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Coniunctionis

Trauma, Transformation, and Punk Rock

Philosophy, Interview, and Research

By David Kopacz

November 2000 - December 2002



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CONIUNCTIONIS

Trauma, Transformation & Punk Rock

(2000 – 2002)

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CONIUNCTIONIS.o

Introduction:

*On stranger waves, the lows and highs
Our vision touched the sky.¹*

There is a movement within me, a current and flow that lives through me. I have felt the pull to be inside, where everything is happening. I have felt the pull to be outside of it all, where nothing is happening. These essays, written between 2000-2002 for the online journal *Mental Contagion*, are attempts to understand the inside and the outside and the power that flows from outside to inside and from inside to outside. These essays are investigations into the nature of reality through Joy Division, trauma, transformation, and punk rock.

There is a pull that some people feel, to go deeply inward, sometimes that pull is a push, from alienation or trauma in the outer world. Going into this inner wilderness is a kind of darkness and it can overlap with despair. Maybe despair is the cause of the inwardness or maybe despair is a station along the path of inwardness, like a phase of grief that one goes through, leaving the communal and collective world and entering into the sacred inner cave of consciousness and being. Jung wrote,

As a child I felt myself to be alone, and I am still, because I know things and must hint at things which others apparently know nothing of, and for the most part

¹ "A Means to an End," Joy division, *Closer*, 1980.

do not want to know. Loneliness does not come from having no people about one, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself, or from holding certain views which others find inadmissible. The loneliness began with the experiences of my early dreams, and reached its climax at the time I was working on the unconscious. . . .

It is important to have a secret, a premonition of things unknown. It fills life with something impersonal, a *numinosum*.²

For Jung, this loneliness was difficult to bear, but it was a source of learning and experience that he would not have traded for fitting in. Ian Curtis, the lead singer of Joy Division, also found a creativity in the darkness and the loneliness and he sent back missives from the depths, as a lone astronaut exploring space might send back scratchy transmissions from another galaxy:

“You’ve been seeking things in darkness, not in learning” (No Love Lost)

“I’ve been waiting for a guide to come and take me by the hand.
Could these sensation make me feel the pleasures of a normal man?
These sensations barely interest me for another day
I’ve got the spirit, lose the feeling, take the shock away (Disorder)

Depending on how this pull is engaged in, one goes on an inner journey. If one goes deep enough, there is an inner well of transformation, drinking that water of the deep self is like a form of rebirth, but rebirth infers that there has been a death. Without guidance, many are lost on this path and there is untold loss of human potential. Yet, these brave souls, these inner warriors, can serve as heroes as well as cautionary tales. To give one’s self over to this inner secret is like taking the steps of what Joseph Campbell called the “Hero’s Journey,”

² Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 356.

with steps of 1) separating from the everyday world; 2) entering into a magical world or the underworld and going through an initiation and transformation into a new way of being; and 3) a return and reintegration into society. Jung's process of individuation would say that the hero brings back energy and ideas from the collective unconscious, and yet the hero bringing this back is alone, because no one else made that journey and no one else yet understands the beauty and value of what the hero or heroine has brought back from the unconscious into the light of day. Joseph Campbell felt that the hero is rejected by society, because he or she has gone places that most people do not know or understand. Herman Hesse, in *Steppenwolf*, wrote of a similar concept, that creativity is infused into society by the lone wolf, the liminal being, the misfit.

“We are psychiatrists; we are German; we have read Nietzsche; we know that to gaze too long at monsters is to risk becoming one – that is what we get paid for,”
(Huelsenbeck, quoted in Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 226).

I was a young psychiatrist when I was writing these columns and I was trying to find my path as an artist, a writer, a professional and a person. I was not German, but I had read Nietzsche, Jung, and a number of other writers you'll find in these pages. I had listened to Joy Division and punk rock and post-punk. I was gazing at monsters, both inner and outer, as Richard Huelsenbeck, the Dadaist Psychiatrist.

These essays were about me trying to figure some things out, but they are really more explorations than answers. Over the years, the topics in these essays have resurfaced and recurred in my life in various ways. After a period of some years, I found that I had more to write on these topics and began writing additional columns.

For the purpose of this archival collection, I have just collected those essays published in *Mental Contagion* 2000 – 2002. Post 9/11/2001, I mostly shifted to doing interviews for the column, for this collection I have kept just a few interviews as many of them seem more specific to that time and that place (Champaign-Urbana, Illinois). You can read more recent *Coniunctionis* essays on my blog [Being Fully Human](#). My website www.davidkopacz.com also has the original *Coniunctionis* essays, along with artwork, photography, poetry, publications, and other work. The work of *Coniunctionis* prefigures my current work with Joseph Rael (Beautiful Painted Arrow) and has continued to influence my writing and published work:

[*Re-humanizing Medicine: A Holistic Framework for Transforming Your Self, Your Practice and the Culture of Medicine*](#) (2014)

[*Walking the Medicine Wheel: Healing Trauma & PTSD*](#) (2016) with Joseph Rael (Beautiful Painted Arrow)

[*Becoming Medicine: Pathways of Initiation into a Living Spirituality*](#) (2020) with Joseph Rael (Beautiful Painted Arrow)

CONIUNCTIONIS.I

Why Coniunctionis?

(November, 2000)

Coniunctionis is Latin meaning unification or joining together. This term is taken from Carl Gustav Jung's last theoretical work, *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (1955-1956). Jung's later work focused on alchemy as a metaphorical representation of the process of the transformation. Alchemy has generally been considered to be a pre-scientific attempt to manipulate substances, such as transforming lead into gold. From the perspective of modern science, alchemy is considered to be of only historical interest as a primitive and magical (that is irrational, unscientific) precursor of contemporary chemistry.³ Contrary to this view, Jung found in alchemy a strain of thought which sought not only to understand the transformation of substances, such as lead into gold, but also to transform the more subtle substances (or energies) such as the psyche. Thus, for Jung, alchemy was a pre-psychological system and theory of the process of psychic change and growth, which he termed,

³ alchemy (n.)

...mid-14c., from Old French *alchimie* (14c.), *alquemie* (13c.), from Medieval Latin *alkimia*, from Arabic *al-kimiya*, from Greek *khemeioa*...Perhaps from an old name for Egypt (*Khemia*, literally "land of black earth," found in Plutarch), or from Greek *khymatos* "that which is poured out," from *khein* "to pour," from PIE root **gheu-* "to pour"...The *al-* is the Arabic definite article, "the." The art and the name were adopted by the Arabs from Alexandrians and entered Europe via Arabic Spain. Alchemy was the "chemistry" of the Middle Ages and early modern times, involving both occult and natural philosophy and practical chemistry and metallurgy. After c. 1600 the strictly scientific sense went with chemistry, and alchemy was left with the sense "pursuit of the transmutation of baser metals into gold, search for the universal solvent and the panacea."

<https://www.etymonline.com/word/alchemy>

“individuation.” Prior to examining this question of why this column will be titled *Coniunctionis*, a highly condensed survey of alchemical and Jungian theory will be required.

The “*coniunctio*” is the union of opposites in the alchemical work, combining high and low, good and evil, matter and spirit, and base and precious in such a way that the polarized conflict of opposites was united in a third point of synthesis. This synthesis neither negates nor reduces the opposites, but incorporates both in a third term. The alchemists believed that this synthesis resulted in the “*lapis philosophorum*,” or philosopher’s stone which transcended and combined those tensions inherent in physical existence. The stone had both tremendous healing powers as well as powers of destruction. Jung discerned that some alchemists realized that the true goal of the work, or “*opus*,” was not simply the creation of gold, but rather the spiritual and moral transformation of the self.

Jung considered this process of transformation, or “individuation” as consisting of a gradual and continuous (that is, it never reaches completion) interchange between the unconscious and consciousness. Another term he used was the “self,” which is the goal that individuation approaches asymptotically. The “self” consists of the conscious, experiencing ego, the personal unconscious (historical memories of an individual nature), as well as the “collective unconscious” (which is comprised of those universal elements and conflicts of humanity). The collective unconscious communicates with the personal unconscious and the conscious ego indirectly through dreams, fantasies, and charged interpersonal relationships. This communication is mediated by what he called “archetypes,” which are images or ideas which constellate various possibilities of experience and relationship. These archetypes tend to have both “positive” and “negative” elements as the unconscious is, in a very real sense, beyond human conceptions of good and evil.

So, let us return to our question, “why *Coniunctionis*?” I have recently returned to a study of Jung in an attempt to understand certain questions and difficulties in the process of life. Two primary threads have led me back to Jung, both of which involve change and transformation. The first is an ongoing examination of punk and post-punk rock in which expressions of anger, violence, and despair (which are often considered “negative” or “destructive”) can lead to a transformation in which one goes deeper and deeper into an emotional state and then somehow ends up on the other side, or perhaps beyond it, or perhaps it is seen in some larger context. A related question to this is “can a performer go to these extremes and the audience somehow go along vicariously?” And, further, “can the audience experience a transformation even if the performer succumbs to the dangers involved in the exploration of extreme states?” I will return to these questions in later editions of this column.

The second thread that has led me back to Jung is that of personal transformation of the individual, particularly when that transformation leads one through a period of darkness and despair. Periods of depression, dissatisfaction, physical or mental illness were viewed by Jung as often announcing a process of change and were, perhaps even necessary for the process of *individuation*. Here again, Jung found an alchemical parallel with the process of psychological transformation. The alchemists had a stage of the work called the “*nigredo*,” or stage of darkness or death, which had to be passed through in order for further transformation to occur. This is similar to the concept that change requires a disruption of a past state of equilibrium and that old patterns of thinking must be discarded (the birth of the new requires the death of the old).

Common to both of the above threads is the issue of the “negative,” illness, despair, rage, pessimism, nihilism, and how these states can be transformed, not simply into the opposite “positive” perspective of optimism, happiness, and good health, but rather into something else, a third perspective. Jung’s theory has a place for such negatives, not simply as pathologies to move beyond, but as integral parts of growth and transformation (that is, life).

In choosing the name *Coniunctionis* for this column, I am reminding myself to avoid a dichotomous strategy for solving problems. The topic matter will be cultural, artistic, and psychological issues, with a particular attention to the interplay between darkness and light. While I have focused a great deal on Jungian theory thus far, I hope this will not be a “Jungian” column. I would also like to include other thinkers and writers, such as Nietzsche. I will start each column with a question and then attempt to allow the various answers to dialogue and interrelate in a synthetic manner. I will let Hölderlin have the last words, “Where danger is, there is salvation also.”

CONIUNCTIONIS.2

Is Reality Real? (Part 1)⁴

(December, 2000)

Does Advanced Technology Lead to Enslavement, or at Least to Dehumanization?

This is a common theme in Science Fiction. From the minds of “genius” scientists spring forth every type of mutant monster, robot, computer, weapon, virus, genetic hybrid or what have you. There is an inherent fear in the human psyche of one of the very things that makes us human, our desire to create and tamper with nature. Yet, on the surface, Americans from the USA are uncritically obsessed with the newest and latest and we tend to think that there is opportunity for unlimited progress in every human endeavor.⁵ However, below this surface level of material optimism, lies the (culturally unconscious) fear of this very progress through technological advancement. In Jungian thought, this unconscious fear could be considered to compensate for the over-valued, one-sided conscious attitude toward progress

⁴ Poet E. Richard Hoffman, of Omaha Nebraska, was a regular contributor to *Mental Contagion* under the name “Butcher Boy.” Eric told me that he was going to write his first column on *eXistenZ* and *The Matrix*. I said, “of course you will comment on the parallels in *The Matrix* to Buddhist and Hindu conceptions of enlightenment, with a particular emphasis on lifting the veil of illusion (or *maya*).” Eric simply said “No, I’d never even considered that.” He ended up not even writing about *The Matrix*, so I felt compelled to write this column that I had been hoping to read. Eric also, incidentally, turned me on to Philip K. Dick.

⁵ This attitude of unlimited progress is essential to capitalism (planned obsolescence), but is, perhaps, not a product of capitalism, but more related to the tradition of linear time in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

and technology. In Jungian terms this fear is an aspect of the *Shadow* (which contains all the attitudes which the conscious mind rejects, but which still are a necessary component for a realistic approach to reality).

This fear of technology can be traced back to the anti-industrial movement of the Luddites, the various isolationist religious groups who reject technology as an interference with spirituality, or, in a way, even back to antiquity and the Greek conception of hubris (the arrogance of a human being who presumes to be able to act like a god). Hubris is always punished severely in the old Greek tragedies. Now, instead of fearing retribution from the gods, we instead fear retribution from our own creations (and, to the extent that our creations are extensions of ourselves, we fear ourselves – or, in Jungian terms again, our *Shadow*). Unfortunately, this fear is not just something which we see projected into, or “played” with in the arts, but it also confronts us in a very real way in the form of nuclear weapons, biological warfare, genetically-modified food, increasingly more advanced robots and computers, and a proliferation of communication and monitoring technology, all of which is quickly making possible dystopian worlds, like in Orwell’s *1984*, or Philip K. Dick’s *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*, or *A Scanner Darkly*.⁶

In *The Matrix* (which will be the focus of next month’s column) the feared technology is a group of AI (Artificial Intelligence) creations of humanity which turn on their creators and enslave them in a false reality. The created “game” (or *matrix*) is considered reality by those who are in it. There are only two levels, illusion (*matrix*), and reality. The transcendent moment is when Neo sees the matrix as it is: illusion and computer code. He is

⁶ Actually, *Scanner* has a somewhat similar theme to “eXistenZ,” in which the main character switches back and forth between two realities. In one reality, he is Bob Arctor, acting out the role of a drugged out goon, but in the other, he is Fred, a narcotics agent monitoring Arctor and his group of goons. Also, there is a twist at the end, is there not, which reality is reality? Or, to put it in Dickian terms, which is the “fake” fake?

able to break free of the illusory reality and maintain what William Blake called “double vision,”⁷ or the ability to see two different realities at the same time.

In *eXistenZ* reality is not so clear and there is no clarifying double vision. Instead, there is a paranoid, claustrophobic feel, rather than a transcendent “hero with a thousand faces” script. Butcher Boy cites Pikul’s comment that upon returning to the supposed reality, that it “feels completely unreal.” Butcher then goes on to write, “placed within this context, this feeling of ‘unreality’ is an insight from Pikul’s perspective,” (from the November issue of *Mental Contagion*). This insight (really a form of doubt) is achieved after the experience of a different reality. In returning back from game reality, real reality no longer seems as real. Is this because Pikul now finds himself nested within a maze of realities in which it is no longer possible to differentiate game and reality, or is it simply that this experience of the alternate, game reality has infected Pikul’s minds with a doubt which he had never even thought to consider before: can he trust his perceptions to tell him what true reality is?

What repeatedly strikes me is that these issues and questions concerning reality are not new, nor are they simply an artifact of high technology. These same questions are asked and contemplated throughout the history of philosophy, back to the ancient Indian and Chinese texts. For instance, Chuang Tzu (a Taoist sage, 4th Century, B.C.E.) reports his dream that he was a butterfly zipping through the air. Then, however, he awakens and is perplexed: is he now an awakened Chuang Tzu who had dreamed he was a butterfly, or is he

⁷ “For double the vision my Eyes do see
And a double vision is always with me.
With my inward Eye ‘tis an old Man grey;
With my outward a thistle across my way.”

William Blake, letter to Thomas Butts Nov 22, 1802, in *The Portable Blake*, 208.

a sleeping butterfly who is now dreaming he is an awakened Chuang Tzu? There is a philosophical term for this problem, “egocentric dilemma,” which basically states that all of our experience with reality is mediated by our perceptions, however, it is realized that some perceptions are erroneous, therefore one can never truly know if what one perceives is reality or error.

Another example of the question of reality (which is also not mediated by technology) is in the current debate over Recovered Memory vs. False Memory Syndrome. Here the issue is whether an individual can repress (forget) a traumatic memory and then at a later time experience anamnesis to remember the previously forgotten event. A primary question is how can we determine the veracity of an internal perception (memory)? This is similar to the “egocentric dilemma,” but now the perception in question is coming from the internal, rather than the external environment. Now the dilemma is not a question of, “what is reality,” but rather, “who am I and what has happened in my life?” This debate is linked in with the larger question of does multiple personality disorder exist? In multiple personality, an individual has multiple centers of consciousness, which do not necessarily share memory with one another, in other words, there are multiple realities within the same physical brain and body. The world of a person with multiple personality could be very much like the world of “eXistenZ,” a difference being that each “character” would not have full access to the memories of the other “characters” in different game realities. What could be present is some form of “bleed through” from one reality to another.⁸

⁸ I would like to make a passing reference to a few movies which explore this theme of forgotten memory, multiple identity, or multiple realities: “Fight Club,” “Angel Heart,” “Sliding Doors,” and “Being John Malkovich,” just to name a few. These themes are also common in Philip K. Dick’s books, particularly, *Valis* and the above-mentioned *Flow My Tears...*, and *A Scanner Darkly*. In regard to an electronic communication with the editor of *Mental Contagion* (Karen Kopacz), it does seem that there is a proliferation of books and movies exploring these *deep* themes, even in the popular media.

E. Richard Hoffman, writing in *Mental Contagion*, notes this phenomenon of “bleed through” in *eXistenZ*. This occurs when a repeated theme or object that recurs (contaminates?) in various levels of game or reality. For instance, the associations of the dog and a gun, or the “strong anti-game theme.” This concept of *bleed through* is commonly found in Freudian theory in discussions of the interactions between the unconscious and conscious realities. For instance, the day residue in dreams refers to routine events of the day which find their way dreams. Also, there are the two levels of reality of the dream, the manifest (surface) content and the latent (hidden) content. In fact, *bleed through* is the only way that the conscious and unconscious can communicate. Freud considered dreams to be the “royal road” to the unconscious because of this bleed through of unconscious material into the dream consciousness. The unconscious could also bleed through in the form of what we now call Freudian slips, in which a person would inadvertently reveal a deeper truth or preoccupation through a linguistic mistake.

Butcher’s closing statement is this: “*eXistenZ* warns us that the further we inundate ourselves with alternate or virtual realities, the more effective technology assembles and organizes our lives, the more we lose touch with a sense of reality and with ourselves as human beings.” The strange thing is that I fully agree with this (justifiably?) paranoid position toward science and technology, but there is something in me that is, at the same time, unsettled by this statement. I think I would have agreed with it before considering the parallels in *The Matrix* and *eXistenZ* between advanced technology’s distortion of the perception of reality and the ancient sages’ question of “what is reality?” In a way it may mean that, although we appear to lose touch with our humanity through technology, we may also come full circle and confront our basic human-ness in immediate and vivid ways which

are beyond the wildest dreams and speculations of philosophers. Mind you, I am simply saying that technology is a double-edged sword, perhaps like the way to enlightenment, it is a razor's edge. I am not sure if it is the nature of virtual realities to cause us to lose touch with our selves, per se. We have been very effective at losing touch with our selves even without the aid of technology. What technology does, however, is raise the cost of what could happen in an automated world in which we no longer know who we are. What I would like to ponder is whether there is a way to integrate our shadowy fear of technology with our uncritical drive toward innovation and manipulation of matter, in a way that we can confront ourselves and our fears and in the process transform ourselves so that we can better handle the responsibility of high technology. I would agree that, at this point in time, the rate of change of technology is outdistancing the rate of change of our consciousness. While this invokes the potential for great danger, it may also provide an incentive to change consciousness. This attempt at changing consciousness could possibly explain the number of recent movies and books dealing with these issues of technology, reality, and identity.

CONIUNCTIONIS .3

Is Reality Real? (Part II)

(January, 2001)

The Wachowski brothers' film, *The Matrix*, begins with Trinity's⁹ descent into the world of the matrix. She is searching for "the One" by running code on a laptop, when she is interrupted by a group of policemen who she quickly overcomes in a display of supra-worldly fighting skills.

The next scene: Neo¹⁰ asleep at his computer. It (the computer) flashes at him, "Wake up, Neo." Thus begins Neo's awakening to the realization that the "reality" in which he has been living is an illusory reality, fed to him and other enslaved (unenlightened or sleeping) humans through a series of computer cables (recall the "bio-port" of *eXistenZ*), while, in the "true" reality, they slumber in suspended animation, with their energies being used as battery cells for a race of AI machines that now control the earth. There follows a lot of special

⁹ The name "Trinity" calls to mind the Christian trinity of the father, son, and the holy ghost, yet Trinity is here cast as the holy ghost, the messenger of God/the wise old man, Morpheus. She is the young woman of great beauty, yet also great power and strength who enters Neo's world to entangle him in adventure/enlighten him. This is the role of the Jungian "anima," the feminine principle who draws man into both life's joys and dangers. As Jung writes, the anima is "is the great illusionist, the seductress who draws him into life with her Maya – and not only into life's reasonable and useful aspects, but into its frightful paradoxes and ambivalences where good and evil, success and ruin, hope and despair, counterbalance one another. Because she is his greatest danger she demands from a man his greatest, and if he has it in him she will receive it," *Aion*, p. 13.

¹⁰ The name comes from *neo-* from Greek, *neos*, meaning "new." Here, in his hacker name, there is the promise of something new, a rebirth. Also, the ritual of re-naming occurs in initiation rites symbolizing a passage from one realm of life to another.

effects panoramas of shoot outs, chase scenes, and martial arts fights. Sounds like a far-fetched SF movie, right?

Yet, “The Matrix” is saturated with themes of Heroic Quest and references to numerous spiritual and religious traditions of the world. These are the elements in which I am interested, particularly the interesting ease with which the high-tech, SF narrative parallels ancient, low-tech spiritual narratives of enlightenment. This paper is thus a continuation of the examination of the nested layers of reality created by technology in Cronenberg’s “eXistenZ” in the past issues of *Mental Contagion*.

The Christian elements of *Matrix* are obvious – “Trinity,” and the “One” who is a savior who dies and is reborn to teach others the way. There are also Gnostic¹¹ elements– the world (matrix) is a creation meant to enslave humanity in delusion, true reality is attained by denying or “seeing through” the illusory reality. Also, reality/matrix is created by the evil and demented AI machines. This reality is invaded (see Philip K. Dick’s *Divine Invasion* and *Valis*) by the good spiritual elements, i.e. Trinity and Morpheus, to save humanity from delusion.

This view of reality/matrix as illusion will be my primary focus. It is my opinion that this question of the reality of reality is becoming more pertinent to a large number of people as a result of the tremendous advances in computer and communication technology. Yet, this question of reality is an ancient one, and can be traced back to Gnosticism (in the West) and Hinduism and Buddhism (in the East).¹² Of particular importance is the Hindu-

¹¹ Gnosticism flourished in the early centuries A. D. and was eventually branded as heretical and suppressed by the Orthodox Church in the 4th and 5th centuries A. D. See Joseph Campbell’s *Creative Mythology*, and *Occidental Mythology* for a summary of Gnosticism.

¹² This view is expressed in Jungian analyst, James Hillman’s statement that the “real revolution going on in the individual soul is...a struggle for a wholly new (yet most ancient and religious) expression of reality,” *Insearch*, p. 79.

Buddhist conception of “*maya*.” The concept of *maya* is that the perceived phenomenal world of reality is a veil of illusion. In Hinduism, *maya* is a consequence of the dance of the feminine principle, “*Sakti*.” Behind the veil is the reality of “*Brahman*,” or the unitary element of existence of which there is no division, but out of whom emanates all things. *Maya*, thus “expresses the notion that there only seems to be a world composed of distinct conscious and non-conscious things, and rather than this seeming multiplicity there exists only ineffable *Brahman*,” or we could say, the *One*, (*Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*). Enlightenment, “(*moksha*) is conceived as seeing through the illusion,” of *maya*, (*ibid.*).

Buddhism, (Guatama Siddhartha, c. 563 – 479 B. C.) which grew out of the matrix¹³ of Hinduism in India, inherited the conception of *maya*, but did away with the idea of a deity behind the illusion. Instead, illusion is a consequence of our own perceptions. As Mahayana Buddhist thought maintains, “our sensory experience is not reliable, but rather it is systematically illusory,” (*Cam. Dict. Phil.*). Buddhism conceives of enlightenment as consisting of the realization that the phenomenal world is unsatisfactory, impermanent, and further, that there is no permanent self. This leads to the principle of non-attachment to the world and to one’s ego and body, which leads to a release from the cycle of death and rebirth.

To return to “The Matrix,” Neo’s break from illusory reality, or *maya*, occurs through the intervention of the Anima (Trinity), the Shadow (Cipher,¹⁴ the traitor also, the Agents

¹³ The word, “matrix,” is defined as “1. Something within or from which something else originates, develops, or takes form...5 a) a rectangular array of mathematical elements (as the coefficients of simultaneous linear equations) that can be combined to form sums and products with similar arrays having appropriate number of rows and columns...from Latin, Mater: mother; matrix: breeding animal” (interestingly, the Buddha’s mother was named Queen *Maya*).

¹⁴ The word, “cipher” is defined as, “1a. zero; 1b. one that has no weight, worth, or influence; 2a. a method of transforming a text in order to conceal its meaning; 2b. a message in code.” Cipher chooses the matrix/reality, or delusion, when he makes the deal with the Agents to betray Morpheus, he makes the statement, “Ignorance is bliss.” Cipher doesn’t even want to remember the deal he is making with the Agents, he wants his memory erased. This is the opposite of enlightenment and Cipher stands for all of those passing pleasures of the senses and body: wine, cigars, food, money, sexuality. So, his name is thus fitting, what he chooses is something which

who are, in a sense, creations of the collective mind of humanity) and the Wise Old Man (Morpheus)¹⁵ who offers him to partake of the sacred herb (the red pill). Neo then experiences the “return to the womb,” and a second birth, a re-birth, into the world of true, ugly reality of post-apocalyptic earth.¹⁶ Neo is then swallowed by the whale/dragon of Morpheus’ ship, the Nebuchadnezzar. There, the following dialogue (more or less) takes place between Morpheus and Neo:

M: “Welcome to the Real World.”
N: “Am I dead?”
M: “Far from it...”
N: “My eyes...”
M: “You have never used them before.”

In this Real World, Neo’s body and eyes are weak, atrophied and he has numerous bio-ports on his body for computer interface. He is then hooked up to various teaching programs, Matrix-like virtual realities, in which information is downloaded (recall: *gnosis*, or knowledge, of the Gnostics by which the initiate sees through the veil of illusion to the true reality and obtains what Blake called, “double vision,” or the ability to see two realities at once. Also recall Horselover Fat’s phosphene beam that downloaded information into his brain, in Philip K. Dick’s *Valis*). Neo gradually learns that his limitations in the Matrix lie in his mind, imposed by himself, rather than in his body and environment. By changing his

is irrelevant, or nothing, at least from a Buddhist perspective. Another interesting point about Ciphher is his role in the development of the plot, of Neo becoming the “One.” (We thus have a struggle between “the zero” and “the one,” or the fundamental binary code). It is largely a result of Ciphher’s actions which lead Neo to his realization. While he appears to be an “evil” or “negative” character, without him, Neo may not have reached a state of enlightenment. Another way to put it is that Ciphher’s role was necessary for the fulfillment of Neo’s role. Recall Mephistopheles in Goethe’s *Faust*, I am that “Part of that Power which would The Evil ever do, and ever does the good.”)

¹⁵ “Morpheus: the Greek god of dreams,” also, “-morph: form, shape, structure...from the Greek, morphē: shape.”

¹⁶ See Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, pgs. 75-91, for a discussion of these themes.

mind and expectations, he is eventually able to alter reality/matrix, e.g. bending a spoon with his mind, dodging bullets, and eventually seeing the computer code which creates the Matrix.¹⁷

Here, Neo transcends reality/matrix and pulls aside the veil of illusion. This *double vision* allows him to see and manipulate not only objects in the Matrix, but even his own Matrix-body. In the words of the philosopher, Roberts Avens, he achieves a “vantage point from which the ego too can be seen as an image among other images,” (*Imagination is Reality*, p. 39). From this vantage point, “his powers of imagination extend far beyond the compass of nature,” (*ibid.*, p. 22). The logic of this enlightenment experience can be diagrammed as a reversal of the usual process of perception:

From: Object ⇒ Sensory Perception ⇒ Psychic Image/Reality

To: Psychic Image/Thought/Belief ⇒ Sensory Perception ⇒ Altered Object/Reality

Then, thought, imagination, or belief determines reality.¹⁸

Neo’s ability to perceive reality/matrix as computer code, allows him to enter into (infect) the Agent who just killed him. He then destroys the Agent from within by bursting

¹⁷ Campbell: “One has but to alter one’s psychological orientation and recognize (re-cognize) what is within. Deprived of this recognition, we are removed from our own reality by a cerebral short sightedness which is called in Sanskrit *maya*, “delusion” (from the verbal root *ma*, “to measure, measure out, to form, to build, denoting, in the first place, the power of a god or demon to produce illusory effects, to change form, and to appear under deceiving masks; in the second place, “magic,” the production of illusions and in warfare, camouflage, deceptive tactics; and finally, in philosophical discourse, the illusion superimposed upon reality as an effect of ignorance,” *Oriental Mythology*, 13. Recall Plato’s allegory of the cave, in which what is perceived is only the shadow of the real object or archetype, or Idea.

¹⁸ This is similar to the theory of Cognitive Psychology, which maintains that faulty or pathological cognitive schemas lead to the manifestation of psychological and physical symptoms of depression and anxiety.

through him (illuminating him with light energy). This completes a full cycle, for earlier, Neo was infected by a mechanical tracking device by the Agent.

To move back briefly to Neo's death. He is surprised by an Agent and shot multiple times. As his matrix-body slumps to the ground, he hears the distant sound of falling empty bullet casings, and his "real" body (back in the ship) goes into cardiac arrest.¹⁹ Trinity then tells him her secret – she will fall in love with the "One," and since she loves him, he is thus the "One" and he cannot die – she kisses him and he is re-animated. Here, again, we see the power of thought/belief illustrated in the movie. One can trace Neo's achievement of being the One through a series of psychic infections by the belief of others.

When Neo is taken to the Oracle, he is told that Morpheus was told by her that he (M) would find the One.²⁰ In talking with the Oracle, it is Neo who says, "I am not the One," she never makes a pronouncement of whether he is or is not the One. She simply says, "You've got a gift, but it looks like you are waiting for something." (Perhaps what he is waiting for is an external pronouncement that he is the One. Recall in Buddhism, every person is potentially the One, meaning the Buddha, but the realization must come from within, rather than without). So, Neo imposes his belief on himself that he is not the One. Morpheus, however, continues to believe.

When Morpheus is captured and is being tortured by Agents, Neo has a breakthrough, "I don't *believe* this is happening," (emphasis added). Here, Neo sees through the illusion of the Matrix and begins to have an intuition of the power of belief and thought over "reality." He realizes that in believing he is the One, he actually becomes the One. As

¹⁹ This sound of falling shells re-occurs throughout the movie and is of a significance which will not be gone into at this time.

²⁰ Notice the use of sunglasses which both the Agents and Morpheus' crew wear – in an apparent attempt to remind themselves that what they see as reality is altered by their perception and is not the "true" reality.

he battles the Agents he becomes able to bend illusory reality/matrix more and more, yet, even so, he is shot and killed. At this point of surprise, his conditioned mind took over and he believed himself to be killed. However, the power of belief and imagination again invades the Matrix with Trinity's belief that Neo cannot die because she loves him and he is thus the One. With this belief and a kiss, Neo fully becomes the One and transcends the illusion of space-time in the Matrix.

Let us return to Campbell and notice how this next quote parallels the process in the above scene. One recognizes immediately the relationship of this Schopenhauerian concept of the will to the Indian idea of the *brahman*, which is identical with the self (*atman*) of all beings...The will as *brahman*, transcends the object-subject relationship and is therefore non-dual (*nir-dvandva*). Duality (*dvanda*), on the other hand, is an illusion of the sphere of space and time (*maya*): both our fear of death (*mara*) and our yearning for pleasures of this world (*kama*) derive from, and attach us to, this manifold delusion, from which release (*moksa*) is achieved only when the fear of death and desire for enjoyment are extinguished in the knowledge (Sanskrit, *bodhi*; Greek, *gnosis*) of non-duality (*nir-dvandva: tat tvam asi* ["thou art that"]). With that, the veil of delusion dissolves and the realization is immediate that 'we are all,' as Schopenhauer avers, 'one and the same single Being,' (Campbell, *Creative Mythology*, pgs. 78-79).

When Neo realizes there is no difference (or separation) between life and death, between himself and the Agent, he can just as easily be inside the Agent as outside of him.²¹

²¹ Recall the great scene in "Fight Club," "If he is me and the gun is in his hand, then the gun is in my hand."

So, why all this fuss and analysis over a SF movie? I would like to restate my thesis that this movie (as well as the earlier discussion of “eXistenZ,” and a plethora of other recent movies) represents an attempt on the part of the collective consciousness to grapple with questions of reality/identity. The stimulus for asking these questions is the rapid advance in technology which is challenging our traditional views of reality/identity. Interestingly, these new questions mirror age-old questions from religion, philosophy, and mysticism. One is left wondering at the “goodness of fit” of the ancient questions with the current crisis of reality/identity. Does the fact that these new and old questions mirror each other serve to validate the utility of earlier spiritual/philosophical practices?

In closing, I will admit the cautionary statement that these movies could represent a *spectacle* which serves to hide from view the true process occurring in the non-movie reality. In this way, movies addressing questions of reality and identity that seem to lead to an “expansion of consciousness,” could actually serve to distract from a contraction of consciousness at another level. To state it another way, because it is happening up there on the movie screen, it doesn’t have to happen in here, in my head, and aren’t those special effects awesome! In this sense, watching a film about breaking through the veil of maya could serve as a veil in a practical sense in the non-movie reality.

As the Critical Arts Ensemble argue that “with the imaging systems...the goal is not to prepare a person for life in the virtual, but to specify, regulate, and habituate he/r role in the material world,” (*Flesh Machine: Cyborgs, Designer Babies, and New Eugenic Consciousness*, p. 24). Or, again, that the “most significant use of the electronic apparatus is to keep order, to replicate dominant pancapitalist ideology, and to develop new markets,” [have you seen the special platinum edition of “The Matrix” on DVD?], (141). And, lastly, that if “new

consciousness is indicative of anything, it is the new age of imperialism that will be realized through information control (as opposed to the early capital model of military domination)” (155).

I wish to acknowledge these very valid caveats to the above discussion, and perhaps I will address *Flesh Machine* in a future column. I am basing the validity of these current questions of reality/identity on the basis of the mirroring of ancient traditions of philosophical and mystical investigation. However, just because something is ancient doesn't mean it is necessarily true. A slightly different way of looking at this issue is that if something keeps repeatedly presenting itself (whether it is considered true or false), the fact of its repetition is some degree of validation. The question thus remains: why this recurrence of the theme of is reality real?

CONIUNCTIONIS.4

How can ugliness and disharmony, which are the content of tragic myth [and punk rock], inspire esthetic delight?

Joy Division, Punk Rock, Violence, Despair & Transformation (Part I)

(February, 2001)

“How can ugliness and disharmony, which are the content of tragic myth [and punk rock], inspire esthetic delight?”

(Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 143).

“Why bother...with music so seemingly dead-end and depressing?”

(Mikal Gilmore, *Night Beat: A shadow history of rock & roll*, 159).

In other words, how is it possible to listen to the dark and despairing music of Joy Division and to somehow come out on the other side of despair, into a state of calmness and expansiveness?

Or, again, how can something lead to its opposite, or perhaps a better way of putting it is how does extremity (violence, trauma, despair) lead to the possible outcomes of varying degrees of transformation and destruction?

Manchester, England, 12/10/76: The day after the Sex Pistols' gig – Peter Hook and Bernard Sumner, inspired by the ethic of DIY (Do It Yourself) noise and expression, go out

and buy a bass guitar and an electric guitar. Thus begins the story that leads from punk rock to Joy Division, to New Order, and into the present. Hook and Sumner are soon joined by Ian Curtis (vocals) and Stephen Morris (drums). These four young men embark on a journey. The start in Manchester in the late 1970s – economically depressed, becoming post-industrial.

Manchester, England, 5/18/80 (On the eve of their first American tour):

Ian Curtis leaves Manchester via Herzog's film, *Stroszek*, Iggy Pop's *The Idiot*, a pot of coffee, a bottle of whiskey and a noose. Thus ends the story of Joy Division, and, thus, begins the story of New Order. The remaining 3 band members form New Order and add Gillian Gilbert (guitar, synth). They become an immensely popular, internationally known pop/dance band. (While New Order enjoyed larger commercial success, Joy Division continues to enjoy critical acclaim amongst artists as diverse as U2, Manic Street Preachers, George Michael, Nine Inch Nails, Girls Against Boys, Moby, Low, and Tortoise. Joy Division did have a number of songs high up in the English music charts and their song, "Love Will Tear Us Apart," was *Rolling Stones'* single of the year in 1980).

This is the story I would like to explore in the next few issues: 4 young men immerse themselves in the chaos and violence of punk rock, they descend into darkness, 3 of them emerge and add a feminine element and success follows.

Let us return to the late 70s – back to the 4 young men, ready to leave, leaving, but never leaving. And how does one leave, and yet never leave? **Perhaps by entering the "dreamtime" the *altjeringa* or *lalai* of the Native Australians, "the creative primordial state, per se...in which they fly to distant lands, or descend into the underworld,"** (Holger Kalweit, *Shamans, Healers, and Medicine Men*, 9-10). The dreamtime is the true reality which

interpenetrates the profane reality in which we spend our daily activities. In the dreamtime, past, present, and future can all simultaneously exist and communicate. The journey to the timeless state of dreamtime can be therapeutic, instructive, or destructive, it is a place of raw power, raw energy that can just as easily burn as be a tool.

We can think of the dreamtime in the following quote in Dave Simpson's discussion of the drugged-out appearance of Curtis in his performances, that he was **"giving himself over to the intensity that inevitably accompanied Joy Division's journey into the human psyche...Joy Division were about a cleansing, a purging of the soul,"** (Dave Simpson, liner notes of "Joy Division, The complete BBC recordings"). This journey begins in intense interiority and eventually expands outward to communicate with the universal, with the dreamtime, and it comes into contact with a primordial fire which can purge or destroy, depending on how it is handled.

*Here are the young men, a weight on their shoulders,
Here are the young men, well where have they been?
We knocked on the doors of Hell's darker chamber,
Pushed to the limit, we dragged ourselves in,
Watched from the wings as the scenes were replaying,
We saw ourselves now as we never had seen.
Portrayal of the trauma and degeneration,
The sorrows we suffered and never were free...
Where have they been?....*

"Decades" (1980),
(All lyrics are taken from Deborah Curtis' book, *Touching From a Distance*)

Like so many things, this story starts with frustration and disillusionment. Like so many things, it starts with the interplay of idealism and nihilism. Like so many things, this story starts with punk rock and the Sex Pistols. And how does it end?

*Weary inside, now our heart's lost forever,
Can't replace the fear, or the thrill of the chase,
Each ritual showed up the door for our wanderings,
Open then shut, then slammed in our face...
Where have they been?...*

“Decades”

Let's go back to the beginning...12/10/76, (or should we say, 10/12/76). We start with 4 young men from London passing the torch (igniting, setting on fire) 4 young men from Manchester. the stagnation and frustration is replaced by the motivating forces of idealism and nihilism. Add to the retort the sounds of Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground, David Bowie, Throbbing Gristle, and Iggy Pop; add the words of J.G. Ballard (*The Atrocity Exhibition*), William S. Burroughs, and Nietzsche (the philosopher who uses a hammer). The band starts as “Warsaw” (recalling Bowie’s “Warszawa,” off of *Low*, 1977), and they make some demo recordings. They soon change their name to Joy Division, which is reportedly the name of the barracks in the Nazi concentration camp which housed the female prisoners who were sexually used by the soldiers – from the novel, *House of Dolls*, by Ka-Tzetnik 135633 (cited in Jon Savage’s, “good evening, we’re Joy Division,” in the booklet from *Heart and Soul. Joy Division*, box set, 1997). Curtis had a preoccupation with the extreme and shocking, and these themes pervade his lyrics. Punk rock nurtured this cultivation of extremity in an effort to shake the audience out of their complacency (to *awaken* them).

In the bands early shows, Curtis acted out the aggression, extreme statements, and social criticism that were the punk fashion. Meanwhile, the rest of the band watched on, got lost in their playing, sometimes even turned their backs on the audience. Curtis developed a strange, flailing dance on stage and had fits of violence, slashing himself with broken glass and rolling around in it on stage. Blood and violence were not out of place at punk shows at

the time (Nor was it new, Iggy had already been bleeding on stage in the early 70s...nor was it new, the “**front man held in his extended right hand the small flint knife...the whole time the bull-roarers were sounding everywhere so loudly...the assistant circumciser grasps the foreskin, pulls it out as far as possible, and the operator cuts it off...a third man, sitting aside the boy’s body, grasps the penis and holds it ready for the stone knife, while the operator, appearing suddenly, slits the whole length of the urethra from below...the boy is lifted away and squats over a shield into which the blood is allowed to drain, while one or more of the younger men present...stand up and voluntarily undergo a second operation to increase the length of their incisions,**” (Joseph Campbell, describing the initiation rite of the Native Australian Aranda tribe *Primitive Mythology*, 96-97, 102-103).

Music mingled with violence and self-injury had quite an appeal to frustrated youth (and likewise to Native peoples desiring contact with the sacred). Joy Division’s music started out fast and hard and looked outward at all that was wrong in society and sought to destroy it. “**I wanna be anarchy...get pissed...destroy!**” (Johnny Rotten, the Sex Pistols, “Anarchy in the U.K.) “**Remember, however, that the passion for destruction is also a creative passion,**” (Bakunin, cited in Alvarez, *The Savage God*, 17).

Even in the rapid punk beat, Curtis’ lyrics prefigure the change about to come – the shadow clamoring to break out of the unconscious, even as the feet shuffle and kick.

*You’ve been seeing things,
In darkness, not in learning
“No Love Lost” (1977)*

The scene gradually shifts from outward to inward. The punk beat gradually slows to a funeral dirge, a trance induction, Curtis’ voice deepens and opens out into the emptiness of dreamtime, which is also a fullness. Curtis follows his guide, the calling voices, and in so

doing he becomes our guide into “hells darker chambers.”

*I've been waiting for a guide to come and take me by the hand...
It's getting faster, moving faster now, it's getting out of hand...
Until the spirit new sensation takes hold, then you know...
“Disorder” (1979)*

*Someone take these dreams away,
That point me to another day...
They keep on calling me,
Keep calling me,
They keep calling me
“Dead Souls” (1979)*

“Punk stripped music of pretensions to express the central Oedipal lyric of pop, ‘Fuck You’...For a couple of years all we needed to say was ‘fuck you’ but sooner or later someone would have to find a way to say ‘I’m fucked.’ With all the intensity on earth,” (Tony Wilson recounting a conversation with Bernard Sumner, liner notes of the tribute album, *A Means To An End: The music of Joy Division*, 1995).

12/27/78: Curtis had his first grand mal seizure, which seemed oddly prefigured in his strange, jerking dance of an automaton gone haywire (one reviewer of *Unknown Pleasures* (1979) called the music, “**death disco**”). He began to have seizures during gigs, particularly from the phototic stimulation of the strobe lights...the audience enthusiastically approved of him collapsing in a fit and falling into the drum set as the music peaked. Curtis, however, became increasingly ashamed at these episodes of loss of control.

*And she gave away the secrets of her past,
And said I've lost control again...
And she screamed out kicking on her side and said,
I've lost control again.
And she seized up on the floor, I thought she'd die.
She said I've lost control...
And she showed up all the errors and mistakes...
And walked upon the edge of no escape...
She's lost control again.
She's lost control.
“She's Lost Control” (1979)*

And he began to increasingly wonder at the crowds' thirst for blood shed and destruction, apparently, his destruction (consider the scapegoat or the human sacrifice that purifies the group at the expense of the individual).

*Where people had paid to see inside,
For entertainment they watch his body twist,
Behind his eyes he says, 'I still exist...'
But the sickness is drowned by cries for more,
Pray to God, make it quick, watch him fall...
This is the way, step inside...
"Atrocity Exhibition" (1980)*

Yet, in the end, he decides to accept his role as guide into the realms of despair and darkness, and ultimately death...

*Can't replace or relate, can't release or repair,
Take my hand and I'll show you what was and will be...
"Atrocity Exhibition" (1980)*

And here we will pause in our journey until next issue...In the following installments we will explore various issues, violence/despair and transformation; Jon Savage's *England's Dreaming*, Greil Marcus' *Lipstick Traces* and the Sex Pistols; Jung's stages of alchemical transformation; the shaman's journey through death to healing; Nietzsche on music, tragedy, the balance of creation and destruction in art; Bataille's writings on excess and inner experience; cultural critics discussion on "ugliness" in art and music; the interplay of the individual on the stage and the emotions of the audience; movement inward/outward.

For those interested in further reading, or in tracking down the veracity of what I have written, refer to:

Touching From A Distance, Deborah Curtis, 1995 (Ian's widow).

From Joy Division to New Order: The Factory Story, Mick Middles, 1996.
An Ideal For Living: An History of Joy Division, Mark Johnson, 1984.
Night Beat: A Shadow History of Rock & Roll, Mikal Gilmore, 1998.
And any of the various liner notes for Joy Division and New Order releases.

CONIUNCTIONIS.5

Why is Revolt Necessary?

Joy Division, Punk Rock, Violence, Despair & Transformation (Part II)

(March, 2001)

Many students and theorists of humanity end up struggling with the conception of the interplay of opposing, irreconcilable forces (for instance, Freud's life and death instincts). These students often end up with a respect for and acceptance of paradox, yet this can only be achieved through struggle, as it seems to be human nature to take the easy way of dichotomous thinking in which we value one side of the paradox and devalue (or even demonize) the other side. In reducing paradox to choice, we end up with a "this versus that" paradigm: life vs. death; good vs. evil; knowledge vs. ignorance; capitalism vs. socialism; productivity vs. unproductivity; Christian vs. pagan; republican vs. democrat; or order vs. chaos.

Transformation is the process of something changing into something else, sometimes this can be a bridge across paradox, for instance, something "good" comes out of something "bad." The process of transformation is an amazing thing and something we know very little about. Various theorists have incorporated transformation into their theories of humanity, yet there is a danger of then viewing the paradox as only a dialectical vehicle toward a

unitary concept (Jung: Individuation; Hegel: Spirit; Marx: Utopian (Communist) Society).

Joy Division, Punk Rock, Violence, Despair and Transformation (Part II)

The focus will be on the question: why did the cultural revolt (transformation) of punk take place? Was this revolt necessary? Can it be understood in a larger context of humanity? Two writers will primarily be considered in this section: Greil Marcus and Georges Bataille.

“NO FUTURE, NO FUTURE FOR ME” (Sex Pistols)

To begin with Marcus, the argument of his book, *Lipstick Traces: A secret history of the twentieth century* (1989), is that the Sex Pistols (punk rock) were one manifestation of a larger counter-cultural force. We could think of this as a counterforce (Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, pgs. 719-887) to the force of main stream society. Marcus traces this “secret history” back from the Sex Pistols to various 60s movements, Situationist International (1957) and Lettrist International (1952) (French cultural art movements), to the Surrealists (1920s), to Dada (1910s), and earlier to “the young Karl Marx, Saint-Just, various medieval heretics, and the knights of the round table,” (Marcus, 18). This is a pretty tall order to link these seemingly divergent movements, particularly in combining secular art/music movements with mysticism and heretics. However, if we try to imagine back into time how art/music were often vehicles for expressing elements from the spiritual domain (and perhaps, even developed out of a feeling of in-spiration from/by the Muses), we can see that the

manipulation of symbols in art/music parallels the manipulation of symbols in spiritualism. One could even argue that in our secular society, art/music is the primary spiritual experience for the masses. How else can we explain the power of art to “move” (transform) the individual, and, thus, the culture? Marcus focuses primarily on movements in the 20th century, where the connection to the sacred or spiritual had already been attenuated by years of intellectualism, rationalism, science, and modernist disappointment in Christianity as a world view. In later editions of this column we will explore some of the earlier connections to the “heretics,” mystics and shamans (just briefly consider the use of music in trance induction and explosions of violence and sacrifice in “pagan” outbursts (festivals), such as those described of the indigenous Australian tribes in the last issue).

A reasonable question to ask Marcus is: is this secret history transmitted from person to person (such as the oral traditions in Native cultures), or is it something that people can spontaneously tap into? I think Marcus would reply that it is both. He traces Malcolm McLaren’s (the Sex Pistols’ manager) and Bernie Rhodes’ (the Clash’s manager) education and experience back to various influences from art school, the 60s, and counter-cultural social movements (providing the direct transmission route). However, Marcus also argues that young Johnny Rotten didn’t have much direct knowledge of these earlier theories, but tapped into something deep within himself which seemed to resonate with something deep within the youth of his era. Marcus invokes Jungian ideas of archetypes and the collective unconscious, and also Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. We could extrapolate from Marcus and say that the reason people thought the Sex Pistols were important and inspiring (inspire: to “communicate by divine influence,” to “breathe life into”) was because they tapped into some transpersonal energy that was

infectious/contagious (that is, triggered some form of sympathetic resonance in the audience/listener). **“I saw the Sex Pistols,’ said Bernard Sumner of Joy Division...’They were terrible. I thought they were great. I wanted to get up and be terrible too,”** (Marcus, 7).

A Thinking That Does Not Fall Apart in the Face of Horror

So, what is the nature of this *counterforce*, this spring that nourishes Marcus’ *secret history*? To examine this question, we will turn to the writings of Georges Bataille (1897-1962). Bataille was a librarian of medieval studies, a seminary drop out (he said he quit when his religion made a woman he loved cry), an early Surrealist, a student of yoga and shamanism, a practitioner of “non-religious mysticism,” a co-editor of *Contre Attaque* (1935-6) with Andre Breton, the “head” of *ancéphale* (1936-39), the founder of the Collège de sociologie, the author of *Inner Experience*, *On Nietzsche, Literature and Evil*, “Base Materialism and Gnosticism,” and “Sacrifice, the Festival and the Principles of the Sacred World,” (see the introduction of *The Bataille Reader*, (hereafter, *BR*) F. Botting and S. Wilson (eds.) 1997). Bataille struggled to develop a **“thinking that does not fall apart in the face of horror, a self-consciousness that does not steal away when it is time to explore the possibility of the limit,”** (*The Accursed Share*, vol. II, cited in *BR*, p. 236). He was a thinker who viewed the truth as something which could not be captured by knowledge and words, and thus accepted the paradox inherent in humanity. The importance of Bataille is that he was a student of extreme states (like violence and despair, like punk rock).

“That which is revolting, shocking, that which disarms predictable patterns of thinking and feeling, that which lies at the unhallowed extremes and unavowed interstices of social, philosophical or theoretical frameworks, are the objects of

Bataille's fascination. Encounters with horror, violent disgust, that miraculously transform into experiences of laughter, intoxication, ecstasy, constitute, for Bataille, inner experiences that overwhelm any sense of distinction between interiority and exteriority," (BR, 2, emphasis mine).

*I hope to find some friends to maybe lead astray
To wake this dormant sleep and tread on father's grave*
(Joy Division, "Colony," Peel Session, 1979)

Bataille focused on various, interrelated, opposing forces: knowledge/non-knowledge; homogeneity/heterogeneity; profane/sacred; continuity/discontinuity; accumulation/excretion; productive/non-productive expenditure; sovereignty/servility; and being human/being a thing. Unlike Jung, Marx, and Hegel, Bataille did not postulate a third term, or goal to which these forces proceeded toward, in a dialectical fashion. Rather, he seemed to view these forces as the paradoxical basis of human (which makes little distinction between individual/social). In a way analogous to Oriental philosophy (and Jungian thought, to some extent) he did seem to think that there could be a "better" or "worse" harmony or balance of these forces. If both forces are accepted and allowed their place, it could possibly de-escalate the power and severity with which the repressed (heterogeneous or sacred) force which periodically invades or expresses itself in homogeneous (rational, order-based) society. (This can be thought of in energetic terms, in that the greater the force applied to repress, the greater the pressure builds in the opposite direction. This is reminiscent of Newton's third law of physics: every action has an equal and opposite reaction. While this is a well know principle of physics, it is not as readily apparent when applied to more subtle actions like thought. Bataille traced out this principle as it applied to realms of the sacred and heterogeneous. **"What is sacred undoubtedly corresponds to the object of horror I have spoken of, a fetid, sticky object without boundaries, which teems with life and yet is the sign**

of death. It is nature at the point where its effervescence closely joins life and death...An object that is repugnant presents a force of repulsion more or less great. I will add that, following my hypothesis, it should also present a force of attraction; like the force of repulsion, its opposite, the force of attraction will be more or less great," (*The Accursed Share*, vol. II, (AS), cited in BR, 251-2). Bataille argued that a balance of heterogeneous/homogeneous could possibly be obtained through frequent festivals which could give the sacred expression, rather than having it burst out in larger scale, mass violence. (I may be extrapolating from Bataille somewhat with this thesis).

Homogeneity/Heterogeneity

Bataille's terms *homogeneity/heterogeneity* and *knowledge/non-knowledge* are of particular relevance to the current examination. The homogeneous force is one which leads to a "productive...useful society," in which "every useless element is excluded," ("The Psychological Structure of Fascism," (PSF) in BR, 122). In homogeneous society, "human relations are sustained by a reduction to fixed rules based on the consciousness of the possible identity of delineable persons and situations, in principle, all violence is excluded from this course of existence," (ibid., 122). The force of homogeneity can easily be seen in rationality and science: "the object of science is to establish the *homogeneity* of phenomenon," (ibid. 126) and in capitalism: "each man is worth what he produces...he stops being an existence for *itself*; he is no more than a function, arranged within measurable limits," (ibid. 123). This argument is reminiscent of the Critical Arts Ensemble's, which seems to be influenced by Bataille, amongst others. **"Under this new bio-regime, physical perfection will be defined by**

an individual's ability to separate he/rself from non-rational motivation and emergent desires, thus increasing he/r potential devotion to the varieties of political-economic service to perpetuate the pancapitalist dynasty," (*Flesh Machine*, 5).

An opposing (or complementary) force to homogeneity is the heterogeneous, which he Bataille considers to include, "the *unconscious...the sacred* [and] everything resulting from *unproductive* expenditure," (PSF, BR, 126-7). The sacred, and likewise the heterogeneous, is "charged with an unknown and dangerous force...and a certain social prohibition of contact (*taboo*)," (ibid., 127). This conception of the sacred may seem somewhat foreign to the contemporary American. For instance, in Christianity the sacred has been sanitized, (d)evil has been split off from go(o)d, but if w-e look to the Old Testament, "pagan," traditional, and native cultures, the sacred is an ambivalent force in which good and evil are intermixed. What is perceived is a powerful charge or force that is unstable and can bring about a rapid transformation toward "good," "evil," or a paradoxical mixture of both. Bataille writes that **the heterogeneous (sacred), "consists of everything rejected by homogeneous society as waste or as superior transcendent value. Included are the waste products of the human body and certain analogous matter (trash, vermin, etc.); the parts of the body; persons, words, or acts having a suggestive erotic value; the various unconscious processes such as dreams or neuroses; the numerous elements or social forms that homogeneous society is powerless to assimilate: mobs, the warrior, aristocratic and impoverished classes, different types of violent individual or at least those who refuse the rule (madmen, leaders, poets, etc.),"** (ibid., 127).

"Non-Knowledge Lays Bare" (*Inner Experience*, in BR, 82).

Another pair of related terms is *knowledge/non-knowledge*. For Bataille, knowledge is the product of project, it is a reduction to utility, order, expectation, and thus a force of homogeneity. Knowledge is a function of time and effort. He writes, “thought, subordinated to some anticipated result, completely enslaved, ceases to be in being *sovereign*, that only un-knowing is *sovereign*,” (*The Accursed Share, vol. II, in BR, 308*). (The *sovereign* is a term closely related to heterogeneity, it is a state of being that is not reduced to utility or external definition by others). While Bataille often seems hostile toward knowledge, it is perhaps to compensate for the over-value which he saw modern culture giving to knowledge and the devaluation of non-knowledge.

The counterforce of knowledge is non-knowledge...it is “inner experience,” extreme states, it is not a function of time and effort, but comes of its own accord (as a gift, a curse, an infection, an inspiration). Non-knowledge is similar to non-attachment, it is a breakdown of the boundary between individual/other, individual/universe; it is transcendence and unity (as opposed to differentiation and objectification in knowledge).

“I resolved long ago not to seek knowledge, as others do, but to seek its contrary, which is unknowing. I no longer anticipated the moment when I would be rewarded for my effort, *when I would know at last*, but rather the moment when *I would no longer know*, when *my initial anticipation would dissolve into NOTHING*. This is perhaps a mysticism in the sense that my craving not to know one day ceased to be distinguishable from the experience that the monks called mystical - but I had neither a presupposition nor a god,” (ibid., 308).

***You’ve been seeing things,
in darkness, not in learning***
(Joy Division, “No Love Lost,” 1977)

***What did you see there?
I saw all knowledge destroyed***
(Joy Division, “Wilderness,” 1979)

Thus, the pursuit of non-knowledge leads away from the servility of the homogeneous and toward the sovereign, sacred, heterogeneous realm where non-knowledge, rather than knowledge is the mode of perception. In Bataille's view, the homogeneous force in society is reductive to utility, order, limitation of desires, and tries to moderate and/or exclude the heterogeneous (like Freud's battle between the Super-ego and Id, and also life and death instincts). (Notice the similarity, also with Nietzsche's forces of the *Apollonian/Dionysian* in art and culture). From the perspective of the homogeneous force, the heterogeneous is viewed as ugly, evil, bad, disruptive, chaotic, yet in a paradoxical way, also includes the opposite values of extreme beauty (do not look upon Diana in the nude), transcendence, and the breakdown of the isolated individual into a state of unification with the universe. In excluding the lowest, homogeneous society excludes the highest (remember the alchemical dictum, "as above, so below"). Thus, with the dominance of "Christian," Pancapitalist values of "goodness," productivity, utility, and the progress of sci/tech, we are separated from the repressed (dissociated) heterogeneous force.

For instance, consider books such as Hammerschlag's *The Theft of the Spirit*, or Mander's *The Absence of the Sacred*, which view contemporary society as being cut off from the life-giving spiritual force. (There is also the argument of the Religious Right, which calls out for a return to traditional, Christian values, but this could possibly be in the "sanitized" form of a religion of conformity and homogeneity, rather than an invitation for a "divine invasion" (P. K. Dick) into human life, which tends to upset, rather than support the existing social order, consider Dostoevsky's *Grand Inquisitor*). **"A culture that reveres life maintains its myths and symbols; without them, we dehumanize the life we live. A culture that upholds material wealth and technology as its only sustaining values worships death and**

stagnation. A culture that allows...materialism and technology to determine its priorities devalues life and the spirit, and leaves no room for mystery, dreams, and growth...We must reinvest our ceremonies and symbols with life-giving, healthful meaning,” (Hammerschlag, 21-26). This calls to mind Bataille’s call for a return of more meaningful festivals in which the repressed can be expressed (perhaps a connection to the collective unconscious and the realm of symbol and archetype?). Also consider the arguments of Joseph Campbell, Jung, James Hillman, and Roberts Avens, for a re-mythologization of contemporary life. These arguments are very similar to Bataille’s, contemporary culture has cut itself off from, has lost connection with, something that is vital (that invigorates, inspires) human life, and without it, we are something less than human and we befoul our environment (that is, our own cages). Also in this group, we can consider the various books that delineate the “wound” of contemporary culture, such as Kirby Farrell’s *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and interpretation in the nineties*. This book examines the current motive to view ourselves as victims in regard to all manner of aggressor (including those systems we ourselves have created). It seems that everyone feels wounded, yet no one knows what really caused it and how to transform it. In a sense, we are overly focused on the wound itself, instead of that which can come after the wound, as occurred for the shaman who gained power and (non-)knowledge from the wound. I will note that there is the embryonic field of Posttraumatic Growth which is just starting to receive serious study.

Conclusion

Going back to Marcus’ *secret history*, we can view the counterforce which the Sex

Pistols tapped into as being (from Bataille's perspective) a manifestation of that which homogeneous society represses and dissociates, namely the revolt (return) of the heterogeneous in its various guises of non-knowledge, the sacred, and sovereignty. This force is ambivalent..."I saw the Sex Pistols...They were terrible. I thought they were great." This revolt subverts the objectification and utilitarian view of the individual. The individual is infected with the vitality of the heterogeneous (and thus, contagious) and becomes sovereign, rather than servile. **"Yesterday I thought I was a crud...Then I saw the Sex Pistols, and I became a king,"** (Joe Strummer, Marcus, 37).

Again, going back to Marcus, we can say that whenever the homogeneous force of society becomes too stultifying, dehumanizing, so that the individual sees "no future," we can expect an eruption of the repressed heterogeneous force. Thus, revolt is necessary as long as the homogenizing force of society is not balanced by the heterogeneous.

CONIUNCTIONIS.6

Is alienation necessary for creativity?

Punk Rock, Violence, Despair & Transformation
(Part III)

(April, 2001)

Joy Division's first album, "Unknown Pleasures," was not printed with an "A" and a "B" side, but rather with an "Inside" and an "Outside."

Am I outside looking in, or inside looking out?

I stand outside looking in and I wonder...how did I get here? Was it by choice? The door opens and I turn my back on the smiling, happy faces. The door slams shut. I am still on the outside, looking in. How did I get here? Is this really where I want to be?

I think back...I got here because I never felt comfortable on the inside...because (maybe these are just excuses, maybe these are effects, rather than causes) I was too quiet, I thought too much, I was too self-conscious, too "weird." I felt rejected by the inside and yet I still wanted to belong there. I remember 8th grade...I remember being shocked and hurt to find out that the girl that I liked thought I was "weird." And how is it now that I would consider this a compliment?

Is choosing the outside just a **reaction formation** (psychoanalytic term: a **“common defense...characterized by warding off an unacceptable wish or impulse by adopting a character trait that is diametrically opposed to it,”** Gabbard, *Psychodynamic Psychiatry in Clinical Practice*). Is punk rock just a way of rejecting the inside and creating a new way/ve, that forms a new inside in the outside (a sense of belonging amongst those who do not belong)? Is this **“music by and for outcasts,”** (Jon Savage commenting on the Adverts in his book, *England’s Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock and Beyond*, 296). And is there not the risk of this new inside becoming like the old inside? Hence the arguments of “sell out,” “mellow out,” and the counterargument of it is “better to burn out than to fade away.”

“Frustration Is One of the Greatest Things in Art: Satisfaction is Nothing,”
(Malcolm McLaren’s college notes, winter 1967/8, in Savage, 9).

Anarchism: “a system of social thought , aiming at fundamental changes in the structure of society and particularly the replacement of the authoritarian state by some form of non-governmental cooperation between free individuals,” George Woodcock, *Anarchism*, cited in Savage, 27-8).

McLaren argues that the artist must be outside, frustrated, dissatisfied, in a word, outside. And what does one want if dissatisfied: change, which has two (at least two) aspects: destruction and creation. Dissatisfied with a social system in which one feels marginalized and alienated, one can strike out in anger, and perhaps then try to replace the old with the new. There is this possibility in the destructive: finding idealism, of stumbling on to a transformative idea, that maybe can be used to create a new inside, or perhaps to transform the inside that just extruded/was rejected by you. In fact, it seems to be common that the most negationistic or nihilistic individuals were once the staunchest believers, and that their angry energy and thirst for destruction/transformation comes out of frustrated idealism. As

a “post-punk” Lydon chanted: **“anger is an energy”** (“Rise,” from “Album,” 1985). I should have commented on this earlier, I am more of synthetic, rather than divisionist thinker. I do not see much point to the distinctions between art movements, whether it is “punk,” or “post-punk,” or “new wave,” these are arbitrary divisions that critics came up with to divide and understand and market the world more easily. It may be puzzling that I seem to lump Joy Division in with the Sex Pistols and Punk Rock. I am using the term “punk” in a broad way to include music (or art) that pursues extremity, rather than in a strict, historical sense of a certain period in the 1970s in New York or London. I thus consider the intense despair of Joy Division as one form of punk music, just as the chaos and disorder of the Sex Pistols is another way to pursue of extremity. All these divisions are more of a mental construction rather than inherent in the music. For instance, it is fair to consider Warsaw a punk band, but what about when the same band became known as Joy Division and put out “Unknown Pleasures?” Were they punk and then post-punk? Inside and then outside, or vice versa? When did they change from one to the other? When did the Clash stop being a punk band, were they ever? So, for purposes of this column, **I will use the term “punk” to represent a dangerous voice from outside that pursues extremity and/or promises radical change, such as a transformation of society, say through anarchism.**

Anarchism was an oft touted phrase for the punks, tear down the old, get rid of all the social structures which come between human being and human being, that come between a person and themselves, and replace it with a utopian vision. Various punk bands focused on one, the other, or both of these elements of change: the Pistols were primarily negationists; the Clash were more idealistic and utopian; Crass and Flux of Pink Indians were very much into the utopian idea of anarchism and were very constructive; Joy Division were, like the

Sex Pistols, negationists, yet turned inward to negate the self, rather than outward to negate the social. Thus, we have another conception of inside/outside: the internal mind of the individual/the interpersonal, political world. The anger from finding oneself outside of society can thus go in two (or more) directions: inside the individual or outside into the world. This recalls Freud's discussion of melancholia in which **"the shadow of the lost object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object,"** (Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 1917). Hence the anger/frustration toward the lost object (or, as we hinted at above, paradise lost...frustrated idealism) turns inward, creating despair and self-loathing. The ego becomes the forsaken object. What was outside is now inside. So, there are three directions that the energy of anger can go: inside toward the self, outside toward the social world, or both inside/outside in a rejection of all existence as in nihilism.

"It was a desperate stubborn refusal of the world, a total rejection: the kind of thing that once drove men into the desert"...[again, notice the reference to the mystical, the sacred, the quest – recall last the discussion of Bataille in last issue, particularly his concept of the "heterogeneous," an "unknown and dangerous force...(taboo)" and yet, at the same time, including the sacred and the "different types of violent individual or at least those who refuse the rule (madmen, leaders, poets, etc.)" *The Bataille Reader*, 127]...this refusal takes two forms, the "first was to throw all your rage outwards. The second was to write your own script of self-destruction," (Charlotte Pressher, cited in Savage, 136).

I wanna be anarchy! Get pissed! Destroy!

(The Sex Pistols "Anarchy in the U.K.")

“I’m so messed up. Somebody gotta help me please; somebody gotta save my soul,”
(Sid Vicious, Savage, 506).

*Mother I tried, please believe me
I’m doing the best that I can
I’m ashamed of the things I’ve been put through
I’m ashamed of the person I am
Isolation...*
(Joy Division, “Isolation”)

The Dangers of the Perverse-Modernist Itch

“We are psychiatrists; we are German; we have read Nietzsche; we know that to gaze too long at monsters is to risk becoming one – that is what we get paid for,” (Marcus, 226).

Obviously, there is some very real danger in finding oneself outside. Both Ian Curtis and Sid Vicious ended up dead by their own hand and they are only the tip of the punk rock iceberg of death, violence, and suicide. Add to this Darby Crash (the Germs), Peter Laughner (Pere Ubu), or, if you want to stretch the punk definition even further, even Jim Morrison and Kurt Cobain. It should not be too surprising then if some critics only see the self-destructive element of punk music and miss the other elements, particularly the idealistic, utopian elements. For instance, it interesting to read Martha Bayles’ book, *Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty & meaning in American Popular Music* alongside Mikal Gilmore’s book, *Night Beat: A Shadow History of Rock & Roll*. They both are looking at the same phenomenon and draw opposite conclusions. Bayles’ book is a lament of the loss of the “sublime and the beautiful” (that is from Dostoevsky’s, *Notes From Underground*, p. 7, which is what comes to mind as I read Bayles, these sentimental laments that remind me of the people in high school who used to come and say, “smile, it is not that bad!” Oh no, I would think, it is even worse.) in music. She appeals to principles of harmony and beauty and sees only ugliness and danger in punk. She sees punk as having shown, “precious little concern for what was supposed to be

left standing in its wake. Destruction was the thrill, the messier the better, therefore the proper word is ‘nihilism,’” (Bayles, 307). And she asks, **what “is the point of whipping up all this anger?”** (Bayles, 315). She attempts to subvert the argument of William S. Burroughs “when asked about his own proclivities for horrific imagery,” he remarked, “Look around. Just look around,” (Bayles, 316). She states that the “perverse-modernist itch to erase the line between art and life has taken a new twist: Because horror and evil exist in life, art has the right – indeed the obligation – to concentrate exclusively on them,” (Bayles, 316). Bayles’ argument seems to be that punk created as much or more negativity than it mirrored in society. If we again recall Bataille’s discussion of the “homogeneous” it appears to be similar to what Bayles is championing and what Dostoevsky puts in quotation marks, “the sublime and the beautiful.”

How is it that Bayles sees punk and even a lot of rock & roll in this light and Gilmore sees the same objective phenomenon and praises it? He writes that rock music (including punk): **“articulated losses, angers and horrible (as in *unattainable*) hopes, and that it emboldened me in many, many dark hours. It also, as much as anything else in my life, defined my convictions and my experience of what it meant (and still means) to be an American, and it gave me a moral (and of course immoral) guidance that nothing else in my life ever matched, short of dreams of sheer generous love or of sheer ruthless rapacity and destruction,”** (Gilmore, 1). Could the difference be explained by Bataille’s view of the interplay of the homogeneous and heterogeneous? Could it be the difference of whether one is on the inside looking out at the raging storm, the hungry wolves, the apocalypse or whether one is on the outside trying to break inside/destroy inside/transform inside, in which case one is embodying the energy of the storm, the wolves, the apocalypse, one is a

raging fire that indiscriminately burns away the old and clears the way for the new (order) growth.

“The kids want misery and death,” snorts Lydon, ‘they want threatening noises, because that shakes you out of apathy,” (Savage, 122).

Punk magazine, “captured the attitude: people wanted to say something negative. I liked that time of decay. There was nihilism in the atmosphere, a longing to die. Part of the feeling of New York at that time was this longing for oblivion, that you were about to disintegrate...yet that was something almost mystically wonderful,” (Mary Harron, interviewer of the Ramones in *Punk’s* first issue, Savage, 133).

Suffering is the Sole Origin of Consciousness

“And what if it so happens that a man’s advantage *sometimes* not only may, but even must, consist exactly in his desiring under certain conditions what is harmful to himself and not what is advantageous,” (Dostoevsky, 19). And further, “Perhaps suffering is just as great an advantage to him as prosperity?...Whether it is good or bad, it is sometimes very pleasant to smash things, too....And yet I am sure man will never renounce real suffering, that is, destruction and chaos. Why, after all, suffering is the sole origin of consciousness,” (Dostoevsky, 31). Remember, Dostoevsky was writing this in 1864, while “his wife lay on her deathbed and he himself was in ill health,” (Ralph Matlaw’s introduction, viii), where is the “sublime and beautiful” in that? I am now thinking of Schacht’s *Alienation* (because Kaufmann’s introductory essay, which I am only now just reading, is so much more defined than the discussion of alienation that follows), and Hesse’s *Steppenwolf*, but I don’t think there is time for them in this issue, maybe next issue will be on alienation...

Trapped inside themselves, forced/choosing the outside of society, in a word: alienated. Can one be alienated from society and not alienated from oneself? This is an interesting question. Or, is alienation present at all levels: self, other, society, universe, etc.? A Taoist view of harmony would hold that harmony would only exist when it is found at all levels (in harmony with the Tao) – one could not be in harmony with the self and alienated from society. And yet, underlying this whole investigation is the observation that “good” things come from the outside (alienation). The outside has its dangers, but it also has its boons.

“The first work of the hero is to retreat from the world scene of secondary effects to those causal zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside, and there to clarify the difficulties, eradicate them in his own case...and break through to the undistorted, direct experience and assimilation of what C. G. Jung has called the archetypal images,” (Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, cited in Savage, 103). (More on Jung and punk in later issues, suffice it to say that the first archetype encountered is the “shadow” and that the archetypes are ambivalent in that they can lead to destruction or transformation, i.e. they contain both the “sublime and the beautiful” as well as the “horror and evil”).

So, this first step outside is required of potential heroes, Native Americans on vision quests, Shaman’s succumbing to their sacred illness, Hesse’s wolf of the steppe, the artist, and the punk rock musician. Recall the earlier McLaren quote that the artist must leave satisfaction behind and enter frustration in order to create art.

All Art Begins With a Critique...of the Self

“All art begins with a critique...with a critique of the self, the self always reflecting society [thus intermingling inside and outside, ed.]. Our critique began, as all critique begins with doubt...*Doubt became our life*. Doubt and outrage. Our doubt was so deep, finally, that we asked ourselves: Can language express a doubt so deep?”
(Huelsenbeck on dada, in Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 220).

To look at this in another way: to be outside is a wound, a state of partial victimhood, and partially self-inflicted. The wound is the traumatic separation from the womb, the breast, the family, the society, the universe, All That Is, and, ultimately, from oneself. This wound is our contemporary, American society which views the individual as a separate, bounded individual whose job is to accumulate goods and to accept the dictates of objective science and rationality (recall Bataille) which stress limits, boundaries, objectification, and dehumanization. Yet, this wound has always been present, even before our society, it just takes a different form now, it is caused by different weapons. (I have to be careful here, I know Kaufmann thinks I am on thin ice). This is what I was talking about years ago when I spoke into a tape recorder and said, “Rational Thought Is Dead,” and then re-wound it and played it back, repeatedly, at slow speed. Rational Thought had gone far enough, too far even, it had reached its apogee. The further development of imbalance can only lead to catastrophe – a fatal wounding. Thus, we are wounded in our very being, by our very being. Rationality and objectivity are not the cure for the wound, but rather, its cause. This wound corresponds to Bataille’s homogeneous – objectivity, dehumanization, reduction, compartmentalization. Does this mean that subjectivity, humanization, and irrationality are the cure of this wound? (The terminology seems to suggest it does, but I wouldn’t trust me on this.) Do we need Nietzsche’s Dionysian, Bataille’s Heterogeneous, Grof’s Holotropic?

What can heal the wound in our being? But first what is this wound? Let’s go back to Dostoevsky for a moment...”to be hyperconscious is a disease, a real positive disease,” (p. 6).

Or, to put it another way, self-consciousness is a disease. How does one cure this disease of self-consciousness – by becoming more self-conscious or less? Bayles argues that we have a “hole in our soul.” That I agree with, but the question is what to do about it? Is punk a symptom of the disease, an attempt at cure, or a little of both? Should we use allopathic medicine (the use of opposite medication effect, i.e. fighting fire with water) or homeopathic medicine (cure by the use of the same effect, i.e. fighting fire with fire)? Punk (and I use this term even more broadly) is the fever of society. It can be tempered with acetaminophen, but the infection may linger, untouched. Bayles wants a sanitized, “sublime and beautiful” culture (remember that the growth of mold or bacteria in a petri dish is also called a “culture”), yet is it possible to attain this if we are existentially wounded, if there is no balance between inside and outside? What if it is not so simple as choosing inside over outside, or good over evil? If there is a smoldering infection (which at the same time may be our life) in our being the wound may need debridement. Maybe we need to face the ugly pus of violence and disorder, maybe we need to go deeper into the darkness and despair, deeper into the wound and probe its boundaries – and not just heal it, not just hope it goes away because that is wishing yourself away. If this is an existential wound it is not possible to rid ourselves of it, but is there a way to accept it, to transform it, to give it a “sacred yes,” to say, this wound is the best thing that ever happened to me?

“It was awful, he thought, but so awful that it crashed through into the other side, into magnificence,” (Savage on McLaren listening to the New York Dolls first album, p. 62).

Yet There Are Many Kinds of Death

I do not want to just contradict Bayles and say that the heterogeneous is really the “sublime and the beautiful.” Far from it – it is a danger, a curse, a bolt of lightning from beyond. I’ve already mentioned some of its victims. It is quite literally playing with fire, handling poisonous snakes, people go mad, get killed, kill themselves. But let us not reject it as evil, either. The way of transformation is the way of risk. The way out is the way in. The forces of transformation are dangerously close to the forces of complete destruction. In “holotropic therapy dramatic results can be sometimes achieved within a few days or even hours...the depth and intensity of the experiences...often includes an encounter with death so convincing that it cannot be distinguished from actual biological emergency and vital threat, episodes of mental disorganization that feel like insanity, total loss of control lasting several minutes, episodes of extreme choking, or long periods of violent tremors, shaking, and flailing around,” (Grof, *The Adventure of Self-Discovery*, 256).

*And she screamed out, kicking on her side and said
I've lost control again
And seized up on the floor - I thought she'd die - she said
I've lost control [again]
She's lost control again - she's lost control
(Joy Division, “She’s Lost Control”)*

“Yet there are many kind of death: Lydon began a systematic disordering of the senses...in favor of a more instinctive, unconscious approach,” (Savage, 127).

“‘Our performances were about taboos,’ says Genesis P-Orridge of COUM [later of Psychic TV, ed.] ...’ It was the reduction down to the critical moment between being dead and alive. Which is the one [sic.] only feels totally alive but also under threat. That is exactly in Punk at the beginning: the same edge,” (Savage, 250).

“The desire begins with a demand to live not as an object but as a subject of history...The music came forth as a no that became a yes, then a no again, the again a yes: nothing is true except our conviction that the world we are asked to accept is false,” (Marcus, 5-6).

So, was that the start of my punk career? Was that it? 8th grade, Tommy telling me that the girl I liked thought I was “weird.” And I thought, “fuck you!” Then I probably went home and cried and I all of sudden hated her and I hated myself for my weirdness and I hated society for being so extroverted and making me all weird and shy. And then I wrote down every swear word and insult I could think of, even a few in Spanish. Could that have been the moment when I stepped outside and became a punk?

No. I was never really that much of punk, anyway. I was more of a melancholy new-waver, listening to “Temptation” over and over again, and then maybe a little Echo and the Bunnymen or the Psychedelic Furs, and then when it got really bad, Joy Division. Actually, I was already weird from pretty early on and I even kind of enjoyed it back then. Like remember listening to the Clockwork Orange soundtrack or “Revolver” and totally getting into “Tomorrow Never Knows” on the hi-fi and running around like little maniacs? Or what about when mom brought the pony in the house, man, we had no hope of making it on the inside – not with an image of your mom leading a pony through the house. Maybe it is all her fault – isn’t it kind of weird how she like Ministry – I mean late (a mind is a terrible thing to taste) Ministry – because she likes the rhythm?

Maybe we didn’t know any better – that “normal,” inside people shunned novel, challenging things and that there was a group of counter-culture weirdoes out there that would save us from a lonely existence of watching from the outside with a mixture of bitterness, hatred, and envy....

**“If you bring forth that which is within you,
then that which is within you
will be your salvation.
If you do not bring forth that which is within you,
Then that which is within you,
Will destroy you.”**
(Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*)

Can I really end at this point? Are there too many threads left dangling?

I guess my point is that there is an inside/outside for the individual and likewise for the society. There is a force (think of Bataille, Jung, Marcus, Taoism) that is activated and compensates for a one-sided attitude in the individual and in society. Also, the individual and society are in relationship, mutually interpenetrating, and they depend on each other, and to change one is to change the other. Lastly, punk is that which is within you and it can transform and even maybe destroy you, but if you don't bring it forth, it will definitely destroy you.

CONIUNCTIONIS.7

Is There an Inside/Outside?

Trauma, Transformation & Punk Rock (Part IV)

(May, 2001)

Is the artist inside or outside of society? Does inspiration come from within or without? Does society change from the inside or from the outside? Is your True Self hidden inside or revealed through your outward actions? Is the True Self found or created? Is there even such a thing as a True Self and False Self - or is that distinction a mythology, a myth-perception?

There are many different ways to divide something into inside/outside. There is the inside/outside of the group and the inside/outside of the individual. I can feel a part of a group, and thus, be inside it - or, I can feel apart from the group, unrelated to it, and thus feel I am on the outside. I can focus on what goes on inside my head or inside my body, as thoughts or pain or illness, or I can focus outside my body, yet still, the outside is mediated by the sense organs - skin, eyes, ears, tongue, nose. Is there really an inside/outside? If the outside is mediated by the inside (senses), how do we know that the outside is not an epiphenomenon of the inside (recall the earlier issue on "The Matrix," and Buddhist

conceptions of outside reality as an illusion or production of the mind, or to put it another way: there is no outside). Or, some would argue that concepts of self, mind, unconscious are epiphenomena of external reality - they have no real existence and should be considered in behavioral, objective terms (Behavioral Psychology or Gilbert Ryle's, *Philosophy of Mind* would argue: there is no inside).

Inside/Outside is always a distinction which is relative to something else, perhaps we should just consider it as we consider right/left, it changes depending on your frame of reference. There is no absolute left, nor absolute right (excluding politics - well, maybe not excluding politics) and maybe there is no pure inside, no pure outside. In this case, every outside has a little (potential) inside in it, and vice versa (if you go far enough to the right on the globe, you end up on the left. Imagine this thought experiment, you tell someone, "Stay on my right side." They begin to move away from you on your right, until eventually they reach the opposite side of the globe, one step forward and they are on your left, one step back and they are on your right. It is that moment of shift that is of utmost interest. To return to inside/outside, this could be considered a pair of opposite terms which are intimately related, one cannot exist without the other. Perhaps all opposites have some shadow component in common, a point where one can shift to the other as easily as taking one step forward or one step backward.

"[I]nner experience is the opposite of action. Nothing more," (Bataille, *The Bataille Reader* (BR), 70).

And, again, to recall Bataille in the following quote, the opposites (in this case, attraction/repulsion) are intimately related, or to put it another way, there is an invisible, yet

forceful connection between opposite states, perhaps conceivable as a 2-way energy gradient, or a two way street, if you go right, you can also go left.

“An object that is repugnant presents a force of repulsion more or less great. I will add that, following my hypothesis, it should also present a force of attraction; like the force of repulsion, its opposite, the force of attraction will be more or less great,” (BR, 254). [Recall Newton’s Third Law of Thermodynamics: for every action (force) there is an equal and opposite reaction]. Bataille views the opposites as particularly coinciding in the paradox of the sacred, “What is sacred undoubtedly corresponds to the object of horror...a fetid, sticky object without boundaries which teems with life and yet is the sign of death. It is nature at the point where its effervescence closely joins life and death, where it is death gorging life with decomposed substance,” (BR, 253).

We could perhaps say that the sacred is that place where the opposites break down, intermingle, and become *without boundaries* (no inside/outside). It is this still-point where one is neither to the right or to the left, neither inside, nor outside, yet this point contains the possibilities of both right/left, inside/outside.

Alienation

Last month’s issue introduced some discussion of inside/outside, along with the concept of alienation - which could be taken to mean a feeling of being trapped (either in or out) and one wants to get to the other state (“Let me in!” “Let me out!”). The opposite of alienation could be considered, belonging, being at peace, a state of contentment with where one is. As I was writing last month’s column, I ran across a book that had been sitting, unread, on my book shelf for a number of years: *Alienation*, by University of Illinois Professor Richard Schacht, with an introduction by Walter Kaufmann. The book is a discussion and critique of various writers use of the term and concept, “alienation.” Schacht

comments that the term is often used polemically by writers to denote dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, or that things are not as they should be. Other writers view alienation as something positive, rather than negative. In his introductory essay, Kaufmann writes that alienation, “is neither a disease nor a blessing but, for better or worse, a central feature of human existence,” (Schacht, xvii). Kaufmann (and Schacht) trace much of the current use of the term, alienation, to Erich Fromm, who largely drew from Marx’s early writings, in which the term is found. He quotes Fromm, **“Marx’s philosophy, like much of existential thinking, represents a protest against man’s alienation, his loss of himself and his transformation into a thing; it is a movement against the dehumanization and automatization of man inherent in the development of Western industrialism,”** (Schacht, xxii). One could argue that many strains of punk rock are also a protest and reaction to this perceived alienation and dehumanization.

In reading this introductory essay, I was struck by how much Fromm’s above statement underlies my own thinking and writing on: trauma as an objectification of the self; the effects of technology, science, and rationality in turning the individual into an object (the dominance of the outside over the inside); the dehumanizing elements in the process of medical education; and, closer to home, the story of punk rock (alienated kids take things into their own hands and pursue extremity, through protest, violence, despair, creativity, and loud noise). Likewise, this argument underlies a number of books relevant to this column: Buber’s *I and Thou*; Mander’s *The Absence of the Sacred*; Hammerschlag’s *The Theft of the Spirit*; and The Critical Art Ensembles, *Flesh Machine*. So, obviously, it gave me pause in reading Kaufmann’s critique of the oft heard statement, “Things have never been worse.”

“What we are witnessing is an understandable reaction against the blithe faith in progress that was fashionable in the nineteenth century. But the new anti-faith in the unique alienation of modern man is as unsound and unsophisticated as the old faith in progress. The notion that things were never so good and are constantly getting better, and the notion that things were never so bad and are steadily getting worse, are entirely worthy of each other,” (Schacht, xlv).

Can so much of recent philosophy, cultural critique, and psychological theory be simply a reaction to the 19th Century’s view that the glass is half-full and now we see it as half-empty? Kaufmann has some other good points such as the necessity of “alienation” for the development of self-consciousness and intellectual learning. He states that even, “the best education must increase alienation. At every turn it shows us how what is familiar is not comprehended, and how what seemed clear is really quite strange,” (Schacht, xlviii).

[Although the “worst” education does not have such an alienating, revolutionary effect, but can be seen as intellectual blinders to Truth/Reality, a reduction of the Unknown to the Known]. Another way of putting this is that one must be able to perceive an outside (world) in order to perceive an inside (self-consciousness), one cannot be perceived without the other as its shadow, and where is that edge where light separates into shadow? In his discussion of alienated artists, Kaufmann shows how productive alienation can be and how the truly original, creative person is by necessity alienated because to be original means to be unlike the surround. One last quote from Kaufmann which shows his balance and appreciation of the paradoxical nature of alienation: **“The trouble is that one does not know in advance when estrangement will prove fruitful. Moreover, self-destruction and creativity are not mutually exclusive,”** (Schacht, liii). (Please recall punk rock).

Self-Consciousness Roused to Revolt

Even prior to Marx (and a significant influence on him), Hegel's philosophy frequently made use of the term, "alienation." Schacht's discussion actually differentiates two different usages of "alienation" in Hegel's writing. Alienation₁ is the individual's sense of otherness from the "social substance" (outside). Alienation₂ is a rejection of separation and a return to unity with the social substance. "Only as self-consciousness roused to revolt does it know its own shattered condition, and in knowing this it has *ipso facto* risen above that condition," (Hegel, quoted in Schacht, 65). Schacht sums this up as, "he is discussing the emergence of the individual out of an unreflective unity with his society and culture, as a distinct and independent personality; and the subsequent establishment of a new and conscious unity, within which there is room for individuality," (Schacht, 39). It should be remembered that Hegel's project in his major work, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, traces the emergence of increasingly self-conscious Spirit. (This sounds a lot like the half-full-and-rising philosophy of the Enlightenment, as well as the new age tenet that we are experiencing an evolution of consciousness.) What is interesting in Hegel is his reconciliation of opposites through dialectic, which could be conceptualized as an ever-rising spiral which progresses through unity ⇒ separation into opposites (alienation) ⇒ reunification ⇒ etc. [This is so similar to Jung's conception of the process of individuation, although Jung's only comment on Hegel, in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, is that his language was "arrogant as it was laborious; I regarded him with downright mistrust. He seemed to me like a man who was caged in the edifice of his own words and was pompously gesticulating in his prison," (Jung, 69). One can only wonder if there is not some confusion of inside/outside here. Freud also disavowed influence from a philosopher who preceded many of his own insights, in his case, Nietzsche.]

Hegel's conception is that Spirit, or unity, is the beginning and the end, like the Word. Thus, Schacht observes, **“when the social substance is alienated, from the individual, it is the individual's own true self - objectified - that is alienated, from him...individual consciousness fails to recognize that [quoting Hegel] ‘what seems to happen outside it as an activity directed against it, is its own doing,’”** (Schacht, 51). Or, to repeat, “Where such alienation_i exists, it may be overcome through the recognition that one has been conceiving and asserting one's independence in a way that renders one dependent upon others; and through rejection of this way of conceiving and asserting it, in favor of a more genuinely independent one,” (Schacht, 65).

Mountains and Rivers

So, again, we come back to the question: what is the nature of inside/outside? And also, the question posed in the last issue: does alienation from society necessarily imply alienation from the self? Hegel solves this dilemma of opposites by viewing them as stages of a process, rather than absolute, distinct elements. I am reminded of the Zen parable in which prior to studying Zen, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers. After a prolonged study, mountains are no longer mountains and rivers no longer rivers. After further prolonged study, mountains are once again mountains and rivers are rivers. Bataille, also, allows the opposites to have creative discourse and interplay (in what recalls the yin-yang balance) through the shifting relationship between the homogenous (which consists of firm boundaries) and the heterogeneous (or sacred, without boundaries). Hesse, in *Steppenwolf*, takes this even further, in that the Steppenwolf's “life oscillates, as everyone's does, not

merely between two poles, such as the body and the spirit, the saint and the sinner, but between thousands, between innumerable poles,” (70).

In an attempt at a conclusion, let us examine another stage theory of transformation - Campbell's monomyth of the hero's journey. This journey begins with *separation* from the world (a movement either inside, internal journey, or outside, external journey) into the supernatural realm; next occurs *initiation*, the battle with inner demons/outer dragons; and finally to *return*, a reincorporation into society, but now having a numinous, charged quality (carrying reality₂ into reality₁) which bestows boons on self and society, (summarized in Grof and Grof, *The Stormy Search for the Self*, 127). This parallels Genep's concept of “the rite of passage,” which entails the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation, (*ibid.*, 122).

Here we have several systems of transformation which recall Hegel's dialectical evolution of Spirit. We may ask - what is the transformative element in this process? We can recall Eliade's “return to the origin,” which is purported to be healing/transformational. We can recall Bataille's previously cited passage that implies that the sacred is that point where life and death intermingle without boundaries, or to recall earlier discussions of right becoming left, inside becoming outside. As Kaufmann wrote, creativity and self-destruction are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they may necessarily be linked. The immersion in unmediated, boundary-less lifedeath is the razor's edge, when one returns to reality, one may be vigorously alive or stone cold dead. Things can get better or worse (or both?) suddenly. The movement toward life is not a movement away from death and vice versa (like the movement to the right is not a movement away from the left).

Does this not sound so much like what I have already written in other columns, perhaps even too much so? What about Schacht and Kaufmann's critique of things getting better/worse, alienation being bad/good? Can these criticisms be leveled at these various theories of evolution? We could criticize these systems to the extent that they are viewed as absolute progress toward the "sublime and beautiful." Hegel can be criticized as complacently accepting the status quo (it must be so because it is a development of Spirit and it will progress to the promised land, Marx's "dialectic of history").

The Sphere of the Between

Let us explore one last question here, that of the cross-cultural concepts of "individualism" and "collectivism." One way of formulating this dimension is that in individualistic cultures, it is individual that is the ultimate value (inside), and in collectivist cultures, it is the group that is the ultimate value (outside). Another way of putting it is that in an individualist culture, the inside is the individual, in the collectivist culture, the inside is the group. Thus, this may just be a different bias toward defining what is the basic unit of reference, the individual or the group. I would now like to reference Edward Sampson's article, "Reinterpreting Individualism and Collectivism: Their Religious Roots and Monologic Versus Dialogic Person-Other Relationship," (*American Psychologist*, December, 2000). Sampson attempts to find a third choice in the individual/group pair of opposites which we are often caught up in. He cites Buber: **"What is peculiarly characteristic of the human world is above all that something takes place between one being and another...I call this sphere...the sphere of the between...It is a primal category of human reality,"** (1429). (We

are not venturing so far afield here, when we consider that Kaufmann translated Buber's *I and Thou*). Sampson cites the rabbinic tradition as being, "fundamentally open-ended and [having] indeterminate discussion or debates. No finalized meaning or single authoritative interpretation was either possible or felt to be desirable," (1429). In response to the *monologic* paradigm (the mistaken view that the only "alternative to an individualistic person-other relationship is the loss of the individual as such," 1430), Sampson proposes the *dialogic* paradigm, in which "we can enter into relationship with [a] being that has been set at a distance from us and thereby has become an independent opposite," (1430, quoting Friedman). Here we have yet another linkage between what appear to be opposites, there can be no relationship without two individuals, it is not a question of choosing either individual (inside) or group (outside), one implies the other and the triumph of one is the loss of both. Another way to consider this is the mutual dependence of "opposites," inside and outside are not antagonistic, but rather define one another. The human tendency is to value one over the other, but this is as absurd as choosing right over left; West over East; North over South, etc...

The Razor's Edge Between Inside/Outside

In summary, our tendency to divide the world into seemingly distinct categories of inside/outside, body/mind, self/other may be an artifact of our perspective, rather than an objective truth. Not only may these distinctions be artifacts, but they may necessarily imply one another, thus the choice of one over the other is absurd and only strengthens the unchosen opposite. We have reviewed several different writers who conceptualize the opposites

in a system of back and forth movement. Yet there is a split-second place or pivot where one opposite can transform into the other, at this still point, there is neither inside, nor outside, and yet the potential for either. It is this point that Bataille characterizes as the “sacred,” that Buber calls “the sphere of the between,” and that Eliade calls the “origin.” This is the point (origin) of the creative/destructive. This is the point that punk rock aspires to: life on the edge. Yet, as we all know, “The sharp edge of a razor is difficult to pass over; thus the wise say that the path to Salvation is hard,” (Katha-Upanishad). And if we fail to balance on the razor’s edge, it cuts neatly into two halves: burn out or fade away.

CONIUNCTIONIS.8

What is the meaning of Ian Curtis' death?

Where is the line between the Art Object and the Artist?

Trauma, Transformation, and Punk Rock, Part V

(June, 2001)

“[T]hink of Ian Curtis, let his soul fill you. That man cared for you, that man died for you, that man saw the madness in your area,”

(Dave McCullough's Obituary in *Sounds*, May 31st, 1980.)

“After Ian Curtis's death journalists romanticized him beyond recognition. He conveniently fit a pre-determined mold - that of the romantic poet driven to suicide by an unfeeling world - and as such has entered the pantheon of rock martyrs. Joy Division has also been reinterpreted - and made into something they were not,” (Steve Grant, “Death Will Keep Us Together: Joy Division and New Order Examined,” *Trouser Press*, March, 1982).

“All interpretations, all psychology, all attempts to make things comprehensible, require the medium of theories, mythologies, and lies; and a self-respecting author should not omit, at the close of an exposition, to dissipate these lies so far as may be in his power,” (Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, 69).

Who was Ian Curtis? What was his “message,” his “vision” - did he have a vision/message? How does his suicide on May 18th, 1980, affect how Joy Division's music is viewed today? What is the “truth” of Ian Curtis/Joy Division, what is the “lie,” what is the

“myth?” How much did Joy Division (do all performers/artists) contribute to their own myth? What if myth, rather than truth is the reason that we are drawn to performers? What if we do not want to know the *historical truth*? What takes place in the space between the performer and the audience (Buber’s “Sphere of the Between”) and how does each shape the other?

It is a historical fact that Ian Kevin Curtis was born on July 15th, 1956 and that he died by hanging himself on May 18th, 1980, at the age of 23. These are facts that can be verified, but what about all the books and articles on him and the band: Deborah Curtis’ (his widow) *Touching From a Distance*; Mick Middles’ *From Joy Division to New Order: The Factory Story*; Mark Johnson’s *An Ideal for Living*; or 160 pages of the Xeroxed articles entitled, *Joy Division/New Order: A History in Cuttings?* (All of the articles cited will refer to this last document, unless otherwise specified. This booklet has no author or press or date listed, it is a collection of articles from various sources, some identified, but many not. I found this at the old Wax Trax! on Lincoln Avenue in Chicago. I am not sure how to go about finding a copy of this reference, my apologies.)

Historical Truth/Narrative Truth

Some relativists would argue that there is no such thing as “objective truth,” that every perception is a creation, yet many would say that certain events, (such as birth and death) are easily agreed upon elements of *consensual reality* (even this is sometimes debated, as in Elvis). The line between myth and history is one that is much debated and far from clear. In psychoanalysis, Donald Spence has coined the terms, “historical truth,” and

“narrative truth,” to represent, respectively, the objective and subjective elements of truth. Certain fields of study are more concerned with the subjective, inside of truth, and others with the objective, outside of truth.

Recovered Memory/False Memory

A current example of the debate between these two conceptions of truth is the recovered memory/false memory debate, which has to do with the question of determining historical truth from the narrative truth revealed in psychotherapy. Memory is fallible, that is well documented, but *all* memory cannot be invalid. Another issue in this debate involves the age old fear of the power of the therapist (hypnotist/magician/rock ‘n’ roll star) over the impressionable mind of the patient.

The Recovered Memory (RM) side of the debate argues that early childhood trauma overwhelms the child’s capacity to integrate extreme emotions and as a defense, the child splits off (dissociates) the overwhelming memories from consciousness. Further, it argues that with repeated trauma, these dissociated emotional states may take on the role of an alternate personality to cope with the trauma, while the original personality remains unconscious of the trauma. This then takes the form of Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) or Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) as it is now called.

The False Memory (FM) side of the argument runs this way: the therapist is so powerful that they can create a vivid “memory” in a patient, which never occurred. This is done by “overzealous” therapists who impose their views on the passive patient, in other words, the trauma did not occur in the past, but occurred when the therapist indoctrinated

the patient into the RM framework. The therapist/patient may then create together a series of personae or personalities that take on different “archetypal” roles: villains, heroes, damsels in distress, lost and vulnerable children, wicked step-mothers, devouring parents, rapists, sadists, satanists, and victims. [“Archetype” is a term used by Jung to describe potential, typical life situations, interactions, and modes of being. He explored several different archetypes, including: the shadow, the anima, the animus, the great mother, and the wise old man, to name a few. According to his theory, archetypes are elements of the Collective Unconscious and are universal possibilities of being for everyone. Outside of Jungian psychology and therapy, Jung’s concepts have been influential in the study of mythology and religion, particularly in Joseph Campbell’s study, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*.]

We are then faced with the question: are these mythic forms/roles fictions imposed from the outside (False Memory), or are they “correct” memories of past heinous crimes which took archetypal form (Recovered Memory)? Or, a third perspective: are they a blend of external trauma and internal archetypal projection? We can ask if they are externally imposed, why are they so readily accepted? Could it be because the imposed forms resonate with internal templates (archetypes)? Thus, the external existence and popularity of mythic forms could be understood by the existence of internal templates that resonate with (and also shape?) external forms.

One last comment on this issue, neither the FM, nor RM sides are arguing that Multiple Personality is not created. Rather, the question is when it was created and who created it? Was it the child’s unconscious defense that created MPD in response to overwhelming trauma, or was it created by the therapist who convinced the patient to take on this role of MPD? One interesting flaw in the FM argument is that if therapists are

powerful enough to “create” MPD in a patient they are seeing for one hour a week, would not that seem to argue that parents who have 24 hour control for 16-20 years of a child’s life have even more power? To argue that MPD is a creation does not settle the FM/RM debate.

A Third Point of Synthesis?

Let us turn to a Jungian view of this debate to see if we can find some middle ground between the opposing views. If these forms exist internally as archetypes, they may be more likely to arise if the integrating capacity of the ego is diminished through early trauma (the ego overwhelmed from the outside). We could also imagine these forms spontaneously manifesting and overwhelming the ego from the inside. [Jung referred to this as, “identification with the archetype.” Jung, himself, experienced an overwhelming flood of archetypal experience in the 1910s, which he described in his book, *Memories, Dreams, Reflection*, in the chapter entitled, “Confrontation With the Unconscious.” An interesting note in Jungian biographical scholarship is the possibility of Jung’s own sexual abuse as a boy]. Another possibility is that the externalization of these internal forms could be facilitated by an “overzealous” therapist (by the therapist stimulating the latent archetypes through an invitation to the patient to play out/enact mythic roles).

A view of this debate as described above would thus encompass and allow both extremes of the debate. This is done by largely expanding the domain of narrative truth. It does not answer the complicated questions of historical truth of DID it happen or DID it NOT. It does eliminate the pre-condition of trauma for the existence of MPD. It does not invalidate the possibility of historically true recovered memories.

That Man Saw the Madness in Your Area

Wonderful, but why am I discussing this in an article on Ian Curtis? Largely, because of the complicated interplay between narrative and historical truth and also as a way to introduce the concept of archetypes, and particularly the embodiment or identification with archetypes which may help us to understand, or at least add an element of caution in exploring the frequently larger than life lives of rock 'n' roll stars. [I remember reading something in a book by Mircea Eliade, I cannot remember the title, in which he explores the creation of a modern myth in (Romania?). He spoke with various people who described the supernatural death of a groom on the eve of his wedding. Eliade was able to track down the historical truth of the event, the man died in a mountain climbing accident on the eve of his death, but because of the timing and power of this tragedy, it activated all sorts of archetypal, mythic projections which then became associated with the legend. This is similar to the current study of what we call, "urban legends."]

The current discussion is of how much is an artist's personal life and biography important in understanding his/her art? Does art stand alone and the artist is irrelevant? (I would say, no). Is the art irrelevant, except as an externalization of the artist's psyche? (Again, no).

Where is the Dividing Line Between the Artist and the Art Object?

The argument that art should stand on its own and that the artist's life is irrelevant to its understanding flies in the face of the readily observed popular and critical interest/fascination with the life history of the artist. Whether it is a movie about Jackson Pollock; a biography of Jerzy Kosinski; a spread on who wore what at the Oscars; a blurb on who an actor is dating; a book on the latest girl or boy pop icon; media reaction to the latest Radiohead album; or a book on Joy Division, it seems that everyone (a few theorists aside) is interested in the inner and outer lives of artists. We can deplore this as gossip, or we can ask, why is gossip so compelling? In fact, we may wonder how much of the artists role in culture is the production of art objects versus how much it is to live a larger than life, in the spotlight? Further, to what extent are these two roles be linked?

What Critics Said About Joy Division/Curtis Before His Suicide:

“Joy Division speak of apocalypse, hopelessness and fragmentation, yet their music acts as an exorcism of passivity and neglect, as near a revitalisation of the spirit of rock ‘n’ roll as I’ve experienced in a long while,” (Steve Taylor, “It’s Fun to Play at the YMCA, undated reference, probably review of the 2/8/79 gig in London).

“[T]oday’s purveyors have witnessed the failure of wanton destruction, as epitomized by punk, and in turn have retreated inwardly,” (Chris Bohn, “Northern Gloom: 2, Southern Stomp: 1,” undated reference, University of London, probably review of the 2/8/80 gig).

“[T]he music rolling like some stark answer to the fate of what was punk, like a memorial to something real and furious...Andrew walked to the bathroom. He was humming ‘She’s Lost Control’ to himself when the razor slashed ecstatically like a hungry vampire,” (unnamed author, “Death Disco,” a review of *Unknown Pleasures*, *Sounds*, July, 14th, 1979).

“As Richard Jobson said, Division’s music is genuinely violent , and it’s the violence of beauty rooted in beastly desire, the violence of breakdown, inhibition, failure...fatalism...Joy Division are a powerful act of make believe, their songs like desperate bits of nightmares, clearly drawn, potent and personal. But Joy Division’s dreams are the inescapable places where we live,” (Paul Morely, review of gig with Section 25 and Killing Joke, *New Musical Express*, 2/16/80).

“To talk of life today is like talking of rope in the house of a hanged man,” (unnamed author, “Where Will It End?” review of *Unknown Pleasures*, released in 1979, a year prior to Curtis’ death by hanging).

These quotes show that the myth was already well-formed even prior to Curtis’ suicide. The band seemed to foster this myth - by their sound, by refusing to “entertain” the audience with crowd pleasing banter, by Peter Hook playing his bass with his back to the audience, and by their refusal to reveal the meaning of their music (no lyric sheets, their reluctance to be interviewed). All of these things seemed to paint a picture that Joy Division were not part of the rock and roll swindle, but stood above or apart from it. Add to this the fact that they chose to record on Factory Records, an independent label (unlike the Sex Pistols and the majority of other punk bands). Joy Division refused to play the game of rock and roll stars - instead they behaved like Artists reluctant to reveal/destroy the secret of the philosopher’s stone, the *aqua permanens* of their art - at least until Curtis’ suicide which suddenly burst their carefully guarded anonymity. Curtis’ death gave a finality to the “message” of the band, which could not be argued away. The death was a public event, since he was a critically acclaimed outsider artist, and, like the above described groom, Curtis killed himself within days of the bands first American tour and the possibility of greater stardo(o)m. We may wonder how much of their anonymous stance contributed to the audience’s projection of their own needs or demands for archetypal role play on to Ian Curtis. And yet, does it make any sense to blame the audience for their projections? (“Whatever the cause i feel a portion of the blame must rest with everyone who came into contact with the band - you, me, City Fun, Factory, anyone who bought one of their records or attended a gig. We all put pressure on Joy Division and maybe Ian Curtis just got tired of the pressure - I don’t know,” (Paul H., “Curtis joins Lynyrd Skynyrd,” undated, unreferenced).

*Asylums with doors open wide,
Where people had paid to see inside,
For entertainment they watch his body twist,
Behind his eyes he says, 'I still exist'...
But the sickness is drowned by cries for more,
Pray to god, make it quick, watch him fall*
(Joy Division, "Atrocity Exhibition," 1980)

Or, how much did Curtis get caught up in playing out a role? (Identification with the archetype - which we will explore in greater depth in the future.)

*In the shadowplay, acting out your own death, knowing no more...
But I could only stare in disbelief as the crowds all left*
(Joy Division, "Shadowplay," 1979)

Or, how much is co-creation: the performer taps into the internal, archetypal forms, bringing them to light (externalizing); the audience experiences the external form which resonates with their own (dormant) internal forms; these awakened forms are projected back out on to the performer, which amplifies the original impulse. In this sense, art is the vehicle through which the Collective Unconscious is transmitted from one agent to the next. Or, art is the dialogue of the Collective Unconscious with itself (as embodied in audience and artist).

But What has the Individual Personality to do with the Plight of the Many?

This question of the relationship between performer and audience (or therapist and patient) is worth exploring more in depth in future issues, but for now, let us consider this quote by Jung on the interaction between the one and the many:

"It is not for nothing that our age calls for the redeemer personality, for the one who can emancipate himself from the inescapable grip of the collective and save at least his own soul, who lights a beacon of hope for others, proclaiming that here is at least

one man who has succeeded in extricating himself from that fatal identity with the group psyche. For the group, because of its unconsciousness, has no freedom of choice, and so psychic activity runs on in it like an uncontrolled law of nature. There is thus set going a chain reaction that comes to a stop only in catastrophe. The people always long for a hero, a slayer of dragons, when they feel the danger of psychic forces; hence the cry for personality...But what has the individual personality to do with the plight of the many?...when the mere routine of life predominates in the form of convention and tradition, there is bound to be a destructive outbreak of creative energy,” (Jung, from “The Development of Personality,” cited in Storr’s, *The Essential Jung*, 201-202).

Consider another quote from Jung, this one on the risk of the internal, archetypal form overwhelming the ego and bringing about identification of the ego with the archetype, which leads to a *shadowplay*, or an externalization of the archetype in a totalitarian way:

“It was founded on the perception of symbols thrown up by the unconscious individuation process which always sets in when the collective dominants of human life fall into decay [consider the oft cited social precursors of punk]. At such a time there is bound to be a considerable number of individuals who are possessed by archetypes of a numinous nature that force their way to the surface in order to form new dominants [a new order?]. This state of possession shows itself almost without exception in the fact that the possessed identify themselves with the archetypal contents of their unconscious, and, because they do not realize that the role which is being thrust upon them is the effect of new contents to be understood, they exemplify these concretely in their own lives, thus becoming prophets and reformers...For this reason there have always been people who, not satisfied with the dominants of conscious life, set forth - under cover and by devious paths, to their destruction or salvation - to seek direct experience of the eternal roots, and, following the lure of the restless unconscious psyche, find themselves in the wilderness where, like Jesus, they come up against the son of darkness,” (Jung, from “Introduction to the Religious and Psychological Problems of Alchemy,” *ibid.*, 285-286).

***Try to cry out in the heat of the moment,
Possessed by a fury that burns from inside***
(Joy Division, “The Eternal,” 1980)

***I traveled far and wide through many different times...
What did you see there?
I saw all knowledge destroyed...
What did you see there?
The power and glory of sin***
(Joy Division, “Wilderness,” 1979)

Psychic Infection

Jung, thus describes how the individual can embody the role of prophet and reformer (visionary artist) and manifest contents of the collective psyche (archetypes) which arise in response to the current collective, social situation. This is not without its dangers, however, because the archetypes are charged, numinous energies, that can bring about destruction or salvation (recall Bataille's conception of the sacred which encompasses both the possibilities of death and life). The artist, thus, puts him/herself in harms way, like wading into powerful currents in the water, one can be invigorated or drowned. Through the concept of the Collective Unconscious, Jung has a way of explaining the interactions of the individual and the group - how the individual can act out the unconscious wishes of the group, yet also risk getting swept away in those waters. In this way the artist serves a psychological function for the group by raising topical questions and embodying the social conflicts and tensions of that age (which resonate with classical conflicts, but manifest as old wine in new bottles). One term of Jung's which is pertinent to this discussion (and this magazine) is, "psychic infection," (Jung, from "The Undiscovered Self," *ibid*, 352). This is another way to understand the interplay between the individual, the collective unconscious, and the group: that archetypal forms are psychically infectious, or can precipitate mental contagion

Let us approach a conclusion through another quote from Jung: **"modern art...though seeming to deal with aesthetic problems, it is really performing a work of psychological education on the public by breaking down and destroying their previous aesthetic views of what is beautiful in form and meaningful content...the prophetic spirit of art has turned away from the old object-relationship towards the - for the time being - dark chaos of**

subjectivisms. Certainly art, so far as we can judge of it, has not yet discovered in this darkness what it is that could hold all men together and give expression to psychic wholeness...The development of modern art with its seemingly nihilistic trend towards disintegration must be understood as the symptom and symbol of a mood of universal destruction and renewal that has set its mark on our age," (Jung, *ibid.*, 402).

Music that Unleashes the Savage Beast

It is considered a truism that music soothes the savage beast - this is thought to be true of music that is *sublime and beautiful*. What if you played base and ugly music for the beast? What if the beast starts playing punk rock? Is there a music that unleashes the savage beast from Bambi's breast? What if it is necessary to unleash the savage beast before it can be soothed?

Talking about Rope in the House of a Hanged Man

Let us return to the facts, to the historical truth: On Sunday, May 18th, 1980, Deborah Curtis found Ian Curtis' body hanging from a rope in the kitchen. She knew he had watched Herzog's film, *Stroszek*, the night before. In this film, the protagonist, an artist, travels to America and is unable to choose between his two lovers and commits suicide. Ian, himself, was in a similar situation, in between his wife and his lover, and about to embark on Joy Division's first American tour. [Here we have a complex interrelation of art and life, does Curtis follow the movie, does the movie follow Curtis, is this a case of synchronicity - two

seemingly unrelated events, which become irrationally, but temporally connected - it seems implausible to argue it away, but is that just because it seems so archetypal? Remember Jerzy Kosinski's last night, watching Peter Greenaway's *Drowning by Numbers*, drinking, taking barbiturates, tying a plastic bag over his head and climbing into his bathtub (1, 2, 3, 4...), (from James Park Sloan's, *Jerzy Kosinski*, 3)].

Deborah Curtis reconstructs Ian's last night: coffee, whiskey, *Stroszek*, writing a suicide note, listening to Iggy Pop's, *The Idiot* [it was apparently still on the turntable], and then hanging himself. She describes herself waking that morning in a dream or hallucination of hearing the line from the Doors song, "This is the end, beautiful friend. This is the end, my only friend, the end. I'll never look into your eyes again..." (Deborah Curtis, *Touching From a Distance*, 130-133).

"You, You'll See No More the Pain I Suffered, All the Pain I Caused!"

We are left with a puzzle, unsolvable, unknowable, as the answer lies in the past, and perhaps there is no answer. The line between fact/fiction, between historical/narrative truth, between myth/reality is hopelessly blurred. Curtis/Joy Division lived out an archetypal life and embodied larger than life tragedy, because of this we project our own larger than life desires on to him and the band. This projection was occurring even before Curtis' death, but that event solidified the myth and invited a re-interpretation of all that had come before it. Everyone likes a good story, even if it is a tragedy, maybe especially if it is a tragedy, consider the Ancient Greeks, consider Oedipus. We already know what is going to happen to Oedipus, and yet we still watch in anticipation: sent away so he doesn't fulfill the prophecy

of killing his father and marrying his mother, slaying a stranger who turns out to be his father, defeating the sphinx, marrying a stranger who turns out to be his mother, putting out his eyes (“You, you’ll see no more the pain I suffered, all the pain I caused!”), wandering blind through foreign lands, and then somewhat redeemed, or at least somewhat accepted in the end...

“Some people have said [our music] is all about death and destruction. But it isn’t really. There’s other things. None of the songs are about death and doom,” (Ian Curtis, cited in Thompson’s *Better to Burn Out: The Cult of Death in Rock ‘n’ Roll*, 136).

“If we go further and consider the fact that man is also neither what he himself nor other people know of him - an unknown something which can yet be proved to exist - the problem of identity becomes more difficult still,” (Jung, from *Psychology and Religion*, *ibid*, 241-242).

CONIUNCTIONIS.9

What is Punk Rock?

What is Not Punk Rock?

Trauma, Transformation & Punk Rock (Part VI)

(July, 2001)

The Punk that can be discussed is not the enduring Punk;

The name that can be named is not the enduring eternal name

(modified *Tao Te Ching* quote, cited in Joseph Campbell, *Oriental Mythology*, p. 23).

“Spin does a cover package on punk’s anniversary!” (From “Top Five Times Punk Died,” *Spin*, p. 99, May, 2001)

This month’s issue is a largely a survey of “experts” on punk rock and their conceptions of what is and is not punk. The motivations for this are several, the foremost being that I will be on vacation next month and I thought this would be an easy way to fill a column. But, this is a question which I have returned to again and again in writing this column. I go back and forth about whether or not Joy Division should be discussed in the context of punk rock. But then the above issue of *Spin* came out, *celebrating* “25 Years of Punk.” This issue listed *Unknown Pleasures* as number 11 of the “50 Most Essential Punk Records,” thus putting a permanent end to my questioning as well as that of a new generation of “punks” who can now go out and buy the “50 Essential Punk Records,” only now re-released on CD. [What is with the gothic script, it looks more appropriate for a Heavy Metal retrospective?]

I can't help but be ambivalent toward writing about punk, whether it is in *Spin* or in this column. It is hard not to see this writing as either misguided, myth-guided, or as an attempt to find a new market to exploit. One of our survey respondents put it this way: "Not Punk Rock is something you buy on CD to replace your crappy tape of someone else's old LP."

The *25 Years of Punk* did help me to clarify some of my own thinking about punk. One element that is often left out (in a discussion of what is punk) is the distinction between punk as a movement that occurred at a particular point in history (1970s) versus an attitude of protest that is ahistorical and re-occurs at different times in history. In the first instance, punk is very narrowly defined and is confined to New York (early-mid 70s) England (mid-late 70s) and LA (late 70s) and then the rest of the US (very late 70s and into 80s?). The latter approach views punk as an example of a more universal youth and counter-cultural movement that is trans-historical. An example of this approach can be found in Greil Marcus' *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Marcus traced "punk" attitudes back from the Sex Pistols to various 60s movements, Situationist International (1957) and Lettrist International (1952) (French cultural art movements), to the Surrealists (1920s), to Dada (1910s), and earlier to "the young Karl Marx, Saint-Just, various medieval heretics, and the knights of the round table," (Marcus, 18). Jean-Pierre Turmel's essay on Joy Division from *licht und blindheit* explores the darkness of Joy Division and similarities with the German Romanticists, various mystics, and the writings of Georges Bataille, to find a common source for the energy of "punk" music (this essay can be found in London Records 4 CD set: *Heart and Soul. Joy Division*, or I imagine it came with the original vinyl, if you can find it).

These various writers use punk as an example of trans-historical cultural movements, for instance, we could consider Nietzsche as the “god father of punk,” through his writings on music and the Dionysian element. Examine this following quote by Edinger on the Dionysian, and consider how it may apply to punk rock:

“In general, the Dionysian is daimonic and ecstatic, promoting intensity of experience rather than clear, structured meaning. It is a dissolver of limits and boundaries, bringing life without measure. In its extreme form it is wild, irrational, mad, ecstatic, boundless. It is the enemy of all conventional laws, rules and established forms. It is in the service, not of safety, but of life and rejuvenation. The weak and immature may be destroyed by its onslaught; the healthy will be fertilized and enlivened,” (Edinger, *Anatomy of the Psyche: Alchemical Symbolism in Psychotherapy*, 64).

Another view is that of the historian, David Hackett Fisher, who examines the link between various historical eras and waves of economic change, such as inflation. “These material events had cultural consequences. In literature and the arts, the penultimate stage of every price-revolution was an era of dark visions and restless dreams...Young people, uncertain of both the future and the past, gave way to alienation and cultural anomie,” (Fisher, *The Great Wave*, 238).

My own writing has tended toward this latter, inclusive, view of punk, and has turned toward the trans-historical and general to help to understand the particular. This is not without its risks, I am the first to admit it. It does not bother me if in trying to understand punk, I destroy punk. Well, it does bother me. But my interest is primarily in “punk” rather than in punk. The following survey may help to alleviate some of my own bias in punk. In a sense, we are “taking our research to the streets,” “out to the people!”

The following survey was conducted by email. Eighteen experts were identified and solicited. Seven responded (38.9%, this figure is roughly equivalent to the general response rate to my email, thus, we can consider it a valid sample). I will break the responses down into several separate categories that will sample from the various respondent's replies. The survey consisted of two questions:

- 1) What is punk rock?
- 2) What is not punk rock?

What is the Punk Rock Attitude?

"Punk rock is the opposition to a societal or governmental norm through angst driven music...Punk rock engages both a separateness - from mainstream society - and a gathering - into a group of others of similar beliefs and frustrations. Punk rock concerts are the ritual meeting grounds for exercising frustrations and meeting others of the same ilk."

"...punk rock by definition expresses alienation, conflict, anger, in relation to mainstream expectations and perceptions."

"The Attitude: Anti-Establishment, civil disregard with a tendency toward violence and pain as forms of pleasure."

"Punk rock is an underclass voluntarily created and populated by its members to provide an artistic alternative to the mainstream media."

What is the Punk Rock Appearance?

"...either an intentional lack of energy put toward personal appearance in defiance of societal standards or an extreme costuming that is symbolic of war (Mohawks/war paint) or death (black clothes/pale face)."

What is Punk Rock Music?

"I know nothing about the nuts and bolts of music..."

“Anyone that can pick up an instrument can play.”

What is a Specific Example of a Punk Rock Band?

“Ramones, Illnoiz”

Who Was Illnoiz?

“Illnoiz was the shit. It was a band of high school kids from Decatur. They played at a mini-punk fest that Andy put together on the Quad. I think Mike would remember. Their hit song included the refrain: “Hey sporto, hey sporto, hey sporto, FUCK YOU UP!” or something like that. I also failed to mention that punk rock is about hope.”

“I would agree with Mr. R’ s inclusion of Ill Noize. They were 100% punk, hard core stick eaters.”

Why Were Ill Noize 100% Hard Core Stick Eaters?

“Well, one time I was at a show at Channing-Murray and they were all outside...eating sticks...Don’ t you remember them? They had that one song, “The Mall Crawl.”

What is Not Punk Rock?

“The happy-go-lucky glee club of old.”

“George Michael.”

“Not Punk Rock is something you buy on CD to replace your crappy tape of someone else’s old LP. I can listen to Not Punk Rock for more than 10 minutes these days. Not Punk Rock’s not dead (ha ha).”

“Punk Rock is not a haircut. The revolution is not a hat.”

An Application of Punk/Not Punk to the 25 Years of Punk Issue’s “50 Most Essential Punk Records”

I think they use a combination of a historical definition as well as a trans-historical one. This leads to statements such as “punk as hell but not punk,” which is either idiotic or profound, depending on the nuance.

How could you choose *New Day Rising* over *Zen Arcade*? I, myself, do actually prefer NDR, but ZA is definitely more *punk*.

Nirvana, that is a tough one, but how can you choose *In Utero*?

Meat Puppets II, sure one of my all-time favorite albums, but I’m not sure it is punk, I’d say post-punk.

Devo, come on!

Big Black, I think you could make an argument, but I think you only choose that album because of its title, rather than its music.

Green Day. Maybe I didn’t give them a chance, but I already sold my copy and can’t give them a second chance.

Jesus and Mary Chain...definitely *post-punk*.

Public Enemy, well, I’m glad you put them in there, I’d like to see something written on the relationship of punk and rap music, but I don’t think you can call them punk.

I’ll end with a few records I would have liked to have seen listed:

Butthole Surfers: *Butthole Surfers*, or my favorite, *Psychic...Powerless...Another Man’s Sac* (although that is probably better described as post-punk)

Flux of Pink Indians: *Strive to Survive Causing the Least Amount of Suffering Possible*

Naked Raygun: *Throb, Throb*

CRASS: *Nagasaki Nightmare* (7”), and *Reality Asylum/Shaved Women* (7”)

Black Flag: *Nervous Breakdown* (7”)

And what about the Feederz?

Perhaps the best punk music is not to be found on a record, at least if we listen to our respondents, I don't know if there are any recordings of Ill Noize? I always liked the Defoliants, too.

CONIUNCTIONS.IO

What Does the Shadow Know?

Trauma, Transformation & Punk Rock (Part VII)

(August, 2001)

In the shadowplay, acting out your own death, knowing no more
(Joy Division, "Shadowplay," 1979).

**I never realised the lengths I'd have to go,
All the darkest corners of a sense I didn't know...**
(Joy Division, "Twenty-four Hours," 1980).

One of the recurring themes this column has explored is the attraction to various forms of darkness and how that can lead to change or transformation. This transformation can lead to the question: how can something change into its opposite? We are used to thinking in this culture that things exist as opposites and that opposites are not connected with one another, that they are distinct, different, and separate. We tend to have an allopathic approach to problems and crises in our lives, or, in other words, for a given problem, we apply its opposite. In order to get peace, we wage war. In order to get safety, we buy guns. In order to be happy, we shun sadness. In order to have well-being, we shun suffering. This is *the path of opposition*, and the risk is that it can entrench opposition and preclude transformation.

There is at least one other path, though, the homeopathic, or the application of like to cure like. This can be found in the phrase, “you need to fight fire with fire.” From a homeopathic perspective, the opposites are in relation with each other and “the way out is the way in.”

In Carl Jung’s theoretical system of psychological transformation, the first stage of therapy involves the confrontation with the Shadow Archetype. The Shadow can be thought of as literally a shadow of the conscious personality and the consciousness of the individual. Thus, it includes the

sum of all personal and collective psychic elements which, because of their incompatibility with the chosen conscious attitude, are denied expression in life and therefore coalesce into a relatively autonomous ‘splinter personality’ with contrary tendencies in the unconscious. The shadow behaves compensatorily to consciousness; hence its effects can be positive as well as negative,” *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 398-399, by Jung and Jaffé).

The shadow can be thought of as everything an individual (or culture) is, but does not want to acknowledge. The first step in therapy involves “owning” one’s Shadow, or, to put it more crudely, “owning one’s Shit.” Without acceptance of our dark side (that which is behind our vision) we will be unable to focus on ourselves and do the work of Individuation and move forward on the path of Self-hood.

When the Shadow is split off, it tends to get projected out on to others, and this is the basis for the principle of scapegoating. The unwanted aspects of self and society are projected on to the scapegoat, then when the scapegoat is driven off or destroyed, there is an illusion that one has purged oneself and society of its demons. This is also the basis of the observation that the reason we dislike a particular person is because they amplify a trait we ourselves possess, but would rather deny. Owning the Shadow is the first step that is

necessary in order to have any degree of emotional objectivity toward ourselves/others.

Without taking this step, we hopelessly entangle what belongs to self and what belongs to other.

Jung has described what he calls his own “Confrontation with the Unconscious,” in his book *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. This occurred after his break with Freud and included a period of 8 years in which he turned inward and observed the activities of the psyche through dreams, active imagination, and mandalas. This Confrontation begins with a Descent and an encounter with the Shadow.

“After the parting of ways with Freud, a period of inner uncertainty began for me. It would be no exaggeration to call it a state of disorientation. I felt totally suspended in mid-air, for I had not found by own footing...”

“One fantasy kept returning: there was something dead present, but it was still alive...”

“One of the greatest difficulties for me lay in dealing with my negative feelings. I was voluntarily submitting myself to emotions of which I could not really approve, and I was writing down fantasies which often struck me as nonsense, and toward which I had strong resistances. For as long as we do not understand their meaning, such fantasies are a diabolical mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous...In order to grasp the fantasies which were stirring in me ‘underground,’ I knew that I had to let myself plummet down into them, as it were. I felt not only violent resistance to this, but a distinct fear. For I was afraid of losing command of myself and becoming prey to the fantasies – and as a psychiatrist I realized only too well what that meant. After prolonged hesitation, however, I saw that there was no other way out. I had to take the chance, had to try to gain power over them; for I realized that if I did not do so, I ran the risk of their gaining power over me...”

“Then I let myself drop. Suddenly it was as though the ground literally gave way beneath my feet, and I plunged down into dark depths. I could not fend off a feeling of panic,” (MDR, 170-179).

Like Dante, or Zarathustra, Jung begins his journey through a descent, illustrating that one must go down before one goes up. “Thus Zarathustra began to go under,”

(Nietzsche, from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 122). And like Zarathustra

and Jung, we can argue that Ian Curtis and Joy Division began to go under, into the depths of the underworld and the world of death and shadows.

*I've seen the real atrocities,
Buried in the sand*
(Joy Division, "Ice Age," 1977).

*Guess your dreams always end.
They don't rise up just descend*
(Joy Division, "Insight," 1979).

To the depths of the ocean where all hopes sank, searching for you
(Joy Division, "Shadowplay," 1979).

*Here are the young me, well where have they been?
We knocked on the doors of Hell's darker chamber,
Pushed to the limit, we dragged ourselves in,
We watched from the wings as the scenes were replaying,
We saw ourselves now as we never had seen.
Portrayal of trauma and degeneration,
The sorrows we suffered and never were free*
(Joy Division, "Decades," 1980).

Curtis' lyrics fill the band's music with themes of descent, darkness, suffering. At times there is a sense of a search, a quest, or a dark revelation, as in "Take my hand and I'll show you what was and will be," ("Atrocity Exhibition," 1980) or again, "God in his wisdom took you by the hand, God in his wisdom made you understand," ("Colony," 1980). In this sense, Curtis, like Jung, is an explorer of the Unconscious, through the techniques of despair and hopelessness, he disconnects from the world and begins his descent, commenting like a tour guide as he watches the Shadowplay in the darkness.

A major theme in Curtis' lyrics are the shortcomings or inferior aspects of the self. He explores the limits of psychic endurance and self-esteem. He steps over, from the "normal" position of the preservation of the ego and the distortions of narcissism designed to make one feel better about themselves, and into the distortions of despair and desolation

from which there is no hope of escape. To follow Curtis, we must move from narcissism to nihilism.

All my failings exposed

(Joy Division, "Love Will Tear Us Apart," 1980).

I can see life getting harder...

I can't see it getting better...

Systematically degraded,

Emotionally a scapegoat,

I can't see it getting better...

Hollow now, I'm burned out

(Joy Division, "The Sound of Music," 1979).

Mother I tried please believe me,

I'm doing the best that I can.

I'm ashamed of the things I've been put through,

I'm ashamed of the person I am

(Joy Division, "Isolation," 1980).

Soulless and bent on destruction,

A struggle between right and wrong...

Beyond all this good is the terror...

Existence well what does it matter?

I exist on the best terms I can

(Joy Division, "Heart and Soul," 1980).

In addition to exposing all of his own, individual failings, Curtis also documents a panorama of collective human ugliness. He travels far and wide, deep and dark, and describes Nazis who "drank and killed to pass the time," ("Walked in Line," 1978); "night filled with bloodsport and pain," ("Day of the Lords," 1979); "Heroes, idols cracked like ice," ("Autosuggestion," 1979); and the "horrors of a faraway place...mass murder on a scale you've never seen," ("Atrocity Exhibition," 1980). Curtis passes through the Personal Shadow of faults and weaknesses to the Collective Shadow and immerses himself in the sins of mankind. He witnesses the inversion of wrong and right and the triumph of darkness over light.

*I traveled far and wide through many different times,
What did you see there?
I saw the saints with their toys...
I saw all knowledge destroyed...
The power and glory of sin...
The blood of Christ on their skins...
I saw the one-sided trials...
I saw the tears as they cried*

(Joy Division, "Wilderness, 1979).

All of these encounters with the dark side of the self and culture can easily be viewed from this Jungian perspective of an encounter with the Shadow and the beginning of the descent into the Unconscious. For Jung, this was a necessary first step toward the development of the Self. What is dark must first be "seen" and accepted before it can be illuminated and transformed. The shadow is akin to the base lead that through alchemy can be transformed into gold. However, this is not simply a matter of playful fantasy for Jung, this encounter with the Shadow can destroy as well as transform, and one of the primary dangers he describes at this point is that of over-identification with the Shadow.

While the Shadow must be accepted as part of the personality and humanity, it is incorrect to reduce everything down to the Shadow. Jung's view of the Self includes the Shadow, but also various other elements or Archetypes, such as the Animus (Masculine), the Anima (Feminine), the Mother, the Trickster, and the Wise Old Man, to name a few. All of these psychic elements have a negative and positive side, just like the Shadow. This leads to the odd alchemy of the psyche that often results in the transformation of the negative that is accepted into something oddly similar, but no longer deadly. This is tricky business, as Jung warns if,

“we do not partially succumb, nothing of this apparent evil enters into us, and no regeneration or healing can take place...If we succumb completely, then the contents expressed by the inner voice act as so many devils, and a catastrophe ensues. But if we succumb only in part, and if by self-assertion the ego can save itself from being completely swallowed, then it can assimilate the voice, and we realize that the evil was, after all, only a semblance of evil, but in reality a bringer of healing and illumination,” (Jung, “The Development of Personality,” CW 17, cited in Storr, *The Essential Jung*, 208-209).

One of Jung’s primary examples of identification with the Shadow and subsequent tragedy is Friedrich Nietzsche and his alter-ego, Zarathustra, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Jung ran an ongoing seminar on this book from 1934-1939, which can be read in *Jung’s Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*. We will now turn to some of Jung’s discussion from this text (the abridged edition). Here he cautions that to confront the shadow is to confront “the fact of one’s own negation....[and that] the shadow is so strong that you can be honestly in doubt as to what you really are,” (Jung, 108). In the confrontation with the Shadow, there is a period of utter confusion as to what is self, Shadow, and Self. Or in other words what is ego-consciousness, what is that which negates ego, and what is that which is both ego and non-ego. It is this moment which is of critical importance.

“Naturally, it is impossible to realize the collective unconscious without being entirely dismembered or devoured, unless you have help, some strong link which fastens you down to reality so that you never forget you are a human individual like other individuals. For as soon as you touch the collective unconscious you have an inflation—it is unavoidable—and then you soar into space, disappear into a cloud, become a being beyond human proportions...[and this is what Jung claims happened to Zarathustra/Nietzsche]...his head swells up and he becomes a sort of balloon; one is no longer sure of his identity, whether he is a god or a demon or a devil, a ghost or a madman or a genius,” (Jung, 131-133).

At this point of confused identification with the Shadow (an element of the collective unconscious) one can become identified with either extreme of Shadow or Anti-Shadow. In Nietzsche’s case, Zarathustra becomes like a god-man and swells to a point that is

unsustainable for a human individual. Perhaps in Curtis' case (or at least his lyrical persona), he identified solely with the Shadow, no longer was he a human being with both positive and negative qualities, but now only the darkest, the bleakest, he looks "beyond the day at hand, there's nothing there at all," ("Twenty-four Hours," 1980).

For Jung, the fact that all individuals are connected by having access to the collective unconscious means that ideas cannot only be "psychologically" transferred, but that they can actually activate and manifest contents from the collective unconscious. **"You can of course, infect people by inflation, can cause a sort of mental contagion; people are often inflated and they have an equally inflating influence on other people. Also the contrary is true: when a person is too small for his size he can have a deflating effect upon others...So where there is inflation there is also the contrary; where there is the heat of the spirit there is also the coldness,"** (Jung, 282). With this quote, we have not only managed to establish Jung as the possible originator of the term "mental contagion" (on June, 9th, 1937), but we have also found Jung's solution to why people could be attracted to the bleak despair of Joy Division, and how that attraction could lead to the opposite emotion of a kind of elation, or perhaps even to a unification of these opposites into a peaceful acceptance. As with Bataille, transformation occurs not by changing something from what it is into what it is not, but rather, transformation occurs because the opposites are in some way related or connected. In this sense, to have an emotion X is to have the possibility of also having the emotion that is considered the opposite of X.

To return to our examination of Curtis' lyrical persona in the context of the Jungian Shadow, first we have the descent into the unconscious, the elaboration of the negatives of the personal shadow, the travel through the dimensions of the negative collective shadow.

From this perspective, we can wonder if Curtis identifies or is inflated with the Shadow at this point.

*I've got the spirit, lose the feeling, let it out somehow...
I've got the spirit, but lose the feeling,
I've got the spirit, but lose the feeling
(Joy Division, "Disorder," 1979).*

*Where will it end? Where will it end?
Where will it end? Where will it end?
(Joy Division "Day of the Lords," 1979).*

*Over each mistakes were made.
I took the blame.
Directionless so plain to see,
A loaded gun won't set you free.
So you say
(Joy Division, "New Dawn Fades," 1979).*

*Two ways to choose,
On a razor's edge...
If I can't break out now, the time just won't come...
Something must break now,
This life isn't mine,
Something must break now,
Waiting for the time,
Something must break
(Joy Division, "Something Must Break, 1980).*

And, finally, the last prophetic line of the last prophetic song (released posthumously after Curtis' death by hanging:

*Cord stretches tight then it breaks,
Someday we will die in your dreams,
How I wish we were here with you now
(Joy Division, "In a Lonely Place," 1980).*

In the above quoted lyrics, several themes are apparent: numbness or loss of feeling, or life not belonging to self (separation from self); possession by the spirit (shadow);

impending violence or self-destruction (gun, cord, something breaking); and finally the forced choice of an either/or. These elements could be taken as examples of identification with the Shadow, rather than what Jung considers to be the way out of identification (or partially succumbing), which must be followed by a form of transcending identity from wholly shadow to recognizing the Shadow as one of the many elements or characteristics that make up the Self. This is a somewhat difficult concept to follow. First, the shadow is seen as “out there,” belonging to someone else. Then this is recognized as a projection of oneself, which leads to a depressive position. The next step is in recognizing the universal nature of the shadow as being related to oneself.

Jung states that “the shadow *ought* to be personified in order to be discriminated. As long as you feel it as having no form or particular personality, it is always partially identical with you; in other words, you are unable to make enough difference between that object and yourself...but when you say, this is I and that is the shadow, you personify the shadow, and so you make a clean cut between the two, between yourself and that other, and inasmuch as you can do that, you have detached the shadow from the collective unconscious,” (Jung, 333-334).

Using this schema, we can hypothesize that Curtis failed to detach from the Shadow, or failed to dis-identify with his lyrical persona, and thus in the Shadow play, acted out his own death, “knowing no more.” The complicated question that remains is could it have been otherwise?

A slightly less complicated question is could others (the audience, the listener, the rest of the band) follow in his footsteps, but have a different outcome? Perhaps to be able to identify with Curtis’ archetypal explorations of the Shadow, but then at the end of the record

to say, well, he killed himself, and then to recognize him as an embodiment of the Shadow, perhaps that can allow a detachment of the shadow “from the collective unconscious,” and that allows you to go on.

“The three days’ descent into hell during death describes the sinking of the vanished value into the unconscious, where, by conquering the power of darkness, it establishes a new order, and then rises up to heaven again, that is attains supreme clarity of consciousness,” (Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, CW 11, cited in Storr, 249).

*Oh up down turn around
Please don't let me hit the ground,
Tonight I think I'll walk alone,
I'll find my soul a silent home
(New Order, “Temptation,” 1982).*

CONIUNCTIONIS.II

What is the Relationship Between Music and Religion?

Trauma, Transformation & Punk Rock (Part VIII)

(September, 2001 – pre-9/11)

Have you ever wondered about the origin of music? What chance event led some hominid to imitate nature (the sound of wind across a broken reed) or to supplement nature (the sound of bone striking a hollow skull...one can imagine a scene such as the opening to *2001: A Space Odyssey*)? What did these original behaviors and sounds express? Was it an overflowing of life energy, a surplus of vitality? Could it have been an air of sobriety and mystery at an archaic funeral when vocal howling gave way to frantic pounding on the hollow and resonant corpse with skin drawn tight like a drum? Or, perhaps, could it have been an attempt to mimic nature in a form of imitation magic - the sound of thundering drums to bring rain, the whistle of bird to attract prey? Did music develop before the concept of gods and goddesses who manifest themselves in natural processes? Did certain sounds or whistles invoke specific gods or goddesses, or was sound thought to be a manifestation of the supernatural? Were early shaman's repetitive sounds ways to travel on spiritual quests, or did they simply activate the neurons in the brain responsible for "spiritual experience?" It is all a matter of speculation, but we can be certain that music in the current form of the music

industry and the cd recording is not representative of the form music has taken throughout the ages.

From a strictly materialist perspective, music is superfluous. It does not seem to confer an evolutionary adaptation (unless it is analogous to the attraction of potential mates, as with birds), yet it is ubiquitous throughout historical and contemporary societies. Music tends to invoke a state in the listener - that seems to be a truth. Music is a tool or technique for invoking (in the listener) or expressing (in the performer) particular moods or emotional states. In this sense, music can be considered a technology whose purpose is an evocation/alteration of the emotional states of performers and listeners. Music is a technology of emotional transformation.

It may be somewhat difficult for us to extract ourselves from our current society and to imagine what music was like and why it was performed in various societies throughout the ages. We can imagine martial, folk, and religious applications of music as three primary categories in which the technology of emotional transformation might be useful. I think a fair argument can be made that music was first, or primarily, used in a shamanistic or spiritual context to express and transform emotional energies and experiences.

There is evidence of the development of musical systems in the context of spiritual/religious systems. For instance, in the Indian Yogic tradition, each chakra (energy centers in different parts of the body) is associated with different tones and letters: The various tones are thought to stimulate or “open” the various chakras which can lead to both healing and spiritual growth. In addition to the different frequencies of sound energy mapping onto the chakras, visual energy, in the form of various colors map onto the

physical/spiritual chakra system (from 1-7 respectively, also note the correspondence with the color spectrum of the rainbow).

1st chakra (root/perineum) – LA – red

2nd (genital) – BA – orange

3rd (hara/abdomen) – YM – yellow

4th (heart) – HA – green

5th (throat) – RE – blue

6th (brow/3rd eye) – AH – indigo

7th (crown) – OM – violet

Another system of sound and spirituality is described by Native American, Joseph Rael. He states that since, “people are made of sound, listening is important. It is through listening that you become a true human, and a true human is a listener who is constantly attuned by working with everything that is happening,” (Rael and Marlow, *Being and Vibration*, 1993, p. 34). He further states that, “[e]verything is made up of principal ideas, and for each idea there is also a sound,” (49). Similar to the Indian Yogic tradition, Rael also describes the association of various colors to sounds and cardinal directions, although instead of relating to the chakra system on the body, the Native American tradition refers to the 4 cardinal directions and the 5th point of the center. In a saying that could equally apply to the vibration of sound, he writes that, “the color is directly connected to a particular vibration that, when used properly, will connect the brain almost instantly to that which it seeks to know,” (113). Rael describes the following associations:

East:	Aah (Yellow)
South:	Eh (White)
West:	Eee (Black)
North:	Oh (Red)
Center:	Uu

Robert Gass reports a number of relations between sound and spirituality. For instance in Christianity, he quotes the well-known Biblical passage, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” but he goes on to state that since, “the original Greek word *logos* (here translated as “word”) also means “sound,” it would be also accurate for this famous passage to read: ‘In the beginning was the Sound, and the Sound was with God, and the Sound was God...’” (*Chanting: Discovering Spirit in Sound*, 1999, p. 36). Likewise, looking at root words for spirit, there is often overlap with breath or sound. “The Greek word *psyche* (meaning “soul”) comes from the same root as *psychein*, which means “to breathe.” In Hebrew, the word for breath, *ruach*, means “Spirit,” while in Latin, the words for “soul” (*anima*) and “Spirit” (*animus*) both derive from the word for “wind” (*anemos*), (p. 53).

Gass states that our, “bodies and energy start to beat with the rhythm of the chant, the repeating pulses start to shift our sense of being into a more aligned, more harmonic state,” (16). He further quotes a prominent, contemporary physicist on the question of what are all things made of, what is matter: “matter consists of particles that are different modes of vibration of the string, such as the note G or F. The ‘music’ created by the string is matter itself,” (Michio Kaku, cited on p. 37). Gass cites numerous examples of sound as a medium

which transfers energy from one body to another and how physical rhythms can “entrain” to sound. And, he supports the thesis of this paper with the statement that, “throughout history there has been an intimate relationship between music, health, and healing,” as well as the relationship with spirituality, (43).

Another review of philosophical/spiritual traditions relation to sound can be found in Helmholtz’ discussion of Pythagoras. He cites the Pythagorean doctrine that, “Everything is Number and Harmony,” and also that the term “The Harmony of the Spheres” referred to the belief that the same numerical ratios found in the notes of the musical scale were found in the distances of planets from the sun. Supposedly, Pythagoras could actually hear or sense, this harmony which the planets emanated. Helmholtz further writes that “the five tones of the old Chinese scale were compared with the five elements of their natural philosophy – water, fire, wood, metal, and earth...At a later time the 12 Semitones of the Octave were connected with the 12 months of the year...[s]imilar references of musical tones to the elements, the temperaments, and the constellations are found abundantly scattered among the musical writings of the Arabs,” (Hermann Helmholtz, *On the Sensations of Tone*, translation of the 1885 edition, original edition, 1862, p. 229).

The concept of the harmony of the spheres calls to mind the alchemical dictum, “as above, so below.” This can be dismissed as superstition, or what James Frazer refers to as “Sympathetic Magic,” which breaks down into two different principles: Homeopathic or Imitative Magic (Law of Similarity) that “like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause,” and Contagious Magic (Law of Contagion) “that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed,” (*The Golden Bough*, abridged edition, 1922). These concepts are often

dismissed as primitive, childish, or superstitious, however they inform shamanism and mythology throughout time and history, also, these principles seem to apply in the growing field of Energy Medicine, as well as in Gass' discussion of the studies on the effects of music on the body, and even in some principles of quantum, and even classical physics. For instance, Gass cites the Dutch Scientist, Christian Huygens' observation that if you place a number of pendulum clocks on a wall, their rhythms will eventually entrain so that they are all moving in phase, (Gass, p. 35). Also, Helmholtz describes that musicians "are well acquainted with *sympathetic resonance*. When, for example, the strings of two violins are [tuned] in exact unison, and one string is bowed, the other will begin to vibrate," (Helmholtz, 36). Thus, we have an instance in which sound acts as an energy transfer from a body in motion to a body at rest, inducing motion in that body which is resonant with the first, or in other words, like causing like. While this classical physics principle is somewhat challenging to the materialist world view of isolated, objective elements, it is somewhat intuitive and can be found in common language, that we "click" with someone, or we "connect," or are on the "same wave length."

Helmholtz also cites Euler reasoning about music, in which he concludes that "order pleases us more than disorder," (230). This can be seen as congruent with the above discussion of sympathetic resonance, that a stimulus of order from the outside can lead to a feeling of order inside, again, the idea that music soothes the savage beast. However, we now confront the dilemma of why would some people prefer disordered, discordant music (punk, industrial, experimental, certain jazz traditions) to ordered, harmonic music (the majority of music, from classical, to pop, to primitive polyrhythm)? This is the question I keep returning to and cannot satisfactorily answer.

Yes, this is the question I keep returning to and cannot satisfactorily answer. From the principles of Sympathetic Magic, to the concerns of Tipper Gore over rock lyrics, to scientific studies on the effects of video violence on children, to the concerns of suburban parents about the trench-coat mafia and their music, to Martha Bayles who warns of “the loss of beauty and meaning in American popular music,” well-meaning citizens everywhere say that we should avoid the angry, the depressing, the dark, the bleak, the “bad,” the “negative,” and embrace the “happy-go-lucky glee club of old.” But what about the others, those that for whatever reason, are drawn to discord, to the dark, the violent, to the bad/negative/ugly music? How can Bayles say that “the anarchistic, nihilistic impulses of perverse modernism have been grafted onto popular music, where they have not only undermined the Afro-American tradition, but also encouraged today’s cult of obscenity, brutality, and sonic abuse,” (*Hole in Our Soul*, 1994, p. 12), while Mikal Gilmore describes the same popular music as it “articulated my losses, angers, and horrible (as in *unattainable*) hopes, and it emboldened me in many, many dark hours. It also...defined my convictions and my experience of what it meant...to be an American, and it gave me moral (and of course immoral) guidance that nothing else in my life has ever matched,” (*Night Beat: A shadow history of rock and roll*, 1998, p. 1). And Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground sang, “You know her life was saved by rock and roll,” (“Rock and Roll,” from *Loaded*, 1970). And Robert Pollard, from Guided By Voices, said, “I made rock my religion; that was my church,” (“Chasing Pollard Crazy,” in *The Big Takeover*, Issue 48, 2001, p. 55). And Marilyn Manson describes going to charismatic, Christian, faith-healing services as a teenager: “It was terrifying, like a horror show...people were speaking in tongues...I may have been what inspired me to become a rock musician,” (Interview with Marilyn Manson, at beliefnet.com,

July, 2001). This starts to echo a religious debate, in which one religion thinks it is right and the other is wrong. We have numerous references to “bad” rock music playing a subjectively positive role in some people’s lives, while others decry it as bad, unhealthy, or even evil.

We return to this unanswered question. Here is a possible answer, perhaps if the individual is, or feels, disordered inside (or views the world as disordered), the application of an ordered, harmonic music will “strike a false chord” in that individual. It is out of resonance with the individual’s own vibration and their view of the social realities vibration. Yet, the application of a discordant music will resonate with the way the individual feels inside and with their view of society. Now, the transformation: the hypothesis is that if a resonance is established between the individual and the music, this can amplify the amplitude of the wave and can cause a personal and social transformation through the creation of harmony within disorder. (As always, I again do not mean to imply that this will always happen or will always be a pretty sight, a “harmony” of negative attitudes could also lead to an outbreak of violence, transformation is never certain and this truly is playing with fire). This principle is in contradiction to the above Indian and Native American musical systems of transformation, in that they use the application of the ordered sound to a disordered system, and in the current discussion we are applying a disordered stimulus to a disordered system and creating a degree of order within the disorder. This is similar to Stanislav Grof’s musical/breathing system of Holotropic Breathwork, in which music, “helps to mobilize old emotions and make them available for expression, intensifies and deepens the process, and provides a meaningful context for the experience. The continuous flow of music creates a carrying wave that helps the subject move through the difficult experiences and impasses, overcome psychological defenses, surrender and let go,” (*The*

Adventure of Self-Discovery, 1988, p. 185). This is somewhat reminiscent of the Freudian analytic argument that the discharge of drive energies is necessary (albeit, often in sublimated, or diverted ways), rather than trying to repress them. However, Grof's system does not hypothesize an unending source of antisocial drives like the id, but rather views the situation more from a system like the chakra system in which there can be imbalances or blockages in the flow of energy. Thus, it is possible that the state of disorder/imbalance/blockage/dissatisfaction/nihilism can be transformed, either by the Law of Similarity through the application of the ordering, harmonic stimulus, or by the intensification of this state through the application of a disordering stimulus which pushes to a natural resolution. A fundamental principle of this latter possibility is that "opposite" states are connected (as Bataille has argued through an "invisible" connection) and the intensification of one state loops back into the other state.

CONIUNCTIONIS.I2

What are we to do?

(October, 2001 – post-9/11)

“The escalating cycle of violence is typically welcomed by the harshest and most brutal elements on both sides,” (Noam Chomsky, “Interviewing Chomsky,” Radio B92, Belgrade, from *Z Magazine*).

“Certain experiences resist language. States of love, union, illness, terror, and loss can be so flooded with feeling and sensation that they overwhelm language’s structuring and delimiting work...Such events hold both the possibility of expansion and the threat of destruction, as they move or push us beyond our usual containing mental and emotional patterns,” (Diane Buczek, “Language in Extremis” *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2001).

“A person is a person through other persons. You can’t be a solitary human being. It’s all linked. We have this communal sense, and because of this deep sense of community, the harmony of the group is the prime attribute. And so you realize that in this world-view, anything that undermines the harmony is to be avoided as much as possible. And anger, jealousy and revenge are particularly corrosive. So you try and do everything to enhance the humanity of the other, because you are bound up with each other,” (Desmond Tutu, “Interview with Bishop Desmond Tutu” by Zia Jaffrey, *Boulder Daily Camera*, 3/1/98).

“The specific experience I’m talking about has given me one certainty: *consciousness precedes being* and not the other way around as the Marxist’s claim. For this reason, the salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness, and in human responsibility. *Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in the sphere of our beings as humans,*” (Vaclav Havel, in his speech to the U.S. Congress, 1990).

Interview:

Ouroboros (Houston)

by David Kopacz – for Mental Contagion (MC)

(November, 2001)

This was an email interview done with Carol and Shaun of the band Ouroboros from Houston, Texas. [Note, there are a number of different bands with variations on this name.] Carol is a member or alumni of Linus Pauling Quartet, Rotten Piece, Sad Pygmy, Disband, S.I., The Defenstrarion Unit, Setu, Texas Murder Speedway, and Traylor Trash. Shaun is a member of Rotten Piece and Filthy McNasty, and an alumni of Sad Pygmy, Turmoil in the Toybox, The Defenestration Unit, Setu, Texas Murder Speedway, and Traylor Trash. Bill is a veteran of Bartiromo, Klak, and Friendship Bracelets.

Carol: *Synths, Organ, Clarinet, Photo-Theremin (a homemade light controlled theremin)*

Shaun: *Bass, Effects, Tapes, Loops, Bass Clarinet, Stick-Cello, Stick-Violin (homemade electric string contraptions), Electric Branch Trimmer, Coronet, and Toys*

Rick: *Guitar*

Bill: *Drums, Percussion, Garden Weasel*

MC: Does Bill really play the garden weasel, as in the thing that is “advertised on TV?” Or does he just “play” (act like) a weasel in the garden?

C&S: both. he shakes it, jingles it, taps on it. it looks great and audiences seem to love it, and it sounds great. He plays anything he can get a good sound from, like my old Gumbo pot that is now one of his instruments/carrying case for his assorted drum sticks, and shakers.

MC: I impulse bought Ouroboros' cd, "brushfire" (recorded 9/6/00), when I was down in Austin, Texas, visiting a friend who had just moved there. What first caught my eye was the name of your band (I've read some Jung and various mythology and I'm familiar with the concept of the ouroboros) and then when I picked up the cd and saw a Max Ernst illustration, that was enough to buy it without even knowing what the band would sound like. First off, I'm interested in how you came up with the name "ouroboros," and also what is your interest in Max Ernst? These two factors are what led me to hear your band in the first place.

S: i came up with the name shortly after we started the band (early 99). not only did it seem to describe our sound, the word popped up randomly over the course of a few days, too many times to ignore. the more i dug into the history of the word/concept the more appropriate it became. it shows up all over the world, in different cultures and time periods. i am a big fan of surrealism (i think everyone else in the band is too), but again it was a random choice of artwork. usually one of us does art, but i was behind and feeling kinda lazy, someone had just given me an old copy of the ernst collage novel, and that piece seemed to fit the session. so in that both of these were "chance" selections, it seems your introduction was entirely chance.

MC: Is there anything you would like to say about the musicians who comprise Ouroboros (day jobs, other artistic endeavors, favorite colors/foods/bands, physical location in space/time, etc.)?

C: my favorite color is green. I like ponies and unicorns. that's what i think about when we are playing....sometimes I just empty my mind and play.....

S: carol and i have another project called ROTTEN PIECE, in the dark, experimental, creepy, noise vein. we've released a few cds and toured the u.s. and europe.

MC: When you are playing, do you have any intended effect that you are trying to induce or transfer to the listener?

S: i don't personally. it seems to work best for me to "turn off" my brain and play on auto pilot (of course sometimes we do crash and burn). the fewer expectations i have going in of the end result the better. i don't have an agenda beyond making our freaky, spaced out sounds, if people want to share that great, if not i figure they'll just ignore us anyway.

MC: How would you describe the relationship between the audience or listener with the band?

S: audience reactions have been mostly positive. i'm always surprised too, because it seems weird playing to rock audiences, when we're constantly skirting actually 'rocking.' People

either 'get it' or they don't. the reaction to the discs has been positive as well. the worst i've heard is that it made someone sleepy, and i consider that a compliment, too. it altered their mood and environment. the more i think about it, it's a bit disappointing that it's NOT more confrontational live, doing these mysterious little quiet things for a rock audience. i enjoy shaking people up more than pacifying them. it would be fun to make sounds that could instantly put a whole crowd to sleep at once. REALLY, REALLY ambient kinda stuff. or do a set that is below the threshold of human hearing. that would piss some people off.

MC: Are there any particular artistic, musical, or spiritual theories that influence the sounds that ouroboros produce?

S: we all like the simpsons, and smoke a lot of pot.

MC: While I was listening to "brushfire," I often wondered how much of the music is planned out ahead of time and how much is freeform. Do you have any comments about the role of synchronicity in your music? Also, do you have any thoughts about nonverbal communication between musicians while playing?

S: we have a few song forms, but they're really more launch pads or starting places. we make an effort not to play them the same way twice. synchronicity and chance play a huge role in our music. there are no mistakes, only opportunities... my thought about non verbal communication is: do laptop jockeys trade e-mail during performances?

MC: What do you think the ultimate nature of reality is? How does music relate to that reality?

S: i subscribe to frank zappa's stipulation that the universe is composed of vibrations (of particles/waves/etc) that add up to "the big note." i think music IS an attempt to describe the nature of reality. some people's descriptions and realities are just more stale than others.

MC: Are there any other musicians/artists that you would like other people to know about?

S: yeah, people should listen to more federation x, (early) dwarves, fatal flying guilloteens, DJ assault, brainbombs and rotten piece...

MC: Do you have any thoughts about the following documents which were purportedly written by Philip K. Dick? <http://thesmokinggun.com/archive/pkdick1.shtml>

S: just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're NOT out to get you.

MC: Thanks again for doing the interview. Is there some way that people can obtain recordings?

S: we don't have a website yet, but you could e-mail us for a list of current titles; lazysquid@juno.com. (sound exchange austin and houston both stock our stuff) ouroboros has around 20 CDR releases at the moment.

ouroboros cdr discography

crippling balloon payment on the slums of tomorrow (new!)
captured live
spaceshot blenderizer
groovin' on the poison
the pliers
retinal injuries sustained during laser light show
roc
resinated strains of sonic ecstasies
scissors are sharp
brushfire
neilos
misty eyed transgressions against humanity
sky music
transmuted baloon head
orange spatula
polka for the masses
townhouses of the holy
the fun's all gone
almost washed my hair
incense and pepper spray
jourmongander
all is one

thanks, Carol and Shaun

CONIUNCTIONIS.13

What Does Religion Have to Do with Rock?

A review of Dan Graham's *Rock My Religion* (MIT, 1993)

(December, 2001)

Dan Graham's video, "Rock My Religion," (1984-85). (Note that both the video and the book of essays, as well as one of the essays, all have the same title) begins with visual scenes of a Shaker revival meeting with a rock music soundtrack dubbed over it. Then the scene changes and a visual scene of a punk rock show is overdubbed with the sounds of a revival meeting. What is so intriguing about this is how well the shaking, twitching, rhythmic movements, and circular shuffling of the religious ecstasies resonate with the secular screaming and ranting of the rock music. Likewise, the moshing, slamming, pogo-ing, and head banging of the punk rock crowd meshes with the moaning, chanting, and wailing of the revival meeting soundtrack. The harmony of this visual juxtaposition of seemingly disparate practices speaks more to the underlying similarity of forms in rock and religion than any words can describe. In the following discussion, we will be referring to the video, as well as Graham's written words, primarily his essays, "Rock My Religion," "Punk as Propaganda," and "McLaren's Children."

Graham's essay combines descriptions of the Shakers' religious rituals, as the Native American Ghost Dance, quotes from Patti Smith, Jerry Lee Lewis, Sam Phillips, and Jim Morrison, along with commentary on the emergence of teenagers as a consumer class in the 1950s. Graham's primary method of argument is juxtaposition - he supplies the stimuli and the reader is left to mull over the meanings unleashed by these pairings of seemingly disparate elements. There is a lot of space for the reader's mind to wander within the text. Of the many threads that are woven in, we will unravel two primary themes: 1) music/dance as an ecstatic spiritual practice, and 2) music/dance as a form of social protest in the face of oppression. First, we will have a brief digression to introduce a history of the Shakers and of the Ghost Dance.

The Story of Ann Lee and the Shakers

Graham describes the life of Ann Lee, "an illiterate blacksmith's daughter from Manchester, England, [who] founded the Shakers at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution...She joined a sect which taught that Christ's Second Coming could be experienced through a trance produced by the rhythmic recitation of biblical phrases. This trembling also cured the body of ills," (Graham, p. 80). Graham provides a context for Lee's life of a marriage to a man she "disdained," bearing four children who died in infancy, against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution and the exploitation of the urban working class by factory owners. In a revelation, she saw that sexuality and procreation led to many of the ills in contemporary society and she founded a sect based on celibacy and a simple communal life. "Imprisoned as a witch, Ann Lee had visions that she was the Second

Coming of Christ, incarnated in the form of a Woman,” (G, 81). She emigrated to the US in 1774 and died in 1784. At its peak, the Shaker sect numbered approximately 6,000 but has declined to one small community today, (from the Penguin *Dictionary of Religions*).

The Ghost Dance

“A revivalistic, prophetic movement among Amerindian tribes of the Great Basin and Plains of North America in the late 19th century. The founding prophet, a Paiute Indian, Wovoka, claimed it had been revealed to him in a vision that, if the Indians would dance, the dead would return and all the native peoples would be restored to the happy way of life they had before the arrival of the white man...Fanatical belief that ‘ghost shirts’ would protect wearers from the harm of enemy bullets prompted still further confrontation with the whites. The movement subsided rapidly following the tragic massacre of Sitting Bull and his people at Wounded Knee in 1890,” (from the Penguin *Dict. Rel.*). This is often considered a “millenarian” movement, meaning a vision of cultural renewal or change which often occurs when a culture seems to be approaching “the end times.”

Music/Dance as an Ecstatic Spiritual Practice

(Ecstasy is used here in the spiritual context, defined as: “trance, frenzy, or rapture associated with mystic or prophetic exaltation,” *American Heritage Dictionary*). Graham describes the Shakers ritual Circle Dance, in which “lines of men and women formed four concentric moving circles. The dance liberated the group from individual sin and helped

them to achieve a collective purity. The group rhythmically chanted from the Bible and marched in circles. Stomping their feet, they shouted, ‘Stomp the Devil!’ Sisters and Brothers began whirling in place. The group cried, ‘Shake! Shake! Shake! Christ is with you!’ There is a noise like ‘Whoosh,’ which means the Devil is present. People clapped. They leaped up and down. Some removed their outer clothes. A fit of shaking, ecstatic seizures passed over the group. ‘Reeling, turning, twisting,’ some rocked on their feet. Still others were doubled over, feet and hands linked, as they rolled on the floor. They rolled over and over, like wheels, or they turned like rolling logs. Some got down on four legs [sic] like dogs, growled, snapped their teeth and barked. Indian spirits entering the meeting, ‘possessed’ the bodies of the Shakers. Elder and Eldress would have to pull Squaws and Warriors apart...Ritualistically, the Devil was snared from his hiding place within the group and cast out,” (G, 83). Graham also describes the Great Religious Revival of 1801: “In tent meetings, rural pioneers clapped their hands, rhythmically reciting biblical texts. Here for the first time, the piano and guitar replaced the organ as conveyor of spiritual feeling. The saved would ‘reel and rock’ and, in their collective desire to be ‘reborn,’ people would ‘talk in tongues,” (G, 84).

“My belief in rock ‘n’ roll gave me a kind of strength that other religions couldn’t come close to,” (Patti Smith, quoted in G, 85).

“For a time during the seventies, rock culture became the religion of the avant-garde art world,” (G, 94).

Black Elk describes his experience of the Ghost Dance: “we began dancing, and most of the people wailed and cried as they danced, holding hands in a circle; but some of them laughed with happiness. Now and then someone would fall down like dead, and others would

go staggering around and panting before they would fall...Suddenly it seemed that I was swinging off the ground and not touching it any longer. The queer feeling came up from my legs and was in my heart now. It seemed I could glide forward like a swing, and then glide back again in longer and longer swoops...all I saw at first was a single eagle feather right out in front of me...I looked ahead and floated fast toward where I looked...When I touched the ground, two men were coming toward me, and they wore holy shirts made and painted in a certain way...they said...'We will give you something that you shall carry back to your people and with it they shall see their loved ones.' I knew it was the way their holy shirts were made that they wanted me to take back," (Black Elk, in Niehardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 204-6).

Jim Morrison describes a childhood incident in which he saw the aftermath of a car accident in the desert: "The reaction I get now thinking about it, looking back - is that the souls of the ghosts of those dead Indians...maybe just one or two of 'em...were just running around and freaking out, and just leaped into my soul. And they're still there," (in G, 90).

"Rock performers electrically unleash anarchic energies and provide a hypnotic ritualistic trance for the mass audience - especially when both musicians and audience are under the influence of psychedelic drugs. Such shows suggest the transport of the tent meeting or the Shakers' deliberate seeking out of the Devil in order to purify themselves and ensure communion with God," (G, 92).

Music/Dance as Social Protest

Ann Lee formed a music and dance group that sought to subvert the secular society of the day and institute a religious utopian community based on a mystical communion with God. As a result of following her direct revelation, she was persecuted in England and eventually emigrated to the US to manifest her spiritual vision by forming the Shaker sect.

“There was no hope on earth, and God seemed to have forgotten us. Some said they saw the Son of God; others did not see Him...The people did not know; they did not care. They snatched at the hope. They screamed like crazy men to Him for mercy. They caught at the promise they heard He had made...We begged for life, and the white men thought we wanted theirs,” (Red Cloud, in Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 413).

Kicking Bear describes the news of the visions of the Messiah: “In the beginning, he said, God made the earth and then sent the Christ to earth to teach the people, but the white men had treated him badly, leaving scars on his body, and so he had gone back to heaven. Now he had returned to earth as an Indian, and he was to renew everything as it used to be and make it better...the earth would be covered with new soil which would bury all the white men, and the new land would be covered with sweet grass and running water and trees. Great herds of buffalo and wild horses would come back. The Indians who danced the Ghost Dance would be taken up into the air and suspended there while a wave of new earth was passing, and then they would be set down among the ghosts of their ancestors on the new earth, where only Indians would live,” (B, 407). The whites considered the frantic Indian dancing to be a “pernicious religion,” the “fomenters of disturbance” were rounded up and the tense situation peaked in the massacre at Wounded Knee, in which “Big Foot and more than half of his people were dead or seriously wounded...One estimate placed the final total of dead at very nearly three hundred of the original 350 men, women, and children. The soldiers lost twenty-five dead and thirty-nine wounded, most of them struck by their own bullets or shrapnel,” (B, 408-18).

“The rock club and rock concert performance are like a church, a sanctuary against the adult world. Mechanized electric instruments unleash anarchic energies for the mass. The rock star stands in a sacrificial position against the regime of work; his sacrifice is his body and life. By living life and performing at the edge, he transcends the values of everyday

work. But this transcendence is achieved by sacrificing his ability to become an adult. He must die, or fall from fame,” (G, 90). As with the archetype of Christ as the original rebel who meets a tragic death, so to do those who protest against the social order often (perhaps are even required or expected to) come to an early and tragic end. As newspapers testify to, death sells. Or as Graham writes, death “is a technique to achieve fame and immortality,” (G, 90).

Rock, My Religion/Rock My Religion

Graham’s essays raise many interesting questions (only some of which we have discussed) through both his arguments as well as his juxtaposition of seemingly disparate elements which speak directly to the reader. In discussing various rock figures and styles in the context of Ann Lee and the Shakers, and the millenarian movement of the Plains Indians’ Ghost Dance he anchors current secular pop culture into a history of the use of music/dance as an ecstatic technique of mysticism, as well as a form of social protest which often leads to tragic consequences. While the protester comes to an untimely death, through the intrinsic human process of myth-making, s/he comes to be viewed as a tragic hero and martyr, who can then serve as a historical and inspirational figure for the next generation of protesters. This calls to mind Marcus’ “secret history” of punk rock. [One element which we have not examined, but is well developed in Graham’s essays, is the ambivalent relation that the rock protester has with the society that is subverted. In particular, the entertainment industries ability to market “subversion” in a way that makes it a profitable product which loses its original subversive intent. Perhaps this will be a topic of a future column.]

The protest element of music/dance is well documented and generally accepted, however, the religious or spiritual element is generally not discussed in relation to secular music. The striking similarities between Graham's images and sounds of the Shaker revival and the punk rock concert spur thoughts about the relation of the spiritual/mystical and contemporary music/dance. Could Marcus' "secret history" lead back, not just to avant-garde artists, but further to the in-spiration of mystics throughout time?

To the ancient Greeks, the connection between music and the spiritual was self-evident. The word, "music," derives from "the Greek *mousike* (*tekhne*), (art) of the Muses, i.e., poetry, literature, music, etc., from *mousikos*, of the Muses, from *Mousa*, a Muse," (American Heritage Dictionary). The muses were the nine daughters of Mnemosyne (the goddess of memory) and Zeus (the Father of the gods) who were the source of inspiration for each of the various art forms.

Graham's title (which he liked well enough to use for the title of his video, essay, and eventually his book) captures this connection between rock and spirituality when it is given the emphasis of, rock, my religion. It also captures the protest element, rock (as in rock or agitate the apple cart) my religion. With this title, Graham effects another juxtaposition, uniting both the religious/spiritual element of rock music with the subversion of the social order.

CONIUNCTIONIS.14

What Did You See There?

Ian Curtis and the Visionary Quest of the Shaman

Trauma, Transformation & Punk Rock (Part IX)

(January, 2002)

The focus of this column has been on one central subject, transformation, and particularly transformation through that which is generally shunned: darkness, and despair. I have long wondered why the music and lyrics of Joy Division and Ian Curtis have such a powerful effect and how a curious transformation of mood can occur when listening to their music. One can start off with melancholy, despair, anger, self-hatred, and yet after listening for a while, one's mood can become expansive, energized, and gradually shift, maybe to despair's opposite, or maybe to a sense of vitality or power. The idea of going deeper into darkness in order to reach the light is a concept that can seem counterintuitive. For the contemporary American, the idea that despair, trauma, or suffering could be "positive" is quite challenging. It would seem that a primary assumption of our populace is that life should be pain free, and if one experiences pain, it should be gotten rid of as quickly as possible. We have developed a number of different tools to rid ourselves of pain, such as medication, legislation, law suits, and escapist entertainment. However, this attitude of

avoidance is not the only attitude toward pain and suffering. The attitude of shamanism, which is perhaps the most ancient spiritual practice, views suffering as an unavoidable aspect of transformation.

“The only true wisdom lives far from mankind, out in the great loneliness, and it can be reached only through suffering. Privation and suffering alone can open the mind of a man to all that is hidden to others,” (Igjugarjuk, cited in Joseph Campbell, *Primitive Mythology*, 54).

Mircea Eliade defines shamanism as a “technique of ecstasy” in which the shaman enters into “a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld,” (Eliade, *Shamanism*, 5). The shaman is “chosen” by life threatening illness (and is often reported to have died and been reborn), or by lightning strike (the ultimate “enlightenment”), by voluntary fasting and exhaustion (as in the vision quest), or through hereditary transmission of the “gift.” Suffering, pain, illness, and even death, play a crucial role in the transformation of a member of the community into a shaman. From this perspective, suffering is not to be shunned, but is seen as not only an integral part of life, but something to be valued for its potential transformative power.

“An initiation into shamanic healing means a devaluation of all values, an overturning of the profane world, a peeling away of the inveterate handed-down notions of the world, liberation from everything preconceived. For that reason, shamanism is closely connected with suffering. One must suffer the disintegration of one’s own system of thought in order to perceive a new world in the higher space,” (Holger Kalweit, *Shamans, Healers, and Medicine Men*, 4).

The shaman’s “healing crisis” is similar to the wide spread “rite of initiation,” which has been so well documented. This rite entails separation from the tribe, painful ordeals or body modifications, some form of symbolic death and rebirth and then return to the community with a new identity. This also mirrors the “hero’s journey” of separation,

descent, trial/combat, winning the boon, and return to the community. Here is another Eskimo account of the process of becoming a shaman: “I searched in the darkness, I was silent in the great silence of the dark. That is how I became an angaqq, through visions, dreams, and meetings with flying spirits,” (cited in Kalweit, 14).

You've been seeing things/In darkness, not in learning
(Joy Division, “No Love Lost,” 1977)

I was moving through the silence without motion
(Joy Division, “Shadowplay,” 1979)

I never realised the lengths I'd have to go
All the darkest corners of a sense I didn't know
(Joy Division, “Twenty-four Hours,” 1980)

After surviving and mastering the initial trials of illness and descent into darkness, the shaman gains the ability to voluntarily enter an ecstatic trance that can be transformative not only for the shaman, but also for his/her patient or audience. Drumming, chanting, dancing, and music are often aides or vehicles to enter into such a trance state. In some cultures the drum is even called the shaman’s “horse” or “canoe,” implying that it is a vehicle for travel, (Eliade, 173 and 254, respectively). The trance often culminates in spontaneous, involuntary shaking. For this reason, epileptic seizures were long held to be a sacred illness which was interpreted as “meetings with the gods,” (Eliade, 15). Keeney, a contemporary shaman and psychotherapist, describes his “shaking” as taking “many different forms, including hand, arm, and leg trembling, varieties of head movements, body swaying, vibrating, oscillating, convulsing, jolts and jumps,” (Keeney, *Shaking Out the Spirits*, 167).

“Live, he [Curtis] appears possessed by demons, dancing spasmodically and with lightning speed, unwinding and winding as the rigid metal music folds and unfolds over him,” (Jon Savage’s review of “Unknown Pleasures,” in *Joy Division, New Order, A History in*

Cuttings). Later Curtis did actually develop epilepsy. His widow, Deborah Curtis observed that, “Ian’s dancing had become a distressing parody of his off-stage seizures. His arms would flail around, winding an invisible bobbin, and the wooden jerking of his legs was an accurate impression of the involuntary movements he would make. Only the seething and shaking of his head was omitted. This could have been a deliberate imitation, but his dancing was not dissimilar to the way he had danced at our engagement party four years previously,” (Deborah Curtis, *Touching from a Distance*, 74).

A report of the trance of a Yakut shaman described the following, he “gashed himself with a knife, swallowed sticks, [and] ate burning coals,” (Eliade, 29).

***Oh, I’ve walked on water, run through fire
Can’t seem to feel it anymore***
(Joy Division, “New Dawn Fades,” 1979)

“One night, during a performance at Rafters, he [Curtis] ripped the whole stage apart, pulling off these twelve-inch-square wooden tiles with nails in them and throwing them at the audience. Then he dropped a pint pot on the stage, it smashed and he rolled around in the broken glass, cutting a ten-inch gash in his thigh,” (Peter Hook, in Deborah Curtis, 52).

Often times, the shaman does not recall the words or actions he/she performs in the trance, at other times a possession state seems to occur, in which various spirits speak through the shaman.

“I don’t write about anything in particular, I write very subconsciously,” (Ian Curtis in an interview with Mick Middles in *Sounds*, 11/18/78).

I’ve been waiting for a guide to come and take me by the hand
(Joy Division, “Disorder,” 1979).

While the outward manifestations of drumming, dancing, injury and shaking precipitate or are manifestations of the trance, inwardly the shaman has expansive

experiences which may be recalled after the trance. He/she can visit the land of the dead, descend to hell, explore many heavenly layers of the sky, commune with animals, or transform into animal or supernatural shapes. The shaman can pursue the lost soul of a patient or remove various blockages, objects, or imbalances that are causing illness by disrupting the person's energetic field. It is commonly reported that the shaman encounters the spirits of the dead, dark demons, or even the Supreme Spirit, itself. Also in this state, it is reported that the shaman can wander and explore the entire earth, or other fantastic realms in various out of body manifestations. The shaman is thus, a "seer" and can educate, inform, heal, and protect the community. Likewise, shamans can inflict curses, bring plagues, control the weather, insert troublesome foreign objects in others bodies, or even steal souls.

*To the centre of the city where all roads meet, waiting for you
To the depths of the ocean where all hopes sank, searching for you
(Joy Division, "Shadowplay," 1979)*

*I've travelled far and wide through many different times
What did you see there?
I saw the saints with their toys
What did you see there?
I saw all knowledge destroyed
(Joy Division, "Wilderness," 1979)*

*They keep calling me
(Joy Division, "Dead Souls," 1979)*

*You'll see the horrors of a faraway place
Meet the architects of law face to face
See mass murder on a scale you've never seen...
And I picked on the whims of a thousand or more
Still pursuing a path that's been buried for years
All the dead wood from jungles and the cities on fire...
Take my hand and I'll show you what was and will be
(Joy Division, "Atrocity Exhibition," 1980)*

*A journey that leads to the sun
(Joy Division, "Heart and Soul," 1980)*

*Here are the young men, well where have they been?
We knocked on the doors of Hell's darker chambers*
(Joy Division, "Decades," 1980)

Eliade describes the shaman as being able to act as a mediator between the living and the dead, and to be able to de-mystify death. "Little by little the world of the dead becomes knowable, and death itself is evaluated primarily as a rite of passage to a spiritual mode of being. In the last analysis, the accounts of the shamans' ecstatic journeys contribute to a 'spiritualizing' the world of the dead, at the same time that they enrich it with wondrous forms and figures," (Eliade, 510).

*I'm not afraid anymore...
And all God's angels beware
And all you judges beware*
(Joy Division, "Insight," 1979)

*I've got the spirit, lose the feeling, let it out somehow...
Until the new sensation takes hold, then you know*
(Joy Division, "Disorder," 1979)

*Just passing through, 'till we reach the next stage
But just to where, well it's all been arranged*
(Joy Division, "From Safety to Where...?," 1979)

Kalweit explains that trance "means healing through inner recuperation from the unending stream of external stimuli, from complex thinking, from complicated emotions," (Kalweit, 91). Here we see a return to a balanced, Zen-like, simplicity. Healing is a matter of peeling away the layers of cultural education and assumption, of convoluted ego-oriented thinking and desire, until one can feel the universal pulse of life coursing through existence and oneself.

I saw all knowledge destroyed
(Joy Division, "Wilderness," 1979)

*A blindness that touches perfection...
But if you could just see the beauty
These things I could never describe*
(Joy Division, "Isolation," 1980)

*This is the hour when the mysteries emerge
A strangeness so hard to reflect*
(Joy Division, "Komakino," 1980)

Kalweit sees this return to center as a universal, sacred impulse of humanity that exists in the modern world only in attenuated or perverted form. He observes that social gatherings offer an "opportunity for collective accord and harmony and, above all, for an intensity of emotion that is absent from the monotony of everyday life. Social gatherings make possible a sense of letting emotions flow that reaches a climax through dancing, rhythm, and elation—if necessary supported by psychoactive drugs...In Western society, alcoholic inebriation is a rather hopeless attempt to overcome our compulsively mechanistic definition of humanity, one last fling at trying to regain the ecstatic, mystical side of life, to bring this element back into human existence," (Kalweit, 134). This partially explains the popularity of alcohol and other mind altering substances at contemporary rock shows – as a vehicle out of the ego, that allows the self to ebb and flow, to "feel" the music, and for the audience and performer to "tune in" to the same vibe of pulsating sound energy. In this way the minds of the performers and audience can more easily escape the fleshy shell of the body, and the ego, and "plug into" the vibrations flowing through the air, also allowing the ego to be quieted or sedated so that the body can resonate with the pulsating rhythms. This leads Kalweit to state that the "**human being is essentially sound, vibration, and melody, and perhaps our consciousness frequencies can be arranged in scales,**" (Kalweit, 85). It is worth quoting Kalweit at greater length on the transformative potential of gatherings.

“At its innermost core, this is a state of timelessness and fusion with the world around us. In our own celebrations, as constrained as their dancing and music are, survive the last vestiges of an irrepressible urge to trance and of hope for ecstatic harmony with all beings that cannot be further intellectualized...this state is a collective healing mechanism that tribal societies naturally employ to purify themselves from restrictive, inhibitory, and delusive conditions and to re-open themselves to the all-embracing reality inherent in us, to a more multi-faceted spiritual unfolding, and a more harmonious feeling of community, free from ego-oriented motivations,” (Kalweit, 134-135).

Thus, in the shamanic system, we come to what Kalweit calls **the “shamanic paradox,” that suffering can be viewed as a “way of knowledge,”** (Kalweit, 226). This doesn’t necessarily imply a rejection of health or well-being, but rather can be viewed as an acceptance of humanity’s place—equidistant from light and dark, between despair and joy, between life and death. This can be illustrated in the symbolism of the shaman and the central axis of the world tree, bridging heaven and hell, balanced between the four directions of the compass, as well as the directions of up and down. One can journey to various realms or directions, but the journey is always a return to the center. To go in any one direction, one does not fall off the edge of a flat world, but rather circles back to where one started, but now with a fresh perspective.

To the centre of all life’s desires
(Joy Division, “Failures,” 1977)

To the centre of the city where all roads meet
(Joy Division, “Shadowplay,” 1979)

This return to center is not, however, guaranteed, the journey entails very real dangers. “Those who journey to this gleaming and fabulous realm are in danger of going astray, of drowning,” (Kalweit, 4). Kalweit suggests that in our current culture, one may be

more apt to be lost than to return as we live in a culture that has lost its spiritual vision and its connection with primal sources,” and this can lead to the “negative way,” (Kalweit, 52).

We are not in a position to judge the ultimate outcome of Ian Curtis’ vision quest. From a worldly perspective, Ian Curtis was lost and succumbed to the darkness he was exploring. However, it cannot be denied that his death established a New Order and that many find Joy Division a comforting companion when times are dark.

While it may seem far-fetched to compare a rock band from the late 20th century with the pounding drums, frantic shaking, and visionary trances of shamans, this essay gives one possible explanation for the transformative power of Joy Division’s music. Also, when one sets Curtis’ lyrics side-by-side with the reports of shamans, there is an uncanny similarity in the themes and behaviors: descent into darkness, meetings with spirits, otherworldly travels, strange, frantic dancing, and ecstatic trances. While shamans undertake these journeys for the benefit of humanity, it is less clear what the motivations are of a contemporary visionary and suicide. It is possible that Curtis tuned into the same vibrations of life that the shamans submerge themselves in, perhaps even without knowing what he was doing, just following some strange power that suddenly coursed through his veins. His untimely and tragic death may not illustrate the unsoundness of his methods, but rather may attest to the power of the material he was handling—that where there is great danger, also there is great potential, and where there is death, there is life.

**And the only mistake, led to rumours unfound
Led to pressures unknown, different feelings and sounds
Yeah, the only mistake, like I made once before
Yeah, the only mistake, could have made it before
(Joy Division, “The Only Mistake,” 1979)**

Interview: Poster Children

by David Kopacz (With Special Guests Doug McCarver and Mike Barry)

(February 2002)

This is an interview with Rick Valentin and Rose Marshack of the bands Poster Children and Salaryman. The occasion is that of the release of Poster Children's DVD: "Zero Stars." I've known these two since college, but it is only in the past two years, since moving back to Champaign, Illinois, that I have gotten back in touch with them. I'm very grateful for their friendship and I'd like to thank them for doing this interview and all the other help they've so freely offered. My interview with RK and RV is taken over at one point by two Poster Children fans, Doug McCarver (DM) and Mike Barry (MB) of the elusive, yet promising Champaign-Urbana musical phenomenon of VibraKing.

Poster Children have been in existence since 1987 and they've put out 8 recordings, most recently "DDD," in 2000, which includes the great song, "This Town Needs A Fire" (included as a video on the DVD). Salaryman is an electronic parallel project for which there is a new album "in the can." Rick and Rose are in many ways not what you'd expect of rock'n'rollers. Both are quiet and shy off-stage and never do any drugs harder than brightly colored soda pop. On-stage it is really another story, as you'll be able to see for yourself if you watch their DVD. Zero Stars is composed of a number of re-enacted true-life tales from the road which are interspersed with live footage from shows at Cabaret Metro in Chicago and the Highdive in Champaign.

ZERO STARS

DK: When I was watching Zero Stars, one scene that really caught my attention was the interview scene with Rob at the Highdive, in which you were talking about the Golden Nugget. The philosophy you presented seemed more one of “sustainability” than of “unlimited growth.” Have you had this philosophy all along or did it develop with time?

RV: I don't think we're against unlimited growth but sustainability is definitely a higher priority. We seem to instinctively filter every band decision with the question: “Will this benefit us in the long term?” Most of the music I enjoy is by musicians who have a substantial body of work that was developed over many years, and that's exactly opposite of the music business model which seems to focus on the flavor of the month. I think we just absorbed this philosophy from the band's we liked, bands which are great, but not necessarily hit makers, and have put out the music they want to make with the hopes that someone out there will like it...

DK: How do you think about making future movies after the experience of Zero Stars?

RV: Right now I'm still recovering from the experience of making Zero Stars, it was a lot more work than I expected. The day after I finished, I said: “I'm never doing this again” but as time goes by the idea of making another movie becomes more and more appealing. The digital video revolution is just too exciting - it's like punk rock, all of a sudden what was once the realm of well-funded film studios is now open to the average joe. For a couple of thousand bucks you

can buy your own digital film studio (a DV camera, computer and some software), press up a DVD and distribute it online....

DK: I noticed several references within Zero Stars that I would like to ask about. For instance the number “four” recurs often, four band members, etc., and then the various times that the actors turn first this way and then that, as if they were deliberately trying to call our attention to the act of “turning,” and then the number four again. It took me awhile, but then I figured it out: *The Fourth Turning*, by William Strauss and Neil Howe? Why is this book so important and why does it run like a thread throughout your work?

RV: Wow. I’m going to say that you have discovered a theme that I intentionally put into the movie because it makes me look like a high concept filmmaker rather than just some yokel from Champaign with a bunch of video equipment. *The Fourth Turning* is important to me because it puts forth a very compelling argument for the cyclical predictability of American History, and I always want to know what’s going to happen next. Anything I read, hear, or see is ripe for the picking (stealing), it’s hard to come up with new stuff after being in a band so long...

RM: I see you caught Rick’s references, but no one has yet said anything to me about my two references of washing at the beginning of the movie; I’m washing my feet, which references the Bible and/or Buddhist practice of washing your feet, and washing my armpits, which was a Madonna reference in “Desperately Seeking Susan.” (So, another “bible” reference. haha.)

DK: Also, there seem to be various references to the situationist “spectacle.” Is “Zero Stars” the spectacle or is it a response to the spectacle? Is this a band, or a people mimicking a band, or a band mimicking a band, or a band mimicking itself?

RV: That’s the problem with the spectacle, you can attack the spectacle but soon your attack will be absorbed and become part of the spectacle itself. I’ve always felt like we were mimicking a real band, after all, were a bunch of geeky, computer nerds, not a pack of rabid, sunglassed junkies...

DK: There is a reference to the obvious man of Champaign-Urbana, Andy Switzky. I have heard him called many things, but most often “Svengali-like.” How do you see Mr. Switzky’s role in shaping the C-U music scene of the 80s, 90s, and possibly even 00s?

RV: Andy’s one of the unsung heroes of the late-80s and early-90s Champaign scene, not only was he a founding member of Hum but he was what Malcolm Gladwell called in *The Tipping Point* a “connector” - someone who knew a lot of people and always spread the word. I think Andy spent most of his college years wandering around, meeting people, and telling them about all the cool bands in town, I’m not sure if there’s anyone around nowadays who has taken his place....

DK: Well, I’ve heard, you, Rick, called the “Godfather of Rock and Roll in Champaign-Urbana,” probably from your support and recording of other bands. How do you see PC’s

“mission” in relation to younger musicians just starting out? Why do you think it is important for other people to be able to create and record music?

RV: I’m just glad I’ve been called the Godfather rather than Grandfather. When we were starting out there were bands like the Minutemen who were textbook examples of how to be an independent rock band, hopefully we’re providing the same service locally. Basically the music business is evil, and it’s important to me that people see that there is a way to avoid being corrupted by that evil and be a musician without having to be Britney Spears. It’s war. I like good music and in order to ensure that good music will survive, you have to support good bands, that’s why I try to help in any way I can...

PRE-POSTER CHILDREN

DK: Would you like to comment on the pre-history/early history of PC? If I’m remembering correctly, Rick was in some rock’n’roll band when he was in high school (whose name I can’t remember). Then Dan Guyer and I called Rick when he answered an add for a guitarist we had put up, and there was that amusing, “What, you live in Allen Hall, too? What floor do you live on? Second, we’re on second floor, too? What room do you live in? We’re over in 283, let’s meet in the hallway.” Along with Pete Eggleston, we formed Penguin Dust and then Dan left and Rose joined us in Cries and Whispers. At that time I don’t think Rose had ever played in a rock band, but had classical training in violin, is that correct? The aforementioned Andy Switzky was our manager for the two bands and got Cries and Whispers the show opening for Die Kreuzen at the Union, in which the Defoliants didn’t show up (which I was bummed

about) and we got their \$25, which we split 5-ways. Then Rick and Rose started the Evidence with Archer. It seemed that Cries and Whispers languished for a while and then came to an end. Pete and I were hurt and pissed off, but looking back it was a good decision on your guys part, as I wasn't really that serious about practicing and was mostly in it for fun and free beer.

RV: That pre-history is pretty close, the first band I was in was called Stevie Star and the Twinkletones. Rose played both violin and piano but had never picked up a bass, because of this (if you remember) I was the only band member who thought Rose shouldn't join Penguin Dust/The Rain/Cries and Whispers but I was outvoted by you and Pete. We formed PC with Shannon in 1987 and then stopped changing the name whenever we got a new drummer.

DK: What was "The Rain," that sounds vaguely familiar?

RV: The Rain was our band name during the one song we played with Rose at the last Penguin Dust show. As I remember, Pete announced Dan was leaving the band, introduced Rose, and said our new name was "The Rain." We then played a new song with the new lineup. Later, over Christmas break, we decided to change the name to "Cries and Whispers".

My selective memory of the whole Cries and Whispers/Evidence evolution was that I was writing songs with words, Pete would change the words, sing them differently and that would cause some kind of Pete Townsend / Roger Daltrey conflict which I couldn't deal with. I didn't want to force somebody to sing differently but I also didn't want to change a song from the way I'd written it, so it seemed like the only solution was to start a band that would satisfy my

songwriting ego, which was the Evidence. I thought we had both bands running in parallel but regardless, if we had continued with me trying to write words for Pete or me just playing guitar there would have been some kind of implosion at some point anyways. I'm reliving the guilt of having to make the choice, which I've had to make a couple of times in my life, between sparing the feelings of someone I care for and making a change to satisfy my creative urges. In retrospect I know it can seem like a business type decision, "what's best for my future as a musician?" but it was never like that, it was more like: "things are getting negative, this is supposed to be positive, change things now, because it's only going to get worse as time goes on." Anyways, I'm sorry you guys were hurt and pissed off but I'm glad that I've gotten second chance to hang out and play in a band with you.

DK: It is interesting to hear your memory of it. I always assumed it was because I was a deficient drummer. Then I realized that PC seemed to have something against all drummers, and now you are playing drums, and I wonder how that fits into all this. But, anyway, yeah, I'm really happy about the band and in re-establishing our friendship after all these years.

Back to PC, though, how do you see the role of Poster Children in the overall scheme of your lives? What about Salaryman?

RV: The bands I'm in are all a subset of that area of my life labeled "Music." Music will always be a part of my life, whether or not I make money at it and whether or not it's called Poster Children or Salaryman or Rick's Disco Orchestra. It's like sleep, food or sex - a basic requirement for my physical and mental well-being.

DK: Would you characterize Salaryman as a “side project” or has it taken on a life of its own, independent of Poster Children?

RV: Salaryman is a parallel project. A side project sounds like something done half-assedly. I think of Salaryman as independent but until recently both bands had the same members, so they can't really be separate, I guess. The only real difference is in the equipment we use and that I don't have to sing. I'm starting think you're trying to tie this all into some kind of Phillip K Dick scenario. One band, two identities, they believe they are two different bands but they are really one...

DK: What are some of your other projects/activities/jobs beyond Poster Children and Salaryman?

RV: It's funny you should ask! I play drums in a heavy rock combo called VibraKing. I also bowl on a team called The Human League. To pay the bills, I do graphic/web design and occasionally record bands. I'm 5'11" tall and a Libra.

RM: My extracurricular activities are I teach and learn Tae Kwon Do, I study Kung-fu, I study Buddhism and I'm in graduate school (studying Narrative Media at U of I). During the day, I run a lab at the U of I where I'm a facilitator of arts and technologies projects at the U of I. And like Rick, I also do multimedia programming and web design in my spare time. Rick forgot to add that he does Tai Chi!

HIJACKING THE INTERVIEW

DM: Is it true that one of your previous drummers spontaneously combusted?

RM: No, I think he became a psychiatrist.

DM: How many drummers have there been, including the combustible one?

RM: We are on drummer #7 now, since 1987.

DM: Have you ever had “stalkers” or any problems with fanatics?

RM: I have had a stalker or two - usually it's just someone who will sit and stare at me and I'll know they want to talk to me but can't think of anything to say. Meanwhile someone else will be gabbing away and I'll feel badly for the guy who's afraid to come and talk.

DM: Who was the biggest celebrity asshole that you ever met?

RM: We've had run-ins with a couple of bands before who were acting unskillfully at the time. It's hard for me to believe that someone is inherently “an Asshole.” I just like to think that they were feeling pain at the time and wanted to spread it to others.

DM: Who was the biggest drug-addict celebrity that you ever met?

RM: We were on tour with a band and I came in one day to the sound-check and said really loudly, “Hey, I just listened to your record last night, and it seems like you have an awful lot of songs about heroin - what are you guys, heroin-addicts or something?” and the roadie threw up his hands to shut me up, pointed to the nearly-passed-out band member laying on a bench and shook his head violently with his finger to his mouth, going “SHHHHHH!!!” - like I’d upset the passed-out band member. (or awaken him?)

DM: What is the biggest perk of being a Rock Star (or ‘Zero’ Rock Star)?

RM: I wouldn’t know; probably the heroin.

DM: How many countries have you played in as PC?; as Salaryman?

RM: PC: USA, Texas, Florida, Canada, England, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, The Netherlands. Salaryman: all the above except Florida and Canada, but add Spain.

MB: If the Rolling Stones started c. 1964, after 16 years, it was 1980. Might we infer, from the fact that after 16 years Poster Children still R+CK considerably more than the 1980 era Rolling Stones, that Poster Children are actually a much better band or at least have tapped into some sort of magically inherent ‘truth’ present (or even maybe a defining characteristic) of rock

music? I have been interested in trying to quantify why some bands R+CK and others don't as well as exploring the how the fiendish businessmen involved in rock music manage, despite the obvious lack of R+CK in popesque acts such as Madonna, NSync, Puff Daddy, to market this pop spew as R+CK, and pollute the R+CK section at record stores with it. After the recent Poster Children show I'd seen, where they F_CKING R+CKED, it seemed clear that they possess the secret, despite their avoidance of certain things suggested by 'Beavis and Butthead' or that 'How to Run a Band Story' of Rick's.

RV: I think any band that plays to a crowd of more than 500 people is at a great disadvantage, I don't think there is any way to properly rock a stadium, maybe the first few rows of people will get rocked but the rest will basically be watching TV, at least that's the way I've felt at the few big concerts I've seen. I think if the Rolling Stones had been playing small clubs for their whole career they would be amazing to see live in a club, in fact, they might be an amazing club band, you just have no way of ever knowing. So the inherent truth that we've tapped into is: big shows suck and club shows rock...

DK: Rose, how does your marital arts and meditation experience relate to your performances and music? Do you see any commonalities between music, martial arts and meditation?

RM: Practicing martial arts teaches you to be aware of exactly where your body parts are at all times. Practicing meditation teaches you to control or at least, pay attention to your mind. Practicing both these things makes you an expert on storing and appropriately releasing energy, which might why we appear to - as Mike suggested - still "Rock." Mike suggests that

we possibly tapped into some inherent “truth” of Rock and Roll - I think it’s more a truth of being ourselves; of living. You can apply these functions of body and mind to anything; not only music but cooking, walking, speaking. My entire performance on stage (and possibly off-stage) is a martial arts performance; I am very aware of my store of energy and my entire purpose on the stage is to give this energy to the audience. I think of it as if I’m trying to give a gift.

BACK TO ZERO STARS

DK: I’d like to return to your band philosophy and the issue of the golden nugget. It seems that it is a natural drive of the ego to crave unbounded success and admiration, was there ever a point where Poster Children were trying to achieve the adolescent, air-guitar dream of “making it big?” (In other words, did you always want to be “indie?”)

RV: When we started, there were no independent bands that had made it big, so making it big wasn’t a realistic goal. Bands like ours would drive around in a van, play shows to less than a hundred people and then go home and find a job. It wasn’t until that whole Nirvana-fluke-thing happened and, for a short period of time, major label record executives believed that every second-hand-clothing-wearing band from a college town could make a billion dollars. I honestly never believed it, you could call it lack of confidence, but I call it realistic. You can look in the mirror and know you’re not going to be Miss America. We just took advantage of the situation while we could and continued on our flight path below the radar. I don’t like most of what’s on the radio, so I don’t think I could make music that would popular in the

mainstream; our band couldn't write a hit song if our lives depended on it. That's what's so cool about indie or punk rock or whatever you want to call it, you don't have to be successful to be successful.

RANDOM QUESTIONS & PHILOSOPHICAL MUSINGS

DK: Why does music exist at all? What would a world without music or creativity be like?

RV: I think music is the sloppy older sibling of language; it's just another way of communicating. It's more primitive than speech and therefore can more efficiently zap you in the "monkey brain" but it's not the best way to describe the structure of the atom. A world without music or creativity wouldn't be human, I guess. We'd be a bunch of squirrels gathering nuts. Maybe the origins of music have something to do with being aware of your mortality, once a species comprehends death, they've got to create distractions to keep their minds off the inevitable, gathering nuts isn't enough...I find it interesting that one of the first things oppressive governments do to increase their hold over their citizens/victims is to ban or restrict the arts. I think it's proof that music/art does have power over people and resonates on a deeper level.

DK: Why do you think some people seek out creative encounters with life, while others do not? How come some people seem to be talented in working with multiple media and others feel they can't even draw and that they aren't creative?

RV: I personally believe that everyone is creative but our society has divided us up into haves and have-nots: some people have talent, some people don't, and the talented people are the ones in *Entertainment Weekly*. I think that's ridiculous. When someone says "I'd like to paint but I'm no good at it," I get very upset. What does "no good" mean? You can't sell a painting? Van Gogh couldn't sell a painting. In the case of music, this is especially frustrating. Up until recently the only way people could have music in their lives was to make it themselves, sitting around the campfire or in the parlor. With the advent of recorded music, music became a spectator sport. That's why I'm getting into Sacred Harp Singing which is all about gathering together to sing, the communal aspect of music, rather than the technical aspects of music, like singing in tune.

DK: Any thoughts on Philip K. Dick?

RV: My favorite PKD novel is "A Scanner Darkly." Why? I'm not sure. Probably because it deals with surveillance/voyeurism, something I'm very interested in, along with the usual PKD stuff about identity...I'm also fascinated with people who get messages from the other side or another planet or another time, I'm just fascinated with the human brain: the question of whether or not a person's visions are divine or just an accidental jumbling of chemicals in the brain. The possibility that your personality is genetically determined, not the result of environment. Those studies on twins separated at birth who grow up and both have similar jobs, wives with the same name, children with the same names, creepy stuff like that. All those ideas are swimming around in PKD's fictional and "real" world. I sometimes wish I had a

mysterious beam of light transmitting a bunch of words into my head, it would make songwriting a lot easier...

DK: Over the fourteen years of Poster Children's existence, have you gained any wisdom that you'd like to share with upcoming indie bands?

RV: Go to school; don't quit your day job. At career day in my high school, there was a theater full of people to see a professional musician talk about his job. He had worked as a CPA for ten years before he could make a living full-time as a jingle writer. He said one of the wisest things I've ever heard: "Pursue your dreams but cover your ass."

DK: What is the best memory you have of your years in music?

RV: It's a long story but I'll make it short. By chance we met this guy who was visiting Champaign, checking out the town because he was thinking of going to grad school at the U of I. He told us that he had written to Rose years before about how he hated high school and probably wasn't going to college. Rose had written him back saying that our band was all about educating yourself and finding the positives in negative situations, etc... Anyways, this guy basically said: "your band changed my life, you're the reason why I went to college and you're the reason why I'm here today." Who needs a platinum record when someone say something like that to you? Although I'm sure the guys in NSync hear that kind of stuff all the time...

DK: What about the worst memory?

RV: I really don't dwell on the bad stuff (maybe that's why I'm still in a band). But I'd say the worst memories have been the couple times where the band or myself have been personally attacked (not physically, just verbally). In the same way that someone can believe you're really cool when you're really not, they can also believe you are a Machiavellian spawn of Satan when you're really just another shmoe trying to survive another day on the treadmill...

DK: The whole indie rock thing really interests, but also disturbs me. I can remember being in HS and thinking that the majority of people were idiots because of the music they listened to. There seems like there is this conflicting desire to "spread the word" of "good" indie music, yet also a desire to keep it small and within the control of the "faithful and deserving." As I've gotten older, I've gained a little more perspective in seeing that the fundamental process of my attachment to what I consider "good" music, literature, film, etc., is really no different than someone else's attachment to organized sports, or being a democrat or republican, or being of a particular religious belief and practice. Yet, for whatever reason, I still maintain judgmental attitudes toward art or music that just seems plain "bad." Could you comment on these issues of inside/outside, good/bad, in indie rock?

RV: I used to be militant about my musical tastes and Rose still uses the phrase "music haters" to describe people who don't care as deeply about music as we do. When I was younger, the "weird music club" was a clique that I could belong to; I certainly couldn't hang with the popular kids or the jocks, and within any clique there's an "us vs. them" mentality, so despising someone else's taste in music was the same as a popular kid despising a geek's (lack of) fashion

sense. Now that I'm older and supposedly wiser, it's obvious that insanely popular music is like McDonalds, if I don't like it, I don't have to eat there, and why should I care if other people eat there, maybe the world would be a better place if we were all vegetarians who ate a locally owned establishments, but at least I have a choice of what to eat, and as time goes on other people may discover the variety the world has to offer. For a lot of people music is like a hat or a pair of socks...

On a global level I believe there's no such thing as bad art, but on a personal level I can definitely say whether or not something's good according to my taste. But I don't believe my opinion matters any more than anyone else's. When a band asks my opinion of their music, I don't want to give it to them, not because I don't have an opinion but because it shouldn't matter what I think. Everybody's wrong and everybody's right.

DK: What were a few of the highlights of the early years as Poster Children? Like what was the first band you played with that you were really excited about? When did you realize that you yourselves were rock stars? What about any dealings with labels that you had?

RV: The big highlight I remember from the early years was the first time we went on a full tour of the US. Up until then we would just play shows on weekends and during vacations from work but when our second record came out we quit our jobs and hit the road. We were gone for two months, some shows were great, most were not, and every couple of days our drummer would tell us he was quitting the band but it was the best time of my life. I liken it to a greyhound being allowed to run in the wild after being kept in a cage at the racetrack all his life. Once you do that it's hard to get the dog back into the cage.

I don't consider myself a rock star. Rock stars are people that someone's mom recognizes even though she hasn't heard their music. I think your fame factor has to be fairly high to be a rock star. The fame factor is how many people know who you are but you don't know who they are. I'd say there are around a thousand strangers who know who I am; compare that to how many strangers know Steven Tyler from Aerosmith....

I'd say we've been very lucky in our dealings with record labels. We survived the jump from indie to major and back again with little collateral damage unlike a lot of bands we knew who were mercilessly screwed by labels until they gave up. We always spent a lot of time making sure we were doing the right thing when we signed to a label, that it wouldn't mess up the band over the long term.

For more information about the bands, visit their web sites:

www.posterchildren.com

www.salaryman.org

CONIUNCTIONIS...

Afterwords

Looking back and collecting these writings, I notice something that I was not aware of at the time. The month after 9/11/2001 I could only list a few quotes for that month's contribution to Mental Contagion. I only did a few more theoretical pieces and shifted to doing interviews, mostly with my friends, about some of the same theoretical topics around music and art, but also about the world political situation as well as a lot of discussions about the Champaign-Urbana music scene. I have omitted the remainder of the interviews from this current collection, but included those with Ouroboros and Poster Children as examples of the interview series that continued on for a year.

I have continued to write Coniunctionis columns over the years and these can be found on my blog and website. If I can find the time, I would like to collect them in book form in the future and this collection is a first step toward that. The themes of punk rock, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, trauma, and transformation led me across a wide-ranging terrain. The themes in this volume prefigure much of my later work, particularly my ongoing work and collaboration with Joseph Rael (*Beautiful Painted Arrow*).

The journey continues...If you would like to follow along please visit my website, blog, or my published work.

Blog: [Being Fully Human](#)

Website: [DavidKopacz.com](#)

Books: [*Re-humanizing Medicine: A Holistic Framework for Transforming Your Self, Your Practice and the Culture of Medicine*](#) (2014)

[*Walking the Medicine Wheel: Healing Trauma & PTSD*](#) (2016) with Joseph Rael (Beautiful Painted Arrow)

[*Becoming Medicine: Pathways of Initiation into a Living Spirituality*](#) (2020) with J. Joseph Rael (Beautiful Painted Arrow)