes: “the real problem is that if we (i.e., critics, theorists) were to relinquish the vocabulary of critical discourse on the avant-garde, the discourse of oppositional art, or critical art, on the grounds that postmodern culture has rendered such terms impossible or irrelevant, what would be left to say about the art we want most to address?”<sup>114</sup> In other words, is it possible to engage in the study of the avant-garde as outsiders, and avoid being a part of its theory death? The question is valid in reference to Siegel’s audience as well; is there a method by which we can promote avant-garde works, without being implicit in its eventual recuperation by the mainstream? The answer, it appears, is no; any social participation with an avant-garde subculture by non-members dilutes its isolation and brings it closer to incorporation with the mainstream. However, Mann’s theory death is only disturbing when considering the avant-garde as a stasis. Theorizing the avant-garde, as Mann discusses it, occurs after the work is produced, and therefore, only the work, but not the practice is

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<sup>113</sup> Radin, Robert. “The Recuperation of “The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde.”” *Diacritics* 28, no. 2 (July 1, 1998): 41–51.

<sup>114</sup> Auslander, Philip. “The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde by Paul Mann.” *MIT Press, TDR*, 37, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 96–201.

recuperated. Traditionally, while one avant-garde is experiencing such theory death, another is emerging. I will return to this topic in Chapters 4 and 5, because the problem in network society is that such recuperation now occurs while the avant-garde is still incubating its ideas and practices.

Prior to network society, the cycle of death and the production of new art in the avant-garde was a process actively engaged in by the artists themselves, with each new avant-garde declaring the former dead. In this section, I review an example of this, the shift of Dada into Surrealism and eventually Situationist International, to explain the evolution that avant-garde engages in during this cycle. I return to this process of evolution in Chapter 4 in describing the role of boundaries in aiding evolution.

Following the split of Zurich Dada, Tristan Tzara moved to Paris to work with a group of French artists, heavily influenced by Dada, including Andre Breton and Francis Picabia. Together, the Parisian Dada group set forth to be the next evolution of the avant-garde group. The collaboration did not last long, as Tzara's increasing formalization of Dada, as well as his authoritarian approach, became a serious strain on the younger members. Even worse, popular culture had begun to accept Dada, with the 1920 article by Jaques Riviere welcoming Dada to the French intelligentsia.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Melzer, Annabelle Henkin. *Dada and Surrealist Performance*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994..38-42.

Breton took his grievances to the stage with his play *Un Homme Libre*. The performance placed Philippe Soupault, Louis Aragon, Andre Breton, and several other soon to be surrealists in white aprons and scarlet caps, where they enacted the trial of a respectable writer who had lost his integrity and spirit. The play was a condemnation of Dada, and Tzara's role as the witness gave rise to an impromptu confrontation between Tzara and Breton. Tzara, perceiving the play as overly serious and pretentious, gave his testimony as "We are all nothing but a pack of fools, and that consequently the little differences – bigger fools or smaller fools – make no difference."<sup>116</sup> To this, Breton replied "Does the witness insist on acting like an utter imbecile, or is he trying to get himself put away?"<sup>117</sup> This is more than an onstage struggle between two personalities of the avant-garde - it marks a clash of different ideologies. Tzara's statement is classic Dada nihilism, in which everything is meaningless, defending Dada with typical Dada illogic. Breton's retort is equally weighted and much more direct, Dada is ludicrous, and will left behind.

The fracturing that began with *Un Homme Libre* was continued with Breton's manifesto *Leave Everything*. In it, Breton called for the reader to

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<sup>116</sup> Melzer, Annabelle Henkin. *Dada and Surrealist Performance*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.41 .

<sup>117</sup> Melzer, Annabelle Henkin. *Dada and Surrealist Performance*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.41 .

leave wife, life, and home, but also to leave Dada. Dada was dead, and the younger generation of avant-garde artists was clearing the way for new forms of experimental expression. Breton and Picabia refused to have any part in Dada performances. When Tzara asked Duchamp to take part in a new Dada work, Duchamp replied by telegram “*peue de balle*”, which translates roughly as “lick my nuts.” In the death throes of the Parisian Dada group, Tzara attempted to stage *Le Coeur a Gaz*. In it, the performers were dressed as various parts of a face: neck, eye nose, mouth, and ear. It was during its second performance, as each facial object moved across the stage chanting monotonously, that Surrealism launched their attack. From the audience, Breton and Benjamin Peret began taunting the performers, finally climbing onto the stage and entering into a fist fight with them.<sup>118</sup>

Direct confrontations with the older generation are de rigueur for the emerging avant-garde group. Mension describes the Lettrist’s own turn against the Surrealists as a requirement of being avant-garde. “We had this idea of Breton as fallen; and if we hated him so much, perhaps it was not only that he was a father figure, but also that he was a father fallen from grace.”<sup>119</sup> Later, he states “We were, in any case, duty bound to denounce

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<sup>118</sup> Melzer, Annabelle Henkin. *Dada and Surrealist Performance*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.119.

<sup>119</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001. 117

the Surrealists. Which reminds me that we used to run into an old gentleman who was Tristan Tzara. When we met him, we would insult him.”<sup>120</sup> There is, it appears, a tradition of disrespecting the preceding generation, as a means of cementing differences.

Poggioli describes this exchange from the older avant-garde to newer groups as a transference of power. “The crisis of avant-gardism is not, so to speak, a crisis of rule, but only of succession: the king is dead, long live the king! More ingenuous observers see denials and betrayals where there is only a simple change of names and personalities.”<sup>121</sup> Thus, in the transference from Dada to Surrealism, we find the new Surrealists making alterations to Dada, but continuing on the avant-garde project of integrating art into life.

In both recuperation and transference of power, the avant-garde engages in a process of ending its critical practice, and becoming historical (Bürger). As I have explained, this historicization is considered an institutional recuperation, yet it also can be beneficial to the emerging avant-garde. The concern, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, arises when this process of recuperation is intensified to the point of occurring before the

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<sup>120</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001.118

<sup>121</sup> Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge [etc.]: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982.221

avant-garde has even had enough time to evolve new strategies, theories, and aesthetics.

### Fifth Trait - Scenes of the Avant-Garde

Given that I am incorporating the subcultural into an understanding of the avant-garde, I propose considering the active practice of the avant-garde to be more than an art practice, and to be also a social and spatial one. I use the term *scene* to refer to subcultural spaces for several reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, because it is a term used by subcultures themselves when referring to their spaces and members. The scene is a wonderfully nuanced word that provides for multiple layers of abstraction, and can be used to identify a specific congregation of people for a period of time in a particular space. For example, there are the music scene, punk scene, the California punk scene, and even the Southern Californian punk scene of the early 1980s. A scene is therefore a combination of the historical, spatial, and social, and its reference includes all three. In *Youth and Subculture As Creative Force* Hans Arthur Skott-Myhre writes that “subcultural ‘scenes’ produced by the combinations of multiple bodies across a particular space will create a unique and unrepeatable pattern of possibility for action and creativity.” Skott-Myhre’s use of ‘unrepeatable’ here is interesting, as it shows that each scene is ephemeral, and thus has a unique value to society.

In this section, I explain how the scene provides avant-garde subcultures with a free space to collectively explore and express themselves in ways that are different to societal norms, and with a location to develop an identity and aesthetic together. In my opinion, the scene has not received enough critical attention, and I will remedy this through various examples, detailing the manner in which scenes are important to the formation and cohesion of their avant-garde subculture. This will serve as an introduction to the upcoming section, where I engage the philosophical work of Henri Lefebvre to explain the role of space in hegemony, and how avant-garde subcultural spaces provide anti-hegemonic value.

### *Aura of the Scene*

Avant-garde subcultural spaces should be examined not only by their physical dimensions of space, but also in the psychological imagery that they invoke: their aura. Gendron discusses this when describing Pat Rogers' writing *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture*<sup>122</sup> saying "He rightly notes that Grub Street, a real place in London, nevertheless flows into literary writing to become symbolic, to serve a set of cultural/political

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<sup>122</sup> Gendron, Bernhard. *Between Montmartre and the Muddclub: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. Pr, 2002.321 .



ideologies, but also to be imagined, exaggerated, worked into poetry.”<sup>123</sup> This element of the imaginary which has psychological effect on how we think about the spaces we are in will be discussed in detail in the coming section on Lefebvre’s spaces of representation.<sup>124</sup> However, in our understanding of the importance of the scene to the avant-garde, we must include the auratic power which they hold to their members. With only a few exceptions, the avant-garde does not physically build a space, but occupies an existing one, making it theirs in the process. Without understanding how they have become infused with cultural meaning, it is difficult to understand the value that they come to hold.

Subcultures mark and design their spaces to match their cultural values and aesthetics, thus helping to amplify the aura of the scene. In the warehouses in which raves are thrown, this is done with theatrical lighting systems to create colored amorphic patterns on the ceilings and walls. The effect is intended to enhance the overall sensations of ‘transcendence’ and match the playful, energetic, and positive tone of the music.<sup>125</sup> In punk cultures, graffiti often transforms the walls of both the venues and streets

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<sup>123</sup> Gendron, Bernhard. *Between Montmartre and the Muddclub: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. Pr, 2002.108.

<sup>124</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of everyday life. Vol. 2, Vol. 2.*, London: Verso, 2008. 182

<sup>125</sup> Kahn-Egan, Chrys. “Degeneration X: The Artifacts and Lexicon of the Rave Subculture.” *Studies in Popular Culture*, 1998, 33–44.. 42

which punks occupy. Graffiti conveys a ‘symbol of resistance’ to the authority of the space. Punk graffiti matches the overall punk aesthetic and typography of punk<sup>126</sup> and often references slogans of the subculture such as “Punks not dead” or the anarchy symbol. Punk graffiti is often spread throughout urban spaces, and can operate as a discourse to the space. Within the punk scene graffiti is omnipresent, covering the space with its designs. Although the punk and rave examples are quite different in their approach, in each we find the space being redesigned to match their respective subcultural aesthetics.

The use of art to completely transform the space is common amongst the avant-garde. Cafe Guerbois, frequented by Manet, Cézanne and Degas, created an ambiance of a secret cenacle in its backroom. In his story *La Double Vie de Louis Séguin*, Duranty described the cafe as being composed of a front terrace-like room and a second ‘crypt’ like room, with low ceiling and “shafts of light with irregular windows in the ceiling that give a shifting light, and create everywhere mysteriously illuminated recesses, deep, long shadows sliced through by bursts of light”.<sup>127</sup> Duranty’s description is evocative of the style of lighting we find in many of the painters’ works of the Fauves. It appears that the space was

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<sup>126</sup> Redhead, Steve. *Punk Style*. A&C Black, 2013. 53

<sup>127</sup> Bernier, Georges. *Paris Cafes: Their Role in the Birth of Modern Art*. Wildenstein, n.d.39

influential in the thinking of the people who gathered there, or perhaps it was selected because it matched the aesthetics of the participants.

The aesthetics of the scene provide a psychological benefit to its participants, those members of the subculture who inhabit the space. For example, Monet wrote of Cafe Guerbois: “mutual stimulation made it easier for you to follow a course of disinterested artistic research; you store up a stock of enthusiasm that for weeks and weeks sustained you until your ideas achieved a definitive form. You always left steeled, your willpower firmer still, your thoughts clearer, more distinct.”<sup>128</sup> The idea that a space refuels one’s artistic abilities underlines the importance such spaces have in subcultures. Monet’s description of Cafe Guerbois is similarly described by Chris A. about 924 Gilman “Punk to me, before Gilman, was a bit sinister and more closely related to metal. Gilman helped open up new ideas and new ways of approaching punk.”<sup>129</sup> In both examples, we find that the scene is creating a space for participants to advance themselves within it. I will return to the reasons for this psychological effect in the next section on Lefebvre.

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<sup>128</sup> Bernier, Georges. *Paris Cafes: Their Role in the Birth of Modern Art*. Wildenstein, n.d. 40

<sup>129</sup> Edge, Brian. *924 Gilman: The Story So Far...* San Francisco, CA: Maximum Rocknroll, 2004.153

## *Subcultural Scenes as Heterotopia*

An important concept for understanding the function of the scene is what Foucault calls *heterotopias*.<sup>130</sup> In his piece *Heterotopias, of other spaces* Foucault describes heterotopias as spaces embedded within society, yet external to the everyday, explaining that they are designed for specific actions, and that they provide transformation to the people who enter. Foucault's examples include the cemetery and the honeymoon trip, both created by societies to provide an external space where one goes to experience a transformation, before returning back to society. I suggest that spaces such as the punk club and bohemian cafes function in a similar fashion, disconnected from everyday life, where one enters to engage in a transformation of self. This is true of the previous examples from Monet and Chris A., and backed up by Duncombe who claims that the scene provides a sort of "free space" for developing ideas and practices. Subcultures produce heterotopias which provide a respite from everyday life, and develop new perspectives and strategies to return to society with.

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<sup>130</sup> Soja points out that Foucault rarely spoke explicitly about space, and that *Heterotopias* was not a published work and should thus be thought of more as a draft (Soja 147-8). Yet Soja insists that Foucault's work is about power, knowledge and space. Where Lefebvre deals with the society and space on a Marxist level, Foucault engages in specific examples such as prisons and mental institutions which implicate the rest of society.

Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996.

As a space separated from everyday life and mainstream culture, the scene can function as a safe haven in which to collectively engage in subculture's shared differences. Like Café Guerbois, many of these spaces are private, built with no visibility to the outside street. Clubs such as *CBGBs* use blacked out windows, or stages above and below street level to keep visibility minimal. For those scenes which took place outside of traditional urban spaces such as raves and Burning Man, I suggest that the obstruction of visibility to outsiders is rendered by the remoteness of their locations. By limiting observation only to participants, the presentation of self is limited to those within<sup>131</sup> the confines of the space.

In these private spaces, social norms are recast to the values of the subculture. Siegel quotes Jeanneret as one of the first to describe the liberties of bohemia. "Oppressed as I was by social niceties, that state, which comes only once and belongs only to one age, permitted me to live and saved me from becoming an outright brute. Thanks to Bohemia, my future was not lost."<sup>132</sup> Bohemia is a realm of permission external to larger

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<sup>131</sup> Goffman, Erving. *THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE*. RE ISSUE edition. New York N.Y.: ANCHOR BOOKS, 1990. 79

<sup>132</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.83 .

Parisian society.<sup>133</sup> Subcultural scenes open opportunities for provocative acts, illicit drugs, and sexual experimentation within their spaces.

However, in these scenes, these behaviors are often explained as paths of transformation.

For those inside the scene, these spaces function as places of learning, exchanging subcultural knowledge and practices. Icons of the scene mix with other regulars and newcomers, and typically incorporate select fringe members of other societal realms. Wilson lists accounts of bohemian cafés as operating as a school “where we learned, almost in a more penetrating way than at the university” and in which “at any hour day or night one could meet people one wanted to talk with or start a press with, open a studio with, form a group with.”<sup>134</sup> People go to the scene expecting a particular type of space and people with whom to interact with, but not always knowing who they will find there or what interactions will take place.

Although often presented as chance encounters, the interaction of participants of the scene often occur because likeminded people are

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<sup>133</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. 270

<sup>134</sup> Wilson, Elizabeth. *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts*. London; New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2003. 35

attracted to the same space. It is no accident that Dada would happen in the capital of Switzerland during World War I, at a cafe known as the gathering spot for artists, authors and intellectuals. *Café de la Terrasse* was the suggested meeting spot for Hans Richter with his two friends should they survive their time in the German army,<sup>135</sup> as it was already the center of the bohemian scene in Zurich, and many of Richter's friends from Berlin's bohemian cafés like *Cafés des Westens* had also relocated there. One was Emmy Henning, who with her husband Hugo Ball had recently placed futurist styled posters in the cafe and neighborhood announcing their *Cabaret Voltaire* to be held at *Café de la Terrasse*, and seeking 'the young artists of Zurich' to give 'musical performances and readings at the daily meetings'. The new group of Dada artists that Richter joined was comprised of bohemians who already had cultural and social connections to each other.

With so many like minded people filtering through a shared space, the likelihood of a chance encounter sparking intense creativity interaction is much higher than in the mainstream world.<sup>136</sup> Genesis P-Orridge describes meeting future collaborator Cosey Fanny-Tutti at an Acid Test party: "she was so much like a cartoon, a pretty cartoon. I said 'Hello' and

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<sup>135</sup> Richter, Hans, and David Britt. *Dada, Art and Anti-Art*. New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1997. 26

<sup>136</sup> Ball, Hugo, and John Elderfield. *Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. 51

apparently the elastic on her knickers snapped. I didn't know this at the time but I guess that when you're on acid it must have seemed highly significant to her. She remembered me because of this."<sup>137</sup> This example illustrates the sense of fortuitousness that the scene provides, opening up chance encounters with like minded people.

### *Slumming*

Subcultural scenes operate as heterotopias by maintaining an externality to the encompassing culture, by being a space engaged in what Foucault describes as the "opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable."<sup>138</sup> Siegel echoes Foucault's sentiments in his description of the patrons of Montmartre who seek release from the repression of "everyday bourgeois life". "To enter that stage [*Le Chat Noir*] one had to pass through the aura of mystery and uncertainty that surrounded the lowlife of Montmartre."<sup>139</sup> Criminals, prostitutes, drunks and opium smokers mixed with the bohemian artists in Montmartre, all of which gave an otherness to the bourgeois who entered the spaces on weekends.

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<sup>137</sup> Ford, Simon. *Wreckers of Civilisation*. S.l.: Black Dog Pub., 2001.117

<sup>138</sup> Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowiec. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics*, 1986, 22–27

<sup>139</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. 239-240



Bohemia, in this instance, was a place to experience these secret pleasures. Thus, we find that subcultural scenes benefit from their placement in the more dangerous of urban environments.

Gelder describes these bourgeois jaunts into subcultural scenes as *slumming*, where “middleclass ‘adventurers’ leave their homes and transform themselves ... to experience if only for a moment [another life]”.<sup>140</sup> Slumming was a popular fad in Victorian England.<sup>141</sup> The aristocrats masqueraded as vagrants to wander through London’s lower class neighborhoods seeking experience and opportunities to do charitable work. Koven quotes *Link Journal*, October 1888, which decried the bourgeois who “slummed because... the horrors they brushed by threw into more brilliant relief the daintiness of their own fair surroundings.”<sup>142</sup> Slumming exemplifies the desire to experience something other than regular life, an excitement and danger, that restores the enjoyment of one’s “own fair surroundings.” Gelder is suggesting that this slumming continues to this day in the upper and middle class participation of subcultures which often occur in dangerous neighborhoods.

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<sup>140</sup> Gelder, Ken. *Subcultures Cultural Histories and Social Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2007. 13

<sup>141</sup> Gelder, Ken. *Subcultures Cultural Histories and Social Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2007. 13

<sup>142</sup> Koven, Seth. *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. 46

In slumming, there is a continued sense of being external to the space, of remaining an outsider to the environment. Even when the artist seeks to engage the inhabitants of these areas, they are unable to, except as outsiders. As Belkind points out “despite such expressions of solidarity with the local working-class, and despite positioning themselves as activists or bohemian outsiders, the motivations of many artists who moved to the Lower East Side were essentially middle class.”<sup>143</sup> Thus, the scene functions as an island within these poor neighborhoods, one that is affected by the surrounding neighborhoods, but different from them.

While danger provides a thrill to the bourgeois visitor, it also serves as a boundary for the scene. Belkind quotes Clay Patterson about living in the LES “The good thing about the drugs was that they kept that attitude out: the middle and upper middle classes and shitty values. This was a [working-class, ethnic] community. Though it was less safe, it was a trade-off.”<sup>144</sup> Patterson views himself as an outsider from both the middle and upper classes, and to those lower classes who kept them out, and he considers this to be positive. The scene not only feels more authentic for

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<sup>143</sup> BELKIND, LARA. “Stealth Gentrification: Camouflage and Commerce on the Lower East Side.” *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 21, no. 1 (October 1, 2009): 21–36. 26

<sup>144</sup> BELKIND, LARA. “Stealth Gentrification: Camouflage and Commerce on the Lower East Side.” *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 21, no. 1 (October 1, 2009): 21–36. 25

being situated in lower working-class neighborhoods, but considers this a filter for keeping others out. Writing about the *Situationist* hangout in a rougher neighborhood of the left bank, Mension stated “on first opening the door to the place: the vast majority fled; the rest said to themselves, ‘Here it is, this is the only place for me!’”<sup>145</sup> Mension’s “this is the only place for me” underlines the notion of this space being aligned with one’s natural self.<sup>146</sup> Paradoxically, the scene believes itself to be a new native, despite remaining distinct from the working class residents. Thus, although the subculture might not be a member of the neighborhood that it occupies, it is able to create its own space within it.

### *Detourning Spaces*

Spaces have two qualities which yield themselves well to subcultural appropriation. The first is that they do not cause high expenditures in either money or time. For example, *Dada* and the *Situationists* practically live in their cafes, holding “daily meetings”<sup>147</sup> and spending all night

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<sup>145</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001.26

<sup>146</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001.26

<sup>147</sup> Ball, Hugo, and John Elderfield. *Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. 50

there.<sup>148</sup> *Throbbing Gristle*<sup>149</sup> and the LES artists took over squats,<sup>150</sup> avoiding any kind of rent. Aside from the financial savings, this tactic of using existing places removes the need for maintenance or administration and the political hierarchies that come with it. Since no investment was initially made to the scene's infrastructure, the option to migrate to another space is always available. The exception to this are the punk spaces of the late 1970s and 1980s such as ABC No Rio and 924 Gilman. In these cases, the punk social values associated with squatter rights, and their relative comfort in being confrontational with authority, resulted in several battles over space.

The spaces selected by scenes are often raw spaces: vacant warehouses, abandoned squats, and buildings and houses in poor condition. For example, *Project for Living Artists*, a 24-hour art loft run by six artists including Alan Vega, was located in the empty second floor of a dilapidated building on Broadway. Band member Martin Rev describes the building as follows: “[The building] encompassed a lot of people from different backgrounds. Homeless people, radical people, and there was a lot of

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<sup>148</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001.58-60

<sup>149</sup> Ford, Simon. *Wreckers of Civilisation*. S.l.: Black Dog Pub., 2001.3.9

<sup>150</sup> Belkind, Lara. “Stealth Gentrification: Camouflage and Commerce on the Lower East Side.” *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 21, no. 1 (October 1, 2009): 21–36. 25

drugs. It was the only place we could rehearse, and we could keep our equipment there, as Alan had the key for the night shift.”<sup>151</sup> The band was extremely poor<sup>152</sup> and the loft space of Project for a Living Artist provided them with a space to develop their experimental music, an income for Alan of \$90 per month, and a place to live.<sup>153</sup> This example shows how beneficial raw spaces can be.

In *The Space of Subculture in the City*, Dougal Sheridan describes the rapid growth of a subcultural network to over 200,000 in East Berlin following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.<sup>154</sup> Writing about the specific affordances of *indeterminate territories*, that is, spaces disregarded and unclaimed by the city, Sheridan states: “In these instances the particular qualities of these places becomes memorable and these conditions of indeterminacy offer us the opportunity for an unmediated experience of the specificity of a place.”<sup>155</sup> Sheridan documented the occupation of the *Besetzte Haus*, a large abandoned complex of several buildings occupied

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<sup>151</sup> Nobahkt, David. *Suicide: No Compromise*. 1 edition. London: SAF Publishing Ltd, 2004.25

<sup>152</sup> Nobahkt, David. *Suicide: No Compromise*. 1 edition. London: SAF Publishing Ltd, 2004. 28

<sup>153</sup> Reynolds, Simon. *Totally Wired: Postpunk Interviews and Overviews*. Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2010.. 25

<sup>154</sup> Sheridan, Dougal. “The Space of Subculture in the City: Getting Specific about Berlin’s Indeterminate Territories.” *Field Journal*, n.d. 102

<sup>155</sup> Sheridan, Dougal. “The Space of Subculture in the City: Getting Specific about Berlin’s Indeterminate Territories.” *Field Journal*, n.d. 106

by different several different groups in East Berlin between 1994 and 1996.

The smaller spaces were converted into private rooms, with larger areas and the courtyard used for shared spaces, including a library, night club and cafe. The structure was viewed by its occupants as permeable, with walls knocked down to create larger spaces or individual rooms.<sup>156</sup>

Sheridan concludes: “Latent in the occupation of these indeterminate territories is the questioning of existing structures, be they material or ideological. The way in which the building is occupied and manipulated is similar to subculture’s occupation, de-naturalization, and re-inscription of cultural artifacts with new meaning.”<sup>157</sup> Sheridan is comparing the practice of spatial occupation to *bricolage*,<sup>158</sup> thus connecting it to the cultural practices of the avant-garde.

Leaving and changing the space is an act that changes the dynamics of the scene, however at times this is an important transition in the avant-garde subculture. Mension describes the move of the *Lettrist International* from *Le Tablou*, popular with “the generation before mine” (meaning Surrealists), to *Moineau’s*, which was “roughly three hundred meters”

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<sup>156</sup> Sheridan, Dougal. “The Space of Subculture in the City: Getting Specific about Berlin’s Indeterminate Territories.” *Field Journal*, n.d. 114

<sup>157</sup> Sheridan, Dougal. “The Space of Subculture in the City: Getting Specific about Berlin’s Indeterminate Territories.” *Field Journal*, n.d. 116

<sup>158</sup> Sheridan, Dougal. “The Space of Subculture in the City: Getting Specific about Berlin’s Indeterminate Territories.” *Field Journal*, n.d. 116

away, but where “we lost even more people on the way across.”<sup>159</sup> The move between cafés calcified the *Lettrist* group, separating them both from the older generation of artists and from those who were not committed members. A more dramatic example of leaving a space to change the scene is provided by Lee “Scratch” Perry, who burned down his music recording studios *Black Ark* when he felt there were too many negative people around. In a recent interview, Lee recounts “The only way to get rid of them was to burn down that place. You purify it and get rid of the guppies and get rid of the beggars and get rid of the evil spirits. Reincarnation.”<sup>160</sup> Both Mension and Perry see this notion of ‘reincarnation’, leaving a scene for new one, as positive. The act of finding a new space to exist in cements the group membership, while leaving the bad elements in the old space.

Avant-garde subcultures have produced their scenes in different ways depending on their own cultural values, and also on what is available to them. Bohemians preferred the bar, cabaret and cafe because they were abundant in the modern city. Punks took over abandoned spaces and houses at a time when many major cities had seen a decline in both

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<sup>159</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001.16-23

<sup>160</sup> “Lee Scratch Perry.” *Dazed*. Accessed January 15, 2014. <http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/709/1/lee-scratch-perry>.

population. Similar to punks, ravers held their raves in abandoned factories at a time when production was leaving western countries. In this way, subcultures have been clever in maximizing the potential of the environment around them. It is unsurprising that contemporary subcultures are moving to online spaces such as Tinychat. These spaces are available without cost, do not require any sort of maintenance from the participants, and are neutral in design. However, these spaces do not provide the aura I have described, and we do not find accounts of the same nourishment Monet ascribed to Cafe Gourbois being given here.

In order to understand the reasons for this qualitative difference between online scenes and physical ones, we must understand the psychological effect that spaces have, the role they play in our everyday lives, and the manners in which they engage the hegemony. In the next Chapter, I will define these by reviewing the work of the philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who argued that urban space enabled a hegemonic control over its inhabitants. As I will explain, avant-garde subcultures are able to introduce difference to society by producing spaces of representation. Finally, I introduce Manuel Castell's theory of *network society* to show how digital media has changed amplified hegemonic control and diluted the boundaries of subculture.



### **III. The Production of Space and Network Society**

In this chapter, I explain how the avant-garde have served as a form of resistance to hegemony during the modern era, primarily by producing a space in which people can experience non-normative thoughts and art forms. I rely upon the work of Henri Lefebvre to explain the importance of space both in establishing hegemonic control and in countering it by producing *spaces of representation*. Then I review the changes that have happened to space in Network Society. In the conclusion, I argue that subcultures like Vaporwave, while matching the traits that define the avant-garde, are not providing the same critical force of prior subcultures.

#### **Space, the Everyday, and Social Power Structures**

Lefebvre develops his critique of everyday life by noting a difference between the pre-modern agrarian town of his childhood Navarrenx and the modern suburbs of Paris. According to Lefebvre, “Everyday life, ancient gestures, rituals as old as time itself, continue unchanged – except for the fact that this life has been stripped of its beauty. Only the dust of words remain, dead gestures. Because rituals and feelings, prayers and magic spells, blessings, curses have been detached from life, they have

become abstract and ‘inner’.”<sup>161</sup> The difference between ancient and modern life is the gradual increase of *urban space* and the resulting increase in *alienation* of the inhabitants. Alienation is a sense of being disconnected from the world. The Marxist use of alienation is based on the working class lacking autonomy over from the products that they produce, and in his use Lefebvre is extending Marx’s notion to include an everyday life that lacks autonomy. This is the challenge which Lefebvre sets for himself in *Navarrenx*, and to which he devoted his philosophical career: to reintegrate autonomy and, consequentially, fulfillment into everyday life. I consider Lefebvre’s work to be highly relevant to this dissertation because his philosophical concepts of space, everyday life, alienation, and fulfillment (which occur through moments) are what the avant-garde are engaged in.

Lefebvre describes *realized abstraction* as the transference of autonomy to an external control structure, and explains that they have grown as civilization has become more complex. Lefebvre cites nature-based belief systems’ attempt to control the physical world around the practitioner as an early historical example. The religious individual accedes control over their life to (an) almighty power(s), and focuses on the development of the

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<sup>161</sup> Lefebvre, Henri, John Moore, and Michel Trebitsch. *Critique of Everyday Life. Vol. 1, Vol. 1.* London; New York: Verso, 2008.203

spiritual rather than physical.<sup>162</sup> Thus, with the introduction of organized religions into society, we find an intensification of the transference from autonomy to external belief systems.

Organized religion codifies its knowledge into prayers and texts to enable the shared belief system to permeate across geographical spaces and generations of people. The codification of religious knowledge has two effects. First, it centers authority over this knowledge to the original producer, in Lefebvre's case the Church. Second, codification enables the transmission of knowledge throughout different territories, including those where it where it was not initially relevant. For example, the belief system of Christianity (the dominant religion in France) is based on Judaism, and the theme of desert life plays heavily into its stories and knowledge. Symbols and history such as the palm tree branch and Jewish Exodus from Egypt are part of the French Catholic belief system, despite having no direct presence in the lives of the believers. Prior to Catholicism, the belief system had been nature based, and was very much integrated into the surrounding landscapes. With Catholicism, the spiritual and emotional energy which the French are investing into religion, are now based on foreign concepts and require a degree of abstraction. It is this disconnection between spiritual belief system (the realized abstraction)

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<sup>162</sup> Lefebvre, Henri, John Moore, and Michel Trebitsch. *Critique of Everyday Life. Vol. 1, Vol. 1.* London; New York: Verso, 2008.236.

and the spaces of everyday life that, according to Lefebvre, gives rise to alienation.

Realized abstraction, and consequently alienation, was intensified with the development of the modern state. Where religion occupies the spiritual and moral aspects of life, the state controls the structuring of most of the lived experience: from water and food supplies, the determination of working hours and years of employment, to housing and healthcare.

Lefebvre explains that even leisure is not separated from our urban lives, but tends to be its justification, rationed out into sanctioned activities to provide an interlude to our everyday lives.

In his concept of realized abstraction, Lefebvre lays the groundwork for connecting the Marxist concept of alienation with his own of urban space and everyday life. The argument is that alienation is not just a problem of labor being privatized and not owned by the laborer, but of everyday life and urban space no longer being in the control of the citizen. Lefebvre's writing on realized abstractions is focused on philosophical discourse, and I consider it a bit hard to grasp without more concrete examples.

Therefore, I turn to Michel Foucault's work in order to explain how realized abstraction operates in the modern state. Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* describes the state exertion of control over the body through the creation of health practices, in which the patient becomes a subject to the doctor, and spaces for health to be engaged in. Foucault shows how this

structure of knowledge creates power relations that distance the person from their own body and health. Healthcare, in Foucault's example, is a form of realized abstraction because our relationship to our own body has become abstracted by the belief that doctors are the people to explain the knowledge of the body to us.

Of course, in the case of healthcare, medical expertise is vital. A realized abstraction is not necessarily negative in itself. However, realized abstractions produce alienation, and the medical industry can either increase or decrease this alienation by providing people with a personal sense of agency and understanding in dealings with their own health.

Healthcare is one example from thousands of systems in modern society which are realized abstractions. Other examples are the judicial, financial, and commerce systems, each of which can be alienating to a person who must rely upon them, trusting that they will work, without understanding how they work. Later, I will return to realized abstractions in network society to explain how the phenomenon increases when digital technologies are relied upon every day.

Facing the surmounting alienation of modern society, Lefebvre offers a method of regaining fulfillment in life which he calls *The Theory of Moments*. "We situate the 'moment' as a function of a history, the history of the individual. We consider that up to a certain point (very limited, and as yet, too limited) this history is his own creative undertaking, and that he

recognizes himself within it, even if it is in a confused way.”<sup>163</sup> Moments have significance because they align to the individual’s own tastes and belief system. In turn these moments reinforce the individual’s identity, creating a sense of purpose and autonomy in life. In this regard moments are *disalienating* because they connect lived experiences to the values of the individual.

Moments are not only the internal representation of an individual, but also impact their external presentation of self. Humans construct stories about themselves based on the moments they consider valuable, and to explain who they are to each other. Lefebvre<sup>164</sup> uses the moment of love as an example of an archetypal moment that many experience.<sup>165</sup> While each person’s experience with love is intensely individual, it remains, in abstraction, a common experience. These shared moments connect people to each other by allowing them to relate to each other through these similar moments.

This concept, that an experience can reduce alienation, is a common theme in the avant-garde. Indeed, Lefebvre formulated his *Theory of Moments* at a time he

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<sup>163</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of everyday life. Vol. 2, Vol. 2.* London: Verso, 2008.

<sup>164</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of everyday life. Vol. 2, Vol. 2.* London: Verso, 2008.352.

<sup>165</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of everyday life. Vol. 2, Vol. 2.* London: Verso, 2008.373.

was friends with Guy Debord of *Situationist International* and Debord was developing his concept of the *situation*. Following Lefebvre's writing *Theory of Moments*, Debord published an amicable response clarifying that the situation is different from the moment in that it "seeks to found itself on the objectivity of artistic production. Such production breaks radically with durable works. It is inseparable from its immediate consumption as a use value essentially foreign to conservation as a commodity."<sup>166</sup> The situation, as an artistic production, attempts to intentionally disrupt everyday life through a somewhat contrived experience. Through the production of the situation, the artist can regain a level of autonomy over their everyday lives. This strategy, which the *Situationist International* refers to as situation, is found in many of the performance works of preceding avant-garde groups, and is continued in later avant-garde groups. I consider the situation to be part of the larger project of transforming life into art.

Lefebvre, like his avant-garde counterparts, championed transforming life into art, writing "Let everyday life become a work of art! Let every technical means be employed for the transformation of everyday life!"<sup>167</sup> Yet Lefebvre did not believe that it would be artists that would be capable of such a transformation. The capability of art to transform all of life is a key point of distinction between Lefebvre and the avant-garde. He credits the avant-garde as leading the future:

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<sup>166</sup> Debord, Guy. "The Theory of Moments and the Construction of Situations.pdf," n.d. <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/moments.html>.

<sup>167</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of everyday life. Vol. 2, Vol. 2.* London: Verso, 2008<sup>204</sup>

“Yes, because it is an avant-garde, it scours the future. It marches in the vanguard, scanning and prefiguring the horizon,”<sup>168</sup> but ultimately Lefebvre believes the avant-garde too inwardly focused to solve “urgent and relatively precise problems, such as urbanism - new towns, problems which make utopianism rational and transfer it from the realm of the imagination into almost positive reason by turning it into a method.”<sup>169</sup> Lefebvre hoped for a Marxist revolution that would bring about this change.

For those within avant-garde subcultures, it is easier to understand how life transforms into art, because we have seen examples of it. Previously, I discussed Siegel’s attribution of Baudelaire as the penultimate bohemian for living his life as art. In subcultures, such as ravers and punks, we see a dedication to being expressive through fashion and behavior. Yet, Lefebvre’s goal is to bring this transformation to all of society, and his argument is that the avant-garde is too insular to do so. However, Lefebvre does not engage in methods for producing moments, but instead seems to imply that they would increase in a life under less hegemonic control.

I consider the avant-garde production of situations, and their intentional attempts to transform life into art, to be the foundation for why their scenes

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<sup>168</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *Introduction to Modernity*. Reprint edition. London; New York: Verso, 2012. 362

<sup>169</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *Introduction to Modernity*. Reprint edition. London; New York: Verso, 2012.362



operate as heterotopias to mainstream spaces. The spaces that the avant-garde produce signal to those that enter that they are spaces for experimentation and transforming that moment of life into art. In the next section, I will discuss this as a space of representation, and present in further detail the role it plays in society.

In closing, I want to note that the production of moments is utilized by commercial ventures to associate emotional impact with shopping experiences. In *The Experience Economy*, Pine and Gilmore write: “Trips to the grocery store, often a burden for families, become exciting events at places such as Bristol Farms Gourmet Specialty Foods Markets in Southern California. This upscale chain ‘operates its stores as if they were theaters’ according to *Stores* magazine, featuring ‘music, live entertainment, exotic scenery, free refreshments, a video-equipped amphitheater, famous-name guest stars and full audience participation’.<sup>170</sup>” The spectacular grocery store provides a variation to the rhythm of everyday life, but it is one that quickly fades back into the background noise, because these packaged experiences are not unique from everyday life, nor are they autonomously created, and therefore are not what Lefebvre would define as a moment. An authentic moment provides agency to the individual, it is shaped because of them, and in turn changes them. By their very nature,

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<sup>170</sup> Pine, B. Joseph, and James H. Gilmore. *The Experience Economy*. Harvard Business Press, 2011.5

moments must be unique and finite, otherwise they become repetitious and mundane.

## **Spaces of Representation**

Lefebvre's overarching philosophical practice, *rhythmanalysis*, combines the study of everyday life and lived experience, discussed in the previous section, with the relationship between space, urbanism, and hegemonic power. Lefebvre posits that embedded within space are the regulations and control structures which influence our behavior and everyday lives. Lefebvre uses the example of the cathedral as a source of religious power, and explains that religious space is necessary to permeate religious realized abstractions. In this section, I provide an overview for how space acquires psychological affects, and is thus able to influence behavior. I return to avant-garde scenes, and relate them to what Lefebvre calls spaces of representation: those sites in which individuals can autonomously represent themselves. As I discuss, spaces of representation provide a framework for understanding the anti-hegemonic value that the avant-garde scene serves to society.

Societies produce spaces that have influence on the behavior performed within them, by designing and labeling them according to specific functions. For example, the marketplace, bedroom, and highway each

connote a space that has particular activities allotted to them. The functions of these *social spaces* are socially defined and culturally biased. Lefebvre explains that social spaces include not just their physical properties, but an abstract, or symbolic, dimension that communicates understanding of what type of behaviors should occur within.

The abstract dimensions of a space are manifest through physical objects and presented within the space. I refer to these physical objects which are infused with a cultural symbolism as *symbolic objects*, to emphasize their role in the abstract dimension of space. However, all objects have some degree of symbolic value, and are in essence symbolic objects. Social spaces utilize these symbolic objects in order to communicate their abstract dimension, thus providing instructions on behavior within the space. Merleau-Ponty uses a red carpet as an example of this in *Phenomenology of Perceptions*, showing how perception involves not only the physical ability to see, but also the mental ability to determine its cultural context from shape and color, and thus understand its symbolic function. Physically, the red color, the elongated shape, and the textured pattern of the carpet material are seen. Meanwhile, the context of the red carpet placed leading up to an entrance is understood, and thus cultural meaning of a regal entrance is encoded into the space. Were a velvet rope placed alongside the carpet, or were this carpet surrounded by a camera toting crowd, these would both signify additional cultural information

about the space. The red carpet operates as a symbolic object that influences the behavior of those within the space it is placed.

Lefebvre explains the power of symbolic objects through his notion of *consciousness*. Lefebvre writes: Consciousness is “put into the service of signs and of their formal connections. It is receptiveness on a particular level of signals (the level of unmediated practical action).”<sup>171</sup> In other words, our consciousness operates by (over time and with repetition) internalizing the symbolism of the objects around us, and only considering their function in how they are presented to us. There are two important factors to extract from Lefebvre’s connection of symbolic objects to consciousness. First, in a society that mass produces the majority of its objects, the manner in which consciousness understands and utilizes these objects is limited to the few. Consider the prefabrication of houses and furniture, which determine the everyday behavior of all those who use them. It can be argued that the design differences of a house have some small significance in discussion of hegemonic power, however remember that Lefebvre’s principal argument is that hegemonic power is most effective in its structuring of everyday life. The second point to extract from Lefebvre’s connection of consciousness to symbolic objects is that by engaging in the *détournement* of these mass produced objects, the avant-

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<sup>171</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *Introduction to Modernity*. Reprint edition. London; New York: Verso, 2012. 296

garde is reclaiming autonomy over them. Duchamp's *The Fountain* is not only an attack on art, but also a challenge of symbolic objects. By placing it upside down, the function of the urinal becomes a fountain, and transforms from a site of filth to one of cleanliness.

On the power of symbolic objects, Lefebvre states that they “employ elements borrowed on the one hand from the lived and from society as a whole, and on the other from institutions and ideologies. Ignored or misunderstood, the real relation becomes completely alienated and fossilized (reified) in a deceptive and limiting representation.”<sup>172</sup>

Lefebvre is arguing that mass production increases alienation by surrounding society with a limited and static functionality. But further, Lefebvre warns of the loss in representing oneself through the objects we use. By creating our own objects, or by détourning them, we are ingraining them with functionalities that match our needs and desires. Admittedly, on a single-case basis this does not seem incredibly important, but it is significant when comparing a life surrounded primarily by customized objects, to a life surrounded primarily by mass-produced objects. In the latter, we can see a greater degree of alienation.

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<sup>172</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *Introduction to Modernity*. Reprint edition. London; New York: Verso, 2012. 265

Social spaces, which are comprised of symbolic objects, inherit this problem of alienation. Those spaces which contain objects that match the values and desires of the inhabitant are more disalienating than those which do not. Consider Monet's example of Café Guerbois which for him is a retreat to find artistic nourishment. The space of Café Guerbois had the right people, the right food and drink, the right ambiance, and the right spatial design for Monet and his fellow Fauves.

According to Lefebvre, in order to *change life*, new spaces must be produced which enable these changes, and new symbolic objects must be produced to compose these spaces. This is what we find avant-garde subcultures practicing in the building of their scenes. Whether the graffiti of punk clubs, the light shows at raves, or the darkened caverns of the Fauves' cafés, we find each subculture producing spaces that represent their values. Lefebvre calls these "spaces of representation": spaces in which the individual can exert autonomy by producing symbolic objects that align to their personal beliefs and which instantiate meaningful moments.

Lefebvre's use of the term representation is important here, because it implies that the values of the space are communicated back to the mainstream culture. While avant-garde scenes protect their boundaries from outsiders, they remain partially accessible to the mainstream.

Through journalism, slumming, and new members seeking out the spaces, the scene engages in a communications interlock with the mainstream.

Avant-garde spaces represent a communication with the mainstream against hegemony in three ways. First, by being a space of non-normativity, they offer an opportunity to those who seek what Stephen Duncombe calls “free space” to experiment outside of the restrictions of mainstream definitions. Clearly, not all avant-garde spaces are accepting of all differences, but they do communicate what non-normative behaviors can be engaged in within them. Second, by expressing values that do not have a voice in mainstream society. And third, by being a space that defines itself in contrast to mainstream society, avant-garde scenes communicate to others in their society that defiant spaces are possible.

Unfortunately, the anti-hegemonic value of avant-garde spaces does not continue with as much strength in the virtual spaces of Vaporwave. This is because virtual spaces do not have territorial contention in the same way physical spaces do. As online spaces, they are compliant to the rules and regulations of the websites in which they congregate. It can be argued that Vaporwave communicates non-normativity, but this too should be questioned, as their being online increases the sense of distance they have to those in society. A punk space such as 924 Gilman is continually in contention with their neighbors because it resides within a physical

space.<sup>173</sup> For example, 924 Gilman has to deal with neighbors that register noise and graffiti complaints against them. In addition, the physical location of 924 Gilman is for many mentally associated with the punk community that inhabits it. This battling over the rights, or the association of a wider neighborhood to a subcultural community, does not occur online, where people who do not intentionally connect to the virtual space have no engagement with it. To be clear, the avant-garde does not always have problems with the spaces they occupy, nor do they add value to society by engaging in continual problems. However, it is only physical spaces that offer the same degree of critical representation to the mainstream. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the role of physical spaces in establishing boundaries and cultural identity for subcultures.

## **Network Society**

While Lefebvre's theories provide a framework to understand the role of avant-garde subcultural spaces, society has changed significantly in the digital age. In this section, I will utilize Manuel Castell's work on *Network Society* to examine some of these changes within the context of their effect upon avant-garde subcultural spaces. First I examine Castell's concept of

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<sup>173</sup> "Pansy Division, Ghoulies Keep Troubled Gilman St. Club Rocking - MTV." Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.mtv.com/news/511842/pansy-division-ghoulies-keep-troubled-gilman-st-club-rocking/>.



network society and explain how the term is focused on the shift of hegemonic power to a system distributed over a network. Then I establish how realized abstractions have become more entrenched in our lives since Lefebvre's writing on them. Realized abstractions can explain, at least partially, how we have succumbed to the dramatic, and at times negative, impacts of network society upon our lives. I discuss some of these (absent presence, access, and homogenization of cultures), incorporating past theoretical work to better understand these conditions. This will provide the platform for the Chapter 3, where I will examine the dilution of avant-garde subcultural boundaries by network society.

Castells' term *network society* is useful in understanding the manner in which global networked systems are transforming society. Network systems, such as roads, electrical systems, or phone lines, have always been a significant factor in society, yet Castells explains why it is only now that networks have become the prominent factor in our society. "For most of human history, and unlike biological evolution, networks were outperformed by organizations able to master resources around centrally defined goals, achieved through the implementation of tasks in rationalized, vertical chains of command and control. But for the first time, the introduction of new information/communication technologies allows networks to keep their flexibility and adaptability, thus asserting their evolutionary nature. While, at the same time, these technologies allow for co-ordination and management of complexity, in an interactive

system which features feedback effects, and communication patterns from anywhere to everywhere within the networks.”<sup>174</sup> Castells points out that societal control is decentralized in network society. This is different from Lefebvre who, writing in 1970, states that “There can be no city or urban reality without a center [...] it is theoretically impossible not to support urban concentration, together with the attendant risks of saturation and disorder, and the opportunities for encounters, information, and convergence.”<sup>175</sup> Centrality was essential to organization prior to digital networks. However, now these spaces of power no longer need to be located at a specific nexus, and rather can be anywhere that it is connected to the network.

The decentralization of hegemonic power has had an effect on the geography of power. International organizations and corporations are able to operate as “a new form of sovereignty that knows no boundaries, or rather, knows only flexible, mobile boundaries.”<sup>176</sup> While this shift in political structures to international decentralized network systems is too comprehensive to cover in this dissertation, it is important to note that

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<sup>174</sup> Castells, Manuel. “Materials for an Exploratory Theory of the Network Society.” *The British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 1 (2000): 5–24. 15

<sup>175</sup> Lefebvre, Henri, Bononno, Robert, and Neil Smith. *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis (Minn.); London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. 96

<sup>176</sup> Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001. 153

control in network society is scattered and flexible. The effects of this are explained by Gilles Deleuze in his *Postscripts on the Societies of Control*: “There is no need to ask which is the toughest or most tolerable regime, for it’s within each of them that liberating and enslaving forces confront one another.”<sup>177</sup> This entanglement of different spaces of power causes problems for an avant-garde that is seeking to produce heterotopias outside of mainstream society.

A real world example of this problem is the abundance of digital video now taken in subcultural spaces. The ever-present potential of someone with a smart phone placing photographic or video documentation online alters behavior similar to Foucault’s description of the panopticon. Mainstream society’s potential looking inside avant-garde spaces has a cooling effect on what occurs within them, thereby decreasing the non-normative behaviors that occur within these spaces.

Network Society also influences behavior through the affordances of the technologies which are used. Alexander Galloway, in *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization*, defines this as *protocol*. “Protocol is a language that regulates flow, directs net space, codes relationships, and connects life-forms. Protocol does not produce or casually effect

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<sup>177</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. “Postscripts on the Societies of Control.” Accessed December 28, 2013. [https://files.nyu.edu/dnm232/public/deleuze\\_postscript.pdf](https://files.nyu.edu/dnm232/public/deleuze_postscript.pdf). 4

objects, but rather is a structuring agent as the result of a set object disposition.”<sup>178</sup> Galloway is implying here that the control which protocol exerts over behavior is subtle. In this section, I will describe how the protocols of networked technologies result into specific affordances, which in turn exert control over human behaviors.

Protocol is not a new phenomenon, but an aspect of all networked systems. For example, the introduction of the telephone to the American public brought with it an education, not only in how to technically use the device, but what the proper social etiquette was for the device.<sup>179</sup> The rise of these social protocol manuals indicates the shift in their usage between 1915 and 1920. Telephonic technology was no longer a novelty, but had become incorporated into everyday life. Consequently, divergent social practices had started to emerge. Pamphlets, such as *The Kingdom of the Subscriber*, were produced towards the closing of World War I.<sup>180</sup> These rules went beyond those necessary to enable communication through a distributed network. In fact, AT&T even considered the word “Hello” to be a vulgarity and tried to stop its use. Alexander Graham Bell sponsored a

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<sup>178</sup> Galloway, Alexander R. *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2004. 74

<sup>179</sup> Fischer, Claude S. *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.183-191

<sup>180</sup> Fischer, Claude S. *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.183.

hortatory essay on the subject, with the winner citing “Would you rush into an office or up to the door of a residence and blurt out ‘Hello! Hello! Who am I talking to?’”<sup>181</sup> Instead, phone users were instructed to mimic the social behavior expected in face-to-face interactions. Use of the telephone is thus governed not only by technical constraints, but also by cultural determination.

In network society, protocol has increased both in technical constraints and social expectations. For instance, the brevity of text messaging, with its 160 character limit, has influenced contemporary conversation styles.<sup>182</sup> Similar to the pamphlets of the telephone, online social sites influence behavior due to their technological affordances. The effects of protocol are quite similar to those of mass produced symbolic objects in that those who design the protocols control their functionality. Network society thus intensifies alienation by introducing protocol to communication and social structure.

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<sup>181</sup> Fischer, Claude S. *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. 70-71

<sup>182</sup> Jacobs, Gloria E. “We Learn What We Do: Developing a Repertoire of Writing Practices in an Instant Messaging World.” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 52, no. 3 (2008): 203–11.

Amanda Lenhart. “Cell Phones and American Adults.” *Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project*. Accessed June 19, 2014. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2010/09/02/cell-phones-and-american-adults/>.

## Realized Abstractions

Extending Lefebvre's theory of mass produced symbolic objects, I find that this alienating effect of digital technologies is due to our having naturalized them into our everyday behavior while not understanding the complex dynamics under which they operate, nor being able to have autonomous control over their functionality. As an approximation to understanding how digital technologies function, people develop a series of abstract beliefs about, and general practices for the use of digital technologies. For example, practices such as rebooting the computer when a system error occurs are often effective enough in solving the problem without the need to understand its cause. While at times effective, digital technologies have become another realized abstraction, another mystified system that we depend upon in our daily life. The realized abstractions that occur around digital technologies are phenomenologically similar to those discussed by Lefebvre and Foucault, they reduce autonomy and place control in an external and abstractly understood other. Without the personal knowledge that enables autonomous control over the digital technology, we must rely upon external companies.

This digital technological realized abstraction has large societal consequences. In *Techno-Fix: Why Technology Won't Save Us or the Environment*, Huesmann & Huesmann argue that our cultural optimism for technology has led to ongoing development without a critical

assessment of its effects. “The operating homilies remain the same: ‘You can’t stop progress’, ‘Once the genie is out of the bottle you cannot put it back’, ‘Technology is here to stay, so we have to find ways to use it better’. In reality, these are all rationalizations to cover up a culture-wide passivity; a failure to take a hard look at technology in all of its dimensions, or to draw the obvious conclusions from the evidence at hand.”<sup>183</sup> The failure to critique our own technology use as described by the Huesmanns is the same mental passivity that was directed at the changes to urban spaces during the development of the modern city. As a realized abstraction, technology is considered too complex for the average person to engage with critically.

Avant-garde groups have responded to realized abstraction by encouraging criticality and transparency. Similar to Lefebvre’s arguing for our *right to the city*, which argued that citizens should have inalienable autonomy over how they use their urban spaces, certain avant-garde groups have argued for open source rights to technology, in which people should legally be permitted to hack and change their technologies. For example, the *F.A.T. (Free Art and Technology) Lab* “is the unsolicited guerrilla marketing

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<sup>183</sup> Huesemann, Michael, and Joyce Huesemann. “Techno-Fix.” *Utne*. Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://httpwww.utnereader.com/arts/techno-fix-zeOz1304zcalt.aspx>.

division for the open source revolution in art.”<sup>184</sup> In projects such as *Fuck Google*, members impersonated a *Google Maps* car and proceeded to create humiliating stunts such as getting lost, driving poorly, and pretending to push a pedestrian.<sup>185</sup> The project was then released with a set of instructions on how to print your own version on their site.<sup>186</sup> *F.A.T. Lab*, challenges societal acceptance of Google as an authority by posing as Google and comically failing. The F.A.T. Lab release all of their concepts and software to the public as open-source. While open source makes the designs of technology available to the public, it does not provide full access to the technologies themselves, as this requires both technological skills and fabrication capabilities. As I will discuss next (see 1.4.2.3), this type of access is difficult to acquire.

### Access

In this section I examine the phenomenon by which access to digital technologies and networks is related to economic power, and intensifies the gap between the wealthy and poor.

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<sup>184</sup> Quaranta, Domenico, and Geraldine Juárez. *The F.A.T. Manual*. EINDHOVEN: Stichting MU, 2013. 9

<sup>185</sup> “How to Build a Fake Google Street View Car | F.A.T.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://fffff.at/google-street-view-car/>.

<sup>186</sup> “How to Build a Fake Google Street View Car | F.A.T.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://fffff.at/google-street-view-car/>.



When the majority of society incorporates a technology into everyday life, such as has happened with the automobile, television, and mobile phone, the affordances of the technology become expected of the members of society. As Virilio explains it, “technologically enhanced life begins to seem like our natural state.”<sup>187</sup> “Natural” in Virilio’s usage refers to the technology becoming so entrenched in everyday life that we assume that it will be there forever. For example, we do not first ask whether someone has a telephone, but skip directly to enquiring what their phone number is.

Digital technologies are not distributed evenly across the population, and many do not have access to those that others take for granted. In a society where information holds economic value, access to information and to the means of creating and distributing information, equates to economic power. Those who lack the technologies or skills to engage in information technologies are also not able to participate in this form of economic power. Consequently, network society can actually increase the imbalance of preexisting wealth inequalities by providing access to these technologies only to those who can afford them.

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<sup>187</sup> Virilio, Paul. *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*. Translated by Phil Beitchman. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext, 1991.50

In addition to having access to digital technologies, being connected to the network through these technologies is equally advantageous. In network society, economic power is maintained by having continuous accessibility to online social networks and communication services. For digital laborers, monitoring email accounts, engaging in social networks, and contributing to online content and forums, are requirements of their career. Pew Research reports that nearly two-thirds of those with mobile phones have slept with them,<sup>188</sup> proving the importance of maintaining access.

Socialization also depends upon access to the online social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. Yet, as Sherry Turkle notes in *Alone Together*, the need to be accessible online has hidden costs. “We are increasingly connected to each other but oddly more alone: in intimacy, new solitudes.”<sup>189</sup> Turkle is concerned that we are losing some of the quality in relationships when they occur mostly online. Turkle is using the term solitude to illustrate a qualitative difference between online and physical world relationships. I do not agree with this, there are many examples of strong relationships forming exclusively online, the members

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<sup>188</sup> Amanda Lenhart. “Cell Phones and American Adults.” *Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project*. Accessed June 19, 2014. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2010/09/02/cell-phones-and-american-adults/>.

<sup>189</sup> Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2011. 19

of Vaporwave being one. However, I do consider solitude an interesting word choice in that it describes what occurs in the physical spaces when the people inhabiting them are connecting online, rather with those physically proximate. The next section describes this phenomenon as an absent presence, yet from the perspective of someone who does not have networked access, and is surrounded by those who do, the phenomenon does create a sort of new solitude.

### Absent Presence

With the telephone, and now the internet, near instantaneous transmission of information can occur regardless of physical distance, enabling real-time communication to occur between two or more parties who are not physically close. In the last section, I described the effect upon the physical world around the person as a new solitude. Cooley described this phenomenon with the telephone as early as 1912: “In our own lifetime the intimacy of the neighborhood has been broken up by the growth of an intricate mesh of wider contacts which leaves us strangers to people who live in the same house... diminishing our economic and spiritual community with our neighbors.”<sup>190</sup> The increase of distant relationships maintained over networked technology is only possibly at the

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<sup>190</sup> Fischer, Claude S. *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.193

cost of nearby physical ones. We remain physically present, but we are mentally elsewhere.

Kenneth Gergen echoes Cooley's concerns in describing the contemporary version of this phenomenon as *absent presence*: "One is physically present, but is absorbed by a technologically mediated world of elsewhere. Typically it is a world of relationships - both active and vicarious - within which domains of meaning are being created or sustained. Increasingly these domains of anterior meaning insinuate themselves into the world of full presence - that world in which one is otherwise absorbed and constituted by the immediacy of concrete, face-to-face relationships."<sup>191</sup> Absent presence produces a sense of absence to all who are physically proximate, it displays a private space in which they are not participants.

The term presence, in Gergen's usage, means the act of being aware of, and engaged in, one's current situation. The academic journal *Presence* covers the psychological engagement of virtual and remote environments, and a typical article might describe *the realness* of a virtual experience. For example, the Winter 2013 issue featured articles on the effect of packet loss in providing haptic feedback in co-present experiences, and an article

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<sup>191</sup> Gergen, Kenneth J. "14 The Challenge of Absent Presence." *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance*, 2002, 227.

on a virtual surgical simulator.<sup>192</sup> Presence is thus a barometer of the degree of engagement with both the physical and virtual world. Absent presence then is the transference of one's engagement elsewhere from where one's physical body is located.

This dichotomy of virtual and physical world presence is however not sufficient in describing the new paradigms of real virtuality, in which the virtual and physical are merged. For example in augmented reality as provided by Google Glass, the virtual is overlaid on top the physical world. The user is not truly absent from the physical space, yet some of their perceptions are altered. A significant similarity can be found in the phenomenon of listening to music on a Walkman, which sociologist Michael Bull frames as a privatization of space.<sup>193</sup> Where on the telephone people devote their presence to the space of the conversation, presence in real virtuality is not as easily observable. The person is partially available, and partially elsewhere. Yet, Bull's concept of the technologically enabled privatization of space is important to consider in relation to absent presence. The information viewable to the Google Glass wearer is private

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<sup>192</sup> Qin, Jing, Kup-Sze Choi, Renheng Xu, Wai-Man Pang, and Pheng-Ann Heng. "Effect of Packet Loss on Collaborative Haptic Interactions in Networked Virtual Environments: An Experimental Study." *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments* 22, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 36–53

<sup>193</sup> Bull, Michael The Intimate sounds of urban experience: An auditory epistemology of everyday mobility. In Nyiri, Kristof, ed. *A Sense of Place. The Global and the Local in Mobile Communication*. Wien: Passagen, 2005.169-178

and not shared with those physically near. While the wearer might blur their engagement between physical and virtual by, for example, telling those nearby what they are viewing, this engagement is a private experience chosen instead of a shared one.

Absent presence is a phenomenon of networked technology that has its effect by providing virtual or real virtualities that are preferential to the physical world. This phenomenon has already been described in the Vaporwave example. I consider discussions in which either the virtual or the physical are given preference to overlook the increasing merging of the two into a real virtuality. Instead, I believe that each can be evaluated by how their affordances fit the needs they meet. However, arguments both for and against this shift to virtual spaces and real virtualities provide questions that I address in Chapter 4 1) what affordances of the physical sites make the virtual preferential, and 2) for what needs does a physically located avant-garde subculture provide to society which are not provided by the virtual subculture?

### Homogenization of Space

While our physical spaces are increasingly privatized, they are also becoming more *homogeneous*. As discussed above, our online social networks consist of many weak connections, which we can selectively

engage in. Gergen states that this results in our selecting relationships that match our own viewpoint, while avoiding differences. “Lacking outside interference, local ontologies and moralities can be sustained with relative ease. Lacking dissenting voices, there is little with which to compare and little grounds for question.”<sup>194</sup> According to Gergen, we become ensiled with individuals of likeminded perspective. However, Gergen overlooks the ability to locate and engage with cultures of opposing perspectives, which happens most often in *Trolling*: the act of being intentionally provocative in an online community or forum.<sup>195</sup> Yet, even with trolling, I find that the homogenization Gergen refers to exists. Our ability to curate our engagement with others reduces our opportunities to stumble onto unexpected encounters.

The effects of homogenization are not necessarily negative, especially in their impact on reducing hatred. “The Internet has been shown to ameliorate the negative impacts of homophobia by providing access to friendships and support, information, romantic partners, and a gay community”<sup>196</sup> This online support network has traditionally been

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<sup>194</sup> Gergen, Kenneth J. “14 The Challenge of Absent Presence.” *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance*, 2002, 2

<sup>195</sup> Phillips, Whitney. “The House That Fox Built Anonymous, Spectacle, and Cycles of Amplification.” *Television & New Media* 14, no. 6 (2013): 494–509.

<sup>196</sup> Hillier, Lynne, Kimberly J. Mitchell, and Michele L. Ybarra. “The Internet As a Safety Net: Findings From a Series of Online Focus Groups With LGB and Non-

accomplished by moving to neighborhoods of likeminded individuals.<sup>197</sup> Thus gay neighborhoods in the modern city provided the reduction of what Gergen calls ‘outside interference’. Yet recent studies indicate that in the gay community, the selection of location is decreasingly related to the similarity with neighbors, and thus more on par with the larger society. This suggests that the spaces that the gay community find safe to live in have increased, but also that the community itself is not as geographically cohesive as it once was. This generalized distribution has been better documented in the gay community than it has in avant-garde subcultures, yet a similar effect is happening across all cultures.

In culture, online services such as Spotify provide<sup>198</sup> access to ad-supported on-demand music to much of the globe. The impact is enormous, as any person with an internet enabled audio player can now listen to songs in Spotify’s multimillion collection of tracks. While online music has been extensively used since Napster’s launch in 1999, services such as Spotify are novel because they are completely legal, and because

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LGB Young People in the United States.” *Journal of LGBT Youth* 9, no. 3 (2012): 225–46.

<sup>197</sup> Hillier, Lynne, Kimberly J. Mitchell, and Michele L. Ybarra. “The Internet As a Safety Net: Findings From a Series of Online Focus Groups With LGB and Non-LGB Young People in the United States.” *Journal of LGBT Youth* 9, no. 3 (2012): 225–46.

<sup>198</sup> “Spotify Terms and Conditions of Use.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <https://www.spotify.com/us/legal/end-user-agreement/>.



they are commercially supported. This, in effect, is providing a narrower selection at much greater ease for most users. Spotify provides people free access to all the major label music, but cannot acquire rights for every song produced locally or on smaller publishing labels. The result is that where services such as Spotify are enabled, people are increasingly listening to global offerings. The online music space provides a litmus test of the homogenization of culture in network society. Despite the plethora of music content that is globally available on-demand at minimal costs,<sup>199</sup> Spotify's top tracks of 2013 were almost identical in countries across the globe.

Cultural discovery is most often a process in which those 'in the know', a cultural elite, disseminate their particular tastes through communication channels. DeMain reports in the *Performing Songwriter* on the historical problem of bribing music curators. "In November 1959, in closed and open sessions before the U.S. House Oversight Committee, 335 disc jockeys from around the country admitted to having received over \$263,000 in 'consulting fees'. That figure was only the tip of the payola iceberg." What has changed in music discovery is that tastes are now being disseminated through social networking sites rather than local radio DJs or record store clerks. For example, in 2011 Spotify reported that music had been shared

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<sup>199</sup> "Música Para Todos - Spotify." Accessed January 5, 2015. <https://www.spotify.com/co/>.

27,834,742 times in the United States alone during their initial year of launch.<sup>200</sup> Given that this sharing is happening across the majority of the Spotify audience, it shows a diffusion in cultural elitism. Culture in network society has many more tastemakers sharing with their networks than radio had DJs when it was the dominant form of discovery.

If cultural discovery is now decentralized, why is it that the music space has become increasingly homogenized? It appears that music tastes and distribution levels across genres remain similar to those prior to internet music services, with pop music still dominating. However, these tastes are now distributed across the internet, and national borders are no longer relevant. The U.K.'s *Independent* reports that global hit makers will increasingly come from South America and Asia. "The biggest hits of 2012 included *Gangnam Style* by the South Korean rapper Psy, which attracted 1.2 billion YouTube views and *Ai Se Eu Te Pego* by Brazilian singer Michel Teló."<sup>201</sup> This statistic is consistent with the theory of homogenization: the

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<sup>200</sup> "Spotify-1-Year-Newsletter." Accessed January 5, 2015.  
<http://www.hypebot.com/.a/6a00d83451b36c69e20177438c74f4970d-popup>.

<sup>201</sup> "Music Industry 'on the Road to Recovery' as It Records Growth for First Time in 15 Years - News - Music - The Independent." Accessed January 5, 2015.  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/music-industry-on-the-road-to-recovery-as-it-records-growth-for-first-time-in-15-years-8511592.html>.

greater the distribution of music services, the more music hits will be produced in more populous regions.

A final question to consider in relation to culture in network society is whether it has become stagnant and self-reflective of meaning. In *Retromania*, Reynolds makes an argument that we are recreating culture by mining from the past rather than building new content. “Instead of being about itself, the 2000s has been about every other previous decade happening again all at once: a simultaneity of pop time that abolishes history while nibbling away at the present’s own sense of itself as an era with a distinct identity and feel.”<sup>202</sup> In his article for *Slate*, Reynolds furthers his position, bemoaning the academic appraisal for remix culture, which he considers not to be new creative.<sup>203</sup> For Reynolds, there is a difference between a copy and an interpretation that is being lost in this assessment.

Reynolds notion of retromania is similar to that of Jameson’s *pastiche*.

“Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique,

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<sup>202</sup> Reynolds, Simon. *Retromania*. Accessed September 3, 2014.  
[http://www.scribd.com/document\\_downloads/direct/159998768?extension=pdf&ft=1409751866&lt=1409755476&user\\_id=243911032&uahk=THp/KANaf+mAYPD6hGodURGjcMw.x-IX](http://www.scribd.com/document_downloads/direct/159998768?extension=pdf&ft=1409751866&lt=1409755476&user_id=243911032&uahk=THp/KANaf+mAYPD6hGodURGjcMw.x-IX)

<sup>203</sup> “Against Recreativity: Critics and Artists Are Obsessed with Remix Culture.” Accessed January 5, 2015.  
[http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2012/10/against\\_recreativity\\_critics\\_and\\_artists\\_are\\_obsessed\\_with\\_remix\\_culture\\_.2.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2012/10/against_recreativity_critics_and_artists_are_obsessed_with_remix_culture_.2.html).

idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction"<sup>204</sup> Pastiche is found often in visual art, with paintings that reference famous works in style. A cultural pastiche thus refabricates the same cultural values and works, rather than adding to them. Both retromania and pastiche represent a homogenization of culture in that the past is remixed, rather than new material being created.

In Chapter 4, I will engage this issue of retromania and pastiche as it pertains to contemporary avant-garde cultural production. I will show that it is an intentional strategy, and I will argue it is not neutral, nor solely reflective. However, I will consider why the avant-garde aesthetic has not expanded into new diverse cultural forms like their predecessors, but has for the entirety of network society been self-reflexive.

In this chapter I have utilized the theoretical work of Lefebvre to explain the implicit hegemony of urban spaces and the manner in which it controls behavior through realized abstractions. The avant-garde counters hegemony by producing spaces of representation, in which non-normality is celebrated and new cultural forms are produced, both of which add to a

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<sup>204</sup> Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Post-Contemporary Interventions). Reprint edition. Duke University Press Books, 1990.17

sense of fulfillment to the lives of those involved. I have examined the contemporary situation of network society, a term Manuel Castells developed to describe a society which is controlled through distributed computational networks. I described five aspects of network society that affect avant-garde subcultures and cultural production in general. I conclude that there is a qualitative difference in avant-garde subcultures in network society. In the coming chapters I will examine both the causes and effects of these differences, and I will show that contemporary avant-garde subcultures lack the critical force previous avant-garde groups had.

#### IV. The Boundaries of Avant-Garde Subcultures

*A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presenting.*

- Martin Heidegger, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*

Boundaries are the expression of division between two or more zones, and as Heidegger notes above, it is the space where expression begins. I utilize the term boundary in a cultural context, wherein subcultures engage cultural expression (such as fashion, music, slang, etc.) to define a difference between themselves and mainstream society. I consider boundary the best term because it emphasizes a spatial differentiation, although I will engage other, similar terms, such as authenticity and distinction. As I will argue in Chapter 5, it is the pervasive quality of network society that has diluted the subcultural boundaries I will be presenting in this chapter. By using a spatial philosophical framework, I am able to establish the traditional flows of differentiation and recuperation of avant-garde subcultures, and their acceleration with the dilution of the boundary.

Space has been an important factor of subcultural studies since its inception. In their introduction to *Resistance Through Rituals*, members of the famed

sociological school Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts write that subcultures win space for the young: cultural space in the neighborhood and institutions, real time for leisure and recreation, actual room on the street or street-corner. They serve to mark out and appropriate ‘territory’ in the localities.<sup>205</sup> Subcultures carve out a space in society that enables behaviors which otherwise would not be permitted.

In order to better understand the dynamics in which subcultures can “carve out” space, I turn to my philosophical framework of space based upon Lefebvre’s *Production of Space* and *Critique of Everyday Life* as well as Foucault’s *Heterotopias*. This framework establishes how societies produce both physical and mental spaces, and that such spaces enable an elite hegemony by regulating behaviors within them. I believe that avant-garde subcultures have historically produced a different kind of space, a type of heterotopia, a space representing the freedom to be different from the mainstream.

In order to produce spaces different from the mainstream, subcultures use boundaries that establish a distinction between the insider (the subculture) and outsider (the mainstream.) In this chapter I discuss the importance of boundaries in protecting the social and cultural capital of the subculture.

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<sup>205</sup> Hall, Stuart, and Tony Jefferson. *Resistance through Rituals Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1989 .3

Subcultural boundaries restrict inclusion to those who have proven their authenticity, and exclude outsiders from participating. I examine five ways in which subcultures produce boundaries, namely fashion, slang, accumulation, esoteric knowledge, and physical space. This is not far from comprehensive, but instead provides an overview meant to prove that in many of the communication interlocks, those spaces where mainstream and subculture engage one another, the subculture has produced boundaries. Subcultural boundaries, therefore, not only establish distinction, but also manage the flows of appropriation and recuperation with the mainstream.

Having established an understanding of how subcultures produce boundaries, I turn to their role in defining the avant-garde subculture. I utilize Bourdieu's theory of cultural change and Randall Collin's work on intellectual communities to show that boundaries enable the complex and novel thoughts and cultural work that past avant-garde subcultures have produced. Further, I show that boundaries are responsible for prompting cultural evolution, such as Surrealism from Dada, once the subculture has become too established. Subcultural evolution is a process of ending some cultural values and practices, often through recuperation, while at the same time creating new values and practices.

Finally, I examine "selling out," a form of recuperation where a subcultural member sells part of their subculture to the mainstream, and I discuss its role in evolution. I provide different examples of selling out to prove that traditionally, it operated as a component of subcultural evolution, and that some forms of it were



considered beneficial by the subculture itself. Doing so establishes a method to evaluate recuperation from the subculturalist perspective. I will apply this methodology in the following chapter to determine the effects of the acceleration of the cycle of subcultural recuperation.

### **The Capital of Avant-Garde Subculture**

In *The Forms of Capital*, Pierre Bourdieu argues that society operates on three forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Bourdieu argues that social and cultural capital can be “transubstantiated” into economic capital. In this section I present cultural and social capital as Bourdieu explained them, and then extend this to subcultures. For the latter, I rely in part upon the work of Sarah Thornton, who extended Bourdieu’s concept to analyze what she terms *subcultural capital*. While Thornton’s work is beneficial, I find her usage of subcultural capital to be confusing since it is actually cultural capital which is produced by subculture. Therefore, I continue to use Bourdieu’s terminology while engaging Thornton’s theoretical work.

Bourdieu’s concept of transubstantiation grounds cultural and social value in the more concrete terms of economics. This concept will be beneficial later in the chapter in understanding that selling out can provide financial and social gains. Bourdieu has discussed transubstantiation as a method for the elite to mask their true power and wealth in cultural and social capital. Cultural and social capital

are thus at play in the overarching power structures of society. Along these lines, I will suggest that, under certain conditions, recuperation can increase the power of the subculture.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu delves into the role of cultural capital as a hidden market accessible only to the elite. Culture has a commonly acknowledged economic value, for example Marcel Duchamp's *The Fountain* was valued by Sotheby's at \$1.7 million.<sup>206</sup> The tastes which define cultural market value are only available to the hegemonic class, thus excluding other classes of society from participation. For example, only those who have the economic means to bid on *The Fountain* are engaged in its market valuation. Distinction, for Bourdieu, is a method of using culture and social status to differentiate oneself from lower classes.

As Bourdieu explains, cultural tastes, accumulated through both labor and time, increase one's distinction from those who do not have them. For example, a taste in opera is refined by experiencing many operas and studying its forms and history. Traditionally, high cultural forms were accessible only to the wealthy, and cultural tastes tended to be transmitted from within tight social communities such as families or social circles. Bourdieu explains that such cultural tastes were used to display status to others, thus maintaining distinction from those in other

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<sup>206</sup> Ingalls, Christina. "'Fountain' by Marcel Duchamp." Accessed January 5, 2015. [https://ospace.otis.edu/cingallshonors/Fountain\\_by\\_Marcel\\_Duchamp](https://ospace.otis.edu/cingallshonors/Fountain_by_Marcel_Duchamp).

economic classes. Bourdieu's concern is that cultural capital enables a hereditary form of class distinction which operates outside of any financial market and outside the reaches of the non-elite.

Sociological research has confirmed Bourdieu's theories that cultural tastes were based on class distinction. However, Paul Dimaggio's *Classification in Art* (1987), shows that over the past thirty years a cultural pluralism has replaced the system Bourdieu describes. The boundary of wealth to limit access to high culture has been diluted by recorded media, enabling those in lower classes to spend the labor and time to gain the cultural taste. In *Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore* (1996) Peterson and Kern show that the wealthy now cultivate a breadth of tastes as a signifier of being more sophisticated and worldly. The wealthy's expansion of tastes, of course, reaches into the avant-garde, however this is not new to the phenomenon being described by Peterson and Kern. Bourdieu describes an intellectual bourgeoisie that, lacking economic dominance, use the avant-garde to display tastes "more cerebral than expensive, more ascetic than self-indulgent."<sup>207</sup> According to Bourdieu, it is the intellectual bourgeoisie who are responsible for the recuperation of the avant-garde within the institutions of art and academy.

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<sup>207</sup> Gartman, David. "Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Change: Explication, Application, Critique," n.d.258

In addition to the distinctions that the intellectual bourgeoisie bring to the avant-garde, Thornton argues that avant-garde subcultures produce their own cultural distinctions. She presents this as contradictory of the subcultures, on the one hand intentionally blurring societal class distinctions within their communities,<sup>208</sup> yet meanwhile producing their own distinctions that rely upon economic standing. “Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections.”<sup>209</sup> Thornton argues that the economic advantage of the wealthy, which Bourdieu describes for high culture, is still at play in avant-garde subcultures.

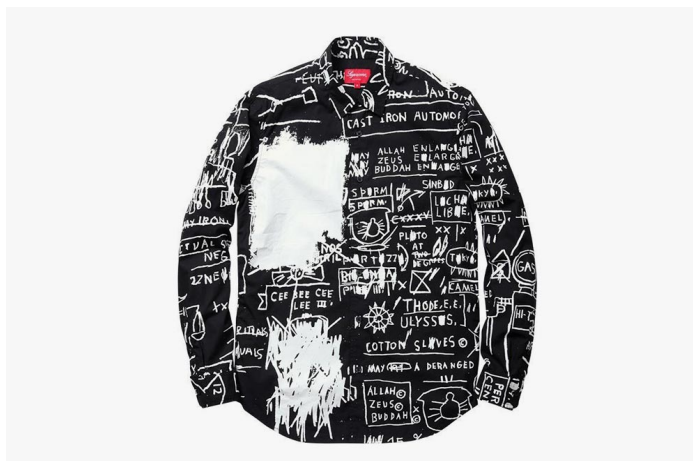
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<sup>208</sup> Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996. 12

<sup>209</sup> Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996. 11



**Figure 2<sup>210</sup> Louboutin Red Sole Designer Shoes**



**Figure 3<sup>211</sup> Replica Basquiat Shirt<sup>212</sup>**

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<sup>210</sup> “Christian Louboutin Fall Winter 2014.” My Fashion Guide. Accessed January 6, 2015. [http://fashionguide.me/collection\\_page/christian-louboutin-fall-winter-2014/](http://fashionguide.me/collection_page/christian-louboutin-fall-winter-2014/).

<sup>211</sup> “Supreme - Basquiat Shirt Replicas (1983) - UG.SHAFT.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.ug-shaft.jp/?mode=opt&pid=64481116>.

While Thornton is correct that the elite can purchase cultural and social capital of avant-garde subcultures (such as chic haircuts and rare records), she overlooks the low economic barriers to these capitals for those with esoteric knowledge. Unlike the high economic costs of art pieces or attendance to the opera, avant-garde subcultural style emphasizes aesthetics that are relatively cheap to acquire. Consider the shirt of Jean-Michel Basquiat, which operates as a status symbol not because it is expensive to reproduce, but because it displays expertise over cultural knowledge. While the rich can purchase a replica (such as displayed above), the subculture itself encourages creating one for yourself. This is not the case with clothing of the elite such as the Louboutin designer shoes with signature red soles. Although they have recuperated the punk fashions of leopard print and spikes into the shoe pictured above, the red sole is trademarked and protected from copy, as witnessed in Louboutin's recent law suit against rival fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent.<sup>213</sup>

This practice of engaging in cultural production of the subculture, has been common through all avant-garde subcultures, but in the 1980s it became

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<sup>212</sup> "Supreme X Jean-Michel Basquiat FW 2013 Collection • Highsnobiety." Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.highsnobiety.com/2013/09/23/supreme-jean-michel-basquiat-fall-winter-2013-capsule-collection/>.

<sup>213</sup> "Christian Louboutin Wins Right To Trademark Red Sole - Business Insider." Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.businessinsider.com/christian-louboutin-wins-right-to-trademark-red-sole-2012-9>.

popularized as the term *DIY (Do It Yourself)*. In *Distress to Impress*, Frank Cartlege provides an example of how DIY enabled him to rectify his failed attempt of purchasing punk status: “[purchased a] punk PVC motorbike jacket from back of Sounds music paper. Get it back and I’m disappointed because it looks crap—remedy situation by daubing it with graffiti.”<sup>214</sup> Cartlege presents this as part of his transition into being punk, wherein he learns that authentic punk is a practice of production, rather than just of purchasing.

The Cartledge example contradicts Thornton’s emphasis on the purchasing power the wealthy have in avant-garde subcultures. I contend that Thornton is correct that subcultures retain cultural distinction, and I will examine this more throughout the chapter, but particularly in my explanation of authenticity. However, I believe Thornton overlooks the emphasis on DIY as a key differentiator between avant-garde subcultures and the elite.

In addition to cultural capital, subcultures also possess social capital. Bourdieu describes social capital as membership to a group that “provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word”.<sup>215</sup> In *Three Approaches to Social Capital*, David Gauntlett explains that Bourdieu saw social

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<sup>214</sup> Cartlege, Frank *Distress to Impress*. In Sabin, Roger. *Punk Rock, so What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk*. London; New York: Routledge, 1999. 146

<sup>215</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. “Three Approaches to Social Capital.” Accessed March 16, 2014. <http://www.makingisconnecting.org/gauntlett2011-extract-sc.pdf>.

capital as a method of exclusion. Gauntlett points to James Coleman for a more nuanced understanding of social capital as “people looking beyond themselves and engaging in supportive or helpful actions, not because they expect a reward or immediate reciprocal help, but because they believe it’s a good thing to do.”<sup>216</sup> I agree with Gauntlett and Coleman’s thesis that social capital is not solely used for exclusion, but also for building and helping one’s social group. However, in the case of avant-garde subcultures at least, I do not agree that the reason for this is because “it is a good thing to do.” Rather, I look to the sociological research from Randall Collins on *thought communities* to argue that a complex social structure with many different actors is required to produce the new forms of thought and cultural work that are associated with the avant-garde. Part of the value of social capital in avant-garde subcultures is therefore being part of a community that is collectively producing avant-garde work. The credentials of social capital operate in subculture by providing membership to this community.

Social capital also operates by restricting membership, thus delineating insiders from outsiders. Avant-garde subcultures differ from mainstream society in the ways they use boundaries to establish membership. Goffman provides an example of mainstream social capital at play at a cocktail party in his book *Behavior in Public Spaces*. In a party environment, insiders to a conversation stand physically close to outsiders, and therefore signify their membership by

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<sup>216</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. “Three Approaches to Social Capital.” Accessed March 16, 2014. <http://www.makingisconnecting.org/gauntlett2011-extract-sc.pdf>. 3



facing each other and maintaining eye contact. Meanwhile those outside the conversation partake in “an expression of inattention and noninvolvement”<sup>217</sup> that conveys their disassociation from the insiders. These behavioral cues establish clear boundaries between insiders and outsiders at the cocktail party. Erving Goffman describes such social behavioral units as *interaction rituals*. The interaction rituals of establishing mutual membership to an avant-garde subculture rely upon a different set of cues, typically those of fashion. In public environments, subcultural members will notice one another and exchange a *knowing head nod* to one another, or a compliment on their dress, as an inconspicuous acknowledgment of their shared fraternity. This subtle interaction ritual establishes camaraderie, while not causing undue attention.

The interaction rituals involved in establishing membership to the subcultural social networks<sup>218</sup> are important because they provide access to one another’s resources and a general sense of solidarity, even when the individuals are not personally acquainted. Hodkinson’s interview with a British goth exemplifies this phenomenon: “I’ve got a very camaraderie type attitude: ‘that’s one of our boys’

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<sup>217</sup> Goffman, Erving. *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*. Reissue edition. New York: Free Press, 1966.156

<sup>218</sup> I use the term *social network* to describe this set of social relationships in a subcultural group, as it emphasizes the strength of connectivity between individuals, rather than the type of social bond (friend, family, lover). Social network has become common when referring to digital social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, yet I consider social network to be broader than this digital approximation. For clarity, when I discuss the use of digital social networks in contemporary avant-garde subcultures, I will qualify them as being digital.

type attitude even though I don't know them. They're still goth so they're alright by me."<sup>219</sup> Examples of access to the subculture are so critical in defining ones status that they are typically woven into the narrative of the person. For example, Alfred Jarry received a letter of introduction from Léon-Paul Fargue to the literary circles of the Symbolists, which granted him access to their soirees and established him within the social network of Paris.<sup>220</sup> Once invited to these parties, Jarry was able to befriend the publishers of *Mercure* literary journal, which helped to launch his career. Even Thornton's academic studies of raver culture are framed by being granted access to the backrooms and upper echelons of the culture due to her befriending Kate, the sister of a popular DJ. In both cases, Thornton and Jarry are overcoming boundaries of the subculture by utilizing credentials of social capital. These interaction rituals of avant-garde subcultures help to define the structures and hierarchy of the social group.

In *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*, Randall Collins explains how intellectual social networks, or "thought communities" are even more important than master/disciple relations in creating advanced forms of thought, and are responsible for the leading philosophical achievements of Western, Indian and Asian philosophies. Collins' research brings attention to the necessity of community for support and influence. Collins' work

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<sup>219</sup> Hodkinson, Paul. *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002.71

<sup>220</sup> Brotchie, Alastair. *Alfred Jarry: A Pataphysical Life*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011.

on thought communities applies well to avant-garde subcultures, because like philosophy, the cultural creative processes of the avant-garde require building upon each other's theoretical work. The most obvious proof of this within the avant-garde is collaboration.

Collaboration enables multiple persons to leverage each other in producing a more comprehensive subculture. For example, Malcolm McLaren, the producer of the *Sex Pistols* and credited with being the creator of the U.K. Punk scene<sup>221</sup> relied upon his partner Vivienne Westwood to design the punk clothes worn by the Sex Pistols and sold in their shop SEX. Hugo Ball, writing about the formation of Dada in *Flight Out of Time*, describes the importance of Marcel Janco's masks:

“Janco arrived with his masks, and everyone immediately put one on. Then something strange happened. Not only did the mask immediately call for a costume; it also demanded a quite definite, passionate gesture, bordering on madness.”<sup>222</sup>

The effect of Janco's involvement was not expected by the other members of the group, and yet had a profound effect on their performance, and consequently on

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<sup>221</sup>Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990. 33, 53-57

<sup>222</sup> Ball, Hugo, and John Elderfield. *Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. 64

the development of the Dada aesthetic. The example of Janco and Dada shows how the creative processes of the avant-garde operate as a type of interaction ritual within the safety of those who have already been granted membership to the group. Collaboration in avant-garde subcultures relies upon a boundary to entry, because those permitted inside have, compared to those outside, unrestrained influence upon the other members.

Collaboration between artists not only influences the aesthetics of each participant, but also can provide definition to the avant-garde subculture as a whole. The collaborators of a subculture positively and negatively affect one another's reputation by association. For instance, *Parade*, written by then twenty-eight year old emerging artist Jean Cocteau, combined an all-star cast of avant-garde luminaries with Eric Satie composing the music, Pablo Picasso designing the scenery and costumes, and Apollinaire writing the program notes. While each of these artists had already been gaining in recognition, the collaboration between all of them "seems to have given a heightened recognition to the avant-garde as a movement."<sup>223</sup> As such, *Parade* helped to solidify shared aesthetic practices into a recognized cultural phenomenon of the avant-garde. Had the collaborators not been carefully selected (and restricted), this recognized

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<sup>223</sup> Cate, Phillip Dennis, Mary Lewis Shaw, Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Society of the Four Arts, and Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art. *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1996. 360

cultural phenomenon would have been quite different and might not have happened at all.

While selecting collaborators is important to avant-garde subcultures, so is choosing one's adversaries. Collins' work on thought communities explains that argumentative relations between intellectuals prompt the necessary discourse in advancing each person's thinking. The role of adversity in developing a new aesthetic is wonderfully presented about Brion Gysin in Barry Miles book *The Beat Hotel*. Gysin's initial career as a Surrealist painter came to an abrupt halt when Andre Breton was offended by one of Gysin's paintings and demanded his removal from the show. , Years later, he discovered a black magic curse written on a photo of him and hidden in the ceiling of his restaurant in Tangiers. Gysin tore up and rewrote the curse, and being pleased with the aesthetic, began using it in his paintings. This technique, *escritures*, in which letters are written on top of each other, served as a primary influence for William Burroughs book *Naked Lunch* and the cut-up technique, which subsequently influenced many others.<sup>224</sup> Gysin's placing himself in opposition to practitioners of black magic gives his own work an esoteric quality it would not otherwise have had.

Aside from the collaborations and rivalries of the creative luminaries, avant-garde subcultures rely upon a diverse cast of actors. While mapping avant-garde

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<sup>224</sup> Miles, Barry. *The Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs & Corso in Paris, 1957-1963*. Reprint edition. New York: Grove Press, 2001. 151-158

social structures onto social network theory, as Collins has done for philosophers, is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is my hope that the examples provided in this chapter will illustrate that “creativity is not facilitated by mere ideas, culture, material base, or by random processes, but it is produced in the intersection of external shocks and network configurations.”<sup>225</sup> The social capital of the avant-garde subculture is more than access to a community (Thornton), an opportunity for collaboration (Cocteau), or even for critical discourse (Gysin). Social capital in avant-garde subcultures provides membership in a social ecosystem that is quite often fragile and small, yet passionate and creative. With membership, especially to the smaller of subcultures, one can have a strong effect in shaping what the culture will become and produce.

### **The Boundaries of Avant-Garde Subcultures**

Bourdieu’s theory of social capital and cultural capital provides a method for determining the non-economic values that avant-garde subcultures have. Further, it helps to explain why avant-garde subcultures would be restrictive in who gains access. Unlike the economic elite in my past example of the opera, avant-garde subcultures cannot restrict membership through high prices.

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<sup>225</sup> Talmud, Ilan. “Review on The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change by Randall Collins.” *Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Haifa Israel*, 1998.  
[http://www.academia.edu/3002137/Review\\_on\\_The\\_Sociology\\_of\\_Philosophies\\_A\\_Global\\_Theory\\_of\\_Intellectual\\_Change\\_by\\_Randall\\_Collins](http://www.academia.edu/3002137/Review_on_The_Sociology_of_Philosophies_A_Global_Theory_of_Intellectual_Change_by_Randall_Collins).

Instead they must find a way to differentiate themselves. Rather than economic distinction, subcultures exhibit distinction through cultural practices.

Goffman's work explains this phenomenon in subcultural fashion to establish boundaries from the mainstream by expressing what Goffman refers to as "anti-social intent." Of these people, Goffman says "the offender would not modify his conduct at the time even if given a second chance, and seems to have no reason for the act other than what he can convey by it to those he offends." Applying this to subcultures, we find that the actions of provocation, or even of presenting oneself as different, such as the ripped clothing and mohawks of punk, must be done in a way so that the mainstream observer understands that they are intentional, and done specifically as to establish a difference and a boundary between the subcultural member and the outsider.

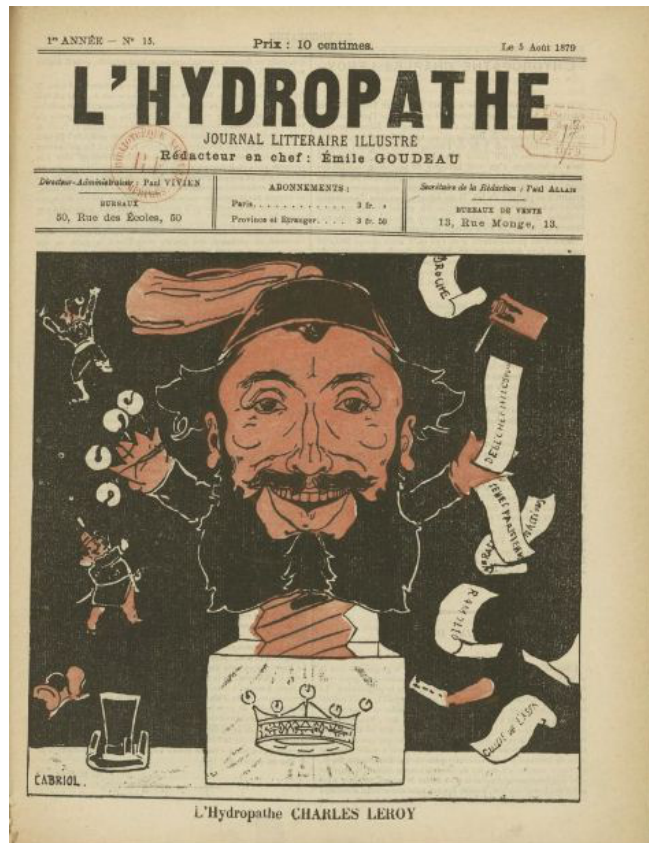
In this section I discuss the ways differences are self presented and propose that they operate as a necessary means to enable the subculture. I examine how subcultures protect their cultural and social capital by: 1) producing boundaries that differentiate themselves from the mainstream 2) establishing echelons within the subculture based on authenticity 3) utilizing distinction expressed as disdain and elitism towards outsiders. I present these as being fundamental aspects to the structure of subcultures, and consider their role and effectiveness in qualitatively shaping what we think of as avant-garde subcultures.

There are two perspectives that must be accounted for in studying boundaries. For insiders, cultural nuances, tastes, and behaviors help to connect subcultures together. At the same time, these same cultural nuances, tastes and behaviors intentionally exhibit a distinction from outsiders. Within Lefebvre's framework of mental space, this operates as a spatial quality that is manifested in physical spaces, and in turn modifies behavior. For instance, punk fashion expresses a difference between subculture from the mainstream, and also produces fashion stores such as SEX, which becomes a place for youth to meet and eventually form the Sex Pistols. Similarly, *fumiste*, French slang for someone both serious and a bit crazy, calcified the aesthetic of the *Hydropathes*, a French subculture of the 1880s<sup>226</sup> famed for popularizing caricatured illustrations (see below). The concept of *fumiste* helped produce a difference between insiders and outsiders, as well as a space in which insiders gathered together. I examine five forms (Slang, Fashion, Accumulation, Esoteric Knowledge, and Space) subcultures use to self-identify and produce a boundary from outsiders. In each I define how new artifacts within these forms are produced and function within the subculture, and the methods of their eventual recuperation into mainstream society.

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<sup>226</sup> Stephan, Philip. *Paul Verlaine and the Decadence, 1882-90*. 1st edition. Manchester, Eng. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, n.d. 42- 43





**Figure 4<sup>227</sup> Cover of *L'Hydropathe***

## Slang

Avant-garde subcultures encrypt their inner values and concerns into slang, establishing a shared knowledge for those within the subculture, while excluding

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<sup>227</sup> Gaspard, Céline. “Rencontre Gallica : La Petite Presse.” *BnF Pour Tous*, April 23, 2013. [http://blog.bnf.fr/diversification\\_publics/index.php/2013/04/23/rencontre-gallica-la-petite-presse/](http://blog.bnf.fr/diversification_publics/index.php/2013/04/23/rencontre-gallica-la-petite-presse/).

outsiders. As such, slang operates as a boundary that limits the knowledge of the subculture to insiders. In each subcultural community we find slang that matches their internal values and culture.

The importance of slang to a subcultural community is exemplified in the article *What PLUR Really Stands For*, by Frankie Bones. Bones is known as the “godfather of the rave scene”,<sup>228</sup> having started much of the dance culture in NYC in the late 1980s. Peace, Love, and Unity was originally the title of a song by Frankie Bones which describes the euphoric feelings of being at a rave while on ecstasy. The addition of Respect is debated within the community,<sup>229</sup> but PLUR became the mantra of the raver movement.<sup>230</sup> Bones’ article describes the violence which plagued ravers, and how his call for PLUR was in response to a fight that occurred at one of his events. “If you don’t start showing some peace, love, and unity, I’ll break your fucking faces” was the first time Bones shouted the term to the rave audience.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> “DJ Frankie Bones - Hardcore / Old Skool / Rave.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.fantazia.org.uk/DJs/djfrankiebones.htm>.

<sup>229</sup> “PLUR Origins.” Accessed January 5, 2015. [http://hyperreal.org/raves/spirit/plur/Origin\\_of\\_PLUR.html](http://hyperreal.org/raves/spirit/plur/Origin_of_PLUR.html).

<sup>230</sup> “The History Of P.L.U.R.- By Frankie Bones - JoJo Electro - Fashion for the Dance Music Minded People of the World.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <https://jojoelectro.com/2012/02/the-history-of-p-l-u-r-by-frankie-bones/>.

<sup>231</sup> “History of the Rave |.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://rollingstoneraver.wordpress.com/2011/02/15/history-of-the-rave/>.

Bones' threat of violence is a curious birth for PLUR, but upon closer inspection it is aligned to the contradiction within raver culture of striving for peace while surrounded by violence. Semiotic analysis can be applied to avant-garde subcultures to better understand them. For instance, an examination of raver culture slang reveals a good deal of terms focused around the avoidance of violence such as *sketch* ("suspicious in nature"), *ghetto* ("of low economic stature"), and *bst* ("brooklyn street thug"). By codifying these concerns into slang, they could be conveyed to other members<sup>232</sup> without alerting outsiders of their suspected threat. Punks, on the other hand, have a particular focus upon lifestyle choices such as "straight edge" meaning not partaking in drugs, alcohol or sex, and "gutter punk" which refers to punks who chose to squat rather than live within society. In this example, the goal is to abbreviate the variant punk lifestyles into easily referable enabling quick distinctions.

While not as informal as slang, avant-garde artists develop new words to easily refer to their often complex artistic practice and theories. Terms like *pataphysics* (Jarry), *détournement* (Debord), *cut-up* (Burroughs) and *happening* (Kaprow) are now part of a larger art world lexicon, but were originally created by artists to convey a specific artistic practice. The use of these terms helps to solidify the practice. For example, the term *détournement* was first developed by Guy

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<sup>232</sup> "Raver Language - Home of Poi." Accessed January 5, 2015. [http://www.homeofpoi.com/community/ubbthreads.php/topics/9461/Raver\\_Language.html](http://www.homeofpoi.com/community/ubbthreads.php/topics/9461/Raver_Language.html).

Debord,<sup>233</sup> although the concept appears in prior art such as Bataille's *Mona Lisa Foumante la Pipe*. Yet by establishing a specific term for the practice, Debord created an association between himself and future endeavors, such as the *Barbie Liberation Organization*. This vernacular of new practices codifies knowledge and builds the identity of the group. The semiotics of avant-garde terms, like slang, unveils the value system of the particular subculture. For example, for Burroughs cut-ups are not only a method of randomly piecing together content, but an occult principle for revealing deeper truths about the practitioner.<sup>234</sup> While the term "cut-ups" has entered common parlance, the occult principles based on Gysin's dealing with black magic are restricted only to insiders. In this way, slang restricts complex and esoteric knowledge to insiders.

Like all subcultural boundaries, slang can become recuperated into mainstream culture. Bone's article on PLUR, released nearly twenty years after its initial usage, appears in part to be an attempt to cement his legacy, coming at a time when the term has expanded into Electronic Dance Music (EDM). In a blog for LA Weekly, another twenty year veteran, Dennis Romero, writes that EDM has "taken rave culture beyond its edge and into the predictable realm of a stage

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<sup>233</sup> Debord, Guy, and Gil J. Wolman. "A User's Guide to Détournement." Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/usersguide.html>.

<sup>234</sup> William S. Burroughs. *Break Through in Grey Room*. Audio CD. Sub Rosa, 2001.

show.”<sup>235</sup> As part of rave culture, slang terms are becoming recuperated, and becoming an empty referent, rather than maintaining their original meaning. In *The Life of Slang*, Julie Coleman writes on this recuperation of slang, in which the term’s usage extends outside of the initial group, and control over its meaning is diminished. Coleman gives the example of *bling*, a term that meant an ‘ostentatious display of wealth’ and was created by late 1990s New York City based hip hop artists. Within a year, *bling* was used in international newspapers to refer to gold jewelry, and at present it has become a generic buzzword for jewelry.<sup>236</sup> Coleman is specific in defining the role of the media in the naturalization of slang: “What we see in newspapers, on television, and in films, isn’t slang. With the possible exception of ‘reality’ television, what we see in the media are representations of slang.”<sup>237</sup> In this way, the restricted knowledge, the boundary produced by slang, is lost when the term becomes adopted by the mainstream.

## Fashion

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<sup>235</sup> “EDC 2012: The Underground Has Left The Building.” *LA Weekly*. Accessed August 19, 2014. <http://www.laweekly.com/westcoastsound/2012/06/11/edc-2012-the-underground-has-left-the-building>.

<sup>236</sup> Coleman, Julie. *The Life of Slang*. Oxford University Press, 2012. 263

<sup>237</sup> Coleman, Julie. *The Life of Slang*. Oxford University Press, 2012. 263

The word fashion comes from the French *façon*, to make, and has come to mean “made in accordance to a particular style”. Subcultural fashion can be understood as both the adherence to a style, but also the making of difference. Subcultural fashion, as being immediately apparent to the observer, has always been one of the dominant boundaries for a subculture. Fashion maintains an affinity between likeminded people while expressing a clear and, at times, offensive boundary with outsiders.<sup>238</sup> As early as the 1790s, The *Incroyables* were shocking aristocratic France with their outrageously transparent clothes and brightly dyed wigs. Their “purpose was to exalt modes of dress and behavior self-consciously opposed to the values of utility and equality spawned by the Revolution.”<sup>239</sup> This tradition of physically demarcating difference through fashion and hairstyle has continued in different avant-garde subcultures, albeit in different forms.

For example, Hebdige’s research examined the visual markers of British subcultures, such as safety pins, pants, and hair. “Style in subculture is, then, pregnant with significance. Its transformations go ‘against nature’, interrupting the process of ‘normalization.’ As such they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the ‘silent majority’, which challenges the principle of unity

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<sup>238</sup> Skott-Myhre, Hans. *Youth and Subculture as Creative Force: Creating New Spaces for Radical Youth Work*. University of Toronto Press, 2013. section 1827

<sup>239</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.101

and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus.”<sup>240</sup> To Hebdige, by being in public space and engaging in punk fashion, the punk was interrupting the majority. In this way, fashion was used to express difference from the mainstream.

Like slang, fashion expresses the values of the subculture. Of course, as fashion becomes recuperated into the mainstream, the effect of the interruptions diminishes. For example, hippies’ preference for natural materials such as fur and cotton over synthetic polyesters were an expression of their ideals.<sup>241</sup> Like PLUR, fashion can be taken from different subcultures, with their meaning changing along the way. For example, the punk style of spiked hair first used by Richard Hell was based on Baudelaire’s poem *The Abyss* which describes hair standing upright in response to a sense of cosmic horror to the infinite.<sup>242</sup> Malcolm McLaren subsequently took photographs of Hell back to the Sex Pistols and instructed them to replicate the look.<sup>243</sup> Thus it became the iconic look for classic punk, mirrored in today’s messy hair. With each evolution, the meaning expressed by the hairstyle was changed.

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<sup>240</sup> Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen, 1979. 18

<sup>241</sup> Guins, Raiford, and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz. *Popular Culture: A Reader*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2005. 376

<sup>242</sup> Kane, Daniel. “Richard Hell, Genesis: Grasp, and the Blank Generation: From Poetry to Punk in New York’s Lower East Side.” *Contemporary Literature* 52, no. 2 (2011): 330–69. 346

<sup>243</sup> McNeil, Legs, and Gillian McCain. *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*. Reprint edition. New York: Grove Press, 2006. 199

The avant-garde's embedding of new meanings into fashion has appeared frequently in the practice of *bricolage*, appropriating mainstream items and critically transforming their symbolic meanings. In their book *Resistance Through Rituals*, Stuart and Hall explain *bricolage* as a practice in which the objects, the 'gear' used to assemble a new subcultural style, must not only already exist, but also carry meanings organized into a system coherent enough for their relocation and transformation to be understood as such. There's no point in it if the new assemblage looks exactly like and carries exactly the same message as that which already existed.<sup>244</sup> Fashion in *bricolage* is intended to draw attention to its transformation, and as such serves as a boundary. There is a subtlety to Picasso wearing "blue overalls, so patched and washed that they suggested a study in delicate pastel shades, set off by a red cotton shirt with white spots"<sup>245</sup> that maintains his presentation as an artist. Picasso is not assimilating into the workforce - but is using their dress to signify an affinity of himself, an artist, with the working class.

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<sup>244</sup> Hall, Stuart, and Tony Jefferson. *Resistance through Rituals Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1989. 177-8

<sup>245</sup> Douglas, Charles. *Artist Quarter: Reminiscences of Montmartre and Montparnasse...* Faber, 1941.46



Angela McRobbie views this repurposing of low-brow clothes into subcultural fashion as a method of producing economic value.<sup>246</sup> She traces the appearance of second hand dresses in fashion to show the entrepreneurial spirit of many who partake in it. “The apparent democracy of this market, from which nobody is excluded on the grounds of cost, is tempered by the very precise tastes and desires of the second-hand searchers.”<sup>247</sup> McRobbie is correct that *bricolage* fashion, because of its cheap source materials and potential high yield, is a prime area for the transubstantiation of value. However, McRobbie does not acknowledge the deeper challenges to mainstream structures (as Stuart and Hall term them) which second hand clothing as a subcultural fashion attempt to express, and which are lost when recuperated.

### Accumulation

In his study of punk cultures, Force notes the role of record collections as a signifier of authenticity. Records display one’s tastes to others, not only when visually seen, but even in conversations in which the individual claims to own a

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<sup>246</sup> “Skinhead Braces and Boot Code | StrHATE Talk By TJ Leyden.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://formerskinhead.blogspot.com/2009/01/skinhead-braces-and-boot-code.html>.

<sup>247</sup> McRobbie, Angela. Second-Hand Dresses and the Role of the Ragmarket In Guins, Raiford, and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz. *Popular Culture: A Reader*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2005. 374

certain number of an artist's records.<sup>248</sup> The rarity of the record and its obscurity to the public both play into its subcultural value. Thornton describes the role records play for genres like techno in which musicians primarily perform in studios, rather than perform live. "Degrees of aura came to be attributed to new, exclusive and rare records. In becoming the source of sounds, records underwent the mystification usually reserved for unique art objects."<sup>249</sup> Similar to an art object, the record can be numbered in limited quantity, feature the artist's signature, and increase in value over time. The exclusivity of collecting limited cultural artifacts is important, because it suggests either being one of the early collectors, or having made a large expense due to a strong appreciation of the artist.

Similarly, the accumulation of lived experience is another method of signifying authenticity. Having gone to certain concerts, met particular musicians, or been in the scene for extended lengths of time, are all considered to be proof of one's authenticity in the subculture.<sup>250</sup> Lifestyles such as visiting particular graveyards for goths, squatting for particular brands of punk, and getting in fights for skinheads, are all measures of authenticity within the subculture. Echoing the

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<sup>248</sup> Ryan Force, William. "Consumption Styles and the Fluid Complexity of Punk Authenticity." *Symbolic Interaction* 32, no. 4 (November 2009): 289–309. 295

<sup>249</sup> Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996. 27-28

<sup>250</sup> Muggleton, David. *Inside Subculture the Postmodern Meaning of Style*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000. 120 –126

avant-garde's 'life as art', the degree to which one engages in activities that align to the subculture's values are considered worthy.

In subcultures, the antonym of accumulation, which is avoiding a product as a type of distinction, is another method for displaying authenticity. David Locher writes that it is actually "the exclusionary nature of such groups that reinforces cohesion among the members."<sup>251</sup> For example, many subcultures consider it imperative to remain within lower economic positions in employment, either by doing menial labor, or by being unemployed.<sup>252</sup> Jobs that are often seen as of lesser value, such as bike messenger and barista, are idealized within such subcultures. According to art theorist Paul Mann, "the avant-garde's committed refusal to work as a means toward self-realization--in the language of Berlin Dada, "Poetry Demands Unemployment"--gives way to the dully heroic limbo of slacking."<sup>253</sup> Employment outside of the scene is seen as a necessary evil, but one that is best avoided. Mann's slacker is a person who works, but presents themselves as apathetic to their employment.<sup>254</sup> Hodkinson notes that distinction is found in goths (by himself), ravers (by Thornton), and punks (by

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<sup>251</sup> Epstein, Jonathan, ed. "The Industrial Identity Crisis: The Failure of a Newly Forming Subculture to Identity Itself." *Youth Culture: Identity in a Postmodern World*, August 1998, 100–117. 101

<sup>252</sup> Hall, Stuart, and Tony Jefferson. *Resistance through Rituals Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1989. 48

<sup>253</sup> Mann, Paul. "Stupid Undergrounds." *Postmodern Culture* 5, no. 3 (1995). [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern\\_culture/v005/5.3mann.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v005/5.3mann.html).32

<sup>254</sup> Mann, Paul. "Stupid Undergrounds." *Postmodern Culture* 5, no. 3 (1995). [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern\\_culture/v005/5.3mann.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v005/5.3mann.html).

Muggleton), and he relates it to Bourdieu's description of discerning bourgeois culture distinguishing themselves from the 'vulgar' tastes of mass society.<sup>255</sup>

The expression of distaste is not always done through distinction, but is sometimes conveyed by the ironic accumulation of products which conflict with the subcultural values. Unlike *bricolage*, which is the alteration of meaning, such displays of kitsch and irony are intended to confuse the outside observer.

Bernhard Gendron notes that kitsch and irony were major factors in art rock bands such as *Talking Heads* and *B-52s*, who dressed in tacky Hawaiian shirts and corporate suits.<sup>256</sup> A more complicated form of irony is in Throbbing Gristle's dressing in military garb. In his biography, Simon Ford explains that the "uniform suggested conformism to values that suppressed individual freedom of choice."<sup>257</sup> The use of fascist imagery is complicated in the industrial scene, as later bands have had far-right politics.<sup>258</sup> However, its general usage is summarized well in Slavoj Zizek's description of the Slovakian industrial band *Laibach*. Zizek writes that *Laibach* "frustrates the system (the ruling ideology) precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation, but represents an over-identification with it - by bringing to light the obscene superego underside of the

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<sup>255</sup> Hodkinson, Paul. *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002.79

<sup>256</sup> Gendron, Bernhard. *Between Montmartre and the Muddclub: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. Pr, 2002. 7

<sup>257</sup> Ford, Simon. *Wreckers of Civilisation*. S.l.: Black Dog Pub., 2001.7.14

<sup>258</sup> Duguid, Brian. "The Unacceptable Face of Freedom," 1995. <http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/articles/freedom.html>.

system, over-identification suspends its efficiency.”<sup>259</sup> Zizek explains that this over-identification functions as a question rather than an answer. When outsiders ask whether *Laibach* or *Throbbing Gristle* are fascist, they are examining cultural signifiers which (hopefully) expose the larger societal fascism.<sup>260</sup> Curiously, such irony, or over-identification, results in an accumulation, where the product in question acquires subcultural value.

In all three forms described (accumulation, distinction, irony), there remains a communications-interlock with the mainstream. The cultural evaluation of products is ultimately exchanged into economic value, and because of this there is a connection between subcultural valuation and mainstream valuation. For example, the combat boot manufacturer Doctor Marten credits skinheads with transforming their brand from one of “reliable working men's footwear” into an icon of “youth rebellion”.<sup>261</sup> This relation to the market becomes important, as subcultures are looked to as a strategy to infuse excitement into a commercial brand. Following their success as an iconic shoe of rebellion, Doctor Marten entered the mainstream, even being given recognition by Queen Elizabeth in

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<sup>259</sup> Zizek, Slavoj. *The Universal Exception*. Edited by Rex Butler and Scott Stephens. London; New York: Continuum, 2006. 65

<sup>260</sup> Zizek, Slavoj. *The Universal Exception*. Edited by Rex Butler and Scott Stephens. London; New York: Continuum, 2006 66

<sup>261</sup> “Dr Martens History | Official Dr Martens Store - US.” Accessed August 5, 2014. <http://www.drmartens.com/us/history>.

1993.<sup>262</sup> Upon such recuperation, the accumulated items become less valued to the subculture.

### Esoteric Knowledge

In chapter 2, I discussed the high degree of knowledge Jarry, Debord, and Hell were noted to have, and I referenced Poggioli's comparisons of the avant-garde movement to cenacles. Subcultural membership requires an intensive knowledge about the subculture, knowledge which is often secret to outsiders. The expression of this knowledge, used to show distinction from the mainstream, gives the avant-garde a reputation for elitism. Esoteric knowledge manifests throughout the subculture from aesthetic practice to knowledge of who is important in the subculture. The accumulation of this knowledge signifies a passion for the subculture, and therefore its application establishes a person as an authentic member of the subculture.

As I have argued, avant-garde subcultures are a type of thought community, in that they organize and develop intellectual innovations centered on cultural production. Within avant-garde subculture, tastemakers serve the role of

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<sup>262</sup> Davies, Karen. "Doc Martens Find Acceptance in Mainstream Fashion World." *The Daily Gazette*, July 13, 1993.  
<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1957&dat=19930713&id=CRcxAAAAI BAJ&sjid=UOEFAAAAIBAJ&pg=4361,2981451>.

curating and disseminating knowledge and culture to others of the subculture. Tastemakers such as record store clerks, blog or zine writers, night club booking agents, gallery curators, and fashion buyers are employed in subcultural spaces. Hodkinson notes that without mainstream media attention, the DJs serve as the primary avenue of disseminating new music<sup>263</sup> to members of the culture. The DJ uses their status in the subculture of being knowledgeable to attain a role of gate keeper, deciding what music is distributed and what is not.

The importance of tastemakers as gatekeepers to social and cultural capital have made them increasingly targeted by corporations, offering tempting financial rewards and exposure for working with them. In the 2010 SXSW panel *Selling Subculture Without Selling Out*, documenting the practice of involving brands with subcultures,<sup>264</sup> Jeff Newelt says “if you’re trying to reach a subculture, don’t imitate them, hire them. Don’t imitate the graffiti artists in your advertising campaign, hire graffiti artists!”<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Hodkinson, Paul. *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002. 97

<sup>264</sup> Sinhababu, Robin. “(Interview) Selling Subculture Without Selling Out - PSFK,” May 5, 2010. <http://www.psfk.com/2010/05/interview-selling-subculture-without-selling-out.html#!r28nZ>.

<sup>265</sup> Sinhababu, Robin. “(Interview) Selling Subculture Without Selling Out - PSFK,” May 5, 2010. <http://www.psfk.com/2010/05/interview-selling-subculture-without-selling-out.html#!r28nZ>.

While Newelt's panel topic suggests that it is possible to sell culture without the danger of recuperation, it is not. The process of introducing the subculture's concepts and culture into the mainstream, results in their becoming more normalized, and no longer culturally specific. Thus when an advertising campaign hires a tastemaker, they are recuperating those aspects, even when not intending to. However, as I will discuss in the section on selling out, by keeping control of such recuperation within the subculture, it is possible to establish a recuperation that fosters the subculture's evolution.

### Physical Spaces





Figure 5 <sup>266</sup>Outside of the 9:30 Club (1980s)

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<sup>266</sup> Madeline Steinberg | Nov, and 2013 | 12:30 Pm. “Journalist Searches for Possible Epic 9:30 Club Archive.” *AdHoc.fm*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://adhoc.fm/post/journalist-searches-possible-epic-930-club-archive/>.



**Figure 6<sup>267</sup> Outside Le Chat Noir (1890s)**

Subcultural spaces provide a place for congregation and collaboration protected from mainstream society. These spaces maintain their boundaries through several strategies. One of the primary methods of keeping a boundary to outsiders is through the appearance of spaces as dangerous and dirty, oftentimes hidden amongst shops in the dilapidated sector of the city. The photos above show that both the Chat Noir and the (original) 930 club are placed in business sectors of their respective cities. However, both the Montmartre neighborhood (Chat Noir) and the F street area of Washington DC (930 Club) were dangerous

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<sup>267</sup> “Themes of Lautrec’s Art - Experience (my) France | Your Travel Guide to Aveyron | Luxury Intimate Small Groups Custom Tours in France.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.experiencemyfrance.com/themes-of-lautrecs-art/>.

places. Ian MacKaye, an influential figure in the DC punk scene states “It was sort of a no man's land around the 9:30 club. It was liquor stores, wig shops, and Ninth Street at the time was largely populated by porno stores and porno movie theaters.”<sup>268</sup> McKaye’s use of “no man’s land” shows the romanticization that the avant-garde subcultures commonly applied to their dangerous and dirty neighborhoods.

Despite the amount of creative talent being housed in these spaces, they are intentionally kept dilapidated and dirty to maintain a dis appeal for the mainstream. Young quotes the NYCGoth website’s description of most goth clubs being “architecturally anonymous, cramped, unsanitary, poorly ventilated, and evoke a film noir ambiance which glorifies the very decrepitude which plagues it.”<sup>269</sup> While 925 Gilman hired patrols to cover up graffiti in the surrounding areas of their neighborhood, they never considered doing so for their own space.<sup>270</sup> In this way, subcultural spaces are similar to fashion, in that they present an interruption to the mainstream. Like the dyed hair and wild clothes of their fashion, this dilapidation is a controlled boundary of avant-garde

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<sup>268</sup> Freedom du Lac, J. “Rock Legend: A Multimedia History of D.C.’s 9:30 Club (washingtonpost.com).” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/artsandliving/930-club-turns-30/>.

<sup>269</sup> Young, Tricia Henry. “Dancing on Bela Lugosi’s Grave: The Politics and Aesthetics of Gothic Club Dancing.” *Dance Research* 17, no. 1 (1999): 75–97.85

<sup>270</sup> Edge, Brian. *924 Gilman: The Story So Far...* San Francisco, CA: Maximum Rocknroll, 2004.

subcultures. In his Amazon review of *The Beat Hotel*, Graham Siedman, who lived there during its famed years, writes the space was dilapidated looking, but clean, “I never saw a four-legged rat there and the only roaches were the cannabis kind.”<sup>271</sup> The distinction being made by Siedman that the space appeared dilapidated, but was well cared for, shows a sense of romanticization, and even nostalgia for these spaces similar to McKaye’s “no man’s land”.



**Figure 7<sup>272</sup> Black Cat Bill showing off his collection of black cats**

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<sup>271</sup> “Amazon.com: *The Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Corso in Paris, 1958-1963* (9780802116680): Barry Miles: Books.” Accessed January 5, 2015. [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/080211668X/ref=oh\\_aui\\_detailpage\\_000\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/080211668X/ref=oh_aui_detailpage_000_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1).

<sup>272</sup> Gwadzilla. “Gwadzilla: Black Cat Black Cat.” *Gwadzilla*, November 28, 2011. <http://gwadzilla.blogspot.com/2011/11/black-cat-black-cat.html>.

Although many in the subculture felt these spaces were their home, they were nonetheless in neighborhoods hostile to them. The very real dangers of the neighborhoods of subcultural spaces serve as an effective boundary to many outsiders. These dangers are mitigated by those within the subculture by engaging in relations with locals of the neighborhood who would handle safety in exchange for small change and drinks. For instance, “Black Cat” Bill was an unofficial doorman at the Black Cat, an underground music hub in Washington DC. Bill was well known to patrons for holding the door and asking for “a little change for the homeless” in exchange. In addition to the money and drinks bought by patrons, The Black Cat staff provided Bill with a meal each day,<sup>273</sup> and Bill in exchange kept patrons safer by being a liaison to the criminals who worked the area. Being acquainted socially with people like Black Cat Bill helps insiders be safe in dangerous neighborhoods.

Traveling through dangerous neighborhoods is also made easier by knowing the neighborhood geography and travelling in groups, both of which privilege the insider with safer access. Hodkinson writes of the interaction rituals performed by goths getting together prior to going out as both: one of his subjects’ favorite of

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<sup>273</sup> Williams, Erin. “Journal of a Rock Photographer: “Black Cat... Black Cat! How ‘Bout Some Change for the Homeless?!”.” *Journal of a Rock Photographer*, January 22, 2009. <http://rockphotographer.blogspot.com/2009/01/black-cat-black-cat-how-bout-some.html>.

activities,<sup>274</sup> and a good strategy to increase safety through safety in numbers.<sup>275</sup> Knowledge about whom to avoid, what streets to travel, and signs of danger were all shared by the group of insiders, keeping them safe in areas that otherwise would not be.

Subcultural spaces protect not only through their location, but also by keeping the inside of the space hidden from outsider view. Gelder writes that subcultural spaces, similar to Victorian secret societies,<sup>276</sup> meet in private spaces in order to protect the behaviors from outside scrutiny. Gelder also cites Angela McRobbie and Sarah Louise Baker in their discussions of a pre-teen girl's bedroom as "as a creative site, not just a place of consumption – and even a clandestine site, a place of 'dark play' that can evade the parent's supervisory gaze."<sup>277</sup> In both examples, creativity requires the evasion of societal gaze by being remote, secretive, and walled off. Even within the spaces there are often depths of restricted access, where more forbidden activities are permitted. For example, *Le Chat Noir* pioneered the VIP room, utilizing a private back room for its special

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<sup>274</sup> Hodkinson, Paul. *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002.90

<sup>275</sup> Hodkinson, Paul. *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002. 86

<sup>276</sup> Gelder, Ken. *Subcultures Cultural Histories and Social Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2007. 98

<sup>277</sup> Gelder, Ken. *Subcultures Cultural Histories and Social Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2007. 98

clients.<sup>278</sup> Thornton describes her guide to the rave scene, Kate, taking her to the VIP section of a nightclub, where she meets “DJs and club owners”<sup>279</sup> and other of the upper echelon of the subculture, before heading to the bathroom with Kate to take ecstasy.<sup>280</sup> In this way, the bathroom within the VIP room serves as the most private of spaces, to protect from outside scrutiny.

In his description of the punk home and music venue 924 Gilman, Brian Tucker writes that “Punk spaces facilitate what Foucault calls popular knowledges, those particular, local, disqualified knowledges that may stand in opposition to dominant discourse.”<sup>281</sup> Tucker describes how the spaces of punk enable people to gather together and develop an identity that is unique to that space, a fact illustrated in Alan O’Connor’s article *Local scenes and dangerous crossroads: punk and theories of cultural Hybridity*. O’Connor argues that postmodern academic theories of cultural hybridity overlook the ethnographic research on punk, which shows that there are variations in the local scenes, due to the regional resources and political variations of the region. Similar to myself, both Tucker and O’Connor consider space an overlooked and important aspect of punk

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<sup>278</sup> Gendron, Bernhard. *Between Montmartre and the Muddclub: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. Pr, 2002.45

<sup>279</sup> Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996. 90

<sup>280</sup> Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996. 89

<sup>281</sup> Tucker, Brian. “Punk Places: The Role of Space in Subcultural Lives.” Ohio University, n.d.20

(or avant-garde subcultures in my case.) Unfortunately neither spend much time considering the effect upon the subculture when such spaces are closed or recuperated.

For example, in 2006, the famous club CBGBs closed its doors. CBGBs last show, Patti Smith, who had started her rock career in the early days of the club, told the audience ““CBGB is a state of mind. There’s new kids with new ideas all over the world. They’ll make their own places — it doesn’t matter whether it’s here or wherever it is.”<sup>282</sup> Smith’s association of space with mental practices is accurate. However, this conflation of CBGBs spirit as being ephemeral and easily applicable elsewhere is wrong and all too common. The decades of labor and energy that artists, fans, and others poured into the space provides it with a unique psychological affect. As her own guitarist Lenny Kaye states, “you couldn’t replicate the décor in a million years, and dismantling all those layers of archaeology of music in the club is a daunting task.”<sup>283</sup> As I’ve argued in this dissertation, it is this archaeology that enables the production of spaces of representation. During the closing, CBGBs owner Hilly Kristal mentions turning down a space offered by the NYC Mayor’s office because it would still cost \$5

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<sup>282</sup> “CBGB Brings Down the Curtain With Nostalgia and One Last Night of Rock - New York Times.” Accessed January 5, 2015.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/16/arts/music/16cbgb.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/16/arts/music/16cbgb.html?_r=0).

<sup>283</sup> “CBGB Brings Down the Curtain With Nostalgia and One Last Night of Rock - New York Times.” Accessed January 5, 2015.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/16/arts/music/16cbgb.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/16/arts/music/16cbgb.html?_r=0).



million, and potentially moving the club to Las Vegas. Unfortunately, Kristal passed away the following year.

The closing of CBGBs and the gentrification of the Lower East Side was often cited as a moving of the cultural center of NYC to Brooklyn.<sup>284</sup> Subcultural spaces serve as the vanguard to gentrification, and urban studies now “conclude that artists comprise a relatively footloose occupation that can serve as a target of regional and local economic development policy.”<sup>285</sup> In a related *Slate* article *Could a Gay Neighborhood Save a City*, George Jackson, CEO and president of the Detroit Economic Growth Corp, states “When I look at this city’s tax base, I say bring on more gentrification.”<sup>286</sup> Gentrification is the economic transubstantiation of the space, one reaped by the space owners, rather than the subcultures who occupied it. Detroit’s attempts to gentrify by catering to certain communities who have historically needed to congregate in dangerous neighborhoods, and then in turn become victims of gentrification, is not only immoral, but also overlooks a deeper understanding of the subcultures. In the case of avant-garde subcultures, CBGBs, Chat Noir, 930 and others were cultural

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<sup>284</sup> “Between Punk Rock and a Hard Place - Hilly Kristal and the Death of CBGB.” Accessed January 5, 2015.  
<http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/music/features/12023/index1.html>.

<sup>285</sup> Markusen, Ann, and Greg Schrock. “The Artistic Dividend: Urban Artistic Specialisation and Economic Development Implications.” *Urban Studies* 43, no. 10 (September 1, 2006): 1661–86.

<sup>286</sup> Benes, Ross. “Detroit Is Bankrupt: Could a Gay Neighborhood Save the City?” Accessed January 5, 2015.  
[http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2013/11/15/detroit\\_is\\_bankrupt\\_could\\_a\\_gay\\_neighborhood\\_save\\_the\\_city.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2013/11/15/detroit_is_bankrupt_could_a_gay_neighborhood_save_the_city.html).

spaces within larger functioning cities, and the patrons of such spaces also lived in and utilized the rest of the city as well.

As shown in the Patti Smith quote, avant-garde subcultures are themselves guilty of buying into the myth of an endless frontier in which to produce their spaces. The cultural centers of Europe and United States are purportedly continually shifting. For example, the neighborhood of Bushwick<sup>287</sup> has become the New York subcultural base (already prompting gentrification), and Leipzig is considered “the new Berlin.”<sup>288</sup> Yet, these spaces each must have their own regional knowledge, their own “layers of archaeology” that they need to build. The signifiers being used to denote such spaces, the presence of hipsters, cafes, and all night parties, do not express the move of a space, and if anything the building of a new one. When a space is recuperated, its members must migrate. The transitions to Bushwick and Leipzig have also been generational shifts. But the fact that “new kids with new ideas” are potentially producing new spaces should not diminish the loss of the other spaces and the communities involved in them.

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<sup>287</sup> Harris, Jacob. “Photos Of Bushwick Gentrification - Business Insider,” November 2013. <http://www.businessinsider.com/photos-of-bushwick-gentrification-2013-11?op=1>.

<sup>288</sup> Popp, Maximilian. “Leipzig Is the New Berlin - SPIEGEL ONLINE.” *Spiegel Online*, October 24, 2012. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/leipzig-is-the-new-berlin-a-863088.html>.



**Figure 8<sup>289</sup> 924 Gilman during the day (1990s)**

Avant-garde subcultures not only mythologize a perpetual frontier for them to occupy, but as a culture, they overlook the difficulties in maintaining a space. In their introduction to *Resistance Through Rituals*, John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts write that subcultures win space for the young: cultural space in the neighborhood and institutions, real time for leisure and recreation, actual room on the street or street-corner. They serve to mark out and appropriate ‘territory’ in the localities.<sup>290</sup> As I’ve explained previously, avant-garde subcultures *produce* spaces, but I believe the term *win* to be an

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<sup>289</sup> Gobetz, Wally. Berkeley - West Berkeley: 924 Gilman Street. Photo, February 26, 2012. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wallyg/6834886440/>.

<sup>290</sup> Hall, Stuart, and Tony Jefferson. *Resistance through Rituals Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1989. 45

overstatement. Although avant-garde subcultures have many methods of controlling access to their cultural and social capital by way of membership, they have historically not been very effective in protecting themselves from outside intrusion. Hodkinson describes a goth event in which two mainstream men in jeans arrived, prompting “resentful stares and mutterings to the effect of ‘what are those trendies doing here?’ among a group of goths sitting nearby. While not everyone reacted so directly, my long-term experience of the goth scene enables a confident assertion that most would have noted the presence of these individuals, demarcated them as outsiders, and set out to avoid contact with them, as indeed I did myself.”<sup>291</sup> Hodkinson’s story exemplifies one of the problems that subcultures have had historically: they rely upon exclusion and disdain as their principle methods of boundary enforcement. Such elitism, as described above, works for initiating new members or for the intellectual stimulation of argumentative relations, but it is ineffective to outsiders who do not care what the subculture thinks of them.

Most avant-garde subcultures protect their spaces from outsiders through elitism and disdain, and if that fails, they tend to abandon the location for another. For example, Tricia Henry Young describes that “Goths are well known for leaving the dance floor if they dislike the band, the song a DJ plays, even other dancers on the floor.” Similarly, when Le Chat Noir raised its entrance price and began

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<sup>291</sup> Hodkinson, Paul. *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002. 90

catering to the bourgeoisie, those artists who had originally been members did not fight to win back their space - they dispersed.<sup>292</sup> One of the only examples of a subculture fighting for space is found in the book *925 Gilman*, a compendium of firsthand accounts of the famed punk house. The book recounts the many efforts engaged in to protect their space from Nazi skinheads and later the encroachment of mainstream businesses. In the latter example, we can understand why avant-garde subcultures often choose to move when they have the option. Protecting a space to the extent that the punks of Gilman did, required hiring full-time staff and security, engaging in violent fights, and several legal proceedings.

Aside from the difficulty of winning spaces through legal proceedings and violent altercations, there are two other reasons why avant-garde subcultures have problems with effective exclusion of outsiders. The first, which I addressed in my section on physical space, is the belief that there is always somewhere else they can go. The second is that subcultures engage in their own recuperation, which I will discuss in the section on selling out. These two aspects result in subcultures being much more willing to move on and produce new spaces (mental and physical), rather than being willing to battle for the ones they currently occupy.

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<sup>292</sup> Seigel, Jerrold E. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. 23

Despite their difficulties in defending their physical spaces to outsiders, most of the social and cultural capital travels with avant-garde subculture members. Gaining access to this capital, outside of recuperating it, is provided to insiders, and is based upon an unspoken echelon determined by the person's perceived *authenticity*. Authenticity is an important concept because it both encourages the evolution of the subculture, and is at the heart of why its recuperation is problematic.

The roots of authenticity can be traced to 18<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher Jean-Jaques Rousseau, as the alignment of an individual's lived experiences to their inner values or "natural self."<sup>293</sup> For a definition of subcultural authenticity, I agree with Philip Lewin and J. Patrick Williams in *The Ideology and Practice of Authenticity in Punk Subculture*: a commitment to the ideologies and participation in the "larger life project" of the subculture.<sup>294</sup> Lewin and Williams' work helps separate subcultural authenticity from cultural representations of boundaries such as fashion or taste in music. In their ethnographic interviews, punks "expressed extreme distaste for people who employed styles in ways

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<sup>293</sup> Lewin, Philip, and J. Patrick Williams. "The Ideology and Practice of Authenticity in Punk Subculture." *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society*, 2009, 65–83. 65

<sup>294</sup> Lewin, Philip, and J. Patrick Williams. "The Ideology and Practice of Authenticity in Punk Subculture." *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society*, 2009, 65–83. 68

judged to be inconsistent with their self-concepts.”<sup>295</sup> In other words, the subculture judges those who express membership (through style) by a deeper inspection of their values.

Even if authenticity is the metric subcultures use to judge one another, an adherence to cultural boundaries is required to self-identify with the subculture and convey a natural predilection to its cultural forms. A problem for initiates into a subculture is that much of the esoteric knowledge that is used to judge their authenticity is hidden from outsiders, and therefore inaccessible to them. This leads to a rather awkward initiation process, where the entrant begins to present their affiliation with the subculture through fashion and other signifiers, all the while being aware that they cannot possibly be as authentic as those who are more established in the subculture. Hodkinson describes initiates of goth subculture, “baby goths” whose display of “a temporary or superficial subcultural appearance are taken to suggest that the individuals concerned have only scratched the surface of the subculture.”<sup>296</sup> Yet, over repeated, potentially scorn-laden attempts, the initiate is eventually accepted into the social network. This process of questioning the initiate’s authenticity tends to cull those not fully committed, and establish a clear hierarchy based upon knowledge.

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<sup>295</sup> Lewin, Philip, and J. Patrick Williams. “The Ideology and Practice of Authenticity in Punk Subculture.” *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society*, 2009, 65–83.74

<sup>296</sup> Hodkinson, Paul. *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002. 79

In my research, I have found a correlation between the codification of subcultures and the difficulty in gaining acceptance as authentic.<sup>297</sup> For example, the Situationist International began as a rather open group of friends in Paris Left bank,<sup>298</sup> but became increasingly stringent on expectations of members in its later years. At these later stages, the authenticity of all members, not just initiates, were brought into question. In the case of the Situationist International, Guy Debord ejected most of the original members for not being true to the cause.<sup>299</sup> Collins' theory of argumentative relations, the *intellectual law of small numbers*, states, among other things, that one dominant position can stifle creativity from others in the thought community. As the authenticity of the subculture becomes a codified set of values, it loses its previous flexibility and becomes less attractive, and harder to attain for new members. This results in subcultures splintering into diverging groups. Collins points out that while this is the life and death cycle for specific philosophic schools (or in our case avant-garde subcultures), from a macroscopic perspective, it maintains diversity between groups.<sup>300</sup> In this way, subcultural authenticity serves not only to assure

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<sup>297</sup> Hodkinson, Paul. *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002. 94

<sup>298</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001. 45

<sup>299</sup> Mension, Jean-Michel, Gérard Berreby, and Francesco Milo. *The Tribe*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001 92

<sup>300</sup> Collins, Randall. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*, 1998.81



that members are consistent with the values of the subculture, but also that subcultures emerge that represent the values of its membership.

### **The Evolutions of Avant-Garde Subculture**



**Figure 9** <sup>301</sup>Siouxsie Sioux, early goth

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<sup>301</sup> “Siouxsie Sioux.” *Pinterest*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <https://www.pinterest.com/magnifikatly/siouxsie-sioux/>.



**Figure 10**<sup>302</sup> **Rose McDowall evolves Sioux's style**

My research has shown that, despite not always being obvious to outsiders, the emphasis upon individuality, and its resulting cultural evolution, is consistent through all of the avant-garde subcultures. Ethnographic accounts of punks, ravers and goths each cite the importance of individuality to their subculture.<sup>303</sup> While an adherence to certain subcultural conventions is expected, so is at least a

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<sup>302</sup> "Strawberry Switchblade." *Teenage*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://teenagefilm.com/archives/freak-party/strawberry-switchblade/>.

<sup>303</sup> Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996 99

Muggleton, David. *Inside Subculture the Postmodern Meaning of Style*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000. 55– 79

Hodkinson, Paul. *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002. 77

slight divergence. Overcommitment to the subculture, without individual expression, is considered inauthentic, as it displays a lack of individuality. In *Punk Styles and Authenticity*, William Force lays out how restraint and non-conformity within the scene are important expressions of this authenticity. “It is common for scene participants to balance their awareness of, and orientation to, implicit appearance rules with acts of self-deprecation, exemplifying the tension between authenticity (meeting social expectations) and punk irreverence.”<sup>304</sup>

Thus Rose McDowell altered the goth fashion rules, originally established by goth pioneer Siouxi Sioux, adding polka-dots and dresses from the 1950s, while retaining Sioux’s heavy eyeliner, white facepaint, and teased black hair.

McDowell changed the boundaries of goth fashion, making it more playful and classically feminine to match her individual personality.

This need to be individually authentic within the subculture has prompted the continuous evolution of avant-garde subcultures. As the subculture grows to larger numbers, individual divergence multiplies upon itself, eventually forming new subcultural forms. New subcultures are born when members are frustrated with their current ones. For instance, punk pioneer Richard Hell began his artistic career as a poet publishing his work in small literary magazines, but he felt confined by the distinctions between the poetry and music worlds, and eventually combined them into his own distinct style. Hell writes of the

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<sup>304</sup> Ryan Force, William. “Consumption Styles and the Fluid Complexity of Punk Authenticity.” *Symbolic Interaction* 32, no. 4 (November 2009): 289–309. doi:10.1525/si.2009.32.4.289.300

frustration he had with initial reactions within the poetry subculture to his new work. “People give me this same shit about my books, going the opposite direction. That I’m a musician who writes. Fuck that. Also, the way I write songs is to write the music first, and then I listen to the music and see what it makes me think, and write the words to it.”<sup>305</sup> Hell is now widely respected as being responsible for much of punk, so it is interesting to read of the difficulties he initially had. Yet, Hell’s own experience mirrors the formula that Collins laid out in his theories: he splintered from one thought community, and joined with likeminded artists (Suicide, The Ramones) to build a new community in New York’s Lower East Side.

When Hell created a new subculture out of the older ones, the pressures upon him shifted significantly. The inception phase of a subculture is free-form, as its authors slowly formulate the thoughts and values that will define it. As the subculture becomes more solidified, and its conventions codified, the process of presenting oneself as being authentic increasingly becomes one of adapting to the subcultural coda. Frank Cartlege, author of *Dressed to Distress*, provides a wonderful listing of the evolution of punk style, which I want to share in full:

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<sup>305</sup> Kane, Daniel. “Richard Hell, Genesis: Grasp, and the Blank Generation: From Poetry to Punk in New York’s Lower East Side.” *Contemporary Literature* 52, no. 2 (2011): 330–69. QTD.

Christgau, Robert and Carola Dibbell. Liner Notes. *Spurts: The Richard Hell Story*. Rhino, 2005. CD 3

“1 c. 1975 and onwards nation-wide. Dress influenced by David Bowie and Roxy Music. Pre-punk, 1940s suits, peg trousers, winklepickers and jelly shoes. Introduced within an arena of various ‘do-it-yourself modifications and experimentations.

2 c. 1975–78: An exclusive London style based on the clothes available from Sex, Seditionaries and later Boy. The King’s Road ex-art school scene of Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, fully conversant with the workings of commodity culture promoted ceaselessly through the media.

3 c. 1976–79. A ‘street level’ look which co-existed alongside the above: old narrow suits with narrow lapels, straight-leg trousers, dresses and shirts (small or no collar) from jumble sales and charity shops, plastic sandals, home-made Tshirts and stencilled slogans, combat fatigues and mohair jumpers.

4 1979 onwards. An iconic punk look derived in part from traditional male rock ‘gear’, black, studded, leather jackets, and Doctor Marten boots, bondage trousers and a predominance of black.

5 c. 1980 onwards. Much the same as above but Mohicans exaggerated in both size and colour, more extreme body piercing and adornment, a culture related to the political doctrines of both the Left and Right promoted by bands such as the Exploited, Crass and Discharge.”<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Sabin, Roger. *Punk Rock, so What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk*. London; New York: Routledge, 1999. 146

It is noteworthy that as the iconic look of punk came into fruition in 1979, new offshoots of punk such as No Wave, then later goth, and then hardcore came about. Therefore, within less than a decade, the punk genre had been formed, codified into a distinct aesthetic, and evolved into several new forms of subculture. As Cartlege's account displays, the later punk was much more politically charged than its predecessors. In an interview, Penny Rimbaud (lead member of Crass) states that they considered Crass to be in opposition to the phony Sex Pistols. "We set up for two reasons: one, to get up and change things for ourselves. We thought the Sex Pistols and The Clash were saying it, before we realized that they had been set up by the music biz and, two, to counter the negative 'No Future' of punk as we believed there was a future and we wanted to demonstrate this in a creative way."<sup>307</sup> Penny Rimbaud illustrates my point that individuals will evolve the subculture to match their own values. In "*Do They Owe Us a Living? Of Course They Do!*" Crass, *Throbbing Gristle, and Anarchy and Radicalism in Early English Punk Rock* Brian Cogan cites Crass and *Throbbing Gristle* as punk bands that espoused a radical, theoretically grounded, leftist politic in their work. "Today, thousands of industrial and anarcho-punk bands across the world cite the two bands as the reason why they continue to make music in a system that is resolutely devoted to consumer culture."<sup>308</sup> While

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<sup>307</sup> The Shend. "Angst and Anarchy, Crass' Penny Rimbaud Looks back to '76." Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.uncarved.org/music/apunk/offbeat.html>.

<sup>308</sup> Cogan, Brian. "'Do They Owe Us a Living? Of Course They Do!' Crass, *Throbbing Gristle, and Anarchy and Radicalism in Early English Punk Rock*." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 1, no. 2 (2008): 77–90.. 87

Cogan is correct in his assessment of the influence Crass and Throbbing Gristle have had on contemporary post-punk subcultures, I contend that it overlooks the structure of argumentative relations in its dismissal of other, less radical punk bands such as the Sex Pistols.

Although it is debatable whether the Clash and Sex Pistols were “set up by the record biz”, it is true that the corporate-owned recording companies such as EMI (Sex Pistols) and CBS (The Clash) were heavily involved in punk. These corporations recuperated early punk, but also helped to promote it. This recuperation prompted the entry of Crass: Rimbaud claims one of the major reasons for starting Crass was to inject a radical and positive politic into the subculture. This moment in punk exemplifies argumentative relations as expressed by Collins, where opposing thought leaders within the same space serve to propel each other’s work. Crass and the Sex Pistols are opposed sides of the same thought community. A similar argument is made in Thornton’s chapter on *The Media Development of ‘Subcultures’*, where she states that media are “integral participants in music culture”<sup>309</sup> whose *negative* press can serve to “breathe longevity” into subcultures.<sup>310</sup> Thornton draws an important distinction

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<sup>309</sup> Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996. 121

<sup>310</sup> Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996. 122

between media size (micro, niche, and mass)<sup>311</sup> and type (positive, negative, investigative), saying of the latter that “the process of illuminating a culture that is supposed to take place in the dark - usually destroys the atmosphere that is the linchpin of club authenticity.”<sup>312</sup> Thornton argues that mass media has served a role in the lifecycle of subcultures, calcifying, extending its life, and destroying it. To me this implies that subcultures must maintain control over their media exposure. Both theories, media’s participation in subculture and argumentative relations, discuss the importance of adversarial relations in evolution of thought communities. In the next section I will review several instances of recuperation within avant-garde subcultures, to examine its adversarial role to independence and authenticity.

### **The Recuperations of Avant-Garde Subculture**

I have shown how recuperation normalizes the subcultural artifact into the domain of the mainstream, and beyond the control of the subculture. In this section, I look at examples of avant-garde recuperation in order to show this adversarial role in the intellectual development of the avant-garde subculture. My theory is that while subcultures generally find selling out offensive, some

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<sup>311</sup> Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996. 122

<sup>312</sup> Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996. 127



subcultures are accepting of it when the benefits of the recuperation help to progress the subcultural value system. As there are not enough ethnographic studies on this topic, I attempt to qualify the reaction from the subculture as expressed to the media, to prove my theory.

My first example, Bob Dylan's 2004 Super Bowl advertisement for Victoria's Secret, is selected for being one of the most egregious examples of selling out.<sup>313</sup> By examining the underlying reaction to Dylan creating this advertisement, I hope to show the relationship between a subculture's values and selling out. Dylan was a counter-cultural icon of the hippy and folk subcultures from the 1960s onwards. He, and the subculture he was a leader within, were known for values of anti-materialism. Victoria's Secret, as a commercial bra company, would seemingly not match such values. In addition, Dylan was known for being against mainstream media in general. *Slate Magazine* author Seth Stevenson's article questions why Dylan would do this commercial, given that he is already wealthy, concluding that it was for exposure to younger audiences.<sup>314</sup> Dylan

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<sup>313</sup> Richards, Chris. "Click Track - Taking Sides: If 'Selling-out' Is Obsolete, Why Do the Black Eyed Peas Still Offend Us?" *Washington Post*, April 2010. [http://blog.washingtonpost.com/clicktrack/2010/04/taking\\_sides\\_is\\_selling-out\\_ob.html](http://blog.washingtonpost.com/clicktrack/2010/04/taking_sides_is_selling-out_ob.html).

<sup>314</sup> Stevenson, Seth. "Bob Dylan Shills for Victoria's Secret." Accessed January 5, 2015. [http://www.slate.com/articles/business/ad\\_report\\_card/2004/04/tangled\\_up\\_in\\_boobs.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/business/ad_report_card/2004/04/tangled_up_in_boobs.html).

himself did not offer commentary on his reasons,<sup>315</sup> however I believe Stevenson's idea to be plausible: the commercial features Dylan himself as much as it does the underwear-clad model. This would suggest that Dylan was abandoning his professed values, for a larger, more mainstream audience.

Yet, many others within the subculture had already sold out, with less fanfare on the matter. Why then did this particular instance cause such outrage among Dylan's (former) subculture? One answer is the oft-quoted John Baky, curator of a collection of Dylan material housed at Philadelphia's La Salle University, who responded "I'm going to have to go blow my brains out", upon hearing the news.<sup>316</sup> For Baky and those he represents, Dylan's earlier songs had been a cornerstone of their cultural capital. Baky's word choice of "gonna have to" is informative. While Baky's statement is hyperbole, he nonetheless presents the decision as one he does not have agency in. As a curator, Baky is economically invested in the cultural capital of Dylan, and therefore Dylan's selling out has dramatically depreciated Baky's own assets. While blowing one's brains out

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<sup>315</sup> Music, in, Television | November 19th, and 2013 11 Comments. "Bob Dylan's Controversial 2004 Victoria's Secret Ad: His First & Last Appearance in a Commercial." *Open Culture*. Accessed September 2, 2014. <http://www.openculture.com/2013/11/bob-dylan-sells-out-in-controversial-2004-victorias-secret-ad.html>.

<sup>316</sup> Steinberg, Brian. "Bob Dylan Gets Tangled Up in Pink - WSJ." *The Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 2004. <http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB108086174426172226>.

sounds extreme, suicide is not wholly uncommon in the financial sector when one's stock plummets.

There is a correlation between reaction from the subculture and the perception of how the recuperation affects the capital of the subculture. For instance, Chumbawumba, an anti-capitalist punk band, appeared to be as hypocritical as Dylan when they signed to EMI 8 years after appearing on the *Fuck EMI*<sup>317</sup> compilation of punk bands opposed to the major label. Aaron Lake Smith tells the complex story for *Jacobin Magazine*, explaining their evolution of tactics during their thirty years of music and activism. Smith explains that Chumbawumba used the distribution of EMI to further their own political agenda. Using their money, such as \$100,000 USD profits from their music being used in a General Motors commercial, Chumbawumba donated the proceeds to *Indymedia* and *Corpwatch*.<sup>318</sup> Smith states that Chumbawumba “wrecked their purity in order to become a funnel to siphon corporate money into anti-corporate activities,”<sup>319</sup> arguing that their continued espousal of anarchist ideologies and their donations to other leftist organizations demonstrate their

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<sup>317</sup> “Various - Fuck EMI.” *Discogs*. Accessed January 5, 2015.  
<http://www.discogs.com/Variou-Fuck-EMI/release/367682>.

<sup>318</sup> Kamp, Chase. “No, Seriously: Chumbawamba Has A Storied Anarchist Past.” *Up on the Sun*, July 2012.  
[http://blogs.phoenixnewtimes.com/uponsun/2012/07/chumbawamba\\_anarchist\\_tubthump.php](http://blogs.phoenixnewtimes.com/uponsun/2012/07/chumbawamba_anarchist_tubthump.php).

<sup>319</sup> “Chumbawamba’s Long Voyage | Jacobin.” Accessed January 5, 2015.  
<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2012/07/chumbawambas-long-voyage/>.

authenticity. In *Never Mind the Bollocks*, Kevin C. Dunn references other punk musicians who have subverted the system by siphoning money back to their subcultural community, citing punk legend Jello Biafra on the band Green Day's donation of \$50,000 to Food Not Bombs<sup>320</sup> as only possible through major label support. Detractors to these tactics, such as musicians Ian McKaye or Steve Albini, are mainly concerned that the artist's integrity is compromised,<sup>321</sup> however the effectiveness of these tactics are not questioned by either. These examples show that by providing money back to the subculture, actions of selling out are often reframed as being subversive, and for the most part, are accepted by the subculture.

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<sup>320</sup> Dunn, Kevin C. "Never Mind the Bollocks: The Punk Rock Politics of Global Communication." *Review of International Studies* 34, no. S1 (January 2008).

<sup>321</sup> Sinker, Daniel. *We Owe You Nothing: Expanded Edition*. Revised Edition edition. New York, NY: Akashic Books, 2007. Location 2823



**Figure 113<sup>22</sup> Stills from Bob Dylan's Victoria Secret Commercial**

The notion that certain forms of selling out are absolved by benefiting the subculture is not unique to punk, but familiar to the avant-garde in general. However, in art, where such playing with commodification is more common, the meaning behind it becomes more indecipherable. In his review of the *Last Decade* retrospective of Andy Warhol's work, Blake Gopnik argues that Warhol "held a mirror up to our sold-out commodity culture by selling himself as a cultural commodity."<sup>323</sup> To Gopnik, Warhol's appearance on MTV and

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<sup>322</sup> RazMataz. "January 25, 2004 | Raz Mataz Magazine." Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://razmatazmag.com/?p=4410>

<sup>323</sup> Gopnik, Blake. "'Last Decade' Reflects How Much Andy Warhol Turned Sellout into High Art." *The Washington Post*, November 11, 2010, sec. Arts & Living. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/10/AR2010111006865.html?sid=ST2010111007254>

advertisement work for Coca-Cola confuse the commodification art, by retaining a self-reflexive awareness. Similar to the above examples, Warhol's selling out is considered to be operating outside of the need for strict profit, but instead to be "pushing art as far as it can go", and thereby leading avant-garde intellectual capital. Yet, could not a similar excuse be applied to Dylan? Dylan certainly strikes a potentially critical gaze (see photo), his lyrics of "silhouettes in the window" and being "sick of love" both could be read as ironic of the advertisement which he appears in. Why then, has no one spoken for Dylan the way that Gopnik does of Warhol? The answer is that Warhol has a history of critical engagement with recuperation, where Dylan has a history of hard-line refusal. Critics and historians are correctly looking to the artists' past work for answers to understand why they sold out. However, it shows that the concept of selling out is in part one of establishing a narrative that either aligns with or conflicts with the person or subculture's values.

Subculturalists attempt to manage the narrative of their own dealings with the mainstream in order to maintain authenticity with their subculture. Blixa Bargeld of the band Einstürzende Neubauten tries to establish the narrative of where he falls on this spectrum between helping the subculture and selling out. Bargeld is aware of the perception of his band by some as being sell outs, saying that many in his German subculture "have us ticked off as a bourgeois cultural

export”<sup>324</sup> and for writing music to a Jordache Jeans commercial. Bargeld objects to these claims: “We've tried to do whatever we could to stay independent. We are independent! We can make the records the way we want, and when we want them, because we are not signed to any major label.”<sup>325</sup> This independence is associated in the interview to the successes some Berlin squatters achieved in having their spaces legalized, a movement Bargeld was a part of. To Bargeld, the commercial work has supported his independence from major labels, and is a sign that he remains true to subcultural values. Yet, as he himself describes, his work is considered to be theatrical and bourgeois. As I will explain, the reason for this is that Bargeld is no longer engaging the larger subculture, but only supporting his own independence.

In comparison, Peter Christopherson financially supported his bands Coil and Throbbing Gristle by working for the London design agency Hipgnosis, where he was responsible for album covers of Pink Floyd and Peter Gabriel. His later work as a commercial director for bands such as pop boy band Hanson<sup>326</sup> is completely

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<sup>324</sup> Turner, Lake. “You Can’t Kill The Drill: Einsturzende Neubauten’s Blixa Bargeld Interviewed.” *The Quietus*, November 18, 2010.  
<http://thequietus.com/articles/05302-einsturzende-neubautenv-blixa-bargeld-interview>.

<sup>325</sup> De Vries, Fred. “Blixa Bargeld: Something Better than Death, We Can Always Find.” Accessed January 5, 2015.  
<http://www.substancebooks.co.za/content/view/62/62/>.

<sup>326</sup> *Hanson - I Will Come To You*, 2009.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rsWf09\\_PmI&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rsWf09_PmI&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

mainstream, yet Christopherson never needed to defend this work, and his commercial work was often cited without any question of his authenticity. For example, *The Guardian* writes of Christopherson's parallel work in the avant-garde and mainstream commercial worlds that "Christopherson was tickled by the notion that the money he made from directing commercials, such as a floral, soft-focus ad for Max Factor's Le Jardin perfume starring Jane Seymour, enabled his post-Throbbing Gristle band Coil to make records called things such as *The Anal Staircase* and *His Body Was a Playground for the Nazi Elite*."<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Petridis, Alexis. "Peter Christopherson Obituary." *The Guardian*. Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/nov/28/peter-christopherson-obituary>.



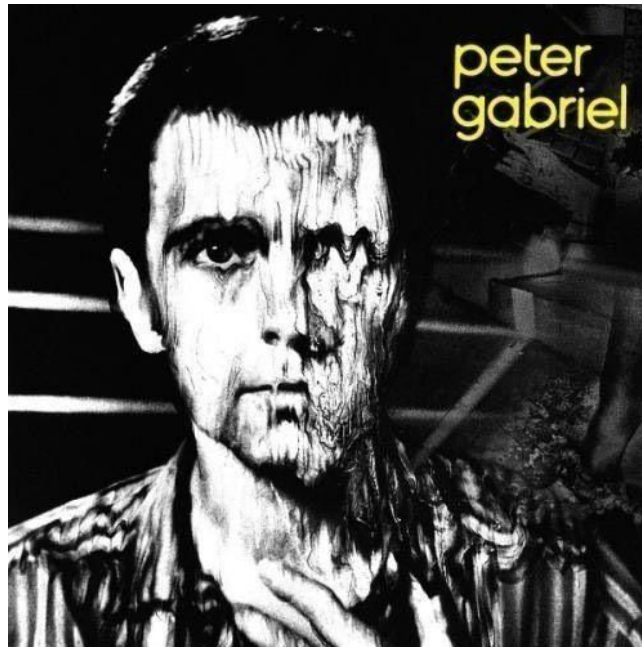


Figure 12<sup>328</sup> Album cover by Christopherson

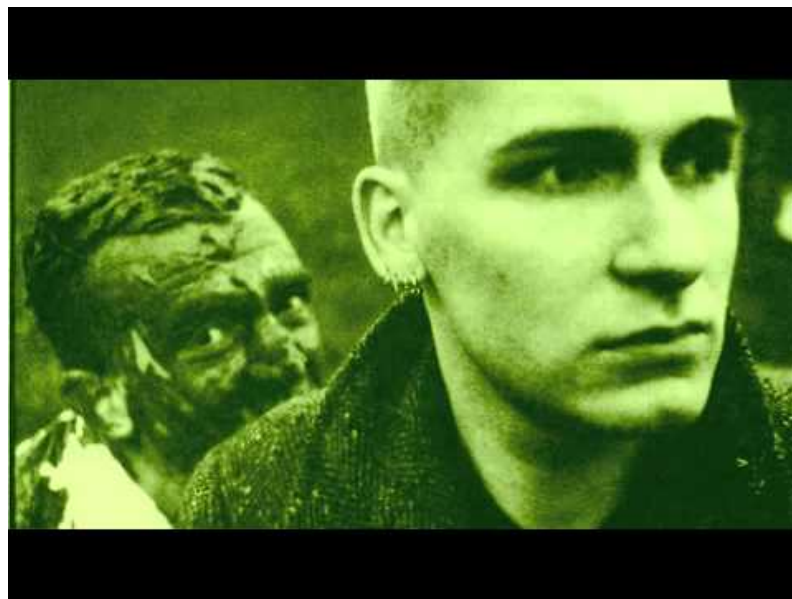


Figure 13<sup>329</sup> Still from Christopherson's Scatology video

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<sup>328</sup> "Peter Gabriel – Peter Gabriel – CDS 4019 – LP Vinyl Record." *eBay*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.ebay.com/itm/Peter-Gabriel-Peter-Gabriel-CDS-4019-LP-Vinyl-Record-/281476775432>.

One way that Christopherson and Bargeld are different is that Christopherson produced commercial work in *parallel* to his avant-garde work, but did not sell his avant-garde work itself, whereas the music that Bargeld used for Jordache Jeans was aesthetically identical to the music produced by his band.

My research into the subcultural reaction to selling out reveals that if recuperation benefits the subcultural community as a whole, then the recuperation is absolved. The donations of Chumbawumba and Green Day are to organizations staffed by radical activists with strong overlaps in the punk community.<sup>330</sup> Christopherson and Warhol each are furthering the intellectual thought of their subcultures. Within my framework of boundary, this is an exchange where one aspect becomes diminished, while another is extended. For example, Chumbawumba might no longer be operating as punk, and they may have become recuperated, but they are advancing the punk subculture they are still connected to beyond their own practice.

Recuperation has operated in part as an internal pressure to evolve and support the subculture. However, both the structure of subculture and the systems of

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<sup>329</sup> *COIL Scatology Demos*, 2013.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2ZhbK61O50&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_playlist](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2ZhbK61O50&feature=youtube_gdata_playlist).

<sup>330</sup> Bruns, Axel. *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production*. Peter Lang, 2005. 84

evolution and recuperation which I have described in this chapter have been affected by network society. As I have explained, subcultures self-identify and protect their capital through the use of boundaries. In the next chapter I will investigate the manners by which digital media dilutes these boundaries in network society. I will show that without such boundaries, subcultural recuperation occurs much quicker, disrupting the incubation required for argumentative relations, and thus has halted subcultural evolution. I will look at symptoms of this phenomenon: fluidity and retromania. Finally, I will suggest a set of digital media practices to help reestablish boundaries in network society.

## V. Fluidity, Retromania and Internet Subcultures



Figure 14<sup>331</sup> Rihanna performance on Saturday Night Live

In November 2012, the pop musician Rihanna performed her hit song “Diamonds” on *Saturday Night Live*. The performance (pictured above) featured outdated clip art graphics and imagery from 90s California surf culture as poorly crafted green screen effects. For many Rihanna fans and Saturday Night Live viewers, the aesthetic was shockingly bad. “Anyone else notice that the band

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<sup>331</sup> “Hung & Drawn.” *Dazed*. Accessed January 6, 2015.  
<http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/15122/1/hung-drawn>.

became a part of the background? :D” wrote The50sGirl.<sup>332</sup> Indeed, most of the comments from 2012 on the Youtube hosted recording are about the ugly, poorly executed background. However, within the next year, these comments increasingly record enjoyment of the aesthetic, with many referencing to it as *Seapunk*.

At the time of Rihanna’s performance, Seapunk consisted of under a dozen artists producing under this retro-marine style as part of a partially humorous meme within what I call *internet subculture*.<sup>333</sup> For reasons I will discuss later in this chapter, internet subculture produces many of these tiny and ephemeral cultural movements, with Seapunk and Vaporwave being two of the most prominent. Interestingly, while initial reactions from Seapunkers to Rihanna’s co-opting were of outrage at neither having received credit nor compensation, these quickly shifted to a vocal support of having their work ripped off. JeromeLOL tweeted “No one owns the 90s” and “Internet is Culture's Playground it's the Best.Stay Posi”. While scene founder Zombelle wrote ”GUYS WE CHANGED POP CULTURE/NOW PERFORMERS LIKE @rihanna R SINGING ABOUT ENLIGHTENMENT/ LOVE HENCE SHIFTING MASS CONSCIOUSNESS W

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<sup>332</sup> “All Comments on Rihanna - Diamonds (Live on SNL) - YouTube.” Accessed January 5, 2015. [https://www.youtube.com/all\\_comments?v=2LT23ixDaJo](https://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=2LT23ixDaJo).

<sup>333</sup> There have been numerous labels applied to this overarching group, some of which I will discuss: post-subcultures, new aesthetic, hipsters. However, I prefer internet subculture because it focuses on the subsection of people who are continuing avant-garde practices in network society.

OUR IMAGERY”<sup>334</sup> Sea Punk’s attitude towards their recuperation is strange not only in its difference from their pre-internet predecessors, but in its almost propagandistic tone. As I will discuss below, for internet subcultures recuperation is not only accepted as part of the cycle, but desired.

The Rihanna performance is an interesting example of subcultural recuperation in part because most of the discussions around the event occurred, and are archived, online. The YouTube comments, for example, provide a glimpse into a societal shift in the appreciation of an aesthetic, but within the context of understanding it as Seapunk. “At the beginning I wasn't able to imagine I'd love it, and take a look at myself now I'm spreading this myself personally!” writes Colin Andrae. Rihanna’s co-opting Seapunk placed her at the center of a subcultural aesthetic, while simultaneously transforming it into a mainstream trend. In the chart from Google trends (below), we can see the spike in interest immediately following Rihanna’s performance, with the trend overall retaining a 20 percent increase in interest following the performance. The manipulation of subcultural trends is not new to Rihanna, and as discussed above, a Malcolm McLaren engaged a similar tactic when he latched the band he managed, The Sex Pistols, onto punk. What has changed compared to previous subcultures is that internet subcultures anticipated this recuperation; their positive reaction to it was part of a new strategy of utilizing the recuperation for their own benefit. In

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<sup>334</sup> Martins, Chris. “Seapunks Salty Over Rihanna and Azealia Banks’ Net Aesthetics.” *SPIN*, November 14, 2012. <http://www.spin.com/articles/azealia-banks-rihanna-seapunk-beef-saturday-night-live-video/>.

this chapter I will examine how the social changes have affected subcultural practices.



**Figure 15<sup>335</sup> Google Analytics on mentions of Seapunk in news articles over time**

In the previous chapter, I established a theoretical framework that analyzed avant-garde subcultures through their cultural boundaries (slang, fashion, accumulation of artifacts, esoteric knowledge, and physical space). I explained that boundaries are used both to manage the recuperation of their cultural and social capital from the mainstream, and to evolve by encouraging new members to produce their own alterations on subcultural conventions. In this chapter, I argue that the shifts in hegemonic power have diluted the boundaries of avant-garde subcultures, and in turn have weakened their management over their recuperation and impeded their evolution.

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<sup>335</sup> Screen capture from <http://www.google.com/trends/explore#q=sea%20punk>. Accessed on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014

I consider there to be four properties, discussed in Chapter 2, that occur in network society which are pertinent to dilution of avant-garde subcultural boundaries: 1) *Realized Abstractions* - The use of technology has become naturalized in our everyday lives, and we have become dependent upon its enhancements; 2) *Access* - There is a correlation between the affordances of networked technologies and the bandwidth with which we access them on the one hand, and the power we hold within society on the other; 3) *Absent Presence* - The pervasive presence of the virtual, or real virtualities, removes our engagement with the physical world around us; 4) *Homogenization of Culture* - We have become increasingly siloed with like-minded individuals, and at the same time a global culture has grown in dominance .

In this chapter, I provide examples of that show how these properties of network society dilute the boundaries of contemporary avant-garde subcultures. I review the concepts of *fluidity* as discussed by the academic subfield of post-subcultural studies, and of *retromania*, developed by acclaimed musical critic Simon Reynolds. I consider fluidity and *retromania* to be symptoms of the underlying problems avant-garde subcultures are having in network society, and as such they support my argument. My own work differs from both post-cultural studies and Reynolds' *retromania*, in that it focuses on analyzing the changes of cultural production, specifically related to boundary, rather than critiquing the cultural product.



## **Riding the Wave**

In this section I discuss a new avant-garde tactic that has emerged within internet subcultures called “riding the wave.” In order to do so, I first must explain that Seapunk is both its own subculture (although not an avant-garde subculture), and a red herring being used by a set of avant-garde artists to promote their work while avoiding recuperation. Seapunk first emerged on Tumblr-style content repository sites, in which participants riff on various memes by sharing past content and their own creations. While these memes are short lived within the community, an overarching new aesthetic emerged (previously introduced in Chapter 2 in my discussion of Vaporwave) of a detoured pop-music, outmoded computer graphics, and day-glo colors.<sup>336</sup> While there are, for reasons to be explained, many names for this overarching group, I use the term internet subculture, to maintain emphasis that this is a subculture that exists predominantly online.

While the internet subculture I am discussing is not the same as the New Aesthetic that James Bridel introduced by way of his Tumblr and SXSW talk, there are some correlations which are helpful in understanding the former. Bridel’s concept of New Aesthetic has come under fire for being a collection (on

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<sup>336</sup> Galil, Leor. “Vaporwave and the Observer Effect.” *Chicago Reader*, February 9, 2013. <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/vaporwave-spf420-chaz-allen-metallic-ghosts-prismcorp-veracom/Content?oid=8831558>.

Tumblr)<sup>337</sup> rather than an emerging artistic aesthetic. In response to these claims, Bridel first admits his misuse of the term aesthetic, and describes “the New Aesthetic project is undertaken within its own medium: it is an attempt to “write” critically about the network in the vernacular of the network itself: in a tumblr, in blog posts, in YouTube videos of lectures, tweeted reports and messages, reblogs, likes, and comments.”<sup>338</sup> In other words, the New Aesthetic is a curatorial project in which Bridel copies to his online Tumblr space a variety of imagery and video that he considers to have similar aesthetics. More interestingly, Bridel claims that this collection in its entirety functions as a kind of critique of network society. Bridel differentiates, I believe correctly, the singular artifact (image, video, song) from the collection (on sites such as Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook) and claims that his artistic contribution occurs by producing the relationship between those items collected. If we accept Bridel’s premise, then we should consider the content of the New Aesthetic project as a networked relationship of various artworks, from which the term New Aesthetic emerges. Interestingly, this correlates to Simon Reynold’s concept that artists are becoming archivists, which I will return to shortly.

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<sup>337</sup> Bogost, Ian. “The New Aesthetic Needs to Get Weirder.” *The Atlantic*, April 13, 2012. [http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/04/the-new-aesthetic-needs-to-get-weirder/255838/?single\\_page=true](http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/04/the-new-aesthetic-needs-to-get-weirder/255838/?single_page=true).

<sup>338</sup> “The New Aesthetic and Its Politics | Booktwo.org.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://booktwo.org/notebook/new-aesthetic-politics/>.

Bridel understands the New Aesthetic to be unique to network society, one in which the work and the critiques emerge through collecting the multitudes of online content pieces and persons participating. Seapunk can perhaps be considered a similar “project” to that of New Aesthetic in that it exists as a collection that emerged out of the network. The question around accepting Bridel’s premise is one of how to account for authorship when it is primarily one of curation. As I demonstrate next in my account of Seapunk, the notion of creativity within internet subculture has shifted to being one of engaging in viral (re)publication, rather than being focused upon contributing to culture.

The word Seapunk is attributed to LilInternet (who refused to provide his real name to the New York Times<sup>339</sup>) who posted his dream to Twitter “Seapunk leather jacket with barnacles where the studs used to be.”<sup>340</sup> Among those to latch onto Lilinternet’s concept, early adopters of Seapunk, Ultrademon (nee Albert Redwine) and Zombelle (nee Shan Beaste),<sup>341</sup> were especially active.

Ultrademon and Zombelle went beyond internet production, engaging in more

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<sup>339</sup> Detrick, Ben. “Seapunk, a Web Joke With Music, Has Its Moment.” *The New York Times*, March 2, 2012, sec. Fashion & Style.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/04/fashion/Seapunk-a-Web-Joke-With-Music-Has-Its-Moment.html>.

<sup>340</sup> INTERNET, @ LIL. “SEAPUNK LEATHER JACKET WITH BARNACLES WHERE THE STUDS USED TO BE.” Microblog. @LILINTERNET, June 1, 2011.  
<https://twitter.com/LILINTERNET/status/75846788397006848>.

<sup>341</sup> Taylor, Josh. “Zombelle and Ultrademon, Seapunks Next Door - Page - Interview Magazine.” *Interview Magazine*. Accessed October 1, 2014.  
<http://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/zombelle-ultrademon-seapunk>.

traditional subcultural production by promoting a fashion aesthetic and founding a record label (Coral Records) around Seapunk.

When the Rihanna performance happened, the Seapunk community split between those who saw it primarily as a web meme (LilInternet), and those who had heavily invested in the development of a subculture (Zombelle and Ultrademon). The former ceased operating with the name, leaving those who had invested in it to continue attempting to build without many within the culture. Yet, it is Lilinternet who has reaped the greatest benefit of Seapunk, snaring music and video directorial deals with pop stars Azelia Banks and Beyonce. While Lilinternet could be considered similar to Malcolm McLaren, who used punk to promote his own career, Lilinternet retains a level of authenticity that McLaren could not. The difference is not in how they behaved, but rather in the subcultural conception around authenticity. The act of labeling and curating, which Bridel described for New Aesthetic, and which Lilinternet engages in, is now viewed as an authentic authorship for the subculture.

In order to better understand this medium, I note Bridel's talk at the SXSW conference about New Aesthetics in which he references Aleister Crowley, saying that "giving something a name gives you power over it, but it also gives other people power too. Other people can pick up your tool and use it." Bridel is speaking of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century occultist's theories of sigils, which were a practice of symbolizing an aspect of the subconscious in order to gain control over it. Similarly, Bridel and Lilinternet have labeled an aesthetic pattern they

found recurring online. Yet they did not stop at labeling, each also promoted this label through various online communities like Twitter, where others could “pick up” the term and use it. By engaging others, the label is transformed into a meme.

Memes were first coined by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*, to describe the potential for thoughts to engage in reproductive behavior across hosts’ minds. Memes have become a common term to refer to recurrent cultural ideas, and they have also become a valuable form of cultural capital. For example, the LOLCats Meme website *I Can Haz Cheezburger*, in which captions are written overtop images of cats, was purchased for \$2 million in 2007, and later received over \$30 million in investment funding. From this perspective, I propose that the internet subculture is engaged in the production of memes (Seapunk, Vaporwave, etc.) which enables a means of gaining power and profit over their cultural production. While other avant-garde groups have produced memes, they were based on singular works. For example, the Situationist International are credited with the slogan “*Ne Travaillez Jamais*” which was popularized in the 1960s student protests.<sup>342</sup> Yet the memes that internet subcultures produce are qualitatively different from those of past avant-gardes, because they emerge through the relational collection of assorted web content, rather than through a singular piece. In addition, the memes of internet

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<sup>342</sup> Debord, Guy. *Never Work*, 1963.  
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/1963/never-work.htm>.

subcultures are made to be shared, in my section on hashtags below, I show that the inventors of the term *slimepunk* are attempting to entice others to join in the production of the meme, by sharing it further, and adding more content to it.

In this way, the memes of online subcultures are intended to be found by others. As YouTube commentary and Google analytics show, memes are important not only for societal appreciation, and but also as a tool for online reference. The term Seapunk categorizes those elements of internet subculture's cultural production which match a certain set of aesthetics (90s ocean imagery, dyed green hair), without providing a name for the larger practice. These names thereby serve as a type of red herring for recuperation. For example, Rihanna's performance co-opted Seapunk rather than the entire internet subculture. While Seapunk has become mainstream and dated, the larger internet subcultural aesthetics (detourned pop, outmoded computer graphics) is able to continue in new instantiations such as Vaporwave or Health Goth.

Jacob Ciocci, an artist who continues to work within the genre, wrote a fantastic summary of this tactic, entitled *Ride the Wave*. Ciocci states: "This kind of self-image-making-as-belief-system is a form of user-generated-youth-branding that uses corporate web2.0 technologies to reappropriate the notion of 'sub-culture' that historically died in the 90s . . . These creative strategies work with what for many of us are outdated fantasies of outsider-ism: when a disconnected and lost youth from the middle of nowhere has no access or sense of perspective on what 'is cool' and decides out of the blue to 'go goth'." Ciocci claims that recuperation

is part of “an exciting cycle that is also painful” , acknowledging “the reality of the internet as a major player in the youth culture manufacturing machine, where everything happens in plain view for all of us to see all the time”, and closing by stating: “All tru [sic] seapunks know how to ride the wave.” Ciocci is suggesting that while Seapunk is recuperated, there remains a deeper layer of cultural values and social structures to the overarching group. Riding the wave is a tactic that enables its practitioners to gain control over what elements will be recuperated, by deciding which to name, and which to refuse to name.

Internet sites such as Tumblr, Twitter, and Youtube make it easy to create a new referential name and move cultural production under its banner. However, this ease of fluidity in network society also makes it more difficult to build a permanent territory. In the previous chapter, I showed that the evolution of avant-garde subcultures requires physical spaces and strong social networks. In this chapter I will return to the five types of subcultural boundaries (slang, fashion, accumulation, esoteric knowledge, and physical space) and provide examples for how they are diluted by the properties of network society (realized abstraction, access, absent presence, and homogenization of culture). As these examples will show, spaces of representation protected by boundaries from the hegemonic powers of network society no longer exist. “Riding the wave” has emerged as a response to these conditions, avoiding recuperation, by abandoning territory. Yet, without a space of incubation in which to evolve, and a strong social network to support such evolution, avant-garde subcultures have culturally stagnated.

## **Fluidity & Retromania**

In Chapter Two, I introduced Manuel Castell's concept of *network society*, in which societal control is organized around decentralized digital networks. I discussed the shift in hegemonic power, which previously Henri Lefebvre had described as being based in the urban center, but as Hardt and Negri explain is now composed of "flexible, mobile boundaries" in network society. This new flexibility of hegemonic power and its affects are derived from utilizing the now pervasive system of networked computer devices. With the affordances of networked computers, nearly every place on earth is accessible to hegemonic power. A recent example of this is the disclosure about the National Security Agencies' monitoring of nearly every American's internet communications. However, there are many much more subtle shifts to hegemonic power in network society, which often escape critical scrutiny because they are embedded within the behavior of everyday life.

The effects of network society onto the radical creative fringe of society, which I refer to as avant-garde subcultures, are often not overt. While the conveniences of networked technologies have been welcomed by avant-garde subcultures, the damaging effects to subcultures have gone largely unnoticed by those members. This problem is coupled with an overall lack of awareness for how boundaries and evolution function. The result is that while older subcultural members may notice a lack of clarity, new generations do not. While not internally noted, the



difference of internet subcultures has been an important issue for subcultural scholars and critics.

Many subcultural scholars' explanations for this phenomenon are based on French sociologist Maffesoli's book *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, which connected critiques of the everyday to a new form of urban social structure that he called neo-tribalism<sup>343</sup>. In Maffesoli's view, neo-tribes are "without the rigidity of the forms of organization with which we are familiar; it refers more to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and it is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and 'form'." A number of recent subcultural theorists, including Muggleton, Bennett, and Hodkinson, build off of Maffesoli to posit that in the post-modern era, *post-subculture* is a better term to describe memberships in these subcultural neo-tribes.

Post-subculturalists discuss the primary difference between internet subcultures and their predecessors as being one of *fluidity*. For instance, David Muggleton's *Inside Subculture: The Post-Modern Theory of Style* documents this phenomenon of fluidity, in which subculture members combine different subcultural styles to create their own individualistic one. For Muggleton, "Post-subculturalists no longer have any sense of subcultural authenticity where

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<sup>343</sup> Maffesoli, Michel. *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. 1 edition. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1996.

inception is rooted in particular sociotemporal contexts and tied to underlying structural relations. Indeed post-subculturalists will experience all the signs of the subculture of their choosing time and time again.”<sup>344</sup> He argues that postmodern society does not offer strong cultural symbolism through which subculturalists can express their values. Fluidity is thus a phenomenon due to the postmodern dominance of spectacle.<sup>345</sup> Seapunk, in this interpretation, combines the symbolism of surfer and punk subculture in an inauthentic manner. Authenticity for the post-subculturalist is fluidly selected by the individual based on their present condition.

While I agree with Muggleton’s concept of fluidity, I take issue with his cultural pessimism, which considers subcultural inauthenticity as being due to a general post-modern, late-capitalist condition. Muggleton and other subcultural scholars fail to connect the phenomenon of fluidity to network society, and therefore do not provide any solutions. In contrast, my approach to understanding this same phenomenon is based on an appreciation for the shifts that have occurred throughout society in the past decade. Throughout this chapter, I address how network society has adversely affected avant-garde subcultures through the dilution of boundaries, and in the following chapter I suggest potential tactics for countering this.

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<sup>344</sup> Muggleton, David, and Rupert Weinzierl. *The Post-Subcultures Reader*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2003. 198

<sup>345</sup> Muggleton, David. *Inside Subculture the Postmodern Meaning of Style*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000. 35

Ciocci's notion of "outdated fantasies of outsider-ism" appears to echo Muggleton's theory that subcultural members are no longer obligated to subscribe to any social cohesion. Indeed, Muggleton appears to predict internet subcultures in his introduction to *The Post-Subcultures Reader* where he argues that "These new network socialities seem to encourage plural, fluid and part-time rather than fixed, discrete and encompassing group identities – individuals are able to flow between multiple signs of identity conceptions."<sup>346</sup> However on closer inspection, Ciocci differs from Muggleton in that he is advocating for a tactic, not describing a phenomenon of post-modernity. To Ciocci, outsider-ism is outdated because of the pervasive visibility of network society, and fluidity is a tactic to remain hidden from total recuperation. It can be argued that subcultural fluidity pre-existed any potential claim to it as a tactic. However, I contend that the use of fluidity as a tactic thereby signifies that it does not preclude subcultural authenticity.

Another problem with the post-subcultural perspective is in its insistence that subcultural symbolism and cultural capital is superficial. In *Tastefully Renovating Subcultural Theory: Making Space for a New Model*, Geoff Stahl writes that the post-subcultural theories championed by Muggleton, in its attempt to align subcultural theory to postmodernism, "obscure[s] the effect that

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<sup>346</sup> Muggleton, David. *Inside Subculture the Postmodern Meaning of Style*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000. 12

difference (structural and otherwise) and differential access to power have on producing meaningful contexts (and contexts of meaning) for cultural activity.”<sup>347</sup> Stahl’s work explains that the dominance of a global and homogeneous culture, which postmodern theory frequently centers around, is due to the spatial expanse afforded by digital networks. Work such as Seapunk can appear to be vapid and superficial, but only by overlooking its critique against hegemonic power of network society, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In fact, Seapunk is highly critical in its use of lo-fi visualizations and its emphasis on a mythical nature (through use of sea imagery). I agree with Stahl’s argument, understanding the critique of internet subculture requires a renewed understanding of subcultural theory that incorporates an understanding of networked space. I find that Stahl’s merger of subcultural theory with communication theory helps to accommodate this.

Stahl argues that theories of cultural dispersion should include an understanding of communications transmissions, thus accounting for the space and time in how the culture was dispersed. The incorporation of transmissions explains the relationship between cultural dispersion and communications technologies, and therefore the reason for subcultures being different in network society. For instance, the cultural dispersion of the historical avant-garde occurred within

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<sup>347</sup> Stahl, Geoff. “Still ‘winning Space?’: Updating Subcultural Theory.” *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Studies* 2 (1999). [http://www.rochester.edu/in\\_visible\\_culture/issue2/IVC-Subcultures/Geoff\\_Stahl.html](http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/issue2/IVC-Subcultures/Geoff_Stahl.html).

neighborhoods, through mailing letters, and through magazines. Cultural dispersion for latter avant-garde groups such as punk, no wave and rave occurred through television and radio. This enabled the propagation of their cultural ideas to distribute quickly to those cultures that shared radio and television programming. For internet subcultures, the cultural dispersion now happens through the global communication systems of network society.

The critique of hegemony was also molded by the communication transmission systems of the time. For example, British punks were engaged in protests against the austerity measures of Thatcher. Even avant-garde practices that engaged with global topics, such as Guy DeBord's *Society of the Spectacle*, were rooted around the local effects occurring in Guy Debord's Paris. In network society, most cultural dispersion occurs through the global internet and physical proximity does not have much advantage. Internet subcultures are learning about each other online, and their critiques of hegemony are not directly related to their proximate locale. Even those artists who are physically proximate tend to focus on the global. For instance, LilInternet's online rally of Seapunkers to *TerraMar*, a global initiative to protect the oceans, was not geographically centered.



@ LIL INTERNET @LILINTERNET · Feb 8

REAL #SEAPUNKS ARE CITIZENS OF @TERRAMARPROJECT GET YOUR GLOBAL OCEAN CITIZENSHIP HERE [theterramarproject.org/citizenship](http://theterramarproject.org/citizenship)

Expand

Reply Retweet Favorite More

**Figure 16<sup>348</sup> LilInternet's tweet that started Seapunk**

Stahl's argument is important not only in explaining the consistency of aesthetic between post-subcultures, but also the stagnation in their cultural evolution. As explained, post-subcultures no longer maintain a shared identity of values and cultural expressions. Tactics such as Ciocci's continually abandon any stake in their subcultural territory upon recuperation. This in turn disrupts the process of evolving from within the subculture (as discussed in the previous chapter), because there is no longer an iterative building upon each other's cultural practice. I acknowledge that it is still possible to culturally evolve, by engaging in an individual course of theoretical training. For example, an artist such as Ciocci likely does build upon his own work to evolve. Instead, I am arguing that the social practice of avant-garde subcultures has changed due to fluidity. Where I differ from other theorists is that I root the cause of fluidity in the dilution of subcultural boundaries that enable the establishment of a shared social identity. Before I address this, I first want to further examine the aesthetics of post-subcultures, as it will help support my argument of cultural stagnation.

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<sup>348</sup> INTERNET, @ LIL. "SEAPUNK LEATHER JACKET WITH BARNACLES WHERE THE STUDS USED TO BE." Microblog. @LILINTERNET, June 1, 2011. <https://twitter.com/LILINTERNET/status/75846788397006848>.

Music critic Simon Reynolds has been writing on music culture since the mid-1980s, and his book *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to its Own Past* is important as a document to the dramatic shift in aesthetic that he has witnessed in the internet age. *Retromania* begins with an analysis of contemporary music, showing that in each of its genres, including the emerging ones, there is both a blurring of styles and a nostalgia for the past. Hip hop artists Childish Gambino or A\$AP Rocky innovate by integrating indie sounds into their songs. For example, Ariel Pink<sup>349</sup>, Youth Code,<sup>350</sup> or Devandra Banhardt<sup>351</sup> are celebrated as innovative, but Reynolds argues that these avant-garde musicians are more accurately arriere-garde, acting as archivists and researchers to fetishize and reproduce aspects of past music scenes (Psychedelic Rock, Electronic Body Music, American Folk respectively).<sup>352</sup> This criticism of contemporary avant-garde cultural groups, that *they take from the old rather than produce new culture*, is quite common when referring to *hipsters*. Yet, while “hipster” is common jargon, its cultural usage is incredibly vague. Internet subcultures are

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<sup>349</sup> Sylvester, Nick. “Ariel Pink Revisited | Riff City | THIRTEEN.” *Riff City*, November 10, 2010. <http://www.thirteen.org/riffcity/music/ariel-pink-revisited/>.

<sup>350</sup> Manelis-O'Donnell, Jamie. “Listen to Youth Code's New Single, ‘Carried Mask.’” *NOISEY*, July 25, 2013. <http://noisey.vice.com/blog/listen-to-youth-codes-new-single-carried-mask>.

<sup>351</sup> Reynolds, Simon. *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past*. Reprint edition. London ; New York: Faber & Faber, 2011. XXX-III

<sup>352</sup> Reynolds, Simon. *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past*. Reprint edition. London ; New York: Faber & Faber, 2011. XX

not the same as what is labeled as hipster, and yet from the mainstream perspective, they are often understood as such. By unpacking its usage, I show how the term relates to subcultural fluidity.

### **What of Hipsters?**

Originally from the Jazz scene of the 1940s and 50s, “hipster” became a blanket term in the late 90s to refer to the fluid styles of subculturalists. In 2008, *Ad Busters Magazine*’s Douglas Haddow wrote that “An artificial appropriation of different styles from different eras, the hipster represents the end of Western civilization – a culture lost in the superficiality of its past and unable to create any new meaning.”<sup>353</sup> Haddow’s frustration is based on the expectation that the hipster carry the avant-garde torch of cultural critique, an opinion that mirrors the magazine’s anti-consumerist politics. Yet seventeen months later, the magazine issued a second article reframing their position (in part due to controversy it sparked) and criticizing Haddow for “[writing] off the largest conglomeration of young people across the globe as only a narcissistic clusterfuck – rather than the inception of the largest youth movement in history – could inadvertently suppress a flame worth fanning.” *Ad Busters*’ waffling and difficulty in defining what the hipster is, reveals the term’s chimerical qualities. “Hipster” has acquired the otherness of past subcultures, but without any clear

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<sup>353</sup> Haddow. “Hipster: The Dead End of Western Civilization.” *Adbusters*, July 29, 2008. <https://www.adbusters.org/magazine/79/hipster.html>.



expression of critique. In the *N+1* Journal's conference booklet *What Was the Hipster: A Sociological Investigation*, the authors first admit their culpability in being considered hipsters, and then pose as outsiders to launch their critique, one that they admit retains a blindness to the full phenomenon.

The problem with defining the hipster is that its usage and conception is haunted by memories of avant-garde subcultures. The use of the term is based on the assumption that there still exists a similar social cohesion in contemporary society as there was in the time of punk or raves. However, this cohesion cannot come, because the notion of the hipster is based upon a misconception of outsidership. The basis of societal outsidership is disrupted by the reduction in perceived space in network society. Where outsidership in avant-garde subcultures came from being situated in a specific locale, it now comes globally through the internet, and is accessible to anyone with an internet connection.



**Figure 17<sup>354</sup> Karen O wearing vintage RUN DMC shirt**



**Figure 18<sup>355</sup> Genesis P-Orridge in hip hop styled jacket**

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<sup>354</sup> “Karen O Solo Album: Yeah Yeah Yeahs Singer To Release ‘Crush Songs’ | Variety.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://variety.com/2014/music/news/yeah-yeah-yeahs-karen-o-to-release-first-solo-album-1201246927/>.

Yet, the concept of a hipster is problematized by the fluidity of post-subcultural style, because actual outsiders also utilize hipster styles. *N+1* author Dayna Tortorici wonders if Karen O of the band *Yeah Yeah Yeahs* could be a hipster due to her use of hipster style, later deciding that “hipsters are not artists”<sup>356</sup> but rather archivists. I would argue that a multitudinal perspective needs to be adopted here in understanding the relationship between hipsters and other post-subcultural groups that acknowledges the fluidity of style. If we define hipsters by a fluid presentation of self that relies on nostalgic cultural artifacts stripped of critical value, then Karen O’s 80s hip hop inspired clothing mixed with her bowl hair cut and glamorous red lipstick appears to qualify. Yet, I agree with Tortorici: Karen O’s artwork has critical value, and therefore should not be dismissed as “hipster”. Similarly, Genesis P-Orridge of Throbbing Gristle, pictured above from 2007, is wearing a hip hop derived fashion matched with makeup and long nails. Similar to Karen O, P-Orridge is mixing and matching styles fluidly, without critical value, yet both are highly creative artists as well. But if, as Tortorici argues, their artistry disqualifies them as hipster, who then is an actual hipster?

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<sup>355</sup> Vals, Columbia. “COLUMBIA VALS 2010-2011: Genesis P-Orridge + Lia Gangitano Sept 14th.” *COLUMBIA VALS 2010-2011*, September 6, 2010. <http://columbiavals.blogspot.com/2010/09/genesis-p-orridge-lia-gangitano-sept.html>.

<sup>356</sup> Tortorici, Dayna. *You Know it When You See it*. In *n+1*, Mark Greif, Christian Lorentzen, Jace Clayton, Reid Pillifant, Rob Horning, Jennifer Baumgardner, et al. *What Was The Hipster?: A Sociological Investigation*. New York: *n+1* Foundation, 2010.

The critics of hipsterism appear to decry a lack of authenticity, which Muggleton claims no longer exist, and which Ciocci states is subjected to a perpetual recuperation. I propose that hipsters, as a social group, do not exist, but instead are a phenomenon generated by the desire for and lack of an avant-garde subculture.



Figure 19<sup>357</sup> The Evolution of the Hipster from Lifestyle Magazine

Although hipsters as a social group do not exist, there are many different people who are labeled as hipsters. The concept of the hipster has permeated society,

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<sup>357</sup> Kiefer, Kate. "The Evolution of the Hipster 2000-2009." *Pastemagazine.com*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2009/12/the-evolution-of-the-hipster-2000-2009.html>.

due to a communications interlock in some ways similar to that of subcultures. During the past two centuries, mainstream society has become accustomed to the production of subcultural culture by various avant-garde subcultures. Industries have emerged that regularly engage in the recuperation of subcultural culture in their reports of the latest trends. While subcultures became increasingly fluid in style, these mainstream industries still needed to produce reportage on what these subcultures were producing. The result (as shown in the above graphic) is the mapping of general fashion trends, such as facial hair on men, to the label hipster. In this manner the hipster has been fabricated by the media.

Yet, the media fabrication of the hipster has incorporated those trends which are some of the most appealing in contemporary culture. For those engaged in subcultures, who now have a fluid style, those trends which might be labeled hipster are as appropriate as those which are not. The avant-garde subculture has ceased adherence to any particular style, and cultural production has stagnated, yet there remains in the subculturalist a desire to express themselves, through their individually constructed fluid style. Thus we find that by dressing in a style different to the mainstream, and utilizing some of the trends that are labeled as hipster, those within the avant-garde subculture in fact unintentionally exemplify what a hipster is.

When examining the cultural work of P-Orridge, Karen O, Ciocci and others whom I consider to be the continuation of the avant-garde traditions, there is an alarming amount of nostalgic reference to the past, rather than developing of new

material. For example, P-Orridge describes his latest work as “dark side of the moon for the 21<sup>st</sup> century”,<sup>358</sup> and Ciocci’s video art recycles footage from 80s and 90s television. Reynolds offers a valuable explanation for why this type of remixed nostalgia has become a near escapable force in contemporary culture. Citing the *Long Tail Effect*,<sup>359</sup> Reynolds writes that the equality of access to all media “shifts the balance in favour of the past and to the disadvantage of the culturally current.”<sup>360</sup> Reynolds points out that until recently, access to older and more obscure media was limited to their original production runs. Pop cultural consumption was therefore much more of the present compared to today. Youtube, Netflix, and Spotify, by providing access to older media, have expanded the community to which creators must respond and compete with. The result, according to Reynolds, is both the previously mentioned switch from avant-garde to arriere-garde, as well as a fluidity of styles mixed together.

Reynolds’ assertion of avant-garde becoming arriere-garde is mostly accurate, albeit slightly over generalized. However, to me, it seems that part of the phenomenon of the hipster is due to a lack of a clearly defined avant-garde

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<sup>358</sup> Bolcer, Julie. “Psychic TV: Turn On, Tune In, Drop Album //.” *NewNowNext*. Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.newnownext.com/psychic-tv-turn-on-tune-in-drop-album/05/2007/>.

<sup>359</sup> First popularized by Chris Anderson for Wired Magazine, The Long Tail seeks to explain why the majority of Amazon book sales were for obscure books unavailable at most physical book stores. Anderson hypothesized the reason being that internet access increases consumerism in niche markets.

<sup>360</sup> Reynolds, Simon. *Retromania: Pop Culture’s Addiction to Its Own Past*. Reprint edition. London ; New York: Faber & Faber, 2011.<sup>71</sup>

subculture. Theoretically, fluidity provides an understanding for why avant-garde subcultures would be harder to recognize, and suggests that they are no longer socially cohesive. Likewise, tactics of “riding the wave” signify that the cycle of recuperation has increased. Yet, I consider Reynold’s reasoning on why retromania has become prevalent to lack substantial theoretical grounding, and find instead that the role of boundaries offers a more concise understanding of what has happened to subcultures. In the next section, I cite specific examples of the dilution of avant-garde subcultural boundaries by the four properties of network society. These examples show that the avant-garde without boundaries not only has become harder to recognize and faster to recuperate, but because of this, has lost its ability to evolve.

### **Slang // Hashtags**

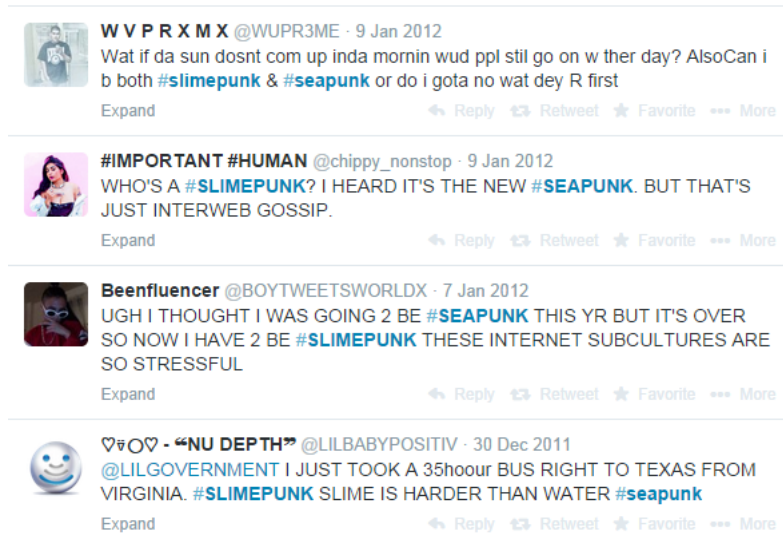


Figure 20<sup>361</sup> Twitter conversation about Slimepunk

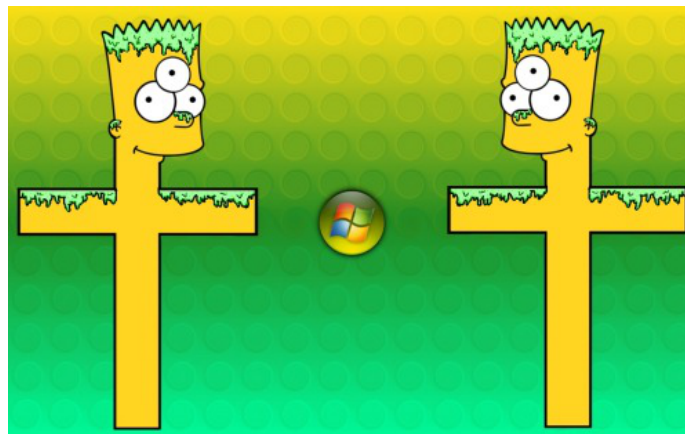


Figure 21<sup>362</sup> Slimepunk graphic

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<sup>361</sup> Compiled screen captures from <http://twitter.com>

<sup>362</sup> "Diffusiantunes.blogspot.com.au: #Seapunk vs #Icepunk vs #Slimepunk ~ Hashtag Genres and Internet Labels." *Diffusiantunes.blogspot.com.au*, February 22, 2012. <http://diffusiantunes.blogspot.com/2012/02/seapunk-vs-icepunk-vs-slimepunk-hashtag.html>.



Hashtags prepend words with a numerical hash sign, marking them as a reference both visually and for computational information systems. In the above examples (from Twitter), tweets are tagged with both #Seapunk and #Slimepunk, which adds their contents into the collections which use the same hashtag(s). Hashtags have been compared with the internet chat rooms (IRCs) of the late 90s, in that any person can start or join a conversation topic, which is then archived and available for others.

Hashtags are a way to produce online space, similar to the mental spaces described by Lefebvre and discussed in Chapter 2. Hashtags enable the congregation of people and media around a topic, and have become popular in internet culture's production of their (albeit brief) subcultures. The use of subculture in the case of online communities should be considered broadly. While these groups attempt to develop shared cultural values, their social dynamics are comprised of weak connections, and they lack a physical space of representation, both aspects I believe to be crucial in subcultures.

Instead of cultural longevity, internet subcultures are continually "riding the wave" to the next subcultural trend. Slimepunk emerged halfway through 2011, but came into prominence after the Rihanna Seapunk performance in November. It is in part an attempt by the community to agree upon a new hashtag, and an aesthetic, to use for congregating around. The example above shows the introduction of Slimepunk as an offshoot of Seapunk, occurring about six weeks

after Rihanna's SNL performance. The hashtag is included with Seapunk so as to insert it into the conversation, and thus to engage other participants in the (then) emerging term. An overview of the brief communications unveils a subtext to the efforts and a confusion in creating a new subculture. @LILBABYPOSITIV retweets another subcultural member @LILGOVERNMENT, appending that "slime is harder than water." Here we see an encouragement to shift from Seapunk to Slimepunk, playfully using harder (as in tougher), to distinguish the urban grit of the Slimepunk aesthetic, and suggesting that @LILGOVERNMENT is already an authentic member. The following week shows that the conversation has moved to one of confusion regarding the term.

### Realized Abstraction

There is a perception of complete openness to generating hashtags on social websites such as Twitter, Facebook and Youtube, however this is not actually the case. Many of these websites limit hashtags considered offensive,<sup>363</sup> but some also limit words such as "photography"<sup>364</sup> that conflict with their community

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<sup>363</sup> Nick. "A List of Blocked and Unsearchable Instagram Hashtags." *The Data Pack*. Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://thedatapack.com/banned-hashtags-instagram/>.

<sup>364</sup> Chan, Caey. "10 Normal Hashtags That Instagram Bans for Some Weird Reason." *Gizmodo*, August 26, 2013. <http://gizmodo.com/10-normal-hashtags-that-instagram-bans-for-some-weird-r-1204373680>.

guidelines. More concerning, the affordances of hashtags privilege those with the greatest amount of followers, by allowing them to dominate conversations. For example, pop singer Azelia Banks began using the Seapunk aesthetic while ignoring the community who had founded it. For instance, she engaged the use of mermaids in her style, an element that Ultrademon had established as *not* Seapunk. Due to her fame, Banks was soon viewed by mainstream media as an important representative for Seapunk due to her being the most recognizable name using the hashtag. However, Azelia was not interested in supporting Seapunk as a community; she was interested in it as a fashion vehicle to differentiate her. In interviews, she ignored the existence of Seapunkers like Zombelle and Ultrademon, and claimed that the entire group was “made up.” Hashtags provide the easy creation of community, but without any boundaries to protect from recuperations such as what occurred in the Banks’ and Seapunk example.

### Access

Hashtags have risen to dominance in the smart phones era , since users can now remain engaged in a conversation throughout their day. Access becomes important in establishing and managing the territory of hashtags, because the more a person engages in a hashtag conversation, the more impact they have.

While hashtags allow for asynchronous communication, it remains important to keep engaged in the conversation.<sup>365</sup>

### Absent Presence

With the increased usage of categorizing our moments through hashtagged photos and videos, hashtags have increased the phenomenological link between the physical and virtual world. In her N+1 chapter *You Know It When You See It*, Dayna Tortorici discusses Cory Kennedy, a teenager who rose to prominence on Instagram and inspired a generational interest in taking disaffected self-portraits at parties. Tortorici argues that the maintenance of an online presence is more important for these people than experiencing the event itself. As discussed in Chapter 2, such behavior causes the reduction of participation within the physical world, making the online spaces and communities appear even more attractive in comparison.

### Homogenization of Culture

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<sup>365</sup> In *Seeking How the brain hard-wires us to love Google, Twitter, and texting. And why that's dangerous* Emily Yoffe links this behaviour to neuroscientist studies of rewards in our pleasure sensors for continually engaging in such activities. Yoffe, Emily. "Seeking: How the Brain Hard-Wires Us to Love Google, Twitter, and Texting. And Why That's Dangerous." *Slate*, August 12, 2009. [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/science/2009/08/seeking.html#p2](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2009/08/seeking.html#p2).

The trending of particular hashtags places a value upon words that are receiving more global attention than others. Internet subcultures are not exempt from this, with many becoming excited that Seapunk was receiving global attention. Yet, online hashtag trends are highly topical, with lifespans of between 11-40 minutes on average,<sup>366</sup> after which they lose public interest. As Tarleton Gillespie points out in his study *Our Misplaced Faith in Twitter*, about the #occupy hashtag, the short lifespan of tweets is in fact due to Twitter's algorithms which prioritize novel terms, even when others are actually in greater use.<sup>367</sup> Further, as a term trends, its authorship, and often its usage, loses specificity. For example #occupy is no longer associated with the initial protest movement and now refers to taking part in practically anything. Reuters reports that only months after the hashtag appeared it was voted one of the most overused words.<sup>368</sup> Since hashtags are archived online, they do not resurface to take on new meanings in the way that slang formerly did. Instead, when a term has become oversaturated by usage, it loses its specificity, and is thereby homogenized.

### Summary

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<sup>366</sup> O'Neill, Jake. "How Many Tweets Make a Trend? | Cision," August 28, 2013. <http://www.cision.com/uk/blog/how-many-tweets-make-a-trend/>.

<sup>367</sup> Gillespie, Tarleton. "Our Misplaced Faith in Twitter Trends." Accessed October 25, 2014. [http://www.salon.com/2011/10/19/our\\_misplaced\\_faith\\_in\\_twitter\\_trends/](http://www.salon.com/2011/10/19/our_misplaced_faith_in_twitter_trends/).

<sup>368</sup> Krasny, Ros. "Occupy Makes Annual List of Most Overused Words." *Reuters*. January 1, 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/01/us-banned-words-idUSTRE80000K20120101>.

Hashtags allow for the production of online spaces to convene and share in the memetic production. Hashtags function as a kind of slang, in that they embody a shared knowledge, but they should perhaps rather be understood as memes. As blogger Aaron Saenz explains “Everyone gets their own opportunity to express themselves, their own point of view, and these versions of the truth are spammed out into the world with little to no vetting.”<sup>369</sup> Prolific hashtags can overtake our perception of the content categorized within them through the predominant association. Yet the websites which help author and maintain hashtags such as Tumblr and Twitter, do not provide ample methods for establishing control over them. The result is that memetic production gravitates to those with the most cultural power to promote their version of meaning, as in the case of Azelia Banks. For subcultures, this means that any particular concept which they publish online can become instantly co-opted by someone else. The result is a tendency to publish ideas early, and to abandon them when they become popular.

## **Fashion // Health Goth**

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<sup>369</sup> Saenz, Aaron. “Steal This Meme: Why Understanding Internet Culture Will Make You Sexy, Rich, and Powerful.” *Singularity Hub*. Accessed October 16, 2014. <http://singularityhub.com/2011/06/01/steal-this-meme-why-understanding-internet-culture-will-make-you-sexy-rich-and-powerful/>.



**Figure 22<sup>370</sup> Health Goth Jacket**

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<sup>370</sup> “Health Goth / Minimalist.” *Pinterest*. Accessed January 6, 2015.  
<https://www.pinterest.com/eschinsky/health-goth-minimalist/>.



**Figure 23**<sup>371</sup> Still from *Whatever 21* fashion video

Health Goth is an emerging offshoot of the internet subcultures, similar to Vaporwave but with a darker, more gothic, sensibility. Health Goth fashion combines inverse branded sports clothing in high contrast black and white. These styles both directly appropriate corporate sportswear (ILS instead of Fils, a reverse Nike Swoosh) and the general sportswear aesthetic (see DEATH jacket above.) Health Goth also fetishizes the use of artificial limbs and elements with a transhuman aesthetic, such as outlandish colored eye contacts or blonde wigs on black muscular men. In the web article *Transcending Normcore with Health Goth*, author Wyatt Shaffner argues that health Goth “projects a completely un-reflexive subjugation of the individual in the urban ecosystem.” In my opinion, this is a misreading of health goth, overlooking their Zizekian over-identification.

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<sup>371</sup> *Whatever21 Fall/Winter 2014 Lookbook Video*, 2014.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbKBglK7quE&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbKBglK7quE&feature=youtube_gdata_player).



In Chapter 3, I discussed Slavoj Žižek’s understanding of industrial musician Laibach as a critique of society by over-identifying with fascism. With Health Goth, the over-identification with sportswear, commercialism, and prosthetics leverages a critique of corporatized transhumanism.

Health Goth music and fashion fetishize the body in a manner reminiscent of the industrial subgenre Electronic Body Music (EBM). Yet unlike these predecessors, who were more aggressive in their critique,<sup>372</sup> Health Goth takes a more passive acceptance. For example, in a fashion performance recorded at a Home Depot (see above left), the models pose in a reclined position, wearing designer *Whatever 21*’s clothing model against the backdrop of Home Improvement. From a mainstream perspective, the models are alien to the Home Depot environment, and yet, their posture and gaze suggest both comfort and dominance, insinuating that it is the viewer who does not belong.

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<sup>372</sup> Electronic Body Musicians such as Deutsche Amerikanische Freundshaft had openly homosexual and confrontational lyrics. Nitzer Ebb were radical socialists in Britain whose songs such as “Join in the Chant” encouraged the youth to rise up and fight.

Doran, John. “The Quietus | Features | A Quietus Interview | Angst Music For Sex People: A Nitzer Ebb Interview.” *The Quietus*. Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://thequietus.com/articles/04086-angst-music-for-sex-people-a-nitzer-ebb-interview%20>

Wharton, Annie, and Dec 17 2009. “Industrial Dance Icons Nitzer Ebb Return With Familiar Sounds.” *OC Weekly*. Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.ocweekly.com/2009-12-17/music/nitzer-ebb-galaxy-concert-theatre-santa-ana/>.

### Realized Abstraction

In Chapter 3, I gave an example of DIY of Frank Cartlege who purchased a punk jacket and then distressed the material to make it satisfactorily punk. Health Goth's over-identification requires that it be polished and new looking, as if the sportswear is fetishized. Unfortunately, a polished aesthetic can only be acquired with professional technologies. To dress Health Goth, one must purchase clothing from the sportswear manufacturers that are being ridiculed. The exception for a few such as for example Whateverer, is creating custom alternatives, but this practice depends upon the use of expensive technology. Health Goth's critique of corporatized transhumanism is inconsistent, because it requires engaging the same means of production that it attempts to critique.

### Access

In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* Dick Hebdige describes punk fashions as a rupture to the society which witnesses them. Health Goth and other internet subcultures rely upon websites such as Tumblr and Twitter to generate and maintain a consistency of significance through the collection of multiple content pieces. To those who do not have access to these, and encounter the style in the physical world, the fashion can be misunderstood as simply awkward tastes or ironic brand replacement, but will not be perceived as a rupture in the same way

that punk was. The lack of signifiers within the physical world helps perpetuate the myth of the generic hipster, as the concepts necessary for understanding the rupture are only available by accessing online websites.

### Absent Presence

Johnny Love, whose solo project *DeathFace* helped to launch the Health Goth's trend, mixes photos, short videos, new music, and workout tips on his social media sites. Love himself insists that Health Goth is a made up subculture, stating in his blog that real subcultures are impossible "because 90% of Youth Culture exists online, and doesn't have time to actually grow before having a spotlight shined on it"<sup>373</sup> Love recounts his own participation in actual subcultures, and laments their recent disappearance. Yet, Love remains a leader in the creation of Health Goth, producing the simulation of subculture for the "internet spotlight", while despairing for its authenticity. It suggests that the tools or knowledge for subcultural production are no longer available to those seeking it.

### Homogenization of Culture

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<sup>373</sup> Love, Johnny. "DEATHFACE - Subculture as We Know It Is Dead, and Its All The..." Accessed March 20, 2014. <http://johnnylove.tumblr.com/post/64124506979/deathofsubcluture>.

Brian Whateverer (sic), founder of *Whatever21*, founded the company as a tribute to the bootleg culture of high-end fashion, copied with slight difference and sold for cheap prices.<sup>374</sup> Whateverer discusses the increasing speed of recuperation, wondering “when the past catches up with the present, retro fetishism could die out completely and people will have to focus on completely new, original ideas and aesthetics instead of relying on those of the past.”<sup>375</sup> Whateverer is attempting a collapse of high and low culture, but his hope that this will result in “completely new, original ideas” is based on the myth of eternal frontier which I discussed in the previous chapter. “Retro fetishism” or *retromania* is a societal phenomenon caused by the nostalgia for subcultures without the spaces to produce new subcultures. If Whateverer, and those like him, succeed in exhausting *retromania*, it will not prompt a new subculture to come into existence, only a further confusion of retro as chic. Whether or not new ideas and aesthetics emerge will depend on people learning to produce subcultural spaces in network society.

### Summary

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<sup>374</sup> Julian. “Bootlegs Are Best: Whatever 21 Designer Brian Whateverer [Exclusive Interview].” *KLX - Karmaloop.com’s Streetwear Lifestyle Blog*. Accessed October 3, 2014. <http://www.karmaloop.com/klx/unsigned-hype-whatever-21-designer-brian-whateverer/>.

<sup>375</sup> Julian. “Bootlegs Are Best: Whatever 21 Designer Brian Whateverer [Exclusive Interview].” *KLX - Karmaloop.com’s Streetwear Lifestyle Blog*. Accessed October 3, 2014. <http://www.karmaloop.com/klx/unsigned-hype-whatever-21-designer-brian-whateverer/>.

As the Health Goth example depicts, the cultural messaging behind subcultural fashion has become somewhat confused. *Whatever21* clothing is a high end product mimicking the low-end rip off of middle market sportswear. Yet to even understand such a reading, access to online sources is required. Where traditional subcultural fashion operated as a rupture, these fashions are a spectacle that is performed largely for an online audience. While both Love and Whateverer speak to a desire for actual subculture, neither are able to produce one. Similarly, the fashion operates without critical force, somewhere between an ongoing joke and a commentary on body politics.

### **Accumulation // BandCamp**



**Figure 24<sup>376</sup> HTRK merchandise**

**Limited Edition Vinyl**

Record/Vinyl

On translucent red vinyl with deluxe card insert with lyrics and photo.  
Second pressing.

Includes unlimited streaming of *Work (work, work)* via the free  
Bandcamp app, plus high-quality download in MP3, FLAC and more.

**Sold Out**

**Figure 25 Screen capture of Bandcamp description of HTRK merchandise**

Bandcamp is a website that allows artists to upload albums and sell both online music and physical merchandise, most often vinyl and t-shirts. Bandcamp offers ease of use in distribution for bands, and receives 15% of sales (with exceptions

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<sup>376</sup> “Work (work, Work), by.” *HTRK*. Accessed January 6, 2015.  
<http://htrk.bandcamp.com/album/work-work-work>.

depending on sale price and amount).<sup>377</sup> Bandcamp has provided a distribution model for approximately over half a million artists<sup>378</sup> who are now able to sell their music and merchandise globally and securely, without investing in any overhead. For this reason, Bandcamp is an example of an internet model that appears to be beneficial to creative communities. Nonetheless, the shift to an online distribution model has effects upon the boundaries of creative cultures.

### Realized Abstraction

Bandcamp is not so much a method of artist distribution as it is of artist support. Much of the artists' music is offered from other online sources such as streaming services like Spotify or Youtube, through illegal sharing from friends, or through "pirate" sites. In my experience, people purchase from Bandcamp rather than using alternatives in order to provide financial support to the artists. However, even this claim of supporting artists is largely superficial, when considering the costs endured by musicians in producing an album. Bandcamp claims to have funded bands to a value of over 83 million dollars, however this is only about \$127 or 13 sales per band. I do not have figures on average costs of production for a band featuring their work on Bandcamp, but \$127 does not even cover the

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<sup>377</sup> "Pricing | Bandcamp." Accessed January 5, 2015.  
<https://bandcamp.com/pricing>.

<sup>378</sup> "How Many Artists Are on Bandcamp?" Accessed January 5, 2015.  
<http://www.quora.com/How-many-artists-are-on-Bandcamp>.

costs of lower-end music equipment. Nonetheless, compared to their competitors, Bandcamp provides one of the best opportunities for musicians, because it lets artists set their own conditions for the sale of music. The mentioned alternatives each dictate the economic structure by which the music will earn revenue, often with little or none reaching the artist.

### Access

The term “unlimited” on sites which offer downloads, such as Bandcamp, is used to assuage concerns that digital content can be easily lost. Despite the term unlimited, Bandcamp’s terms of use policy states that the content “cannot be guaranteed to be available to you perpetually” and that it is the user’s responsibility to save a copy.<sup>379</sup> In addition, digital property operates differently than physical property: it cannot be easily resold or inherited, but is instead tied to the initial purchaser. In actuality, the user is buying unlimited access to the music for as long as Bandcamp permits. Compared with traditional accumulation of records, as discussed in Chapter 3, accumulation of digital access is complicated by the necessity of the digital service provider.

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<sup>379</sup> “Terms of Use | Bandcamp.” Accessed January 5, 2015. [http://bandcamp.com/terms\\_of\\_use](http://bandcamp.com/terms_of_use).



### Absent Presence

Bandcamp artists can offer limited edition vinyl pressings and cassettes, sold alongside the unlimited downloads. These physical recordings (records and cassettes) are a nostalgic collector's item due to their contrast to the digital versions: they degrade upon listening, can be damaged and ruined, and can be displayed on shelves or walls. They are intended for the music lover as nostalgic archivist, rather than being the means to experience music, and therefore they underscore the disconnect with online content and the traditional methods of cultural accumulation.<sup>380</sup>

### Homogenization of Culture

In *Retromania*, Simon Reynolds discusses the locality of the record shop, as a space to which one ventures to hear, discuss, and discover music. Prior to network society, accumulation was a means of subcultural distinction partly because one had to find the physical recording by going to these spaces. The movie *High Fidelity* provides a window into the personality of record store owners, who acted as taste makers for those who came in, and with whom

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<sup>380</sup> I acknowledge that there are some who prefer to listen to vinyl rather than digital versions, yet for many of these people the reasons are the physicality of the vinyl, or the sound of its hiss and pop, which they prefer. Even the warmth of analog, described as a reason for the preference, can be added to the digital versions, making many of these reasons rather suspect.

subculturalists would cultivate relationships in order to acquire their music. Nowadays, online stores such as Bandcamp offer unrestricted access to music without the need for personal relationships. Unfortunately, this results in the experience of music accumulation being less special.

### Summary

Without the scarcity of physical mediums, subcultural accumulation no longer operates as a form of authenticity. In this chapter, I have discussed this in relation to Reynold's theory of *retromania*. However, in this section I reviewed a nostalgic response, in which band merchandise, and vinyl in particular, has become a collector's item, in part because of their physical limitations. Purchasing vinyl is a continuation of the tendencies towards accumulation, but is really a form of nostalgia, rather than a practical way of engaging with music. This points to an overall crisis of how to create aura and value around art that is digitally reproducible. Part of the result of this crisis is that the aura which made accumulation of high value has depreciated significantly.

## Esoteric Knowledge // VICE INC



### Gordon Holden's Photos Create Memories You've Never Had

The photographer's work resembles moments you barely remember from dreams you can't figure out. One of them is a picture of a dog with its head in a box.

Oct 1 2014 | VICE Staff | **Photo**



### Ferguson Officials Aren't Telling You What Happened to Mike Brown

Police and city officials have made it extremely difficult for anyone to access public records concerning Brown's death and the harsh response to protesters.

Oct 1 2014 | VICE News | **News**



### I Went on a Strange, Propaganda-Filled Press Junket to Moscow

A mysterious state-sponsored organization took a group of Western journalists on a tour of Russia seemingly dedicated to telling them just how awful and full of lies the Western media is.

Oct 1 2014 | Holly Dexter | **Travel**

**Figure 26<sup>381</sup> Screen capture of VICE website articles**

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<sup>381</sup> Compiled Screenshot from <http://vice.com>. Accessed August 5, 2014

	Visitors	Impressions	Leaderboard
<b>Art &amp; Design</b>			
Architizer	250,000	0	\$12 CPM
Beautiful Decay	290,000	0	\$12 CPM
Booooooom	179,000	0	\$12 CPM
Lost At E Minor	413,000	0	\$12 CPM
The Worlds Best Ever	180,000	0	×
Visual News	277,000	0	\$12 CPM
<b>Run of channel</b>	<b>1,589,000</b>	<b>0</b>	

**Figure 27<sup>382</sup> AD VICE advertisement pricing on Art and Design websites**

Over the past decade, VICE media has grown from a magazine given for free in alternative clothing stores and skate shops to a leader in news media with an estimated evaluation of \$2.5 billion at the time of writing.<sup>383</sup> Originally, VICE content focused on culture and centered on articles around fashion, music and “street culture”; their most famous recurring feature being VICE’s Dos and

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<sup>382</sup> Screen capture from <http://advice.vice.com/us/products/rate-card/> Accessed September 12 2014

<sup>383</sup> Cookson, Robert. “Vice Media’s Value Increases to \$2.5bn after \$500m Fundraising - FT.com.” Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/645e6bb2-341e-11e4-b81c-00144feabdco>

Don'ts, a list of street photographs ridiculing and exalting behavior of their subjects. Since its expansion into journalism in 2006, they have won an Emmy award for *Outstanding Informational Series or Special* for their news programming, grown their reach from their website to a branded YouTube channel, and developed weekly programming on HBO. VICE has infiltrated a journalist into ISIS and entered North Korea, thus becoming known for their gonzo journalistic style that takes chances and to which younger viewers respond well.<sup>384</sup> In turn, this engagement with youth has garnered heavy spending from advertisers. Throughout this growth in mainstream media, VICE has continued their traditional reportage of culture such as the Dos and Don'ts and reports on various subcultures, including articles written about Vaporwave, Seapunk and Health Goth.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Steel, Emily. "Vice Lands 2nd Investment, to Fuel Expansion." *The New York Times*, September 4, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/04/business/media/vice-lands-2nd-investment-to-fuel-expansion.html>.

<sup>385</sup> Lhooq, Michelle. "Is Vaporwave The Next Seapunk?" *THUMP*. Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://thump.vice.com/words/is-vaporwave-the-next-seapunk>.

Starr Eyes. "Deathface Wants YOU To Stop Eating Carbs." *THUMP*. Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://thump.vice.com/words/deathface-wants-you-to-stop-eating-carbs>.

"Seapunk Washes Up." *NOISEY*, March 9, 2012. <http://noisey.vice.com/blog/seapunk-washes-up>.

## Realized Abstraction

VICE news, similar to many other news media outlets, earns its revenue through advertising. Advertisers pay based upon demographic information about who is viewing which content, for how long, and how frequently these viewers return. It is in VICE's best interest to attract the demographics that advertisers are targeting, and produce content that compels them to return repeatedly. This business model has structured the journalistic format in which VICE presents its knowledge.

Relevant to this dissertation is VICE's targeting of niche demographics to attract the interests of a fluid youth population, and subsequently interest them in other stories using a recommendations algorithm. For example, the Seapunk story attracts interested readers by using metadata terms for search engines such as Google to associate with their story including electronic music, rave, dance music, Electronic Music News. The article then links to other stories within the music category, and shows large banners for VICE's sports and technology sections. The goal is to engage the viewer on a core interest, and then change their behavior to using VICE as their general source for news. The stories that target these niche audiences offer insights unavailable elsewhere, such as interviews with key founders, or exclusive accounts of private parties. Unfortunately, exposing this esoteric knowledge in order to engage users in the larger VICE ecosystem of content hurts the subcultures that are being reported on.

### Access

VICE sells access to a network of 500 cultural news services to advertisers through their branch called AD VICE, the most comprehensive access to diverse cultural groups available. While media and advertising have always had relationships with subcultures, ad technology allows VICE to mediate this in a wholly new fashion. Advertisers purchase “views” within a niche demographic, and their ads are then placed on the appropriate cultural news services. This occurs without editorial supervision by the website hosting the content. For \$12 USD, advertisers receive 1000 views of their ad on a cultural websites – and they do not need to know more about it than the demographics of its visitors (see above right.)

### Absent Presence

The availability of information through websites such as VICE has changed the structure of esoteric knowledge. Perhaps Paul Mann is correct in *Stupid Undergrounds*, that there are subcultures that remain secret and operate “as a sort of decoy, a particularly blank marker for other sorts of communication and secrecy that are not visible in the least.” Yet, this secretive space would not bear similarities to those of avant-garde subcultures, which in part exist by continuing a communications interlock with the mainstream. Of course, it is unlikely that

VICE will ever stop presenting their discoveries of new subcultures, as it is a significant portion of their appeal to youth. Instead, their features increasingly become about sightings of the ephemeral and strange such as the article *I Went to a Nu-Kawaii Cosplay Rave in Brooklyn* which had as the leading comment response:

There's nothing wrong with wanting to expose different types of people to different types of music (whether it's exposing anime people to non-anime music or non-anime people to anime music) but to call the event "otaku", "J-pop", or "cosplay" without the substance to back it up feels misleading and a poor attempt to pander to the leftover crowd from Comic Con weekend. All of that said, none of this is a criticism towards either the artists or crowd, just the exploitation of an established subculture.<sup>386</sup>

Further investigation shows that rather than reporting on some new cosplay rave scene, VICE was actually reporting on a small DJ event that was associated with drum-n-bass. While Mann might be correct in saying that there are remaining actual secret subcultures, the need to continually produce and expose subcultures is resulting in the invention of fake subcultures. Specifically, it appears that VICE

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<sup>386</sup> Lhooq, Michelle. "I Went to a Nu-Kawaii Cosplay Rave in Brooklyn." *THUMP*. Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://thump.vice.com/words/i-went-to-a-nu-kawaii-cosplay-rave-in-brooklyn>.



is embellishing the existence of subcultures in order to increase traffic to their various media properties.

### Homogenization of Culture

News on *VICE* is homogenized by its presentation to the public. There is no distinction between articles and other formats of material. The *VICE* website lists (see above left) each article in a long succession, without any filtering, mixing the light and topical with serious journalism. The result is an experience that reduces any difference between the reportage to a similar degree of spectacle. In regard to subculture, *VICE* opens the door to the secrets of the subculture in much the same way as it attempts to do with Mexican Cartel or ISIS, conducting an informal interview that purports to explain the entire concept.

### Summary

*VICE* has transformed from its skater beginnings into being the leading authority on global subcultures. Their access to subcultures has enabled them to target niche demographics unlike any other media agency, making them a favorite of the advertising world. However, while *VICE* now produces leading news coverage, they must maintain their lead in accessing subcultures. Subcultural esoteric knowledge is exploited by *VICE* to receive advertising revenue, to such a

degree that it becomes fictionalized. For those attempting to create new subcultures, it is difficult to do so without being discovered and reported on by VICE or similar cultural news media.

### **Physical Space // Airbnb Pavillion**



**Figure 28 Image of AirBnB Pavillion exhibition**

AirBnB Pavillion consisted of a panel held at the Swiss Institute and an art exhibition which took place during the 14th Venice Architecture Biennale (4th to the 6th of June 2014). In an intentional misuse of AirBnB policy, the show rented out apartments to host their art exhibition, using the service to expand the Biennale into the residential areas of Venice. On their website they write, “These

works were selected in an attempt to tackle the status of housing in the post-Airbnb city and to examine how design responds to new conditions of lifestyle and inhabitation.”

In the curation, there is a tension between residence and art exhibition, with art hung above beds (as above) or in kitchens and bathrooms. AirBnB Pavillion embraces the fluidity of space in network society in which an internet site can temporarily shift the use of space that it occupies. Unfortunately, while it is a clever premise, the show does not engage the residents of the space, but rather occupies the apartments and then reconvenes in the Swiss Institute to discuss. AirBnB Pavillion does not so much offer a critique of AirBnB, as exploit it for increased art space.

### Realized Abstraction

Alessandro Bava, one of Airbnb Pavillion’s curators, wrote in an interview with the New York Times: “Architects are always talking about the Internet in abstract ways; Airbnb is an amazing paradigm that bridges real spaces and online spaces and shows that architecture is not dead.<sup>387</sup>” To Bava, architectural opportunities

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<sup>387</sup> McGarry, Kevin. “On View | A Satellite Show at the Venice Architecture Biennale, Hosted Through (and Inspired By) Airbnb.” *T Magazine*, June 4, 2014. <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/04/airbnb-pavilion-venice-architecture-biennale/>.

exist in exploiting temporary spaces. Yet this paradigm would not only bridge the physical and virtual, but would require it that the person engage in both.

### Access

Invitations to “pop up spaces” such as the AirBnB Pavillion are based upon connections maintained through social networks, and therefore tend to privilege a global elite over people that are physically proximate. While the boundaries of physical space have been diluted through mapping services (as described previously in this chapter) there are new boundaries emerging based on online social connections.

### Absent Presence

AirBnB has been the center of controversy, particularly in San Francisco, where residents complain that they are being evicted so that apartments can be rented to out of town guests. In the SF Chronicle article *Window into Airbnb’s hidden impact on S.F.*,<sup>388</sup> the impact of AirBnB is noted as an increase of temporary occupants, and consequently a decrease in people invested in the neighborhood.

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<sup>388</sup> Said, Carolyn. “Window into Airbnb’s Hidden Impact on S.F.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. Accessed January 5, 2015. <http://www.sfchronicle.com/business/item/window-into-airbnb-s-hidden-impact-on-s-f-30110.php>.

While enticing for those in need of temporary space, this type of practice disconnects people from investing long term in their physical location. The hosts of these spaces also disengage with the proximate community. Rather than investing in building a community and space to which they can return, they spend time collecting virtual elements (photos, ratings, past visits) to benefit future rentals. Similarly, AirBnB Pavillion satisfies the demand for temporary art space during the Bienalle event, but what it is developing is a practice of using online resources for temporary art events.

### Homogenization of Culture

The Airbnb Pavillion retains the furniture and settings of the apartment, and it remains symbolically a residence, while playing with the tension of spatial practices. In other words, although people are visiting the pavillion and engaging in the art, it is with the understanding that this is a novelty, not a permanent art space. At any moment, the elements both virtual (digital invite list) and physical (the art work) will disappear, and the space will return to being a residence. The fluidity with which space can be used on sites such as AirBnB ultimately homogenize them into open canvases that can easily adapt to any space. They present themselves as available for occupation, rather than having distinct and unique features that qualify them for particular activities.

### Summary

AirBnb Pavillion is an example of the fluidity in function that spaces can acquire in network society. Despite the areas being zoned as residential, and the hosts themselves attempting to use them as hotels, the AirBnB Pavillion has turned them into exhibition spaces, and invited those at the Venice Biennale to view. On the one hand, this is a clever usage of the internet to temporarily have spaces for artistic practices that otherwise did not exist. Yet, compared to subcultural spaces cited earlier, such as Cabaret Voltaire or even the more recent 925 Gilman, I find that the AirBnB Pavillion is not really a substitute. There is not a sense of community or a general production of spaces of representation in these spaces. While artists have spaces to exhibit in, they still lack spaces to gather and exchange ideas and to collaborate.

**Table 1 Cross Listing of Subcultural Boundary and Properties of Network Society**

	<b>Realized Abstraction</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>Absent Presence</b>	<b>Homogenization of Culture</b>
<b>Slang</b>	Easy creation without ownership	Requires smartphone to remain engaged	Inspires performances for online	Trending terms lose their specificity
<b>Fashion</b>	Production of critique requires technologies being critiqued	Requires internet to understand signifiers	Subcultures produced as spectacle for internet	Nostalgia is exhausted
<b>Esoteric Knowledge</b>	Does not actually cover artist expenses, yet purports to be support	“Unlimited” dependent upon the online service	Sells merchandise as nostalgic artifact	Loses experience of going to place for purchase
<b>Accumulation</b>	Uses being subcultural to target niche demographics	Sells access to hundreds of subcultural sites to advertisers	Exaggerates subcultural activity to remain relevant	Mixes news with culture to entice more content interaction
<b>Physical Space</b>	Technology repurposes space	Physical access requires internet	Is more spectacle for the Venice Biennale than actual new art strategy	Homogenizes use of space into being continually fluid and temporary

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have investigated the recent phenomenon in contemporary culture towards both a fluid identity and a fetishized nostalgia for the past. The social structures of the avant-garde have changed in network society, and I discussed two aspects of the successors: hipsters and internet subcultures. I

show that the term hipster, while not referring to an actual social group, is symptomatic of an entire society that utilizes edgy fashion and taste as a type of spectacle, devoid of its former critical strength. However, I have demonstrated that there is continuity between previous avant-garde groups and contemporary subcultural practitioners.

I returned to the forms of subcultural boundary discussed in Chapter 4 (slang, fashion, esoteric knowledge, accumulation, and physical space) and examined how each boundary has been affected by the properties of network society (realized abstraction, access, absent presence, homogenization of culture). In each example, I have shown that network society has complicated the avant-garde in its production and distribution of culture, and has diluted the boundaries on which the avant-garde relies. I have identified examples of subcultural practices that follow the trajectory of the avant-garde, either in being a continuation of their traits (Health Goth, Seapunk) or in the digital technologies that are used in their practices (Bandcamp, Twitter, AirBnB). However, the adoption of these technologies has made their cultures accessible to all, thus diluting their ability to incubate the concepts into fully formed new subcultures. Rather than staking a claim to their cultural territory, they “ride the wave” to the next concept.

With the VICE example, I have shown that this recuperation has become pervasive, using subcultural websites and trends to attract the individualistic youth market sought after by advertisers. VICE is careful to maintain an



authentic insider view into the subcultures, in hopes of being able to influence these people with their advertisements and other content offerings. Distribution of content quickly becomes associated with corporate sponsorships, not only through VICE, but through distribution sites such as YouTube and Spotify which intersperse advertisements between the content. While websites such as Bandcamp, which attempt to facilitate a direct relationship between artist and consumer, offer an alternative and function as an auxiliary business to the primary ad supported services.

Indeed, the adoption of digital technologies to engage in avant-garde practices complicates some of the critiques being expressed. For instance, AirBnB Pavillion's use of residential spaces does not actually produce spaces of representation, but rather exhibition spaces that have a heavy focus on the residential aspect of the curatorial space. The effect of network society upon subcultural boundaries has largely gone unobserved, because the role that boundaries have historically played has never been well understood by subcultural practitioners. While many, including subcultural members, have noticed the general change in subcultural quality, and even associated this with the internet, prior to my research, none have connected this issue to one of boundaries. As the examples in this chapter show, the novel cultural forms that the avant-garde have historically produced are stagnating due to an increase of recuperation.

The internet subcultures' fetish for the past is also due to the increase of recuperation. Cultural evolution always starts by building off of the tastes held by the person at present. In Chapter 4, I provided examples of this evolution occurring in punk with one of its progenitors, Richard Hell, and later with goth Rose McDowall. In network society, the past cultural forms are as accessible as the contemporary ones through online sites such as YouTube. For those seeking to evolve a sound, such as Ariel Pink or Youth Code, the cultures that they are evolving from are more than twenty years old. The result is that these new groups are operating within what is perceived by Reynolds as retro.

Were subcultural boundaries to be strengthened, the period of incubation in which artists congregate to develop a cultural unique aesthetic would be extended, and thus the evolution between contemporary artists and past artists would be more pronounced. The goal is therefore to discover new ways to generate boundaries that will protect social and cultural capital, and enable evolution within subcultures to build up again. One tactic to tackle this challenge, riding the wave, has recently surfaced. While it does not fully remedy the situation, riding the wave does provide a method for subcultures to manage their own recuperation, and demonstrates that further tactics are entirely possible. In the following chapter, I will propose a process-oriented mindset for avant-garde subcultures, based in part on the strategies of startups. I suggest that these processes could provide a new way for avant-garde subcultures to build and share in their cultural and social capital prior to being recuperated.

## **VI. New Methodologies and Spatial Practices**

Throughout this dissertation I have discussed how avant-garde subcultures produce novel forms of thought and culture that are developed with an alternative viewpoint on or critical view of mainstream culture, yet which eventually become recuperated into this mainstream. I have argued that this recuperation into the mainstream is a necessary stage in the avant-garde, and traditionally its negative effects have been offset by the evolution of new avant-garde forms.

In the shift to network society, the boundaries that used to protect the social and cultural capital of avant-garde subcultures have become diluted by digital media. The result is that the recuperation of avant-garde subcultures is no longer hindered by the usual obstacles, and thus recuperation has sped up.

This dissertation has concentrated on understanding the problems of the avant-garde in network society, to which there are no clear solutions. It is not possible for avant-garde subcultures to operate in, and critically engage with, network society without participating in it. The goal at present should be to determine new methods of forging boundaries and new processes of incubating and evolving ideas and practices. In the previous chapter, I reviewed the different tactics avant-garde subcultures use to engage in network society, and some of the

problems they encounter. One of the most significant tactics to emerge is “riding the wave”, i.e. continually producing new subcultural memes when their earlier forms are recuperated. This tactic enables avant-garde subcultures to manage which elements are recuperated, and to deflect other elements by keeping them hidden. However, as previously discussed, utilizing this tactic disables the production of spaces of representation, because the subcultural territory is constantly being abandoned. The result is that the iterations produced by riding the wave (such as Seapunk, Vaporwave, or Health Goth) are not conceptually evolved, and tend to reproduce the same critical arguments as their former versions. My concern, is that without claiming territory, and producing spaces of representation for the subcultures to work from, this stagnation will continue.

In this chapter, I introduce an emerging branch of critical art that has evolved in network society: tactical media. As I will explain, tactical media has developed a method of using the affordances of network society to reproduce their critical work, and thus are potentially an evolution to the role the avant-garde has played. However, tactical media, similar to the subcultures mentioned earlier in the dissertation, have not developed a practice that produces spaces of representation. Unsurprisingly, many of the practitioners mentioned in this dissertation, such as The Yes Men and Jacob Ciocci, have been involved with Eyebeam Arts & Technology Center in New York City. I suggest that Eyebeam served as a space of representation for these artists and many more, and is a potential model of the kinds of spaces needed in network society. I myself have had artist fellowships and residencies at Eyebeam and am familiar with it as a

space. Using my experiences at Eyebeam as a reference, I will examine how Eyebeam has managed to preserve avant-garde subcultural boundaries against the four properties of network society (Absent Presence, Realized Abstraction, Access, and Homogenization of Culture.) Eyebeam itself is in a state of transition, having recently left the location where it was situated for nearly two decades. I conclude the dissertation by suggesting future work to formalize the studies and production of avant-garde spaces of representation, with suggestions for potential fields where such work could occur.

## **Tactical Media**

Tactical Media emerged in the 1990s as a combination of political activism and artistic practice that took a tactical, or informed and methodological, approach to the production and distribution of media. For example, strategically selecting GWBush.com as a website in which to place anti-Bush messaging, with the intention of reaching those who visit the site by accident, is a form of tactical media, because its cultural production of political activism exploits a common mistake in web searches. Tactical media is a broad term, encompassing many practices within it. In her book *Tactical Media*, Rita Raley considers tactical media to range from video game design<sup>389</sup>, to robotics, collaborative software, or even spaces themselves such as open-access technology labs; any practices that

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<sup>389</sup> Raley, Rita. *Tactical Media*. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2009. Location 85

“express dissent and conceive of revolutionary transformation while distancing oneself from one’s forebears, whose lingering nostalgia for their own storming of the barricades, not to mention their idealistic belief in the possibility of visible and permanent social change, seems quaint, if even a trifle embarrassing?<sup>390</sup>” Raley’s definition provides a lot of depth for understanding tactical media as a practice, and by examining it I show that tactical media is an artistic practice that operates like a virus within network society, harnessing recuperation by the news media to globally disperse its political agenda, and building open-source tools that enable others to reproduce their work.

First, tactical media practitioners have a McLuhan concept of media: that media is any kind of an extension to ourselves, and that each medium has its own affordances, which should be understood in order to effectively utilize it. In tactical media, the medium is selected for these specific affordances, enabling a more subtle message to be employed. For example, *The Biotic Baking Brigade*, a loosely formed group of activists, threw pies at those they considered to be harming the planet for corporate interests, such as Bill Gates, Ann Coulter, and San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown. In their trial for assault and battery against Mayor Brown, the defense attorney for The Biotic Baking Brigade argued “[a pie] is not a gun; a pie is not a knife; a pie is not a rock. A pie, is not under any

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<sup>390</sup> Raley, Rita. *Tactical Media*. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2009. Location 86

circumstances, a deadly weapon.”<sup>391</sup> Yet the pie is more than a pie: it is a (rather harmless) comedic prank that publicly humiliates the victim. Yet, in my understanding of the piece, the pie also has a darker subtext as a biological material, suggesting a warning for what could be thrown next. Indeed, some of the political victims of pie throwing have gone so far as to claim it is an act of terrorism.<sup>392</sup> The pie is therefore conceived of as “revolutionary transformation” by showing others the ease which biological agents can be thrown at people in power. In this manner, The Biotic Baking Brigade demonstrate a strong understanding of how to produce a seemingly harmless public spectacle so that the news media conveys their political message. I will return to this concept in the next section on hijacking the news media.

The second important aspect of Raley’s definition of tactical media is its “forebears” who are considered idealistic, quaint, and embarrassing. The forebears of tactical media are both past activists and the historic avant-garde, including Dada and the Situationist International, who as I have described in earlier chapters, and who also sought to introduce “revolutionary

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<sup>391</sup> Nieves, Evelyn. “San Francisco Pie-Throwers Are Guilty Of Battery.” *The New York Times*, January 20, 1999, sec. U.S.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/20/us/san-francisco-pie-throwers-are-guilty-of-battery.html>.

<sup>392</sup> Potter, Will. “PETA’s Pieing Is Terrorism, Canadian Member of Parliament Says.” *Green Is The New Red*. Accessed January 6, 2015.  
<http://www.greenisthenewred.com/blog/peta-pie-terrorism-in-canada/2504/>.

transformation” into everyday life. Raley does not explain why she considers these forebears to be idealistic, but I assume that her arguments are similar to those made by Peter Bürger, who considers the avant-garde to have been fully recuperated. In Chapter 2 I have explained my position on this, in that I believe that the avant-garde has evolved alongside society, adapting to the specific problems of the day. I consider tactical media to be a part of this evolution, one that is attempting to confront network society. And, from this perspective, I would agree with Raley that the application of the tactics of the historical avant-garde to contemporary network society would be idealistic, because there is no longer a “barricade” to storm, the hegemonic center has dispersed.

Without a center to confront, tactical media has adapted to network society: it dismisses, intervenes and resists<sup>393</sup> a hegemonic authority that is both dispersed and pervasive using the most effective mediums available to them. As Raley explains “The overall aim is sustainable pulsing—swarm networks must be able to coalesce rapidly and stealthily on a target, then dissever and redisperse, immediately ready to recombine for a new pulse.”<sup>394</sup> This tactic is informed in part by military strategies such as the book *The Advent of Netwar* by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, which hypothesized coming global conflicts of

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<sup>393</sup> Raley, Rita. *Tactical Media*. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2009. Location 159

<sup>394</sup> Raley, Rita. *Tactical Media*. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2009. Location 845



leaderless revolutionary networks for the Rand Corporation in 1996.<sup>395</sup> Tactical media practice often incorporates instructions and even technological tools for others to reproduce their work. In this way, the news media propagates their work globally for others to create, without requiring any internal infrastructure or leaders to organize this dispersal. I will discuss this further in the section on open-source and copyleft.

### **Hijacking the News Media**

Creating spectacle for public attention is not new to the avant-garde, yet in recent decades it has moved from *culture jamming*, or detouring mainstream advertising, to a more nuanced practice of having the press surreptitiously produce the intended work. In this section, I will describe this development by first explaining the practice of culture jamming, and then following the work of the Yes Men as they moved from culture jamming to this new practice of hijacking the news media.

The term “Culture Jamming” was first coined in 1984 by the musical group/audio collagists Negativland, and means the “practice of parodying advertisements and hijacking billboards in order to drastically alter their

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<sup>395</sup> Arquilla, J., and D. F. Ronfeldt. *The Advent Of Netwar*. First Edition edition. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1996.

messages.”<sup>396</sup> Negativland spliced together audio samples from pop culture in a type of Situationist International inspired detournement. Culture Jamming as a practice has evolved since Negativland, a contemporary reference would be the work found in the magazine Ad Busters, which parody corporate advertising.

In her book *No Logo* Naomi Klein writes “Though culture jammers borrow liberally from the avant-garde movements of the past – from Dada and Surrealism to Conceptualism and Situationism – the canvas these art revolutionaries were attacking tended to be the art world and its passive culture of spectatorship...Today's culture jammers prefer to hack into corporate advertising and other avenues of corporate speech.”<sup>397</sup> Klein's distinction between prior forms of detournement and culture jammers is an important one. The shift appears to have occurred after the term “culture jamming” was first used by Negativland, who were addressing culture rather than advertising. From the 1990s and into present day, the practice has become increasingly one that has abandoned a critique against pop culture, and concentrated on international corporations.

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<sup>396</sup> Klein, Naomi. *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs*. New York: Picador, 2010. 280

<sup>397</sup> Klein, Naomi. *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs*. New York: Picador, 2010. 282

The *Yes Men* (Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno) developed their practice of utilizing the news media by accident, when they created the fake Gatt.org<sup>398</sup> site to spoof the World Trade Organization (WTO), and were surprised to be invited to speak at a conference representing the WTO. Posing as the World Trade Organization, they announced they would be closing, and begin focusing on humanitarian efforts.<sup>399</sup> While they had thought the audience would be aware of the prank, they were surprised to find that it was believed by some of the audience.<sup>400</sup> This began their practice, which they term *identity correction*, of “Impersonating big-time criminals in order to publicly humiliate them, and otherwise giving journalists excuses to cover important issues.”<sup>401</sup> Identity correction impersonates representatives from corporations and institutions with the intention of tricking the news media into covering the issue from a particular political perspective. For example, in New Orleans, the Yes Men posed as *Housing and Urban Development (HUD)*, and held a large press event promising that they had changed their minds in demolishing public housing for new

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<sup>398</sup> “WTO | World Trade Organization: WTO / GATT.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://gatt.org/>.

<sup>399</sup> Men, Yes. *The Yes Men: The True Story of the End of the World Trade Organization*. First Edition edition. New York: The Disinformation Company, 2004.149

<sup>400</sup> Men, Yes. *The Yes Men: The True Story of the End of the World Trade Organization*. First Edition edition. New York: The Disinformation Company, 2004.115

<sup>401</sup> “The Yes Men.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://theyesmen.org/>.

privatized development.<sup>402</sup> The *Yes Men* pranks publicly engage their targets, forcing them to go through awkward retractions explaining that they were not involved, and that they are in fact continuing in the practice in question. For instance, in the case of New Orleans, *HUD* had to state that they were indeed going to destroy the homes of these families.<sup>403</sup> This resulted in news stations asking residents for reactions on learning that their homes were going to be destroyed,<sup>404</sup> something that had not happened previously. In 2008, the Yes Men, along with various other artists (including *Improve Everywhere*, *CODE Pink*, Stephen Duncombe, and Steve Lambert) handed out over 80,000 copies of the *New York Time Special Edition (NYSE)*, a 14-page near replica (albeit thinner) of the *New York Times*.<sup>405</sup> *NYSE* was post-dated to the summer of 2009 and it listed articles of a possible future such as *Iraq War Ends*.<sup>406</sup> *NYSE* included a website and a media press release following the action, which attained

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<sup>402</sup> “CNN.com - Oops: Impostor Scams Louisiana Officials - Aug 28, 2006.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/08/28/hud.hoax/>.

<sup>403</sup> “CNN.com - Oops: Impostor Scams Louisiana Officials - Aug 28, 2006.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/08/28/hud.hoax/>.

<sup>404</sup> “CNN.com - Oops: Impostor Scams Louisiana Officials - Aug 28, 2006.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/08/28/hud.hoax/>.

<sup>405</sup> “New York Times Special Edition | The Yes Men.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://theyesmen.org/hijinks/newyorktimes>.

<sup>406</sup> “New York Times Special Edition | The Yes Men.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://theyesmen.org/hijinks/newyorktimes>.

interviews across many of the major news organizations.<sup>407</sup> As such, *NYSE* represents one of the most comprehensive pranks ever accomplished and illustrates the *Yes Men*'s mastery of tactically manipulating news media. Since 2010, the Yes Men have concentrated on their *Yes Lab*<sup>408</sup> where they train other activists in their tactics.

### **Open-Source and Copyleft**

Since founding The Yes Lab, the Yes Men have focused on empowering universities and activist groups with their strategic skills.<sup>409</sup> Recently, this initiative has expanded to *Action Switchboard*, an online social site that links activists and artists together to continue the Yes Men style practices.<sup>410</sup> By creating the Yes Lab, Bichlbaum and Bonnano have extended their outreach and practices much further than would be possible if they were working alone. This sharing of information and tactics enables the swarming of tactical media that Raley describes, because even if the Yes Men would no longer be able to operate, their work with Yes Lab reproduces their tactics into activists across the world.

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<sup>407</sup> "The New York Times Special Edition." *Steve Lambert*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://visitsteve.com/made/the-ny-times-special-edition/>.

<sup>408</sup> "Yes Lab." *Yes Lab*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://yeslab.org/>.

<sup>409</sup> "Yes Lab." *Yes Lab*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://yeslab.org/about>

<sup>410</sup> "Yes Lab." *Yes Lab*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://yeslab.org/actionswitchboard>

When tactical media discuss this approach, it is often under terms such as *open-source* and *copyleft*, both of which seek to develop new collective ownership of intellectual property. The open-source movement began in the 1980s with initiatives to provide legal protection for sharing software, such as Richard Stallman's *Free Software Foundation*.<sup>411</sup> The concept expanded into open culture with the *copyleft* movement<sup>412</sup> and the *Creative Commons* group<sup>413</sup> led by Lawrence Lessig, both of which provide methods for people to on the one hand acknowledge themselves as creators of the concept or cultural artifact, but on the other to open it up for others to have access to the material and share it. Tactical media artists often open up their work as open-source and copyleft, in the hope that it encourages others to continue their practices.

For example, The *F.A.T. (Free Art and Technology) Lab* is a loose collection of digital artists who release their provocative work for free. As founder Evan Roth states, "F.A.T. Lab is the unsolicited guerrilla marketing division for the open source revolution in art."<sup>414</sup> As evidenced in the quote, *F.A.T.* strikes a pose of

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<sup>411</sup> "Free Software Is a Matter of Liberty, Not Price — Free Software Foundation — Working Together for Free Software." Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.fsf.org/about/>.

<sup>412</sup> "What Is Copyleft? - GNU Project - Free Software Foundation." Accessed January 6, 2015. <https://www.gnu.org/copyleft/>.

<sup>413</sup> "About - Creative Commons." Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://creativecommons.org/about>.

<sup>414</sup> Quaranta, Domenico, and Geraldine Juárez. *The F.A.T. Manual*. EINDHOVEN: Stichting MU, 2013. 9

*enfant terrible* in the digital art world. In projects such as *Fuck Google*, members impersonated a *Google Maps* car and proceeded to create humiliating stunts such as getting lost, driving poorly, and pretending to push a pedestrian. The project was then released with a set of instructions on how to print your own version from their site.<sup>415</sup> Writing about *F.A.T. Lab* art, blogger Regine Debaty states “[what] makes F.A.T.’s work so invaluable is that everyone can get what they are doing,”<sup>416</sup> equating the release of license over the art with an improvement to society. However, Debaty’s statement is not entirely true - in fact nobody can do what *F.A.T. Lab* does, because value in the art and cultural world revolves around being the first to produce a new piece of art. *F.A.T. Lab*, in my opinion, creates incredibly funny and provocative work, yet their adoption of free culture is more important as a stance rather than that it serves a practical purpose.

One of the primary goals of tactical media, is to utilize network society to replicate themselves, both propagandizing their viewpoint by hijacking mainstream news media, and then providing instructions for others to follow. For example, *F.A.T. Lab* uses the free culture movement to suggest duplication of their aesthetic and of their projects. Yet this process does not account for the difficulty of reproducing the incredible talent and critical skills of *F.A.T. Lab* artists. While others can reproduce *Fuck Google*, such action would not have the

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<sup>415</sup> “How to Build a Fake Google Street View Car | F.A.T.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://fffff.at/google-street-view-car/>.

<sup>416</sup> Quaranta, Domenico, and Geraldine Juárez. *The F.A.T. Manual*. EINDHOVEN: Stichting MU, 2013<sup>13</sup>

critical impact as the original instance. The Yes Lab has taken a engaged methods of propagating their work, by operating as a think tank for hire, and providing their skills to the benefit other activists. The effectiveness of this approach will be in other Yes Men like groups emerging from the Yes Lab. Overall, while this strategy of tactical media is clever, I believe that it overlooks the need for spatial resources.

As I have argued in this dissertation, in order for new avant-garde subcultures or other politically inspired art practitioner groups such as tactical media to emerge, there have to be spaces of representation in which they can operate, collaborate, and produce their own social and cultural capital. In the next section, I will support this argument by describing Eyebeam, a place that many tactical media artists (including FAT Lab and Yes Men), as well as Jacob Ciocci, have spent. In my opinion, Eyebeam by being a fixture for twenty years in the digital arts and activist spaces, has served to enable the production of novel cultural forms found in the aforementioned artists. It is not that these artists would not exist without Eyebeam, but rather that they required a space of representation from which to incubate their work, and Eyebeam has served as such.



## Eyebeam

The *Eyebeam Arts and Technology Center* was founded in 1997 by John S. Johnson Jr., heir to the Johnson & Johnson pharmaceuticals<sup>417</sup> with assistance from an assortment of artists and advisors helping to direct its establishment. Johnson, who had grown up around his father's own atelier for sculptors, the *Johnson Atelier*, wanted to create a similar space where artists could develop digital art unencumbered by the gallery system. In the 2003 New York Times article on Eyebeam, *Digital Art's Year-Round Summer Camp*, Johnson describes his aversion to building a digital arts museum, desiring instead to create a place that "can move at the speed of culture."<sup>418</sup> Eyebeam provides amazing support for those at the frontiers of art and technology, giving space, administrative support and a salary to a select group of practitioners, without asking for anything in return. Since 1997, *Eyebeam* has provided over 245 fellowships and residencies,<sup>419</sup> and engaged a large set of the contemporary avant-garde artists.

The New York Times article describes Eyebeam as "clearing house for major exhibitions and prizes worldwide", and since then many of the important digital

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<sup>417</sup> Bard, Elizabeth. "ART; Digital Art's Year-Round Summer Camp." *The New York Times*, November 9, 2003, sec. Arts.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/09/arts/art-digital-art-s-year-round-summer-camp.html>.

<sup>418</sup> Bard, Elizabeth. "ART; Digital Art's Year-Round Summer Camp." *The New York Times*, November 9, 2003, sec. Arts.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/09/arts/art-digital-art-s-year-round-summer-camp.html>.

<sup>419</sup> "About | Eyebeam.org." Accessed January 6, 2015. <https://eyebeam.org/about>.

artists, theorists, and practitioners have been involved with Eyebeam. For instance, many of the leaders in tactical media such as Geert Lovink and the Critical Art Ensemble participated in their first forum.<sup>420</sup> The founder of their Research and Development lab, Jonah Peretti, went on to found both BuzzFeed and the Huffington Post. The Research and Development lab provided residencies to many artists including both Jacob Ciocci and FAT Lab (mentioned above). Eyebeam has also created a community around itself through education programs for New York City high school students,<sup>421</sup> traveling exhibitions of artists,<sup>422</sup> and releasing open-source software.<sup>423</sup>

Eyebeam is an expensive operation that requires millions of dollars annually in support to continue providing the many resources and support staff to its residents.<sup>424</sup> As the neighborhood in Manhattan which Eyebeam was located grew in property value, the decision was made to sell its current location for what

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<sup>420</sup> Johnson, John, Jordan Crandall, and John S. Johnson. *Interaction: Artistic Practice in the Network*. Edited by Amy Scholder. New York, NY: D.A.P./EYEBEAM ATELIER, 2001.

<sup>421</sup> “Teen Programs | Eyebeam.org.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://eyebeam.org/programs/teen-programs>.

<sup>422</sup> “Eyebeam Roadshow | Eyebeam.org.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://eyebeam.org/events/eyebeam-roadshow>.

<sup>423</sup> “OPEN(Art) — Creativity at the Intersection of Art and the Open Web.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://openart.eyebeam.org/>.

<sup>424</sup> “Our Supporters | Eyebeam.org.” Accessed January 6, 2015. <https://eyebeam.org/about/our-supporters>.

is assumed to be around \$30 billion,<sup>425</sup> and move to a new location in Brooklyn. The increased revenue will undoubtedly provide Eyebeam with new opportunities for supporting emerging artists and outreach to the community. Yet, one year after its decision to move to Brooklyn, Eyebeam changed direction from moving to the Brooklyn Art Museum neighborhood to the less developed Industry City in Sunset Park Brooklyn.<sup>426</sup> Eyebeam Executive Director Patricia Jones gave as reason that the original planned space overly emphasized exhibition, and would have taken budget away from artist support. Jones stated that they were looking for a “rough and ready” space similar to the one that their Chelsea location had offered.<sup>427</sup>

I find the decision to maintain a similar style space for Eyebeam to be comforting, as I consider it one of the primary reasons that Eyebeam is so successful. I first performed at Eyebeam at their 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Benefit in 2007, alongside my collaborator Jeff Crouse who was a resident at the time. Later that year, I joined Eyebeam, receiving an art fellowship that would last until the end of 2008. For the next three years, I continued participation at Eyebeam,

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<sup>425</sup> Cascone. “Eyebeam Decamps from Chelsea to Brooklyn - News - Art in America.” *Art in America*, Oc 2013. <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/eyebeam-decamps-from-chelsea-to-brooklyn/>.

<sup>426</sup> Heddaya, Mostafa. “Eyebeam Shelves Move to Downtown Brooklyn.” *Hyperallergic*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://hyperallergic.com/155067/eyebeam-shelves-move-to-downtown-brooklyn/>.

<sup>427</sup> Heddaya, Mostafa. “Eyebeam Shelves Move to Downtown Brooklyn.” *Hyperallergic*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://hyperallergic.com/155067/eyebeam-shelves-move-to-downtown-brooklyn/>.

both exhibiting my work and taking part in various education outreach programs. During my time at Eyebeam, I came to my own theoretical appreciation for the role that spaces have for artists, and it prompted the research that this dissertation has covered. While Eyebeam does not perfectly map onto my own recommendations for spaces of representation, it does provide many affordances to its artists that have afforded them the successes Eyebeam is noted for. In this section, I will return to the four properties of network society which I previously described as diluting subcultural spaces, and address how Eyebeam has managed to at least partly overcome these.

### **Realized Abstraction**

Realized abstraction in network society is the phenomenon of having dependence upon technology while holding misconceptions and mystifications about its use. For artists working with technology, realized abstractions cause problems in two manners: 1) the artists themselves must understand and learn how to use the technology, so that they can incorporate it into their work, and 2) the artist must address the wider misconceptions surrounding the technology in their work. One method by which Eyebeam reduces realized abstraction is by providing education resources to the larger community.



Figure 29<sup>428</sup> Workshop Advertisement

In 2010, I returned to Eyebeam as a teaching Fellow where I taught *Build Your Own Music Making Clothing Line*, a ten-week workshop for sixteen New York City female teenagers. The workshops, based on instructions from and precedence set at Eyebeam, was intended to teach a set of technological skills in both fashion design and building circuitry for music technology, as well as to foster a sense that creative technology is an accessible practice.

Prior to the giving the workshop, I was not myself an expert at either making music technology or designing clothing. Fortunately, Eyebeam encourages its

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<sup>428</sup> Jimison, David “Build Your Own Music Making Clothing Line”. Created for Eyebeam workshop

artists-in-residence to involve outside advisors and assistance in working on technology. In order to prepare for the class, I enlisted fashion designers Julie Robinson and Siki Im (the latter an Ecco Domani winner), and Travis Thatcher, a synthesizer guru and roadie based in New York City. With this team, I was able to learn strategies for teaching each discipline and assemble an appropriate curriculum for the class. By having help from this team of experts I was able to learn the appropriate skills and create a lesson plan for the students. I also served as a surrogate between the teenage novices and these emerging leaders in the fields. As such, the workshop encouraged in both myself and my students a hands on approach in learning about technology.

### **Access**

Network society privileges those with access to technology resources and faster networked bandwidth. As I argued in Chapter 3, this tends to reinforce existing hierarchies, because those with economic resources are more capable of getting access to better technological and bandwidth resources. A core premise of Eyebeam is to “give emerging talent unlimited access to otherwise prohibitively expensive technology”<sup>429</sup> in order to let their creativity be unrestrained by access. Eyebeam supplies its artists with computers, software, a large array of audio

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<sup>429</sup> Bard, Elizabeth. “ART; Digital Art’s Year-Round Summer Camp.” *The New York Times*, November 9, 2003, sec. Arts.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/09/arts/art-digital-art-s-year-round-summer-camp.html>.

visual equipment, a fully stocked electronics lab, and a manufacturing area with wood shop and welding station. Eyebeam staff are specialists in the different areas, and available daily to help train the artists in their use. Finally, Eyebeam provides each artist a stipend to purchase any further equipment they require. The combination of all this support liberates the artist, not only by providing access, but also by giving them a sense that almost any technology is accessible to them.

This latter aspect, that one is able to approach technology without restraint in either material or education was phenomenal to me. Prior to Eyebeam, I had worked with a variety of software in both my academic and professional careers, however I wanted to move my practice into physical objects, specifically robotics. Building robots can be daunting without prior experience. For example, most robotic parts such as sensors, motors, and electrical components are only available via mail order. By the time I arrived at Eyebeam, they had accumulated a decade's worth of different electronic components, motors, and an assortment of other parts, which were stored rather haphazardly in large filing cabinets and drawers throughout the space. When I wanted to build a robotic component, one of the staff or a more knowledgeable artist and I would dig through these areas until we uncovered a similar piece. We could then build a prototype of the robotic interaction and test the system. This step of prototyping with available parts helped in calculating the final components needed.

Other community spaces with shared electronic resources, often called hacker spaces,<sup>430</sup> have popped up across major cities around the world. Most of these are restricted to paid members, but quite a few offer classes to the public. For example, the private collective NYC Resistor,<sup>431</sup> who share a space in downtown Brooklyn, offer courses to the public ranging from courses in making holiday cards to soldering tutorials.<sup>432</sup> I believe that the important aspect of each of these spaces is not just that they share the costs of access to technology, but that they also forge a community of different technological skills who can help each other in their projects. By building these creative spaces, artists are able to create new works that overcome the problems of access in network society.

### **Absent Presence**

Absent Presence is the phenomenon of dividing one's attention between the virtual and physical worlds. This could become a serious problem at Eyebeam, where all of the residents are engaged in their own technological work. Yet, Eyebeam confronted absent presence by instituting a *Stop Work* policy, where

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<sup>430</sup> "HackerspaceWiki." Accessed January 6, 2015.  
<http://hackerspaces.org/wiki/Hackerspaces>.

<sup>431</sup> "About » NYC Resistor." Accessed January 6, 2015.  
<http://www.nycresistor.com/about/>.

<sup>432</sup> "NYC Resistor." *Eventbrite*. Accessed January 4, 2015.  
<http://www.eventbrite.com/org/52408308?ref=eofblike>.



every Friday from 1-4pm, the community were supposed to gather in the large conference area and discuss their current work and its progress. These meetings were not strictly enforced, and at times they were missed by a person or two, but overall they were attended by the majority of the community.

At stop work, one or two members would spend an hour demonstrating their work to the rest of the group and eliciting feedback. These meetings could become a bit contentious when two members of the community disagreed on a practices. For instance, many of the Eyebeam community were committed to open-source as a philosophy, and felt that the privilege of being at Eyebeam should be repaid by making all of one's own work open-source. Others at Eyebeam, myself included, saw the merits of open-source, but disagreed with a dogmatic approach to its application. The stop work events became a site to deliberate these aspects, and ultimately resulted in creating a larger sense of community within Eyebeam. Stop work brought to light a difference in philosophical position which would have gone unnoticed, or at least undiscussed, had we not been attending these meetings. As a result, each side of the disagreement gained in perspective on their position.

Stopping work and attending a meeting does not alleviate the entire condition of absent presence, but it does create a sanctuary to build community from.

Although it comprised only a small portion of the work week at Eyebeam, the conversations of stop work infiltrated the rest of the time there, encouraging further conversations and stronger social ties amongst members. In my opinion,

stop work proves that some of the most effective tactics towards confronting the diluting effects of network society are resolved by creating spaces and times where networked technologies are not welcome, and all attention is focus is on face to face communications.

### **Homogenization of Culture**

Network society homogenizes culture by eliminating the spatial and temporal boundaries involved in its dispersion. Eyebeam is not immune to this, as it is necessary for the artists to engage with global art culture and, to an extent, to modify their work to be successful within this domain. In my own work, I temporarily shifted from the practice of immersive installations such as *Eyebeam Underground* to interactive street furniture in *Too Smart City*, in order to be selected for the prestigious juried exhibition from the Architects League *Towards the Sentient City*. These shifts in practice were often necessary for emerging artists in order to gain further exposure of our work, but the overall effect is to align artistic work along the categories of juried competition.

To an extent, Eyebeam artists were shielded from homogenizing effects of global culture in that they were not required to produce or receive accolades during their residency. For my own practice, I was interested in examining social dynamics when structured by rules of interaction, and therefore decided to play a

murder mystery game with thirty guests at Eyebeam.<sup>433</sup> The event was fully catered and each participant followed the rules written for the game. There was no digital interactivity, and outside of the context of research, the event appeared to have little to do with the art practices Eyebeam sought to enable. To my surprise, the unorthodox research project was welcome at Eyebeam with John S. Johnson even contributing a crate of wine to the event. With Eyebeam's support, I was able to hold the event and study how the specific rules shifted interactive dynamics amongst the group. This became the first of several *Test Parties* which I held at Eyebeam, each time testing out new interactions. These test parties eventually culminated in the *Eyebeam Underground* event, a sold-out event with over 600 in attendance, which received press attention from New York Magazine,<sup>434</sup> Art Slant,<sup>435</sup> and the Gothamist<sup>436</sup> among others. My own artistic practice in creating large scale immersive events was enabled by Eyebeam's

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<sup>433</sup> "How to Host a Murder Party Game - The Class of 54 | Wwww." *Hayneedle.com*. Accessed January 4, 2015. <http://www.hayneedle.com/product/deciphertheclassof54game.cfm>.

<sup>434</sup> "Bands Blur the Line Between Group and Groupie - The All New Issue -- New York Magazine." Accessed January 4, 2015. <http://nymag.com/news/features/all-new/53351/>.

<sup>435</sup> "ArtSlant - November 8th, 2008 9:00 PM - 2:00 AM, Eyebeam, Benton-C Bainbridge, Roxy Cottontail and Judi Chicago, Jon Cohrs, Jeff Feddersen, Drayton Heirs, Jeff Crouse and David Jimison, Chris Kaczmarek, Tetsu Kondo, Christina Kral, Rob O'Neill, JooYoun Paek, Dan Ribaud, Brian Whiton." Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.artslant.com/ny/events/show/31672-mixer-underground>.

<sup>436</sup> "Last Night's Art Party: Eyebeam." *Gothamist*. Accessed January 4, 2015. [http://gothamist.com/2008/11/09/last\\_nights\\_party\\_eyebeam\\_undergrou.php](http://gothamist.com/2008/11/09/last_nights_party_eyebeam_undergrou.php).

supporting my work, even though my work is not aligned to the global trends in digital arts.

## **Conclusion**

For the avant-garde traditions of challenging hegemonic authority and revolutionizing everyday life to continue in network society, new methodologies and practices must be invented. In this chapter I have discussed the work of tactical media practitioners in addressing this challenge. While I consider their work to be effective in challenging hegemony in network society, it does not produce spaces of representation. Without such spaces of representation, I question how much theoretical advancement in avant-garde practices will be able to continue in future generations.

As I have argued in this dissertation, avant-garde practitioners and scholars have largely overlooked the importance of space for the building of community and the development of new practices. Like Patti Smith said of CBGBs, new kids with new ideas will make their own places<sup>437</sup> However, many of these spaces have only been possible by someone with the means doing so, such as Madame Rachou at the Beat Hotel or John S. Johnson at Eyebeam. To credit these avant-garde

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<sup>437</sup> “CBGB Brings Down the Curtain With Nostalgia and One Last Night of Rock - New York Times.” Accessed January 5, 2015.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/16/arts/music/16cbgb.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/16/arts/music/16cbgb.html?_r=0).

subcultures only to the kids, overlooks the importance of such spaces of representation. It is my hope that this dissertation, inspire future avant-garde subcultures to incorporate production of space into their practices.

Eyebeam is an example of how a space of representation can give life to new theoretical work and artistic communities. Eyebeam has partially overcome the properties of network society by providing access to and training around technology, forcing participants to engage each other in shared physical spaces, and protecting their personal interests despite the trends of the global arts community. As such, I believe Eyebeam is a model for the kinds of spaces that need to be produced in order to preserve the avant-garde tradition in society.

Eyebeam is a unique institution that has existed in a large part due to the support of John S. Johnson and its partnerships with technology foundations and companies such as the Mozilla Foundation, BuzzFeed, and the Huffington Post. It is not an appropriate model for wide-scale reproduction, because of the large economic resources it requires. However, as smaller hacker spaces have shown, it is possible to reproduce much of the Eyebeam access to technology by pulling together resources from participants and the larger community. One area of caution in this approach is that administrative duties can become overwhelming, and should be considered part of the operational costs when planning such spaces.

In the near future, I will continue my research and develop a frame work to formalize such practices within the larger communities of interest. This will involve a comprehensive study of the practices that hacker spaces and other artist collectives utilize in fostering community and engendering novel cultural production. This study will also incorporate a historical examination of past artist spaces such as the cafes, bars and clubs used by past avant-garde groups, as I have discussed briefly in this dissertation. The work of Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault serve as a framework for understanding spaces of representation, and evaluating such spaces for their affordances. For example, I imagine that not all spaces have adopted a similar “rough and ready” approach to their space as Eyebeam has, and I credit this with being part of their success, and something that should be one of the practices evaluated in my work. From my study will emerge a set of recommendations that have been shown to work in other spaces.

A second continuation of this research should consist of producing an appropriate online repository for such findings to be shared. In my research for this dissertation, I have compiled a great deal of different practices from online blogs (such as Ciocci’s), historical documents on past avant-garde subcultures, theoretical texts (such as those on tactical media), and from personal experience. It is important to create an online space where these can be presented, added to and discussed by a community of persons interested in this topic.

The research, as an examination of the importance of boundaries to small creative groups, has the potential to benefit a number of disciplines. For one, the design of spaces intended for creative production would do well in incorporating a concept of boundary. I find recent news articles on the negative effects of the “open office” trend<sup>438</sup> unsurprising, as it is endemic of an overall under-appreciation for the importance of space and boundaries to creativity.

Understanding boundaries, and using research such as this dissertation, to design boundaries into creative spaces, will, in my opinion, improve their overall qualitative effect. A second area that this research aligns with is artistic entrepreneurship, which seeks to create new theories and practices for artists to operate as successful business entities. This tactical approach to creativity is similar to the one presented by this dissertation, as I have argued that spatial production will qualitatively improve cultural output. Artists are finding the lines between themselves and businesses increasingly blurred, particularly for those artists seeking to operate outside of the institutions of art. The methods for producing spaces which accommodate art practices are therefore relevant to

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<sup>438</sup> Feifer, Jason. “Offices For All! Why Open-Office Layouts Are Bad For Employees, Bosses, And Productivity.” *Fast Company*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.fastcompany.com/3019758/dialed/offices-for-all-why-open-office-layouts-are-bad-for-employees-bosses-and-productivity>.

Vaccaro, “How Open Floor Plans Are Killing Employee Productivity.” *Inc.com*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.inc.com/adam-vaccaro/when-transparency-and-productivity-are-at-odds.html>.

Groth, Aimee, 2012, 3:21 Pm 8, and 643 9. “Why An Open Office Environment Can Totally Kill Creativity.” *Business Insider*. Accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.businessinsider.com/why-an-open-office-environment-can-totally-kill-creativity-2012-1>.

those artists operating as entrepreneurs. By engaging in this future work, the production of creative spaces, including those that have birthed the avant-garde, will hopefully thrive.



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