

CONTORTING THE COLOR LINE:  
RACE IN NEW YORK CITY UNDERGROUND MUSIC AND CULTURE,  
1978-1981

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Contorting the Color Line:  
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1978-1981

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In “Contorting the Color Line: Race in New York City Underground Music and Culture, 1978-1981,” I use a performance studies framework to argue that the changes in attitudes toward race in Manhattan’s underground music scenes during that period set the template for multicultural pop music in the 1980s. I begin by unpacking several performances in both the song and video for Blondie’s “Rapture” (1981) including instrumentation, vocalization, lyrical re-presentation and allusion, discourse, dance, negotiation of identity through fashion, the act of community building, and ideological organization. I work backward, using the “Rapture” template to examine the No Wave, mutant disco, punk funk, and hip hop scenes as points of cultural contact where black and white artists formed spaces of what Mark Chou and Roland Bleiker refer to as *prefigurative politics*: “a genre of activism that is small in scale and limited in impact but nevertheless can show the way toward a more democratic political community.” In these spaces artists exchanged cultural expressions and formed relationships in a growing Manhattan club scene that promoted interracial mixing and expanded social boundaries by bringing white downtown rockers and black uptown hip hoppers into closer proximity. Their collaborative relationships resulted in musical hybrids that appealed to both races and set the tone for a pastiche style of music making that became popular among mainstream audiences at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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***INTRODUCTION: BLONDIE'S "RAPTURE"***

Blondie's "Rapture" climbed to Number 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles Chart on March 28, 1981.<sup>1</sup> It was the first song to feature rapping to top the pop chart, as well as the first song to feature rapping that was played on MTV when the network premiered on August 1 of that year. For guitarist Chris Stein the recognition meant more than economic success: "We wanted to make music that would cross over. I would like to see the record help resolve tensions by bringing different audiences together. When the new wave kids and the rappers get together, that'll be something. Eventually, they'll all meet up in the middle, where you'll have a strong race of young people that won't be divided by stupid racial issues."<sup>2</sup> His vision was for the song to generate harmony between the postpunk and hip hop scenes in New York City. He also suggests that music has the power to resolve racial tensions through cultural exchange. The song introduced popular audiences to hip hop, a burgeoning form of cultural expression developing in the Bronx. But exposure alone could not translate to political progress. "Rapture," both the song and music video, exhibited several performances that articulated changing attitudes toward race in New York City's underground music and art scenes between 1978 and 1981. Dissecting the aural, visual, and bodily performances in "Rapture," we can chart the changing ideological and artistic landscape in New York that laid the groundwork for cultural crossovers and dance aesthetic in mainstream popular music during the 1980s.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Hot 100 – 1981 Archive, <http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1981/hot-100>.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Stein qtd. in Porter and Needs, 201.

## Methodology

To theorize my argument I use a performance studies model. Here I draw from Richard Schechner's definition of performance<sup>3</sup> that is restored, or "twice-learned," behavior, operating at once as an action in real time but also as action whose meaning changes depending on different contexts; Schechner stresses that behaviors might be the same in different contexts but the interactivity of performer and audience is always in flux, thus making the meaning of performance from the reciprocal processes of negotiation between the two agents. Here he stresses the relationality of performance, writing "[it] isn't 'in' anything, but between."<sup>4</sup> Meaning is a product of collective relationships given specific temporal and spatial situations; and these collective relationships are informed by lived experience and memories.

Performances are often enacted through *performatives*. J.L. Austin emphasized speech acts, or verbal utterances, as the first step in the commitment of an act.<sup>5</sup> Examples include saying "I do" when getting married and saying "I apologize." These verbalizations of intention result in the speaker assuming a role (i.e. a spouse and a confessor). These "speech acts," as John Searle called them, establish identities that become real based on their quality of performativity. Again I draw on Richard Schechner and his understanding that "performativity points to a variety of topics, among them the construction of social reality including gender and race, the restored behavior quality of performances, and the complex relationship of performance practice to performance

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Second Edition, New York, NY: Routledge, 2006, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962, 6-8.

theory.”<sup>6</sup> Seen in this view, performatives extend beyond verbalizations, and roles can be assumed through practices involving multiple modes of communication other than the oral form. Alejandro L. Madrid argues that the space opened by a performance studies framework provides a comprehensive lens to view music’s impact. For a special issue of *Trans: Revista Transcultural De Música* Alejandro L. Madrid writes that:

The fact that performance studies is founded on the notion of “performativity” as a quality of discourse allows performance scholars to not only focus on a wide variety of phenomena, from activities that explicitly involve performance such as music, dance, theater, and ritual to the construction of identities, the enunciative use of language, political activism, or the use of the body in everyday life as performance....a performance studies approach to the study of music asks what music does or allows people to do; such an approach understands musics as a process within larger social and cultural practices and asks how these musics can help us understand these processes as opposed to how do these processes help us understand music.<sup>7</sup>

Madrid comments implicitly on the ineffectiveness of musicology to studying music.

Traditional musicology concerns itself with the physical performance of music, instrumentation. That methodology neglects the “social, political, and cultural dimensions of music.”<sup>8</sup> Following Schechner’s notion that performances lie “between” participants, Madrid suggests music should be interpreted as a mechanism of empowerment at the nexus of identity formation, where both producers and consumers create meaning. Within performance studies, music helps scholars understand shifting social and cultural ideologies.

Let us approach “Rapture” in its song form first. The most obvious type of performance is instrumental. The song brings together late seventies popular musics,

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<sup>6</sup> Schechner, 123.

<sup>7</sup> Alejandro L. Madrid, “Why Music and Performance Studies? Why Now? An Introduction to the Special Issue,” *Trans: Revista Transcultural De Música* 13 (2009), <http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/articulo/1/why-music-and-performance-studies-why-now-an-introduction-to-the-special-issue>.

<sup>8</sup> Chris Rojek, *Pop Music, Pop Culture* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 15.

including a disco back beat, disco horns, and a rock guitar solo. Bringing disco and rock together highlights the attempt to reconcile the merging of rock and disco music's being labeled as "dance music" in the late seventies and early eighties (see Chapter Two).

Dance music became a coded language for discussing music with interracial qualities, at once acknowledging and distancing itself from first generation punk's whiteness and disco's roots in black soul music, while continuing the ambivalent relationship white rockers had with black music. Blondie vocalist Deborah Harry participated more vocally in the discourse surrounding "dance music" in "Rapture" by alternating between a soft sex kitten coo characteristic of disco singers like Donna Summer and the hard rhythms inherent in rapping. Harry mixes the coquettishness of Summer's style, satirized by mutant disco singers such as ZE Records' Cristina Monet, with rap vocals characterized by their "hard" rhymes, the latter primarily a form of black male cultural expression in hip hop's nascent years. She embodies blackness through the assumption of feminine and masculine behaviors, becoming a translator of hip hop for white audiences in what she called "more of a tribute than an actual thing."<sup>9</sup> Tributes are performances that reproduce an original item in homage while creating something new. The past and present form a dialectical relationship, preceding the original item and establishing modern contexts for its consumption by an audience.

Lyrical allusions continue the dialogue with popular audiences. One line commands, "I said don't stop, do punk rock," calling attention to the performative nature of both hip hop and punk. Most of the song's lyrics are in the present or future tense. "I said don't stop," is a quote from the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," (1979)

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<sup>9</sup> Debbie Harry and Chris Stein - Picture This: Blondie's Founding Members Recall '70s and '80s New York," Red Bull Music Academy, New York 2013, <http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/blondie>.

considered the first hip hop recording. And Harry uses it to jog musical memories and remind audiences “you hip-hop, and you don’t stop.” The phrasing, “do punk rock,” illustrates a conscious representation of punk aesthetic. Put side by side in the lyric, Blondie suggests that both hip hop and punk can be performed simultaneously. Being “toe to toe” and “face to face,” then, are metaphors for cultural mixing. Lyrical passages that at first sound ridiculous need further investment:

And you get in your car and you drive real far  
 And you drive all night and then you see a light  
 And it comes right down and lands on the ground  
 And out comes a man from Mars  
 And you try to run but he’s got a gun  
 And he shoots you dead and he eats your head  
 And the you’re the man from Mars  
 You go out at night, eatin’ cars

The repeated use of “And” illustrates restored behavior that happens in a cyclical pattern. Within the entirety of getting in the car and becoming the one “eatin’ cars,” are several performances used metaphorically to suggest a process through which one achieves visibility. When taken with the understanding that “Rapture” is an homage to hip hop culture, “car” is not a personally owned automobile, but rather a subway train car. Graffiti crews in the Bronx “bombed” subway cars when they were in the station overnight, or they rode in vacant cars, tagging ceiling panels with individual symbols or crew logos. “[T]hen you see a light/ And it comes right down and lands on the ground” represents the revelry artists felt when train cars left the station the next morning exhibiting their work like mobile canvases. The emergence of the “man from Mars” is the path from obscurity to notoriety the artists took not only artistically but geographically, coming from the Bronx, which seemed as far as Mars to some rockers in terms of cultural difference, to crossover into the downtown rock scene in Manhattan.

“Shooting” is a clever description of paint spewing from a spray paint can, and “a gun” is the can itself. Finally “you’re the man from Mars/ You go out at night, eatin’ cars.”

Harry addresses the audience directly, commenting on the ultimate performance: that of identifying the potential for reciprocal exchange between both punks and hip hoppers.

The symbiotic relationship is endowed with the potential for revolutionary offspring:

Back to back  
 Sacroiliac  
 Spineless movement  
 And a wild attack  
 Face to face  
 Sadly solitude  
 And it’s finger popping  
 Twenty-four hour shopping in Rapture

Sex is used to suggest a cultural rebirth. The sacroiliac joint is the joint in the human pelvis between the sacrum and the ilium of the pelvis. “Spineless movement” hints at the act of thrusting, or penetrating, in which the back mainly stays straight and the midsection moves, once the two subjects move from being “back to back” to “a wild attack.” The dual connotations of snapping one’s fingers to a musical beat and inserting a finger in an orifice for sexual gratification further the reference to sexual performance. “Finger” represents the penis and “popping” suggests the destruction of the hymen, which helps the penis enter without obstacle to result in pregnancy. The section of the song climaxes in a self-referential acknowledgement of the song as a consumer product. “[S]hopping” refers to the practice of looking for objects to purchase on one level, and on another points to the act of searching for closure in consummation, or the birth of new cultural identities stemming from the merging of black and white synthesis.

The music video for “Rapture” visualizes many of the lyrical themes and builds upon them. Bodies are used to commit performances that negotiate new identities.

Viewers first see an African American man dressed in white from head to toe. He introduces the idea of performative fashion, pronouncing an integrated visual aesthetic. He is our guide on a journey into the underground for a story that complements the one in the song's lyrics. He slowly crouches down on the street of a city block and peeks through a basement window looking beneath ground level. Deborah Harry mimes the come-hither presentation of the verses while she begins to dance with each member of Blondie one by one. Both white and black dancers accompany them. Harry exits the basement apartment into an alley where graffiti artists Fab Five Freddy and Lee Quinones paint murals. She wanders over to the far alley wall where a man in an Uncle Sam costume decked out in all its red, white, and blue patriotic grandeur gyrates to the music. An African American man wearing a Native American headdress then rises from behind a small tree looking stoic with his arms folded and gazing into the camera. These two characters perform competing versions of national identity. In the background we see the embodiment of white supremacy animated in its victory. In the middle ground stands the black figure collapsing Otherness into a single body. His body language is terse, and his stare is brooding. Pausing the video at the 2:43 mark reveals a still image of Deborah Harry in the foreground situated between the figures, once again affirming her role as translator between people and cultures. She then crosses through the frame and back, stopping to dance with the black man dressed in white directly in front of Fab Five Freddy's mural reading "Rap," cueing ignorant audiences as to what they are witnessing and proposing that rapping might serve as a common language. Then Harry and the rest of the band march behind the black man in the white suit like they are following the Pied Piper. They ascend from below ground and emerge back on street level. The last scene

is in many ways the representation of Chris Stein's utopic vision for the song, a manifestation of underground music and ideas to the mainstream.

### **Before there was "Rapture"**

In the chapters that follow I use the performances contained in "Rapture" as a roadmap to trace the social changes that occurred in New York City between 1978 and 1981 following the first wave of punk rock. I examine instrumentation, vocalization, lyrical re-presentations and allusions, discourse, bodily movements, negotiations of identity through fashion, and the act of community building. By being attentive to these forms of behavior, we can understand this period of underground music and culture as a space of what Mark Chou and Roland Bleiker call a relationship of *prefigurative politics*: "a genre of activism that is small in scale and limited in impact but nevertheless can show the way toward a more democratic political community."<sup>10</sup> There are several questions that guide my research and claims. What is the possibility of performance? What are its limitations? How can music be studied as performance beyond the act of playing instruments? How and why did white musicians reintroduce black musical forms such as jazz, funk, rhythm & blues into a punk framework? How was race performed and negotiated in New York during this time? At what depth does a performance gain power to spur political mobilization? How did the music created in New York during this time bridge Manhattan's predominantly white mid-seventies punk scene and the multicultural pop genre that took mainstream music by storm in the 1980s, setting the stage for pop

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Chou and Roland Bleiker, "Betrayed by Democracy: Verbatim Theater as Prefigurative Politics," *Doing Democracy: Activist Art and Cultural Politics* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2013), 232.

music in the 21st century? To begin answering these questions I use a strategic approach divided into three chapters.

Chapter One focuses on the often neglected No Wave movement that developed in the wake of punk's commercialization. Here I discuss the inhabitation of blackness by white artists through the adoption of signifiers associated with black culture such as funk instrumentation, along with the vocalizations and bodily movements of James Brown. I argue that key white No Wave musicians like James Chance reintegrated black musical influences like rhythm and blues, jazz, and funk into a sonic punk framework, inspiring several artists and bands to utilize these styles for further innovation. I begin with the Artist Space festival that historian Marc Masters argues gave birth to the No Wave scene with a nihilistic ethos seeking to break free of traditional musical approaches after New York punk bands failed to do so in the mid seventies. Diverse bands such as James Chance's first group the Contortions, DNA, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, and Mars established a hard, cacophonous sound informed by punk's do-it-yourself (DIY) attitude. The difference, however, was that No Wave was not exclusionary. It opened the door for the reincorporation of black musical influences which punk ostensibly sloughed. No Wave inspired offshoot styles like punk funk and mutant disco, both of which furthered and complicated the relationships between racialized musics.

Chapter Two charts the resulting discourse developed by musical diversity that centered around hybrid musical styles born of mixing white punk and black disco music; "dance music," as it was termed. Punk funk and mutant disco brought together two cultural heritages and established interracial spaces like the Mudd Club and Danceteria, where whites and blacks found kinship. I examine these venues as "vortices of

behavior,” to borrow from Joseph Roach, sites of memory whose “function is to canalize specific needs, desires, and habits in order to reproduce them.”<sup>11</sup> These were social and political spaces where audiences danced to music informed by both rock and disco.

Dance enabled patrons to identify with one another and organize relationships.

Chapter Three illustrates how dance music patrons formed symbiotic relationships that emerged from the clubs and helped black hip hop artists and white rockers mingle on the streets of New York in social and professional collaborations. My argument here centers around the production and dissemination of early hip hop culture as a reciprocal process of meaning-making among white and black cultures. In 1978, when James Chance first recorded a cover of James Brown’s “I Can’t Stand Myself (When You Touch Me),” he was attempting to gain equal artistic footing with black funk musicians. But by 1981, confirming Chance’s influence, white rockers and black hip hoppers were working together. To illustrate this bond I will analyze performances of avant garde hipness depicted on Glenn O’Brien’s *TV Party* cable access program, where white audiences and musicians like Blondie’s Chris Stein, were introduced to graffiti and rapping through Fab Five Freddy and Jean-Michel Basquiat. I conclude in March of 1981 when Blondie’s song “Rapture” reached Number 1 on the Billboard Pop chart, introducing the United States at large to hip hop through radio and television on MTV.

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 28.

## ***CHAPTER ONE: SONIC INTEGRATION***

The flyer read “BANDS.” That was the short and sweet way to introduce a selection of up-and-coming groups set to play a festival at Artists’ Space, a small gallery at 105 Hudson Street in the Tribeca neighborhood in downtown Manhattan. The festival spread over five nights from Tuesday, May 2 to Saturday, May 6 of 1978. It featured 10 bands, including the Communists and Terminal (May 2); the Gynecologists and Theoretical Girls (May 3); Daily Life and Tone Death (May 4); the Contortions and DNA (May 5); and Mars and Teenage Jesus and the Jerks (May 6). Over those five nights a nascent scene coalesced that set itself apart from the first generation of punk; there were now faces at the forefront of a fascinating new underground scene.

By 1978 an eclectic group of musicians from a variety of backgrounds gathered on Manhattan’s Lower East Side. Rent was cheap due to a post-Apocalyptic wasteland of desolated buildings, unkempt streets, and easy access to drugs. Pat Place of the Contortions and later the Bush Tetras came from a visual art background. Arto Lindsay and Robin Crutchfield, both of DNA, and Mark Cunningham of Mars had their training in experimental theater and performance art. Lydia Lunch, leader of Teenage Jesus, was a poet, scorning the idea that music was anything more than a means of eliciting emotional responses from an audience.<sup>12</sup> Alan Vega of Suicide—godfathers of No Wave who played their earliest shows before CBGB opened—never studied performance art, but he took cues from rock’s greatest thespians like Iggy Pop, using a method of violent confrontation to capture the audience’s attention by beating himself in the face with a microphone. Vega’s uninhibited aggression inspired James Chance, who became

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<sup>12</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Rip it Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984*, (New York, NY: Penguin Books, Ltd.), 145.

infamous for physically attacking crowds at Contortions' concerts, sometimes to his own detriment. One such example was when he confronted rock critic Robert Christgau at the Artists' Space festival. On the heels of the punk scene, music was the hottest and most accessible option in New York at the time for artists who wanted to make an impact; so creative types from all disciplines brought their sensibilities to music.

That avant-garde, neophyte approach appealed to Brian Eno. Eno was in town producing Talking Heads' second album *More Songs about Buildings and Food*. He was perfecting his "Enosification" techniques that electronically manipulated instruments in the recording studio first developed during his time with England's Roxy Music. He released two albums with Roxy: *Roxy Music* (1972) and *For Your Pleasure* (1973).

What he saw in New York intrigued his artistic sensibilities:

I notice that many of the more significant [sic] contributions to rock music and to a lesser extent, avant garde music, have been made by enthusiastic amateurs and dabblers. Their strength is that they are able to approach the task of music-making without previously acquired solutions and without too firm a concept of what is and what is not possible.<sup>13</sup>

His penchant for minimalist invention and identification as a "non-musician" allowed him to see that something compelling was happening in New York. Eno was so taken that he approached Island Records about recording a compilation of the Artists' Space bands. But when Eno entered Big Apple Studio, only four of the original ten bands joined him: The Contortions, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, Mars, and DNA. It is unclear exactly why Eno chose to limit the recording sessions, but there is speculation that Theoretical Girls and the Gynecologists were excluded because they came from outside

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<sup>13</sup> Brian Eno qtd. in Mara Missangas, "N.Y. No Wave: Lower East Side Story," liner notes to *N.Y. No Wave: The Ultimate East Village 80's Soundtrack* (Ze Records, CD, 2003), n.p.

the Lower East Side circle.<sup>14</sup> The two groups from the SoHo neighborhood south of Houston Street took a high-art approach to their music, influenced more by Philip Glass' classical experimentation than Iggy Pop's raw animus. Before it went through a gentrification makeover, SoHo was the epicenter of creativity in Manhattan. A chasm formed between hip artists and those who were seen as yesterday's news. The recording was released later that year as *No New York* with each of the four bands allotted four songs. The scene solidified and listeners were confronted with No Wave.

### **What is No Wave?**

No Wave did not operate by a unified philosophy or a consistent sound, but it was clear that these bands were trying to break with the previous generation. Writing for *New York Rocker*, one of the several publications covering the underground music scene by the late seventies, Roy Trakin drew a dividing line: "While the first wave of new music that came from New York--Patti Smith, Television, Blondie, Ramones, Mink Deville--tried to update history, the *No New York* bands usurped the past and spit it back out in a new configuration."<sup>15</sup> Punks used a pastiche of signs, or symbols, to reimagine 1950s culture as a means of resistance to dominant ideologies in the mid 1970s. New York punk emerged during the same period that the United States' nostalgia for 1950s culture birthed television shows like *Happy Days*, films like *American Graffiti* and *Grease*<sup>16</sup>, and bands like Sha Na Na.

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<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, 147.

<sup>15</sup> Roy Trakin, "D.N.A.," *New York Rocker*, October 1980, 29.

<sup>16</sup> *Grease* began as a Broadway musical in 1971 by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey, proving that even the sometimes isolated world of theater was not immune to the fifties nostalgia craze.

Punks embraced the rebellious element of the 1950s and early 1960s epitomized by the pop culture and rock and roll, which parents feared would corrupt white suburban children with thoughts of miscegenation. Patti Smith's first album *Horses* included the medley "Land," which featured "Land of a Thousand Dances" (1963) co-written by Chris Kenner and Fats Domino, two African American rhythm and blues artists from Louisiana. Deborah Harry of Blondie employed a modernized girl group aesthetic in her vocal delivery akin to the Crystals and the Ronettes, two groups featuring women of mixed race, that she and guitarist Chris Stein honed in their previous group, the Stilettoes. Blondie's music also owed a debt to Phil Spector's production style that created the distinctive girl group sound on songs like "Be My Baby" (1963), most obvious in the spoken intro and beat to its first single "X Offender" (1976). Mink Deville went for a similar sound with Spector's production associate Jack Nitzsche arranging its early recordings. The Ramones eponymous debut album pictured Joey, Johnny, Tommy, and Dee Dee wearing leather jackets and sunglasses like extras from *The Wild One* (1953); they went on to work with Spector for *End of the Century* in 1979.

The fear of interracial socializing and sexuality was not as strong in the late seventies as it was in the 1950s. But it is important to trace what George Lipsitz calls the "hidden histories" of popular music. He argues that these layered stories enable us to locate "the alternative archives of history, the shared memories, experiences, and aspirations of ordinary people, whose perspectives rarely appear in formal historical archival collections."<sup>17</sup> As scholars we can see the embrace of pop cultural trends as markers of changing attitudes in American society. The nostalgia for the 1950s

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<sup>17</sup> George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xi.

magnified the absence of African Americans in the punk scene. Harkening back the Eisenhower Era meant embracing a time of whiteness, an act that was complicated by the postmodern 1970s in which minority groups were gaining more and more visibility. The ambiguity between the present and past led No Wavers' to take a different position than their forbearers.

In the same way that John Holmstrom, Ged Dunn, and Legs McNeil helped christen the CBGB scene with a title when they published *Punk* magazine in 1976, the term "No Wave" also came from a fanzine. *NO* magazine was founded in 1977 by New York University Film School students Chris Nelson, Jim Sclavunos, Philip Dray, and Seth Goldstein. It only lasted for four issues, but while working on the zine the staff developed projects of their own. Dray and Nelson joined Rick Brown to form Information, Sclavunos drummed for Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, and Klein and Posner formed Mofungo. *NO* faced healthy competition when Brown, along with two other NYU colleagues, Willie Klein and Jim Posner of the band Blinding Headache, published *Beat Street*.

Marc Masters argues for the importance of the word "No" in his book *No Wave*. He suggests that No Wavers employed the word to simultaneously deny the existence of a cohesive movement as James Chance did in 1979: "I DESPISE movements!! I'd never be part of any movement!"<sup>18</sup> At the same time, he argues, it allowed them to generate a like mindedness: "It could hardly be smaller, yet, like the No Wave movement itself, it is remarkably potent, a symbol of all the possibilities in rejection and resistance."<sup>19</sup> If all

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<sup>18</sup> James Chance interviewed by Roy Trakin from "Q: Why Interview James Chance? A: Because He's There," *New York Rocker*, January 1979, n.p. qtd. in Masters, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Masters, 15.

this time was spent determining what No Wave was not, then how can we understand what No Wave *was*?

Popular and underground music historian Simon Reynolds elaborates on Masters' view of No Wave by reiterating its performative elements. In *Rip It Up and Start Again* he writes:

the No Wave groups *acted* as if they had no ancestors at all...the No Wave bands staged their revolt against rock tradition using the standard rock instrumentation of guitar, bass, and drums. Occasionally they leavened this restricted arsenal with horns or keyboards, but they were always basic sixties-style organs, never synthesizers. Curiously, it was as though No Wavers felt that the electronic route to making a postrock noise was *too* easy. It was more challenging, and perhaps more *threatening*, too, to use rock's own tools against itself.<sup>20</sup>

Punk was already refined and being mass marketed as New Wave by the time *No New York* was released. The No Wave bands rejected punk's assimilation by power pop bands like the Knack that softened its rougher edges and synth pop acts like Depeche Mode that strived for a light, synthetic sound of pulsating synthesizers. They did so by using a sonic framework that built on a seemingly reckless approach to musicianship and abrasive rock and roll that prized guitar, bass, and drums. Mara Missangas contradicts the notion that the No Wave sound lacked precedents:

No wave music explored the original amateurism and anarchy of punk rock but took it further into a cubist brain game, rejecting the formulaic rhythms of rock and roll and the verse/chorus organization. loose [sic] experiment, freaky amalgam of free jazzier, [sic] **Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, Captain Beefheart, Velvet Underground**, old root of black music. A perfect Psycho World Music.<sup>21</sup>

Forgiving Missangas' grammatical errors that can be attributed to the French to English translation, she provides an instructional introduction to *No New York*. Her citation of the Velvet Underground relies on its debut album *Velvet Underground and Nico* (1967),

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<sup>20</sup> Reynolds, 140.

<sup>21</sup> Missangas, n.p.

which featured the heavy drone of John Cale's electric viola to merge the experimental classical music of his formative years studying with LaMonte Young and proto-punk garage rock. She also finds similarities in how jazz players Sun Ra and Albert Ayler and the avant garde blueser Captain Beefheart play atonal saxophone lines with song structures made up of multiple movements with conflicting tempos and timbres.

But these are blanket comparisons that only generally characterize the sound of the four bands on Eno's recording. DNA's "Lionel," for example, reveals a deeper debt to diasporic African music. The song has synthesizer flourishes characteristic of late 1970s electronic experimental music, such as Martin Rev's style in the duo Suicide and early Human League songs like "Being Boiled," but DNA guitarist and singer Arto reveals that much of his influences came from South America:

Pop music is real popular down in Brazil,...It's very sophisticated, too, especially like '20's sambas and early '60s bossa nova. Incredible lyrics. Real jazz-influenced. Then there's carnival music, where four hundred drummers march down the street, playing simultaneously. Just the sound of that--immense, earth-shaking--is very D.N.A. like....There are certain points in the history of pop music where the novel breaks through and causes a new trend. I wanted to start a new trend....We wanted to sound like a big drum, with the three extensions of that drum. That's why we got Tim. We're ahead of our time as a dance band. In Brazilian, African or New Orleans music, the drums are often carrying the melody. People's definitions of melody are just very narrow. Tim and I both play very melodically. We're not anti-melody. There's just a lot more to music than rock 'n' roll, though if you want to succeed, you've still got to satisfy that basic Saturday night urge.<sup>22</sup>

D.N.A used African diasporic musics to distance itself from mainstream popular music. Lindsay emphasizes the drums as a key sonic factor and rhythmic sensibilities as a marker of unique musical identity. If we are to understand the innovation of No Wave, bodily performances become important.

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<sup>22</sup> Trakin, "D.N.A.," 30.

The embrace of African diasporic musics is a major separator between No Wave and New Wave. Embracing multicultural musics was a rejection of New Wave's staid understanding of whiteness. As Theo Cateforis argues in *Are We Not New Wave?: Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s*, the late seventies and early eighties were a moment when bands' choice of musical elements spoke to changing ideas of masculinity and race. Cateforis claims the bodily articulation of nervousness used by male New Wave singers like Talking Heads' David Byrne was a rebellion against the stereotypical, over-sexualized cock rocker persona of classic rock gods like Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant: "new wave's contracted this with a middle-class bookish intellectualism and collegiate, art school pedigree. Where the male cock rock singer was emotionally, physically, and sexually direct, the nervous persona was constricted, distant, and detached."<sup>23</sup> He locates the origin of this conditional remoteness in a Victorian Era medical diagnosis called *sexual neurasthenia*, characterized by men's discomfort with their own bodies. Rather than encouraging men to become more familiar with their bodies, physicians prescribed sexual self-discipline as a coping mechanism, as well as a tool to reinforce civilized white male behavior predicated on reservation, a requisite quality to differentiate itself from the hypersexuality of black men.<sup>24</sup> White cock rockers' attempted to perform black masculinity, while New Wavers cultivated a whiteness that defined itself in opposition to any appropriation of blackness. No Wavers fell somewhere in the middle. They neither blindly appropriated the music, fashion, and bodily articulations of black musicians the way cock rockers did, nor did they distance themselves wholly from integrated black

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<sup>23</sup> Theo Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave?: Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 82-83.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

cultural and musical performances. Rather, they attempted to create something of a hybrid. The leader of this expedition was James Chance.

### **James Chance Goes in Search of The Funk**

James Siegfried was born and raised in Milwaukee and Brookfield, Wisconsin before attending Michigan State University. He then trained on saxophone briefly at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music in Milwaukee, dropped out and moved to New York City in December 1975. Siegfried felt at home on both the CBGB and Loft jazz scenes, the latter inspired by the free jazz and avant garde jazz styles of Albert Ayler, Sun Ra, John Coltrane, and Ornette Coleman in the 1950s and 1960s. Siegfried, now calling himself James Chance, started experimenting with merging punk and jazz with the instrumental quartet Flaming Youth and the rock-oriented Scabs. The Scabs featured a 16-year-old poet named Lydia Anne Koch, a migrant from Rochester, New York who arrived in 1976. She adopted the nickname Lydia Lunch after her practice of stealing lunches for punk bands like Mink Deville and Cleveland transports, the Dead Boys.<sup>25</sup> The Scabs soon broke up, leaving Chance and Lunch to form the first incarnation of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks in the spring of 1977 with drummer Bradly Field and a bassist who went by the single name of Reck.

The pilot version of Teenage Jesus recorded three songs that year, but they were not released until 1979's *Pre-Teenage Jesus* 45 single. I defer to Marc Masters' description of "The Closet," "Less of Me," and "My Eyes" in *No Wave* where he writes:

Atop harsh, dogmatic beats that reigned the group in like a master whipping a slave, Lunch sprays desperate howls and noisy slide guitar, while Chance blurts streams of atonal sax. The slowest track, 'The Closet', most clearly reflects

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<sup>25</sup> Masters, 73.

Lunch's obsessions with torture, imprisonment, and mortal struggle. 'I'm in a closet and I can't breathe/ Won't you just please release me', she screams. 'I can't move and my kidneys fail/ The size of this room feels like jail. Comparing herself Charles Manson's most famous victim, actress Sharon Tate, she blames 'suburban wealth' for sending her 'down the drain', ending with a plea to 'take a bullet to my eye/blow them out and see if I die'.<sup>26</sup>

Masters' brief mention of Chance's Tourette-like sax illustrates how Lunch was the predominant focus of the group. Her nightmarish lyrics and pathological delivery coupled with Teenage Jesus' guillotine beat and relentless guitar proved restricting for Chance. More complex song structures that incorporated his interest in diverse genres meant he had to find a vehicle to meet somewhere between punk and jazz.

The new band's name came from a 1977 *New York Times* review of pianist John Fischer's jazz ensemble in which James Chance performed. Robert Palmer commented on Chance's awkward contortions of his body and the notes he played on the saxophone.<sup>27</sup> The group's name became symbolic of its musical approach. Several musicians passed through the band during the next two years until the classic lineup was set: Chance on vocals and saxophone, Don Christensen on drums, Adele Bertei on keyboard, George Scott on bass, and Jody Harris and Pat Place on guitars. This version of the group is featured on *No New York*; their four contributions illustrate the band attempting to find its sound. "Dish it Out" and "Flip Your Face" are up-tempo and scratchy with punk energy underneath Chance's angry throat-slicing screams. However, the songs exhibit a rhythmic awareness catalyzed by Scott's bass, an instrument typically overshadowed by punk's slicing guitars. "Jaded," a song from Chance's days with Lydia Lunch, sounds like a terrifying dirge for Satan. Its methodical bassline is augmented by a

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 77. A re-recorded version of "The Closet" appears on *No New York*.

<sup>27</sup> Masters, 84; Thurston Moore and Byron Coley, *No Wave. Post-Punk. Underground. New York. 1976-1980*. (New York, NY: Abrams Image), 26.

thinly suggestive sax and drums that slink in like a fading heartbeat. The song climaxes with a keyboard crescendo that could provoke Rip Van Winkle from a peaceful slumber into a murderous rampage. But the most interesting track on the record is a cover of James Brown's "I Can't Stand Myself (When You Touch Me)."

James Brown is widely acknowledged as the Godfather of Soul and innovator of the sound that became funk. Integral to this sound was a distinct rhythm that centered on The One, which emphasized the one and three beats rather than the conventional beat in almost all popular music that centered on the downbeat of two and four. The studio recording of "I Can't Stand Myself" is anomalous in Brown's discography. Brown carved out his unique brand of funk with two black rhythm and blues bands that relied on horn sections, the Famous Flames in the sixties and the J.B.'s in the seventies, and the One to produce signature tunes like "Night Train" (1962), "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag - Pt. 1" (1966), "I Got You (I Feel Good)" (1966), "Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine (1970), "Make it Funky," and "The Payback" (1974). Between working with the Famous Flames and the J.B.'s James Brown cut "I Can't Stand Myself" in 1967 with the Dapps, a white funk band from Cincinnati, Ohio. The Dapps did not include a horn section on the track, but rather an organ, guitar, bass, and drums. Why would a saxophone player like James Chance choose to cover a song that was both one of the only songs in Brown's entire catalogue not to feature any horns, utilizing a swampy, mellower beat, and that was also one of only a few songs in Brown's entire career to be recorded by the all white Dapps for inclusion on *No New York?* I argue that Chance made the calculated decision because it allowed him to transcend a simple cover version. Most of the time when artists re-record a song they honor it by copying the performance note for

note. Less frequently they put an idiosyncratic spin on the track. But almost never are they able to create a hybridized product that sounds fresh. The Contortions deconstruct “I Can’t Stand Myself” into sonic disarray. Reducing the song to its elements enables the group to reconstruct it with Chance’s stabbing sax filling holes in the groove where horns are absent in the original version; Chance’s saxophone assumes the role normally filled by Maceo Parker, Fred Wesley or another of Brown’s horn players. The guitar is scratchy, and the beat is chunky. The beat teases listeners. It sounds as if it is coaxing them to dance but ultimately leaves dancers confused at how to manipulate their bodies to coincide with the noisy sound. The song lacks clarity: it is not furious punk, and it is not trance-inducing funk. “I Can’t Stand Myself” very much sounds like a work in progress. The Contortions were not covering the song as much as generating a hybridized funk that reached across racial lines.

For advice on how to make this new kind of music, Chance reached out to funk pioneer George Clinton. The cover of November 1979’s *New York Rocker* advertised its feature article with the headline, “Punk Meets Funk: George Clinton Talks to James Chance.” In the dual interview and article titled, perhaps prophetically, “The Rap,” Chance and his then-manager Anya Phillips openly ask the Parliament-Funkadelic architect, “How did you get the black teenagers? I think that’s a really hip audience?”, to which Clinton replies, “That, I think, happened in the early ’70s when all the white rock artists had sufficiently fucked that whole scene up.”<sup>28</sup> For Clinton, white artists sacrificed musical authenticity in favor of commercial success; this meant catering to white, middle-class audiences. As a result, Clinton then goes on to discuss how his

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<sup>28</sup> James Quinlan, “The Rap: Clinton/Chance on Records, Reactions, and Rip Offs,” *New York Rocker*, November 1979, 8.

Parliament-Funkadelic constellation had to create “black rock” to fill the void left by many white artists.<sup>29</sup> The result was funk, a truly free mixture of musical styles that incorporated jazz, r & b, soul, and classic rock. For Clinton, funk music is inherently bi-racial. But what is the process through which it became an intersection for black and white culture in the sixties?

The origins of funk lie at the core of the African American experience in Western society. In *Funk: The Music, The People, and the Rhythm of the One* Rickey Vincent argues “[it] is an aesthetic of deliberate confusion, of uninhibited, soulful behavior that remains viable because of a faith in instinct, a joy of self, and a joy of life, particularly unassimilated black American life.”<sup>30</sup> He suggests, “in its modern sense [it] is a deliberate reaction to--and a rejection of--the traditional Western world’s predilection for formality, pretense, and self-repression.”<sup>31</sup> To make this connection Vincent claims that the Funk’s origins lie in African cosmological philosophy prizing natural rhythms and harmonies as the keys to mental and physical health. Leaning on Robert Farris Thompson, Tony Bolden complements Vincent’s point of view by reminding readers that the etymology of the word “funk(y)” is traced back to “lu-fuki,” a Ki-Kongo word meaning “foul body odor. But insofar as this odor is produced from perspiration that is induced by vigorous exertion, ‘funk(y)’ also signifies honest expression and integrity, because the artistic and/or material products that accrue from such exertion reflect a high level of commitment to one’s work.”<sup>32</sup> Bolden’s attention to funk’s linguistic, ethical,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Rickey Vincent, *The Music, The People, and the Rhythm of the One*, (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Griffin), 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> Tony Bolden, “Theorizing the Funk: An Introduction,” *The Funk and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture*, Ed. by Tony Bolden (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 14-15.

spiritual, and economic connotations provide the word with a heritage of cultural memory reaching back to Africa. But more importantly, it illuminates a fundamental tension concerning black performativity that results in stereotyping. He goes on to discuss how these characteristics in black artistic production linked to funk are read by the dominant white supremacist culture as innate, resulting in the misperception that black performers do not have to hone their crafts and therefore are not truly artists. To debunk that logic, Bolden holds “funk” to the same standards presented by Henry Louis Gates when he argued that words like “nigger” became tools of empowerment through resignification. Through this process, a term like “funk” racialized by whites and misunderstood as magnifying the “most degrading and dehumanizing racial stereotypes associated with blacks, including sexual profligacy, promiscuity, laxness, lewdness, and looseness,” was transformed when “blacks emptied the signifier of its most demeaning meanings and refilled it with a denotation that stood in stark opposition.”<sup>33</sup> My intention is not to erode the political struggles of African Americans won by reclaiming ownership of terms like “nigger” and “funk.” It is imperative to realize, however, that identity formation is not a one-way street; it is a product of the merging perspectives of how a group views itself complicit with how society views it. In such a dialectical relationship, simultaneous communication results in ever-changing identities based equally on projection and perception. This is especially true in the multicultural marketplace of the 1960s and 1970s.

The (white) rock influence that provides a key portion of funk’s foundation was birthed in what Anne Danielson calls “the Anglo-American world of popular music,” meaning “the sphere historically and geographically limited by its link to the global

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 15.

construction of rock music in the 1960s and 1970s.”<sup>34</sup> Leaning on sociomusicologist and critic Simon Frith, she proposes that rock’s American and British origins facilitated the continual flow of music and capital back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean. The Anglo-American world of popular music is also responsible for punk, which had parallel movements developing in London at the same time the CBGB scene came together in New York. James Brown, Parliament-Funkadelic, and Sly and the Family Stone crossed over with their unique brands of funk during this period for white, Western, middle-class consumption.

Though funk was an expression of African American cultural memory and an expression of black people’s history in the United States, its meaning was altered when it became a consumer product. Danielsen finishes this section of her book called “Whose Funk Is It?” by placing the ultimate importance on the listener to make meanings out of music. For her, that requires a “non-essentialist understanding of black music,” which realizes “the meaning and function of a specific musical practice may vary considerably according to the cultural and social context: its identity is not inherent in music itself, nor is it equivalent to the culture that may be said to have produced it in the first place.”<sup>35</sup> In this light, I argue that white artists’ adoption of funk cannot be reduced to cultural appropriation that would dismiss the music of bands like James Chance as an exercise in white supremacy. This ignorant reduction devalues any contribution white artists made to the evolving genre. Rather, I see funk existing in separate traditions that both honor the African American past but also inspire progressive approaches to making music for

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<sup>34</sup> Anne Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

several audiences. Funk is at heart an interracial music that can speak to both communities.

Following the zenith of the Civil Rights struggle in the late 1960s and Black Power's most serious presence, African Americans looked to artists and musicians as leaders who could communicate feelings of loss and oppression. Funk music was liberating in the 1970s when the majority of black people in the United States felt disenfranchised; it helped them achieve visibility and form a unified voice. New York University professor and co-editor of *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*, Stephen Duncombe argues that at the same time punk necessitated a reevaluation of whiteness: "Punk offered a space for young whites growing up in a multicultural world to figure out what it meant to be White....Whiteness was an identity, a subjectivity, a culture to be embraced, distanced from, reconfigured, and redefined, but in all cases, something to be acknowledged."<sup>36</sup> Underground postpunk artists tried using this new beginning as a chance to realize punk's DIY ethos by bridging heterogeneous artistic and cultural scenes. The repurposing of funk allowed for the development of a reciprocal relationship between blacks and whites in which James Chance found his understanding of multicultural identity. In this way, funk was a tool to unify cultures in Manhattan.

### **A Real Funked Up Scene**

James Chance took a bigger step in merging funk with punk's frenetic energy and sonic chaos on the Contortions' first full-length album *Buy* in 1979, released on Michael Zilkha and Michael Esteban's New York-based label ZE Records. Englishman Zilkha

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Duncombe, "Introduction," *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*, ed. by Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay (New York, NY: Verso, 2011), 5.

came up in New York's mid-seventies underground music and art scenes working for the *Village Voice* and Frenchman Esteban kept an international eye on the music emerging from New York, the United Kingdom, and France as publisher of the magazine *Rock News*.<sup>37</sup> When John Cale introduced the two in 1977, Zilkha and Esteban hatched the idea for a record label with a particular vision. Esteban recalls, "I had no direct influence at that time from the music scene around. In fact we wanted to do something different...But in 1978 to my point of view rock was a little bit boring after [punk and new wave]." <sup>38</sup> The Contortions immediately caught their attention.

James Chance continued to refine his philosophy on *Buy*. "Anesthetic" and "Twice Removed" feature more listenable saxophone lines that begin sounding like they could have been lifted off a lounge act and ease to a contemplative and mellow pace. "Don't Want to Be Happy" and "Roving Eye" reach closest to mid seventies funk articulated by James Brown's "Get Up Offa That Thing" (1976) and Funkadelic's "Comin' Round the Mountain" (1977) with an undeniable groove built on the proto-disco hi-hat accented dance beat. The album also includes what would become the Contortions' signature song, "Contort Yourself." This first recorded version of the track contains a punk beat and repeatedly demands that listeners "Contort your body/contort your soul" to both physically and spiritually appreciate the music. Chance then adds, "And once you take out all the garbage/ That's in your brain/ Forget about your future/It's just, just, just, just too tame," proclaiming a new era of listening. Overall the album sounds less nightmarish than *No New York*. Chance had an earnest interest in

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<sup>37</sup> "The Future is History: The Birth of Ze Records," *Ze Records*, accessed 22 July 2014, <http://www.zerecords.com/new/about.php>.

<sup>38</sup> "Strange Days Magazine: 2009 Japan - Interview with Michel Esteban," *Ze Records*, accessed 20 June 2014, [http://www.zerecords.com/new/about\\_int\\_1.php](http://www.zerecords.com/new/about_int_1.php).

making more accessible music. Glenn O'Brien, writer, editor, and host of the Manhattan cable access talk show *TV Party* from 1978-1982, put it succinctly: “James saw the obvious....[rock'n'roll] was quickly being frozen into cliché and caricature. Then this white dude with free licks comes boogalooing in on the pointiest shoes you've ever seen and it's okay again for high-IQ booty shaking.”<sup>39</sup> The Contortions' blend of musical styles was becoming more realized and dance-oriented. Chance's saxophone sound had the forceful sonic exclamations of Fred Wesley and Maceo Parker, both of whom played with James Brown and George Clinton's Parliament-Funkadelic contingent, and the break-neck speed of Charlie Parker's hard bop jazz. But there were also elements of the blues in the band's music. Guitarist Pat Place of the Contortions used a slide technique reminiscent of black acoustic blues players like Blind Willie McTell, Son House, and Robert Johnson. While Place maintained that her ineptitude accidentally drew her to playing slide, the sound nonetheless evoked a rural blues aesthetic that can be heard under the rest of the Contortions' playing.

Chance was the star of the New York City underground in 1979. In May the *East Village Eye* featured a stoic animated portrait of Chance, then trying on the new surname of “White,” on its first cover along with an article called “White & Co. Move Uptown” and a profile of the artist by Walter Fleming III. The *Eye*'s first office was located at 151 Ludlow Street near the Alphabet City neighborhood within the East Village. From 1979 to January 1987 the paper covered the wide range of topics concerning the surrounding community, including healthy living, fitness, and sex; community engagement methods; local, domestic, and international politics; and fashion, art, and culture. It was also on the

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<sup>39</sup> Glenn O'Brien qtd. in Michael Esteban, liner notes to James Chance, *Buy* (Ze Records, 1979, 2004), trans. by Kim Masee, n.p. Compact disc.

musical vanguard, spotlighting up-and-coming bands from New York, as well as those that migrated to the scene. Founder and editor Leonard Abrams took a focused perspective to guide his publication:

I saw the opportunity to create the kind of journal I wanted to make, which specifically was a community in print. A place where your mind would be free and you could engage in all the issues of the time. It was a time in which people realized there was a lot more than politics in terms of self expression or expression [concerning] issues of the day. People began using art a lot more: the plastic arts as well as music. And then there was also a lot more interest in the acceptance of not knowing. Okay, you know, coming out of Vietnam, the Vietnam War and Civil Rights, these were huge issues in which [it] was relatively easy to take sides. You were for the war or you were against it; you were for traditional society or you were against it. This allowed a lot of people to stop thinking. But the idea that you don't know and it's okay that you are exploring what you don't know,....<sup>40</sup>

Abrams' main goal was to generate a sense of community grounded in intellectual discussion in the East Village following a period of fragmentation and malaise triggered by the trauma of Vietnam and Civil Rights. The city became a microcosm for testing ideas that could play out on a national stage. He keenly politicized the idea of recovery, suggesting that informed liberal minds negotiating through art and music during this period of "not knowing" would eventually determine the United States' course. Abrams' philosophy of honoring the ambivalent emotions fraught by social change that psychologically manifest in the *Eye*'s pages found a counterpart in the visceral expressions of anger, violence, and rage in the Contortions' performances, which were infamous at the time due to White's habit of physically attacking audience members.

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<sup>40</sup> Leonard Abrams, interview with the Author, 19 March 2014, New York, digital recording. Abrams decision not to use the term "No Wave" speaks to its futility. Within a year of *No New York* the movement of bands strictly associated with No Wave had dissipated. The term "New Wave" was being used regularly as blanket terminology for the flood of rock bands coming emerging from across the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe.

Similar to Abrams, White admits, “I was really just trying to get a reaction out of these people.”<sup>41</sup>

This like-mindedness makes it no surprise that Abrams would choose White to be featured in the first *East Village Eye*. In his profile of the Contortions’ leader, Walter Fleming the III gushes, “With the loving support of a tight entourage and society of friends James White finds himself a paragon of superior excellence,” then continues, “One need not fear the power of James White, one need not fear perfection. He, the star, is the proof of the divinity that can be had by those who strive for a life beyond the schemes of men.”<sup>42</sup> The level of hyperbole in Fleming’s admiration even made White’s father blush. In a letter to Leonard Abrams published in the Summer 1979 edition of the *Eye* Donald Siegfried writes, “[James] has been treated unfairly in the press in the past, and though the article may have gone a little too far in ‘deifying’ him, it certainly does my heart good to see him finally appreciated for what he has done.”<sup>43</sup> Toward the end of his piece, Fleming challenges readers to stop their bourgeois spending practice of buying records and send their money directly to musicians. Relying on American culture’s obsession with celebrity, he claims that it is these “stars,” epitomized by White, who would be advancing America into the 1980s.<sup>44</sup> In 1979 it remained to be seen if the Contortions would break down color barriers, but their take on funk instrumentation was inspiring other groups on the underground scene.

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<sup>41</sup> James Chance/White qtd. in *Punk: Attitude*, dir. Don Letts, 90 min., 3DD Productions DVD, 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Walter Fleming III, “James White,” *East Village Eye*, May 1979, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from Donald Siegfried to Leonard Abrams, *East Village Eye*, Summer 1979, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Fleming III, 9.

## New York After the Contortions

The *New York Rocker*, a smaller competitor of *Punk* magazine, was founded in 1976 by Alan Betrock and reached its largest circulation in 1979. Betrock's vision was less political than Leonard Abrams', focusing specifically on the city's musical output. The dB's immortalized the paper's import during this period on the song "I Read the New York Rocker," which reminds listeners of the *Rocker's* vast reach of New York music and how its influences reverberated in other major cultural capitals like Boston, Los Angeles, and London. Like Walter Fleming, in 1980 Byron Coley also located James Chance/White as a major force on the postpunk scene: "Mr. Chance may be remembered for many things, but his real contribution was the introduction of black funk into a musical context (punk/n. wave) dominated by white players and listeners. The R&B/soul revival currently gripping N. York (if nowhere else) is to a large extent his baby,..."<sup>45</sup>

That same year Roy Trakin wrote that James Chance/White made possible the next wave of innovative artists. Reviewing the Joe Bowie-led Defunkt at Trax in the February 9, 1980 issue of the United Kingdom's *Melody Maker*, Trakin attributed their blistering punk funk sound and impeccable musicianship to Chance/White's latest band the Blacks. He lauds, "You've got to give James Chance/White the credit for that happy development. He attracted some of the city's finest young black jazz innovators into his back-up outfit, the Blacks, and they promptly broke out on their own and left the impish saxist/bandleader in the proverbial dust with a series of hot, White-less gigs."<sup>46</sup> The Blacks were a backup group that synthesized musical styles and racial makeups. Putting

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<sup>45</sup> Byron Coley, "Raybeats," *New York Rocker*, October 1980, 32.

<sup>46</sup> Roy Trakin, "Defunkt: Trax, New York," *Melody Maker*, 9 February 1980, posted on *Rock's Back Pages*, accessed 14 April 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/defunkt-trax-new-york>.

an exclamation point on his piece, Trakin writes, “So what started as a joke propounded by a pompadoured twerp who sought the common ground between Iggy Pop, James Brown, and Albert Ayler has suddenly grown into the most interesting update of an obscure black musical genre since your very own ska revival, with the same refreshing element of racial integration.”<sup>47</sup> The second-wave ska revival known as 2 Tone in the U.K. during the late seventies took up the cause of racial unity in the face of riots led by skinhead white supremacists. It united working class white youth and West Indian immigrants by bringing together punk and reggae cultures. Trakin’s prose endows that same potential for social harmony in the work of James White and the Blacks.

The Raybeats were another new band generating buzz within the James Chance/White constellation and played their first show in June of 1979 at the Squat Theater on West 23rd Street. The Raybeats emerged directly from the Contortions’ lineage. Bassist George Scott III, drummer Don Christensen, and guitarist Jody Harris made their ways through early incarnations of the Contortions between 1977 and 1978. Scott also played with Raybeats keyboardist and saxophone player Pat Irwin in another of Lydia Lunch’s groups called 8-Eyed Spy and toured with John Cale. Harris toured with one of ZE Records’ most successful acts, Lizzy Mercier Descloux. And Christensen recorded as ImpLOG, an electronic industrial outfit reminiscent of the early work of Sheffield, England’s Cabaret Voltaire.

The Raybeats oeuvre as a whole strayed away from the Contortions’ hybrid funk influences. Ironically, Pat Irwin said in a 1980 interview that the music he hated hearing most was “punk funk.”<sup>48</sup> Instead they played instrumentals with the scratchy intensity

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Barone, “Raybeats,” *East Village Eye*, June 1980, 11.

and energy of No Wave tempered by a more traditional rhythm and blues groove. The band described their sound to Byron Coley as having “‘a white R & R [rock ‘n’ roll] rhythmic structure, more in a white R & R group tradition than in a surf tradition’ -- more Astronauts or Kingsmen, let’s say, than Ventures.”<sup>49</sup> The Ventures, the most prominent instrumental combo of the early sixties, became the bellwethers of the “surf rock” fad thanks in large part to recording the theme song for the hit television show *Hawaii Five-O*. But still Byron Coley suggests, “The tradition of white instrumental rock in America is not a particularly strong one. Indeed, most of the young ‘uns I know consider the white instrumental form to be little more than a novelty sound--a tag they would *not* apply to vocal-less jazz or r & b.”<sup>50</sup> Coley’s subtext is that music read as being a black product like jazz and r & b is more authentic or genuine than white instrumental bands that lack the same value audiences. As the sixties progressed into turmoil, Southern California surf culture with its images of carefree, white middle class beachcombers and warm sunny days seemed out of touch with national discourse centered on the Kennedy Assassination, Civil Rights, Vietnam, and deadly protests. Purveyors of surf rock like the Beach Boys who did utilize vocals, longed for a style that was more expressive of the zeitgeist with introspective lyrics and a grounding in gritty rock and roll. But here we have to once again turn back to George Lipsitz’s idea that music contains hidden histories, because they embody shared experiences that mainstream audiences tend to overlook.

The “white R & R rhythmic structure” referenced is based on the retooled rock sound popularized by the British Invasion bands of the early to mid sixties, itself

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<sup>49</sup> Coley, 32.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

informed by African American rock and roll artists of the fifties like Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, and Chris Kenner. The influence of the protopunk style garage rock of the Kingsmen also reveals a Caribbean influence. The original version of the Kingsmen's biggest hit "Louie Louie" was performed in a Jamaican ballad style by the Louisiana r & b singer Richard Berry. Rather than being in the tradition of white instrumental bands, the Raybeats were a composite of ideas that amounted to interracial sonic heritages more akin to instrumental groups like Booker T. and the MG's.

Without a vocalist, the Raybeats could focus on developing instrumental techniques. Pat Irwin told the *East Village Eye's* Richard Barone in 1980 that the band was founded on the "idea for a drum break record."<sup>51</sup> A "break" is the section of a song where the other instruments drop out leaving only the percussion; it is a pause in the arc of the song designed for dancing. Breakbeats can be found in songs from r & b (Rufus Thomas' "Do the Funky Penguin") to rock (The Rolling Stones' "Honky Tonk Women" and Aerosmith's "Walk this Way"), to funk (James Brown's "Funky Drummer" and Funkadelic's "Good Old Music") to disco (KC and the Sunshine Band's "I Get Lifted"). Infusing punk's energy with a relentless r & b groove allowed the Raybeats to create whole songs that acted as breaks, rather than isolating specific sections within songs. Breakbeats were also at the foundation of hip hop music. DJ's at this time in the seventies and early eighties like Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, and Grand Wizard Theodore combed through stacks of records to find passages of songs they could elongate by repeating breaks for MC's to rap over at parties and crew battles. These breakbeats became the basis for early hip hop music. Though the Raybeats were not themselves sampled by many DJ's, a dialectical relationship was forming as

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<sup>51</sup> Barone, 11.

underground white and black New York artists were trading musical and cultural ideas. Raybeats' songs like "Tight Turn" used a monotonous rhythm section led by sludgy bass breaks at the 1:05 and 2:10 marks that fade into euphoric keyboard riffs. No Wave's ethos of driving momentum is coupled with funky horn accents around the 3:00 mark. Rather than cacophonous wails of the Contortions, which some listeners might find repulsive, these horns are pleasant and evoke introspection. The horn lines then break into a jarring, unharmonious frenzy before the song returns to the monotonous beat. A new language was needed to discuss these mixed musical attributes. A discourse surrounding "dance music" developed in the early 1980s.

## ***CHAPTER TWO: THE DISCOURSE SURROUNDING DANCE***

There was a great deal of anxiety in New York City in June 1980 at the inaugural New Music Seminar. Founders Tom Silverman, Mark Josephson, Scott Anderson, and Danny Heaps assembled more than 200 attendees in a small rehearsal space to discuss the state of the music industry at the beginning of a new decade. The problem was best articulated by the “Rock/Disco Face Off” panel that set the stage for the entire event at which panelists tried to “forge some tentative alliance between the forces of new rock and roll and disco under the catch-all banner of ‘dance music.’”<sup>52</sup> Contemporary underground music needed to find a way to not only co-exist with eclectic postpunk rock and mainstream disco, but also to integrate sounds and bodies.

One of the main issues that antagonized this debate was the release of Blondie’s single “Heart of Glass” in January of 1979. Keyboardist Jimmy Destri remembers the provocative rationale behind recording the song: “Chris [Stein] always wanted to do disco songs. He’s a Dadaist,...We’re running through this new wave/I hate disco/punk rock scene, and Chris wants to do [The Tramps’] ‘Disco Inferno’ and [Donna Summer’s] ‘Love to Love You Baby’. We used to do ‘Heart of Glass’ to upset people. It was his idea to bring it back, but as a funky song.”<sup>53</sup> *Punk* magazine founder and animator John Holmstrom depicted a feeling shared by first generation punks that Blondie betrayed them on the *East Village Eye*’s June 1980 cover. The foreground features McNeil and either Holmstrom or Dunn (it is not clear) seated on a curb. McNeil, clad in the mid-seventies punk uniform of a black leather jacket, *Punk* t-shirt, ripped jeans, and Converse sneakers, calls to two trendy new wavers, “Hey, you! Spare a cigarette?” The young

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<sup>52</sup> *New York Rocker*, October 1980, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Nigel Harrison qtd. in Porter and Needs, 143.

woman replies, “Oh, ick! My God!” and her male partner questions, “Who are you?” The Holmstrom or Dunn character admits in defeat, “Well, Legs, we blew it!” The punk movement’s eulogy is complete when viewers recognize McNeil’s foot stepping on a copy of *Punk* magazine with the subtitle reading, “The Original,” discarded in the street like yesterday’s news. The background of the animation satirizes the New Wave that eroded punk’s prominence in New York City. A long line of concert-goers stand in front of a venue ready to pay money to a disgruntled club owner. The venue’s marquee reads “Super-Hip New Wave: Disco Supper Club,” listing Blondie as the night’s main act with comedian Corbett Monaca [sic], Suzanne Fellini, who had a pop hit in 1980 with the novelty track “Love on the Telephone,” and king of the Las Vegas entertainers, Wayne Newton. By situating Blondie, one of punk’s original bands, in the world of mainstream entertainment like the supper club, the cover reflects punks’ bitter lamentation that punk bands had sold out, commercializing their music for mass culture, while losing touch with their fan base in New York City.

In the cover article Holmstrom laments the corporatization of punk that was New Wave and discusses the downfall of his precious magazine:

When you’re an underground publication you depend on support from certain people. Like the groups you write about have to put ads in the magazine. Publications depend on ads to exist....Creative people always liked it. Everybody liked it except business people. They couldn’t understand it. The main problem was a kind of dichotomy. We really needed a lot of support. The Ramones were a lot of support. Blondie’s ex-manager told me he would never have an ad for Blondie in it because of the name. The name was the thing. It’s like what happened to the Dictators. There was too much stigma attached to the word ‘punk.’ Even though all these people in tuxedos are jet-setting around playing with it...<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> June Walker, “Yankees vs. Brewers, John Holmstrom vs. the World,” *East Village Eye*, June 1980, 16.

Later in the issue Blondie's Deborah Harry is ridiculed for being a sell-out in the magazine's "Pooper Scoopers" column, when, Sylvia Thin and Mabel Crunch cheekily refer to her three-year contract advertising the Gloria Vanderbilt jeans collection as "Heart of Ass."<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, the disco crowd was just as reticent to accept Blondie into its fold: "Like most dance-floor excursions by punk and new wave bands, 'Heart of Glass' dispensed with disco's sweet strings, sweeping brass, and romanticism. In their place were guitars, pianos, synthesizers, and frosty cynicism summed up by the line, 'Once I had a love and it was a gas/ Soon turned out to be a pain in the ass.'"<sup>56</sup> Harry's icy delivery of the line that love was "a pain in the ass" poked fun at disco's oversexualized female performances like Donna Summer's orgasms on "Love to Love You Baby." It also set a template for how some female artists would take a general approach of satirizing the disco lifestyle in their music.

The anger and confusion surrounding "Heart of Glass" illustrates several elements about the postpunk and disco relationship that were being mediated by luminaries like those at the New Music Seminar in 1980. The decision to compromise and invoke the term "dance music" to encompass the latest styles emerging in the city, and increasingly on a national level, suggests that the power of bodily movement to generate unity was an idea most pundits found agreeable. Arto Lindsay's ideas of writing danceable songs that utilized several genres was now being accepted by New York media. Inherent in that discourse on dance was a subtextual redefinition of race relations.

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<sup>55</sup> Sylvia Thin and Mabel Crunch, "Pooper Scoopers," *East Village Eye*, June 1980, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 218.

## **What Color is Disco?**

Disco's origins lie in a debate over authenticity in black music. In the 1960s the two record labels dominating America's perception of black music were Motown and Stax. Their respective philosophies were exhibited on the marquees outside each studio. The sign outside Motown in Detroit, Michigan read "Hitsville U.S.A.," summing up founder Berry Gordy's assembly-line ethic of arranging, recording, producing, and marketing pop-friendly songs with subtle horns, symphonic orchestrations, well enunciated vocals, and a 2/4 or 4/4 beat that almost anyone would deem danceable. The company's slogan stating it was "The Sound of Young America" was meant to prompt visions of inclusiveness. Stax Records in Memphis, Tennessee positioned itself as "Soulsville U.S.A." to lay claim to a black identity that Motown lost by trying to market across racial lines to a young white audience. Stax's brand of rhythm and blues was an early prototype for funk with bombastic horn lines, emotive vocals, rough guitars, and deep grooves. Tensions between Motown and Stax make apparent different perspectives on black identity and how African Americans were expected to achieve social progress in the United States.

Motown and Stax furthered oppositional perspectives brought to the fore of civil rights discussions by Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. Washington's accommodationist stance argued that blacks should accept racial prejudice and work within that system for economic success and self-improvement. Du Bois denied Washington, asserting that accepting racial prejudice would only lead to further oppression by whites, and advocating for an embrace of the qualities that make African Americans exceptional. This political debate was reinvigorated during the sixties on the

topic of civil rights, permeating approaches to music making. Motown's softer style was appealing and challenged many traditional markers of rhythm and blues. Stax saw itself as more authentic, grounded in a no-apologies disposition at home with the "Say it Loud-I'm Black I'm Proud" attitude. Disco music borrowed elements from both record labels. But overall it favored the pop-soul of Motown (and the early seventies output of Philadelphia International Records) more than the hard funk of Stax. Many critics misread the softer sound as weak and whitened.

For one, I am troubled by Rickey Vincent's vitriolic reading of disco in *Funk: The Music, The People, and the Rhythm of The One*. While he is right to point out that disco producers largely exploited funk music's innovative merging of African percussion, classical strings, and extended jams, he solipsistically declares:

Universal Funk gave way to color-blind, brain-dead pop. Initially, there had been stiff criteria for white performers to succeed in black music, but disco changed that. The heavy funk of the Average White Band gave way to the lightweight, grooving dance funk of K.C. and the Sunshine Band, which opened doors for the Australian trio the Bee Gees, the gay macho spoof of the Village People, the biggest-selling black chart hit of the Rolling Stones ("Miss You" in 1978), and finally the easy-rock duo Captain & Tennille's ironic "Do That to Me One More Time," in 1980. For the first time since the heyday of Elvis Presley in 1960, white groups made steady inroads onto the black charts, and not everyone was thrilled about it.<sup>57</sup>

Vincent's implicit homophobia when he cites the Village People as a dilution of black music is the same sentiment that led to large-scale anti-disco initiatives like Disco Demolition Night at Chicago's Comiskey Park on July 12, 1979. That night local radio DJ Steve Dahl led over 50,000 attendees in destroying disco records between games of a White Sox and Boston Red Sox doubleheader. But even more disturbing is Vincent's prejudice, which demonstrates the dangers of racializing music. His usage of the term

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<sup>57</sup> Vincent, 209.

“black music” does not account for its evolution as something that honors and transcends African Americans’ cultural experiences. He creates a linear trajectory of funk’s whitening, which is tantamount, so he argues, to its denigration. He sees embracing funk music as cultural appropriation by white artists in a position of power looking to pillage black products.

But if we acknowledge that funk, and all music in the United States, is a product of cultural mixing between blacks and whites, as I have tried to argue thus far, then Vincent’s argument is diminished. The Average White Band (AWB) included a black drummer, Steve Ferrone, during its most commercially successful period, which began with 1975’s *Cut the Cake* and ended when the group disbanded in 1982. Also, the suggestion that it was in the 1970s that the Bee Gees and the Rolling Stones suddenly started playing black-influenced music is wrong. The Bee Gees dramatic, late 1960s pop hits had more in common with soul ballads than popular vanilla singers like Barbara Streisand, and the Rolling Stones, under founder Brian Jones’ direction, were playing blues and r & b since the A side of their first single released in 1963, a cover of Chuck Berry’s “Come On.”

Vincent also suggests that in the rapidly growing 1970s and early 1980s as American society was becoming more integrated, that music should have remained segregated. Why does he think that music should not speak to various cultural changes that occur over time? That way of thinking does not take into account an accurate reading of how music operates for listeners. He ignores the possibility of a constructive racial dialogue within the funk-disco relationship, if we see whites’ contribution as complimentary to blacks’ original style. There seems to be an underlying assumption

that all white musicians using funk are pirates without out any genuine regard for the art form or its history.

Mainstream media glamorized disco in the late seventies through the club Studio 54 at 254 54th Street in Manhattan and the film *Saturday Night Fever* as a phenomenon for upwardly-mobile whites who wanted to achieve lives of excess through sex, drugs, and dancing. By 1978 disco's public face was one of exclusion, denying the sense of racial and sexual unity that dancing was supposed to foster. That imagery was far removed from disco culture's origins in lofts, abandoned firehouses, and clubs around New York. Groups with limited visibility challenged white heterosexual maleness. Gay men of color in particular fostered underground disco culture at a post Civil Rights moment and claimed physical space. Disco's liberating spirit was almost lost in its mass commercialization, save for the Paradise Garage.

### **The Paradise Garage**

Michael Brody purchased the concrete parking garage at 84 King Street in Manhattan's Hudson Square neighborhood when disco was gathering momentum toward its commercial peak. Brody was inspired by the spirit of early seventies discotheques like the Gallery, which became symbols of the freedom gay men were enjoying following the Stonewall Inn riots of 1969. He ran a club called the Chameleon, until February 1978, when the Paradise Garage opened its doors. Disco historians Frank Broughton and Bill Brewster recall that the Garage "was where, a decade or so after taking its first steps, black, spiritual underground disco reached its peak. It was quite simply the largest and

most powerful expression of the original disco spirit.”<sup>58</sup> Mel Cheren, former owner of West End Records, as well as Brody’s ex-lover and financial backer, remembers the Garage as “the one place that truly reflected the rainbow that had produced disco’s pot of gold. The potent intersection of rhythm, race and realness that had produced disco in the first place, black as it was gay, gay as it was black - all came together here.”<sup>59</sup> Unlike Studio 54, where patrons would go to claim their elite social status, the Paradise Garage was an underground democratic space where people of different racial and class spheres intersected. At the Garage “Vogueing drag queens rubbed elbows with downtown punk rockers, artists mixed with factory workers...”<sup>60</sup> No one personified this spirit of inclusion better than the Garage’s DJ, Larry Levan.

Levan, born Lawrence Philpot, was a gay African American man who found a home in the city’s gay club scene in the late sixties. He apprenticed with David Mancuso at the Loft and Nicky Siano at the Gallery. It was Siano that introduced Levan to the turntables, and once Michael Brody recruited him for the new Paradise Garage in 1978, Levan developed a cult following in New York:

[his] genius lay in his ability to play with the audience’s emotions by combining records from across the musical spectrum into a powerful, all-encompassing megamix that underscored the commonality shared by all music, and, by extension, all people. Larry’s approach was part daredevil, part preacher, part mad scientist, part witch doctor, and part drag queen.”<sup>61</sup>

Early disco DJ’s like Siano used soul songs to structure a playlist that kept a consistent beat for dancers. Levan took that approach a step further by matching beats from

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<sup>58</sup> Frank Broughton and Bill Brewster, “Heaven in a Car Park,” liner notes to *Larry Levan Live at the Paradise Garage* (Strut, West End, Garage Records, 2000), n.p. Compact Disc.

<sup>59</sup> Mel Cheren, *Keep On Dancin’: My Life at the Paradise Garage* (New York, NY: 24 Hours For Life, Inc.), 199.

<sup>60</sup> “Journey into Paradise: The Larry Levan Story,” liner notes to Various Artists, *Journey into Paradise: The Larry Levan Story* (Rhino Entertainment Company, 2006), n.p. Compact Disc.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

disparate musical genres to develop a post-disco understanding of dance music that came to be called “house” or “garage.” His playlists mixed mainstream disco with soul, funk, rock, reggae, new wave, electro pop, and early hip hop. On a given night dancers would go on a musical journey that could include Sister Sledge’s “We Are Family,” James Brown’s “Give it Up or Turnit a Loose,” Eddy Grant’s “Living on the Frontline,” The Clash’s “The Magnificent Seven,” Marianne Faithfull’s “Why D’Ya Do It,” ESG’s “Moody,” Eddie Kendricks’ “Girl You Need A Change of Mind,” Kraftwerk’s “The Robots,” David Byrne and Brian Eno’s “My Life in the Bush of Ghosts,” and the Sugarhill Gang’s “Rapper’s Delight.”<sup>62</sup> Levan also spotlighted up-and-coming local artists at the Garage that fit his collage-style sound.

Two of the best examples are Gwen Guthrie and the Peech Boys (also known as the New York Citi Peech Boys or the NYC Peech Boys). Guthrie was born in Oklahoma but grew up in Newark, New Jersey. She provided background vocals for Madonna, Billy Joel, Peter Tosh, and Aretha Franklin, just to name a few, and wrote songs made famous by Ben E. King and Roberta Flack. However, her performances at the Garage allowed her to showcase her talents as a lead vocalist. Levan regularly featured her “It Should Have Been You” in his set. The Peech Boys were a more personal endeavor for Levan, a vehicle for him to graduate from DJ to studio producer. Steven Brown, Michael de Benedictus, R. Bernard Fowler, Robert Kasper, and Darryl Short were an interracial five-piece band from New York that took the basic guitar/bass/drums rock formula and combined it with the cutting edge synthesizer sounds of electro pop that dominated the early 1980s. Levan’s studio wizardry capped off their innovative sound. Levan even

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<sup>62</sup> “The Paradise Garage Top 100,” *Rate Your Music*, accessed 30 June 2014, [http://rateyourmusic.com/list/TheScientist/the\\_paradise\\_garage\\_top\\_100/](http://rateyourmusic.com/list/TheScientist/the_paradise_garage_top_100/).

lends his vocals to “On a Journey” from the Peech Boys’ only album, *Life is Something Special* (1983), which features cover art by Keith Haring, then-recently discovered at the famous Times Square Art Show in 1980. The Paradise Garage and Larry Levan were instrumental in uniting crowds from the city’s music, art, and club scenes. The precedent set by the Garage influenced entrepreneurs to found venues across the city specializing in postpunk and post disco dance music.

### **The Newest Club is Opening Up**

Nina Hagen’s song “New York/N.Y.” captured the feverish dance craze dominating the city in the early eighties. Her repeated announcement that “the newest club is opening up” reflects the rapid pace at which new venues were opening. As a result, more opportunities arose for bands to get their music heard. Tom Goodkind, singer, bassist, and songwriter for U.S. Ape, admitted in 1980 that “in the beginning things were really hard--there was no Hurrah or Irving Plaza--just Max’s [Kansas City] and CB’s. Things are good now by comparison.... The scene is really healthy with New York bands and the clubs are starting to treat the bands well.”<sup>63</sup> The March 16, 1980 edition of the *East Village Eye* featured a directory of 29 clubs stretching roughly from 2nd Avenue to West 72nd Street in Manhattan, running through the neighborhoods of the East Village, Greenwich Village, Chelsea, Midtown, the Upper West Side, and the Upper East Side. Two venues even reached outside Manhattan, My Father’s Place in Long Island and Maxwell’s in Hoboken, New Jersey. Some were older venues like CBGB and Max’s Kansas City where bands still needed to play to make a name for themselves in the New York area, but many of the clubs were new venues that catered to emerging tastes.

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<sup>63</sup> Tom Goodkind qtd. in Richard Fantina and Jan Westervelt, “Interview,” *East Village Eye*, 1980, 10.

A few included Club 57, with sister venues on St. Mark's Place and Irving Plaza; Tramps at 125 East 15th Street; Trax at 100 West 72nd Street; TR3 on West Broadway; Squat at 256 West 23rd Street; and Hurrah on West 62nd Street. The Atlantis poked fun at the over abundance of clubs, billing itself "another rock disco."<sup>64</sup> Private clubs were also getting in on the action, as the Youth International Party held shows at its Studio 10 Bleecker Street space with a curious mix of straight ahead punk groups and country and western music. The Party also used its Studio 10 as a headquarters to organize a Rock Against Racism parade up 6th avenue to Central Park in 1980.<sup>65</sup> Rock Against Racism in its original form was a 1976 campaign initiated by Red Saunders and Roger Huddle as a statement against white nationalist groups in the United Kingdom like the National Front, an all-white neo-Nazi organization. Supporting concerts featured punk, pop, and reggae artists. The movement never caught on as strongly in the United States beyond countercultural groups like the Yippies. But revolutionary power does not always lie in grand political statements.

The most inclusive of these venues was Danceteria, first located at West 37th Street. It was owned and operated by Rudolf Pieper and Jim Fouratt. The club's niche began as a place for crowds coming home after other downtown clubs like CBGB, TR3, Trax, and the Paradise Garage closed. Danceteria was known for combining DJ sets with a video lounge. But that facility was closed in 1980 by the New York Police Department for being unlicensed. Pieper and Fourat began working with John Argento in a reimagined Danceteria on 21st Street with three stories, each featuring a different style of music. Danceteria advertised itself in the local press with one unifying principle: "Our

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<sup>64</sup> Advertisement in the *East Village Eye*, 16 March 1980, 16.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

D.J.'s will continue to play dance music not available on commercial radio."<sup>66</sup> Marc "Beam" Williams, a member of The Cool Five (stylized as either The Cool Five or TC-5) graffiti crew, remembers Danceteria featuring rock on the bottom level, hip hop on the top level, and a large dance floor in the middle.<sup>67</sup> From hip hop music Danceteria also started mixing graffiti into its programming with a music industry night on Tuesdays, art shows on Wednesdays, and live bands on Thursdays and Fridays.<sup>68</sup> Synthesis carried over into another popular locale, the Mudd Club.

Mudd Club proprietor Steve Mass appeared on the popular cable access program *TV Party* to discuss how the underground scene changed since he opened the venue in October 1978. He revealed that his original intent for locating the Mudd Club at 77 White Street in Manhattan's Tribeca neighborhood was for government employees working nearby.<sup>69</sup> But soon it became known as the antidote to Studio 54<sup>70</sup>, a hip alternative to mainstream nightlife. He worked with curator Diego Cortez to develop a rotating art gallery and James Chance/White's manager Anya Phillips to get the Mudd Club off the ground. Its name comes from John Wilkes Booth's physician, Samuel Alexander Mudd. The regular guest list included well-known literary figures like Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs; New York royalty like Lou Reed, David Byrne, Deborah Harry, Johnny Thunders, and Lydia Lunch; up-and-coming visual artists such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat; new wave opera performer Klaus Nomi; and writer Glenn O'Brien. In 1980 the Mudd Club became one of the first downtown clubs

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<sup>66</sup> Advertisement in the *New York Rocker*, July/August 1982, 9.

<sup>67</sup> Marc "BEAM" Williams, interview with the Author, 15 August 2014, New York, digital recording.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> *TV Party*, "The Heavy Metal Show" Extras, n.d., Brink Media, 2006, DVD.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Musto, "Farewell, Queen of the Mudd Club," 17 August 2008, *Village Voice*, [http://blogs.villagevoice.com/dailymusto/2008/08/farewell\\_queen.php](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/dailymusto/2008/08/farewell_queen.php).

to hold hip hop concerts when it advertised a Funky 4 +1 gig<sup>71</sup>. Club DJs Johnny Dynell, Anita Sarko, and David Azarch took Larry Levan's eclecticism further with obscure punk, new wave, funk, and disco mixes for wide appeal.

The zeal for these diverse spaces was matched by a tantamount protest against spaces that exhibited racist attitudes. The *East Village Eye* ripped into the Ritz located on 11th Street between Third and Park Avenues:

It was filled with honkies...it had a huge screen on which videotapes projected old movies and repulsive Pepsi generation-type commercials celebrating the roles of various niggers tap-dancing and honkies pigging out throughout history in a glut of apparently innocuous but actually insidious slave mentality symbolism...Fuck these places. Fuck all of 'em.<sup>72</sup>

Negativity also surrounded changes planned for the Fillmore East in 1980 but from other commentators. Local community members were upset that the Fillmore was being turned into a disco. Their feelings were fueled by the same homophobia that led to the massive demolition in Comiskey Park.

Opened on March 8, 1968, the Fillmore East located at 105 Second Avenue at East 6th Street in Manhattan's East Village was conceived by promoter Bill Graham as the counterpart to his original Fillmore in San Francisco, which had much success with bands like the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane. The venue soon became a hot spot for countercultural bands of the late sixties and early seventies, spawning several live albums from notable acts, including Jimi Hendrix's Band of Gypsys (1970), the Allman Brothers Band (1970 and 1971), Joe Cocker (1970), Miles Davis (1970), Derek and the Dominos (1970), the Flying Burrito Brothers (1970), Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young (1971), Humble Pie (1971), and John Lennon and Yoko Ono's Plastic Ono Band with

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<sup>71</sup> Advertisement in the *East Village Eye*, Xmas 1980.

<sup>72</sup> "East Village Eye Benefit," *East Village Eye*, June 1980, 15.

Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention (1971). But the rapidly changing music industry of the early seventies led to popular bands concentrating on huge venues like arenas and stadiums, leaving smaller theaters like the Fillmores with fewer mainstream acts to generate ticket sales. On June 27, 1971 the Fillmore East closed with a final show featuring the Allman Brothers Band. The theater reopened three years later as the NFE (New Fillmore East) Theater on December 7 by Barry Stuart (Stein) with a concert from Bachman-Turner Overdrive. The name was soon changed again to the Village East, which was used until Stuart ended operations in 1975.

The legendary space sat vacant until 1980, when anxieties rose over its transformation into the Saint, a gay disco nightclub. Pamela C. Smith reported that new owners Bruce Mailman and Bill Alvis wanted to transform the space into “‘a multimedia showcase,’ ... ‘We have the possibility of doing legit theater here, concerts, films, video-- it’s basically a theatrical space, it’s flexible.’”<sup>73</sup> Despite ostensibly seeking to promote a diverse artistic palate, a construction worker interviewed by Smith confirmed that “the Filmore [sic] will ‘definitely be a disco,’” having torn the seats out and replaced them with a dance floor.<sup>74</sup> A community spokesperson only referred to as “Feldman” maintained that the clientele’s sexual orientation was not an issue because “‘what you do inside is none of our business as long as it’s legal.’”<sup>75</sup> Instead he suggested that any negative feelings toward the club’s opening stemmed from loud noise disturbing the neighborhood’s peace. On the other hand, Father Lawrence of St. George’s Catholic Church argued, “‘If they open something like that, it will ruin the neighborhood, because

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<sup>73</sup> Bill Alvis qtd in Pamela C. Smith, “Filmore [sic] East Changing its Tune” EVE June 1980, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

they don't only do the things they do inside -- they bring it right out into the streets.”<sup>76</sup>

A debate about disco's ethics was at the core of economic revitalization.

### **Disco Economics and Community Building**

The bands following in James Chance/White's path helped the Lower East Side move toward gentrification. Marc Masters argues that the success of bands like the Bush Tetras, Material, and ESG—those that mixed reggae, soul, funk, and disco into their rock formulas—achieved a “dance-oriented sound symboliz[ing] the changing climate in New York City. In the early 1980s, the previously abandoned neighborhoods of Lower Manhattan began to attract real estate developers and businesses, driving impoverished artists out of their once dirt-cheap residences.”<sup>77</sup> Clubs, in turn, used “dance-oriented acts” to entice the young urban professionals moving into the area with artists employing “black music.” The consequence was yet another instance of music's racialization. Moreover, it excluded musicians that did not fit a marketable aesthetic. The *New York Rocker* accused The Exile in Long Island City of cheating the dB's out of money they were owed because it was becoming a “rock disco,” and live performers were becoming secondary to a DJ format.<sup>78</sup>

It is terrible that artists were cheated, but the idea of financial insecurity is something people on the Lower East Side of New York City would have known well in the early eighties. Tony Mangia reported on expanding gentrification for the *East Village Eye*: “a most staggering transformation has begun--the influx of middleclass into the Lower East Side. The immigration of artists, students, and professional people into the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Masters, 177-178.

<sup>78</sup> “New York News,” *East Village Eye*, October 1980, 22.

area can be attributed to high rents or no vacancies in other parts of the city, and the promise of this, one of the last low-rent neighborhoods.”<sup>79</sup> He also sheds light on the illegal practices landlords used to force many unemployed Puerto Rican residents dependent on welfare out of their crumbling buildings to make room for the upwardly mobile prospects.

Organizations like Adopt-A-Building set out to block unfair tactics and protect existing tenants’ rights. As political tensions rose, a grassroots movement to claim public space coalesced. In the article “Price of Production: A Do-it-Yourself Guide to Putting on Events at Tompkins Square Park” Lehman Weichselbaum attempted to mobilize readers. Weichselbaum cites deterrents like the high costs of multiple permits and general apathy as reasons the community space was underused, but suggests that hope for more activity was being spurred by Yippie’s Rock Against Racism concerts.<sup>80</sup> Citing the Rock Against Racism concerts as an example, she suggests that a constructive dialogue about political issues like racism galvanized by music could be community building blocks. George Brown echoes Weichselbaum when he argues that for the democratic power of musical merging. He writes that exchanging musical backgrounds in St. Marks Place rejuvenated the community:

When the cafes, clothing emporiums and the roller disco open, the street fills with strident hairdos of all colors, exposed boobs, legs and muscles, studs, leather and dayglow jumpsuits...It’s the New Wave, whatever that is. On some streets down here the sounds and images of the New America are the familiar ones of slum kids in sneakers playing out violent fantasies on violent streets. But again transition is apparent because the kids are Anglo, Ukranian, Hebrew, Puerto Rican, and sometimes Black.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Tony Mangia, “Metamorphosis,” *East Village Eye*, 16 March 1980, 6.

<sup>80</sup> Lehman Weichselbaum, “Price of Production: A Do-it-Yourself Guide to Putting on Events at Tompkins Square Park,” *East Village Eye*, June 1980, 4.

<sup>81</sup> George Brown, “Loisaida: Transition,” *East Village Eye*, June 1980, 7.

Here, he argues, is the nexus where groups could be organized to form coalitions to protect tenant's rights. Two examples were the Loisaida Tenants Organization and The Eleventh Street Movement.

Around this time in the early eighties a language of multiculturalism and dance became more prevalent among music marketing that reflected its economic and social import. Advertisements were everywhere. In 1982 the *New York Rocker* featured a spread titled "Perfect Party Platters!" showcasing new releases from Epic, Portrait, Blue Sky, and Pavillion Records.<sup>82</sup> "Daytime Logic" by Peter Baumann, formerly of German Krautrock band Tangerine Dream, was said to be "an argument for round the clock dancing." In addition, the Quick's *One Night in a Blackout* was hailed as "more flashy dance music from England!" And Funkapolitan's self-titled album, produced by ZE Records' staff producer and leader of Kid Creole and the Coconuts August Darnell was sure to "take you to the very edges of the dance floor." An ad in the same edition of the paper tried to generate interest in the latest Boomtown Rats EP by calling them "Dancing Rats."<sup>83</sup> Archive Records stationed in Rochester, New York took out an advertisement in 1980 for "Older Women" b/w "The Restless Kind," the reggae-tinged single by their group New Math, with the tagline, "a Rocksteady Remedy to get your Crows Feet Dancing."<sup>84</sup> In an ad proclaiming "The New Musical Axis," the paper claims that on Thomas Leer's *Letter from America* "Leer opens up the textures of funk and offers a brilliant electronic account of disco movement," and a review from *Rockpool* on the German band Malaria's EP *New York Passage* endorses, "This driving record is made for

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<sup>82</sup> "Perfect Party Platters!" *New York Rocker*, July/August 1982, back cover.

<sup>83</sup> *New York Rocker*, July/August 1982, 26.

<sup>84</sup> *New York Rocker*, October 1980, 46.

clubs...it is a breath of fresh air.”<sup>85</sup> The sound dominating clubs was becoming more influenced by international sounds. Steven Harvey commented on this diversity in his “Vinyl Exams” column. He writes:

Dance music is presently in a fascinating revolutionary stage. Contemporary disco productions utilize elements of countless styles to create an increasingly sophisticated musical form, including classic R & B, funk, reggae and dub, electro-pop, hard rock, Latin and African. DJs are snatching up everything from the latest London synth duo to samples of tropical musics from around the globe.<sup>86</sup>

Live performers would have to embrace a similar sonic template to remain as relevant as the DJs that were dominating clubs.

A leading proponent of this “global rock” was Chas Jankel. Jankel shot to prominence in England as the leader of Ian Dury’s band the Blockheads. He left the group for a solo career in 1980. Michael Hill’s piece on Jankel for the *New York Rocker* reflected his relevance to the developing sound in New York City. Hill wrote that Jankel’s key contribution was that “He brought disco rhythms ‘round the back door to rock and roll turntables, innocently arranging what he probably never figured would be the marriage of the century,” and characterized his music as being “concerned with building a trans-world rhythm.”<sup>87</sup> During the interview with Jankel, Hill played examples of different ethnic musics including Calypso, African, and African-American and asked Jankel to comment on each. The artist emphasized his connection with black music that came from what he perceived as economic shared experience. When asked to describe the rhythm of his hit “Glad to Know You,” Jankel answered, “I wanted a rhythm that was spot on, that was almost mechanical, because I was finding out that the city

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<sup>85</sup> *New York Rocker*, July/August 1982, 13.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Hill, “A Record Date with Chas Jankel,” *New York Rocker*, July/August 1982, 31.

[London, where he has recently moved from his country home] was very mechanical and I wanted to reflect my urban environment.”<sup>88</sup> Jankel’s association of his urban experience as a middle-class white male in London with that of African Americans in the United States’ cities is complex.

As a successful musician Jankel did not face the same financial hardships in reality, but he did identify with urban artists of color. Artists make connections to forms that allow them to communicate certain ideas; this is a matter of *perceived* expression. In other words, the experiences being compared do not have to be identical. Here again I try to make a dichotomy between the negative connotation of cultural appropriation and a genuine desire to contribute to the oeuvre of cultural forms that allow for a deeper range of articulation than the tools an artist has at his or her disposal. The intent is not to claim ownership over that outside line of thought, but rather to pay tribute to it with an educational understanding of its history and value. I believe this understanding is validated by the fact that producer, arranger, composer, and instrumentalist Quincy Jones chose to cover Jankel’s “Ai No Corrida” in 1981. The African American jazz player and producer crossed over into the pop charts with the song. Jones’ cover creates an internal dialogue between himself and Jankel, as all cover songs do between coverer and original performer when the versions are taken together. “Ai No Corrida” is also important because it prefigures a reciprocal musical relationship in New York City that comes to fruition with hip hop. We will return to hip hop in Chapter Three. But for now we must continue charting that course by examining how polyrhythmic styles were exercised at Manhattan’s cutting edge label, ZE Records.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

## Anything Goes at ZE Records

Michael Zilkha approached James Chance/White with a simple proposition in 1979. Zilkha wanted him to make a disco record. Simon Reynolds argues “Border crossing and musical hybridity were the name of the game at ZE [Records], the New York label that trail blazed the shift from No Wave’s sadomasochistic aesthetic to the more subtle subversions of mutant disco.”<sup>89</sup> The term “mutant disco” is without a definitive origin. Reynolds attributes it to New York scenester and author of *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York*, Luc Sante, who described mutant disco as “‘anything at all + disco bottom.’”<sup>90</sup> The founders of ZE formed a relationship with Larry Levan, who would play test mixes of songs ZE artists recorded at Blank Tape Studios during his sets at the Paradise Garage.<sup>91</sup> For James White the idea of disco was intriguing because it kept with No Wave’s antagonistic philosophy. He and manager Anya Phillips penned an homage to selling out in the first edition of the *East Village Eye*. White proclaims, “it’s time to forget about all this ‘new/no wave’ drivel....Get slick, move uptown and get trancin’ with some superradioactive disco voodoo funk,” to which Phillips adds, “Of course we’re in it for the money. what [sic] else is of any value in a city such as new york [sic], or in a business such as the record industry?”<sup>92</sup> White’s confrontationalism was revolutionary in the sense that he was working within the system of mainstream entertainment epitomized by disco and “fucking it up” to create something that challenged listeners aurally and conceptually.

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<sup>89</sup> Reynolds, 268.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> “*Strange Days Magazine: 2009 Japan - An Interview with Michel Esteban*,” *Ze Records*, accessed 1 June 2014, [http://www.zerecords.com/new/about\\_int\\_1.php](http://www.zerecords.com/new/about_int_1.php).

<sup>92</sup> James White and Anya Phillips, “White & Co. Move Uptown,” *East Village Eye*, May 1979, 8.

*Off White* was recorded in the immediate aftermath of *Buy* under the moniker James White and the Blacks. White asked listeners to engage in disco's interracial complexity before even hearing the music. The Blacks were the Contortions in disguise plus appearances by The Mumps' Kristian Hoffman, Richard Hell and the Voidoids' guitarist Bob Quine, and Lydia Lunch. The band provides an ironic take on disco with "White Savages," supplanting mainstream disco's usual inane and repetitive lyrics with scratchy distortion over a revved up dance beat. But "Almost Black Pt. 1" directly engages in racial discourse. Anya Phillips and Adele Bertei trade spoken lines throughout the song; their dialogue is transcribed below with annotations indicating the exchanges:

Speaker One: "Well, he's almost black."  
 Speaker Two: "That nigga's white."  
 Speaker One: "Well he's got some moves."  
 Speaker Two: "But they ain't right."  
 Speaker One: "He slapped me five."  
 Speaker Two: "That five is jive."  
 Speaker One: "He doesn't talk trash."  
 Speaker Two: "He don't do shit. He don't have roots."  
 Speaker One: "Well, he's proud of it."  
 Speaker Two: "He's got some sass."  
 Speaker One: "He's got a right."  
 Speaker Two: "He's got no soul, girl."  
 Speaker One: "But, then he might./ He makes me feel I turned all night./ He might be white but every time I feel that smack,/ I want him more because he's almost black."

The argument here centers around blackness as cultural capital; the inference is that the man has white skin, so his "cool factor" depends on his ability to perform blackness, which the female speakers eroticize. One entry point is when he slaps the first speaker five. In the late seventies and early eighties black culture was articulated by television shows like *Good Times*, *What's Happening?*, and *The Jeffersons*, depicting hip African Americans as self-confident assets to their community that used jive talk and hand

gestures of inclusion like the “low five,” also referred to as “slapping skin.” Far from trivial signs, the low five has its origins in the American Jazz Age during the 1920s, popularized by black musicians like Cab Calloway.<sup>93</sup> Gene de Paul confirmed the origin of this coded language when he wrote “Gimme Some Skin, My Friend” in 1941 for the Andrews Sisters: “If you want to shake my hand like they do in Harlem/ Stick your hand right out and shout, ‘Give me some skin, my friend.’”

We have to question what it means to be “almost black.” The second speaker’s response, “That nigga’s white,” affirms the possibility of becoming black by referring to the man as a “nigga,” the resignified variation of the oppressive “nigger.” “Nigga” transformed a degrading word into a term of empowerment as blacks reclaimed ownership; use of this word by the speakers in the song suggests a desire to preserve black culture, rather than alter it. The man would be assimilating into black culture, rather than trying to assimilate black culture into white mainstream culture. He simultaneously denies himself access to performative blackness by declaring he is white. The second speaker magnifies this ambiguity. Later in the conversation she says, “He don’t have roots,” the first speaker defensively retorts, “Well, he’s proud of it.” Still, it is less important that we determine the man’s actual skin color, than that we take away the symbolism here. White used Bertel and Phillips as mouthpieces to engage in a discourse on interracial relationships.

White’s account was drawn from his personal life. Leonard Abrams recounts a concert by James White around 1980 that situates White at the center of the scene’s tumultuous relationship with race. According to Abrams, a white male fan yelled

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<sup>93</sup> Jessica Bloustein Marshall, “A Brief History of the High Five,” *Mental Floss*. 18 April 2013, accessed 1 June 2014, <http://mentalfloss.com/article/50163/-brief-history-high-five>.

“nigger” at White’s three black female background singers; White then yelled back, “I’m the only one that can call them that, so shut the fuck up.”<sup>94</sup> Abrams attributes the fans’ discomfort with black women in a downtown club to a sense of tribalism in the postpunk scene; racial epithets were a way of affirming an “us versus them” mentality. At first glance White’s retort seems like a power play, a white man claiming dominance over the black women. But the penchant for controversy that animates his career suggests his comment was meant to be more sensational than misogynistic or racist. Rather than using the word “nigger” as an epithet, Chance instead reclaims ownership of the word from the angry concertgoer. By doing so, he attempts to remove its epithetic quality and reinvent it with an inclusiveness akin to the modern colloquial usage of “nigga.”

White also revamped his signature tune “Contort Yourself” twice for *Off White*. The second rendition on the album has a bouncy hi-hat beat and bass at the foreground with less abrasive guitar and saxophone than the original on *Buy*. But the first version of “Contort Yourself” on the album, which is also the first track, truly demonstrates White’s new direction. Disco is sometimes dismissed as being shallow music. However, in addition to its traces of soul and funk, it also incorporates Latin elements that make it multiracial in an American context and multicultural in a global heritage. The resulting groove depends upon distinctive percussion that ZE staff producer August Darnell used in his remix of “Contort Yourself.” In the tradition of disco mixers like Tom Moulton, he pushes the drums up front and elongates the track so there are percussive passages of irresistible danceability. The rhythm hints at Caribbean rumba. Darnell’s multicultural style became the foundation of ZE’s mutant disco.

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<sup>94</sup> Leonard Abrams, interview with the author.

### **The August Darnell Contingent**

Thomas August Darnell Browder was born in Montreal Canada to a half-black father from the Dominican Republic and a French-Canadian mother. His family soon moved to the Bronx in New York City. Darnell, having dropped his last name, was an enigma, a mulatto wearing pachuco zoot-suits, when he began playing music seriously. He combined a vast knowledge of music from the African diaspora with a range of 20th century American forms in his production work for ZE Records beginning in 1980. With his brother Stony Browder, Jr. in Dr. Buzzard's Savannah Band, he honed the sound over three albums between 1976 and 1979. Browder conferred about its eclectic mix of music from the continental United States and the Caribbean with Carol Cooper in 1982:

Most of the Savannah band rhythms we color with a little Latin, but it's also colored more on the theory of the three cult drums from Africa. Mickey [Sevilla, the band's drummer] and I have a feeling for that three-drum rhythm. So we use that primal rhythm most times against a more continental feeling, which is Latin—a two drum interplay--again blended back into the African. They you color it even more with continental strings. But we're not playing disco fills, we're playing almost classical strings, from Hollywood, yesteryear perspective. It's a romantic, Hollywood interpretation of European classical things; never strictly Schubert, but that Hollywood interpretation of Schubert--chrome and all that. Then, when you put the blues into those five-part harmonies--you know, the saxophones--when Duke Ellington and the 'A' train get put in along with the Latin horns, you start to lean more into the street sounds, the African and Puerto Rican dance music you hear in the parks here.<sup>95</sup>

Between 1979 and 1983 Darnell produced for most of the ZE Records roster. He worked on music for Michael Zilkha's girlfriend Cristina Monet-Palaci, whose lyrics took a satirical look at disco culture in songs like "Blame it on Disco," "Disco Clone," and "Ballad of Immoral Manufacture. With Don Armando's Second Avenue Rhumba Band he combined the rhythm-heavy music in its name with the grandeur of disco brass and orchestration. He carved out a spacey, ominous electro-funk over danceable percussion

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<sup>95</sup> Carol Cooper, Savannah Band: Only with Stony," *New York Rocker*, July/August 1982, 18.

with the Aural Exciters. On the early solo work of Suicide's Alan Vega he made cosmopolitan rockabilly. Even ZE's most successful pop crossover act, Lizzy Mercier Descloux, who Michael Esteban executive produced personally, reflected Darnell's multiculturalism with a heavy dose of African polyrhythms. Darnell was so successful that RCA, London, and EMI America tapped him to lend his touch to several acts. During this time creative disputes with his brother also prompted Darnell to leave Dr. Buzzard's Savannah Band to form his own group with Andy Hernandez.

Kid Creole and the Coconuts recorded their first four albums in affiliation with ZE between 1980 and 1983. Creole was an ambitious project that sought to take Dr. Buzzard's pastiche of styles even further. Darnell told Roy Trakin that:

As both August Darnell and Kid Creole, I represent a coming together of worlds, a co-existence. If I can stand before someone and preach that, how could I then say that whites of this ilk shouldn't be allowed to play black music? I think that for every group like the Clash, that tries a rap record, or like Funkapolitian, that tries a funk record, because the world is the way it is and won't change overnight, they can do more for the cause than a dozen groups that play the real thing. Where I think the injustice comes in is the treatment accorded those people playing the real thing.<sup>96</sup>

In both of Darnell's personas he presents an increasingly complex definition of music that does not rely on skin color. He argues for crossing boundaries, championing mulatto music. But most importantly, he suggests that music emanating from particular bodies or consumed by certain crowds cannot be termed "the real thing." An artist of a certain skin color produces music, but that does not mean the music can be pigeonholed solely as an expression of that one race.

Darnell's ambitions were beyond the public's reach in 1981. Reflecting on the commercial failure of *Fresh Fruit in Foreign Places*, a record he was sure would be a hit,

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<sup>96</sup> Roy Trakin, "August Darnell's Myth Apprehension," *New York Rocker*, July/August 1982, 16.

Darnell hypothesizes that a difference in listening practices among black and white audiences caused his music to remain under appreciated:

It crushed me, man,...I thought for sure I had something with Latin music that could reach the so-called white audience....My crowd seems to be the nightclub audience that goes out to see live acts, and they're primarily Caucasian. Blacks go out to dance to recorded music where whites will seek out live entertainment, whether they hear it on the radio or not.<sup>97</sup>

Latin music was at the crux of Darnell's blend. Despite the influx of venues for "dance-oriented music," there was still a discrepancy in pigment among patrons at live shows.

Dancing had the power to separate audiences in the same way it could draw them together. More research needs to be done here to compare the admission fees for seeing bands versus going to clubs to hear DJs spin records. If ticket prices were higher for live acts, it could explain why wealthier Caucasians moving into a rapidly gentrifying Lower East Side had access to nightclubs where Kid Creole and the Coconuts performed.

Darnell's attentiveness to the demographics of people attending his shows illustrates that he was sensitive to music's ability to provide people with languages of identification. He understood the ways that shared listening could build communities and speak for people at the basest human level. Perhaps Darnell's musical vision was too utopic for mainstream listeners, but that perceptiveness is what Stony Browder, Jr. referenced in his interview with Carol Cooper when he recognized the value in the "street sounds" of New York's "African and Puerto Rican dance music you hear in the parks." Darnell helped his Kid Creole cohort Andy Hernandez, now under the name Coati Mundi, translate his reality into song. "Que Pasa/Me No Pop I" kept consistent with Darnell's auditory resume, but also incorporated an emerging vocal style called rapping.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

During a 1981 conversation with Richard Grabel, Mundi discussed his single released on February 27 by providing context. He related that:

Growing up in the *barrio*, I was always a part of two worlds, the Latino world and the Americanized soul world,...But I also appreciate orchestrations. In my music, even when I do the raps, I've got strings and horns and chord changes and I try to make it more musical. So it's not only street but all the elements which are a part of my experience, as much as I can deliver.<sup>98</sup>

“Barrio” contains multiple meanings across Latin America, but in the United States it references slums outside big cities and lower-middle class neighborhoods inhabited by Latin American communities. Growing up in that environment gave Mundi access to a mixture of black and Latino customs. He merged August Darnell’s more cosmopolitan orchestrations with the rapping he understood as the communication of street life, or nascent hip hop culture.

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<sup>98</sup> Richard Grabel, “¿Que Pasa?: Coati Mundi,” *New York Rocker*, July/August 1982, 17.

### ***CHAPTER THREE: GRAFFITI, CABLE ACCESS, AND AMERICA***

Hip hop culture in the early 1980s was a manifestation of several social, economic, and political elements that built over several decades. Demographically, there was an increase of British Afro-Caribbean immigrants to the United States in the early 20th century during the period of global decolonialization. Between 1900 and 1930 this population rose by about 80,000 people.<sup>99</sup> Most of these migrants were processed at Ellis Island and settled in Manhattan and the Bronx, establishing close communities through churches and social clubs, while also contributing to the local work force as businesspeople. Also during the early 20th century a wave of skilled Puerto Rican laborers travelled to the city seeking employment opportunities in the growing manufacturing and service industries.<sup>100</sup> Immigration reform inaugurated by the Hart-Cellar Act, passed in 1965 and effective on July 1, 1968, allowed another generation of migrants to enter New York in record numbers throughout the seventies. The population of Jamaican-born migrants alone almost doubled between 1971 and 1980.<sup>101</sup>

On a national level President Richard Nixon's administration adopted the informal policy of urban neglect proposed in 1969. The argument made by Nixon staffers was that the United States would benefit from essentially ignoring the problem of race after years of federal government involvement during the Civil Rights era. If legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 did not put an end to racial unrest, they reasoned, maybe it would be better to pretend the problem did not exist. Locally, an urban renewal initiative led by planner and builder

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<sup>99</sup> "Caribbean Migration," *In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience*, accessed 29 June 2014,  
<http://www.inmotionaame.org/print.cfm;jsessionid=f8303039971408049362487?migration=10&bhpc=1>.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

Robert Moses rebuilt the city's landscape. New York's five boroughs saw massive construction projects on several bridges, highways, housing projects, and public parks between the 1930s and 1970s. The state government claimed "eminent domain" to fulfill its vision, allowing it to force out many lower-income black and Hispanic communities. One example was the Cross Bronx Expressway, which cut through the Tremont neighborhood. Roadways allowed white middle-class families to escape into suburbs, leaving young blacks and Hispanics to turn to gangs for community membership and personal value.

Territorial dominion became paramount. Leaning on Eric C. Schneider's study of post World War II youth in New York City, Jeff Chang hierarchizes the gangs operating in the Bronx at this time:

The smaller families-Liberated Panthers, the King Cobras, the Majestic Warlocks, the Ghetto Warriors, the Flying Dutchmen. The hungry ones-the Young Sinners, the Young Cobras, the Young Saints, the Young Saigons, the Roman Kings. The established ones-the Turbans, the Brothers and Sisters, the Latin Aces, the Peacemakers, the Dirty Dozens, the Mongols. And the major families-the Javelins, the Bachelors, the Savage Nomads, the Savage Skulls, the Black Spades, and the Seven Immortals.<sup>102</sup>

The New York Police Department established the Bronx Youth Gang Task Force to combat the rising numbers. Then several gangs attempted to broker a peace treaty to end the deadly turf war. They were tired of fearing for their lives and being under constant surveillance by the NYPD, leaving young people to find other forms of self-expression.

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<sup>102</sup> Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press), 158.

## Hip Hop Revolution

Music, art, fashion, and dance became identity markers that allowed for the claiming of space without violence. Discussing his entrance into hip hop, DJ Afrika Bambaataa told the *East Village Eye*'s Michael Holman:

I was in a street gang called The Organization. Besides being about violence and jitterbugging (*rumbling*), we were also about socializing. We threw parties and dances and put on concerts. We even helped local politicians at times....When the Organization died out, what was left were different crews who were doing the entertaining at the parties, like the D.J.s M.C.s and b-boys. This goes back six years now. At the time I was pretty well known as a D.J. and I was able to pull together what was left of the Organization and called [it] the Zulu Nation.<sup>103</sup>

Bambaataa notes three of the four major components of hip hop and how they could be used as tools for community building. His personal project was educating young black people about their cultural heritages. "Zulu Nation" is a reference to the Bantu ethnic group living in South Africa and other African countries. He took the name "Bambaataa" after the Zulu chief Bhambatha, orchestrator of a 1906 revolt against British rule in Natal, South Africa when colonials tried to institute a poll tax. He linked this historical tradition of black empowerment with bodily movements that expressed physical and intellectual freedoms.

Bambaataa saw that the strength in numbers mentality of gang life could be channeled into a declaration of political independence through DJing, MCing, b-boying, and graffiti writing. In the Bronx, DJing was influenced by Jamaican migrants who introduced the idea for sound systems: large, usually-outdoor parties featuring several disc jockeys spinning reggae, ska, and rocksteady musics. Sometimes Toasters would sing or talk over instrumental rhythms or beats at the sound systems. DJ Kool Herc, born

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<sup>103</sup> Michael Holman, "An Interview with DJ Afrika [sic] Bambaataa," *East Village Eye*, January 1982, 22, 29.

Clive Campbell in Kingston, Jamaica, formerly of the Black Spades gang, gave the first hip hop house party at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx's Morris Heights neighborhood on August 11, 1973. Invitations to the "Back to School Jam" advertised a running time of 9:00PM to 4:00AM and stipulated an admission price of \$.25 for "ladies" and \$.50 for "fellas."<sup>104</sup> House and block parties took the joyous vibe and feeling of togetherness generated at clubs like the Paradise Garage by Larry Levan and brought it to the streets.

Hip hop DJs and club DJs both used records as a way to generate feeling by using two turntables for seamless song mixes and perpetual motion on the dance floor. Disco music even served as the basis for many early hip hop recordings, including the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" (1979), which sampled the bassline and drum beat of Chic's hit "Good Times" (1979). But hip hop DJs also cut up tracks using a scratching method that literally meant forcing the record to go backward against its natural rotation and the turntable needle. Pioneers like Bambaataa, Grand Wizard Theodore, and Grandmaster Flash used scratching as a way to isolate sections of songs for the break beat. James Brown, Parliament-Funkadelic, Sly and the Family Stone, classic soul, funk, and jazz songs were commonly used. But hip hop DJs branched out much further, incorporating classic rock. In the wake of hip hop's global success in the 1990s, several compilation albums with late seventies and early eighties break beat playlists were issued. One rock favorite was Aerosmith's "Walk this Way" (1975), which became the most visible example of the rock and rap collaboration when Joe Perry and Steven Tyler released a music video for a re-recorded version of the song with Run DMC in 1986. The Zulu

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<sup>104</sup> Rebecca Laurence, "40 Years on from the Party Where Hip Hop was Born," 9 August 2013, *BBC Culture*, accessed 16 March 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20130809-the-party-where-hip-hop-was-born>.

Nation's DJ Jazzy Jay would use two copies, one on each turntable, of "Honky Tonk Women" (1969) by the Rolling Stones and play the first eight seconds of the track over and over to get parties started.<sup>105</sup> And white New York punk-funk bands inspired by No Wave were sampled. Liquid Liquid's song "Cavern" (1983) became the musical foundation for "White Lines (Don't Do It)," an anti-cocaine anthem by Grandmaster Melle Mel, formerly of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, in 1983. Like James Chance/White, Chaz Jankel, and the other white musicians discussed in this paper who turned to James Brown's funk and the disco music that originated in black clubs, hip hop DJs complemented the practice of cross-cultural synthesis by sampling rock.

The dialectical relationship between white and black underground artists that centered around breakbeats translated into the repurposing of songs for unilateral expression. It would be easy to misread the rep-representation of these rock songs as an act of decontextualization, thus removing their individual integrity as an act of aggressive distancing. However, I argue that DJs created an intertextual relationship between cultural products. If we acknowledge that every song has its own story to tell with a unique intellectual and emotional history, as George Lipsitz posits, then re-presenting that music does not detract from its value; it adds another layer of meaning, making for a richer narrative. Seen in this light, hip hop music was both an articulation of the urban black and Latino experience in the Bronx and a form of expression that transcended race, time, and space.

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<sup>105</sup> Holman, "An Interview with DJ Africa [sic] Bambaata," 29.

### **Fab Five Freddy Told Me Everybody's Fly**

Fab 5 Freddy was another major player in the culture's development. He located hip hop's strength in its fourth major element. Speaking with Anglo-Austrian musicologist and writer Hans Keller, Freddy said, "This whole thing is an outgrowth of graffiti art. I'm always hanging out in the subways doing graffiti on the glass, the windows, the walls. That's where rap really began," he continues, "The idea was to create something through which all people could communicate. To bring art to the streets. Graffiti deals with the written word, rap deals with the spoken word."<sup>106</sup> From a young age Fred realized that graffiti existed in an artistic tradition:

After painting graffiti on the streets and subways of New York City in the 70's it clicked in my head one day while in the Medgar Evers college library that a lot of NY subway graffiti artist [sic] were taking there [sic] inspiratin from the same sources as pop artist [sic] like Claes Oldenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol. I thought, "graffiti art in many instances was on a par with any work in any museum of modern art". I began pouring over art history books [,] zig zagging through the entire history of man making art, from those wall paintings in pre-historic caves, which are a lot like graffiti to me, to Caravaggio, [Marcel] Duchamp, [Salvador] Dali, [Mark] Rothko and [Jasper] Johns. Yes, I went in deep!<sup>107</sup>

His studies paid off when he achieved notoriety for bombing (the graffiti term for clandestinely spray painting subway cars, usually at night, in the rail yard) versions of Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans on the side of trains.

Born Fred Brathwaite in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, he grew up surrounded by bebop jazz musicians like Thelonious Monk and his godfather Max Roach. Fred also

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<sup>106</sup> Hans Keller, "An Interview with Fab Five Freddy," Translated by Celeste-Monique Lindsey, *East Village Eye*, January 1982, 22, 40.

<sup>107</sup> Fab Five Freddy, "Back Makin' Art...", *FabFiveFreddy.com*, accessed 16 June 2014, <http://fab5freddy.com/back-makin-art/>.

had a keen awareness of racial solidarity, growing up with a grandfather that was an associate of Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey. He was involved in developing several areas of hip hop culture, including the 1982 single “Change the Beat,” which is notable because on the track Freddy raps in both English and French. But Braithwaite’s true passion was art. In the late seventies, Fred befriended the Puerto Rican artist Lee Quinones and, after a 1979 spread about graffiti in the *Village Voice*, both Fred’s and Quinones’ works were featured at the first graffiti art show at the Galleria La Medusa in Rome, Italy. Through Quinones, Fred met the Fab 5 graffiti crew and earned the name Fab Five Freddy. Hip Hop culture’s international presence was in its infantile stages, but in New York it was still isolated. However, Fred was smart enough to realize that cultural products like music and art could not only help African Americans self-identify, but also form larger relationships among disparate communities. As Freddy said to Hans Keller, with graffiti, “The idea was to create something through which all people could communicate.”<sup>108</sup>

### **Culture Clash**

As hip hop grew in popularity and independent record labels in the New York area like Sylvia Robinson’s Sugar Hill Records offered DJs and MCs studio recording time, a dividing line emerged between those who put their rhymes on vinyl and those who did not. Rapping was becoming a more vital means of expression for young blacks and Latinos, and as such, moved out of the Bronx and into Manhattan. Its presence combined with the momentum of open-minded white underground artists clashed on Glenn O’Brien’s *TV Party*.

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<sup>108</sup> Keller, 22.

O'Brien spent most of the seventies making connections in the New York underground scene doing editorial work and contributing journalistic pieces to Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine, *Rolling Stone*, *High Times*, and *Oui* magazine. In 1978, he started producing and hosting *TV Party*, a public-access television program shown in New York City. The show premiered on December 18th and ran until June 13, 1982. *TV Party* was a variety show in the tradition of the *Tonight Show*, the *Ed Sullivan Show*, and Hugh Hefner's *Playboy After Dark*, and showcased the city's up-and-coming intellectuals, artists, and scenesters. The house band was led by Walter "Doc" Steding, a violinist and visual artist who worked CBGB and Max's Kansas City opening for Blondie and the Ramones. He was also an assistant to Andy Warhol for a time. Amos Poe was the director. Despite Blondie's international success, Chris Stein and Deborah Harry preserved street cred by staying regulars on the program; Chris even served as the co-host. O'Brien recalls getting a phone call from Freddy when the latter was still a student at Medgar Evers College asking for a meeting. O'Brien invited Freddy to join the *TV Party* crew as a camera operator. *TV Party*'s aesthetic relied on the do-it-yourself (DIY) punk philosophy. Most episodes devolved into unsteady camera work, long periods of dead air, a live and unscripted format, and unpolished direction. These elements of the show were part of the visceral viewing experience from its premiere episode when host O'Brien and several crew members are seen dancing around and looking confused as O'Brien asks the director and camera operators if the show is ready to begin. Plus, most of the participants were under the influence of a copious amount of marijuana. But the show was not always fun and games. O'Brien reminded his audience that the show was "a COCKTAIL PARTY but which is also a POLITICAL PARTY."

In 1981 he published the “TV Party Manifesto” in *Bomb* magazine crystallizing the show’s guiding principles. O’Brien declared the mass medium of television to a unit of political manipulation: “In America TV is the form of government. Nothing can be governed but people and TV has proved to be the greatest modern instrument for their control. TV PARTY presents and reveals ENTERTAINMENT as the ACTUAL form of GOVERNMENT.”<sup>109</sup> Implicit in his argument about television’s subliminal effect is communications theorist Marshall McLuhan’s idea that the structure of individual mediums elicits responses from audiences independent of the content they disseminate. McLuhan suggests that television perpetuates an inherently subjective experience where the viewer must create meaning, resulting in a false sense of agency.<sup>110</sup> O’Brien’s goal was to invert this harmful power structure that governmental authorities took full advantage of and empower the *TV Party* audience by using entertainment as a method of grassroots organizing: “TV PARTY runs and RE-RUNS on a platform that begins with personal relationships, personalities conspiring for fun. We take it from there. THE PARTY serves as an accelerator and co-ordinator of interpersonal relationships, and as a model for larger social and political networks based on positive social interaction, i.e. FUN.”<sup>111</sup> Glenn O’Brien’s vision of common people taking over the airwaves posited that Gil Scott-Heron was wrong: the revolution would be televised.

Public access television networks were conceived as a democratic medium for local markets, without the regulation, mass-audience, or corporate control of (inter)nationalized stations. Manhattan Cable was the egalitarian antidote to major

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<sup>109</sup> Glenn O’Brien, “TV Party Manifesto,” originally published in *Bomb* magazine, 1981, posted on GlennObrien.com, accessed 5 January 2014, <http://glennobrien.com/?p=178>.

<sup>110</sup> “Marshall McLuhan Full Lecture: The Medium is the Message - 1977 Part 1v3,” YouTube.com, accessed 18 May 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImaH51F4HBw>.

<sup>111</sup> O’Brien, “TV Party Manifesto.”

conglomerates like CBS (channel 2), NBC (channel 4), and ABC (channel 7) in New York City that allowed anyone who desired to reserve studio space for pre-recording shows or doing live broadcasts. O'Brien felt that globalized communications networks in the late seventies and early eighties were destroying the potential that his city's arts and culture had to revolutionize the geopolitical landscape and argued for a new regime:

The only cure is MASS LOCALIZATION. Independence for NEW YORK is just the first step in creating a DIVIDED STATES OF AMERICA and a DIVIDED NATIONS (D.N.) Culture begins with LOCAL PROGRAMMING. The failure of the National Networks is the same as the failure of the National Government. Local programming and fully empowered local government can make this city as good as it is in REALITY. But as it is our REALITY is constantly assaulted by dreams and visions of an inferior quality. NEW YORK is America's greatest center of culture, but this culture is nearly totally blacked out of radio and television communication. NEW YORK has dozens of the greatest bands in modern music but their music is not played on the radio. New York performers are not seen on television. Why should we import all of this "talent" so inferior to our own? We are not doing it. It's being beamed in. The Networks are polluting our environment. TV PARTY demands local control of the Electromagnetic Spectrum. No image irradiation without representation!<sup>112</sup>

The fiery language animated the show's content. Over its five-year run, *TV Party* provided a democratic forum where the discourse on interracial mixing that first surfaced under the guise of "dance" music grew wider.

The show had a subversive quality from the beginning. An unnerving segment of the premier focuses on a conversation Glenn O'Brien had with Robert Fripp, former King Crimson guitarist and solo performer, for *Interview* magazine. In the conversation Fripp accused President Jimmy Carter of suppressing the spread of the Manhattan underground's views. O'Brien acknowledges that at first this proposition seemed outlandish, but confesses that earlier that day he tried to sync the *TV Party* premier with a public cable network that reached Harlem, only to be told his request could not be

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

granted. He does not draw direct conclusions but wonders aloud if his inability to connect was due to George Clinton's scheduled appearance. The implicit suggestion is that the cable companies did not want a cross-section of audiences consuming the show's liberal perspectives. But for those who did see *TV Party*, any color line between white and black cultures was shattered as white and black underground artists exhibited their creative passions for and intellectual interests in funk, disco, reggae, and hip hop.

The white members of the *TV Party* family had an abiding love for reggae. In 1978 Andy Shernoff, formerly of the Dictators, performed a solo cover of the reggae song "Dreadlocks the Time is Now" (1978), a call for self-empowerment originally recorded by the Gladiators. After Shernoff's performance, O'Brien quipped, "I've noticed at reggae concerts that white people are afraid to say, 'Jah Rastafari,'" a Rastafarian phrase of worship used in honor of Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974 and used to reference Selassie as the second coming of God, "but why not, you know?"<sup>113</sup> Reggae was also a hot topic on January 8, 1979 during an episode called "The Sublimely Intolerable Show" in a segment titled "White People Don't Talk About Reggae" with director David Silver and photographer Kate Simon. Quoting DJ Earl Chin, David Silver says:

Reggae music is uplifting music, you know? And it's also breakthrough music and rebellious music, and that's why it's funny because reggae music as a spiritual form can cross over a lot of new wave music, you know? Both reggae music and new wave music break through, they break through the consciousness. They make the trance, they make the dance, they make them happy.... Why should whites, I'm English and I'm Jewish, why should I like reggae music? ... I like skanking, I like dancing, I like that beat.... The black Americans don't like it too much, and the white Americans don't understand it. But as Earl Chin says,...it's uplifting music....it's very interesting to be attached to something that's spiritual.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>113</sup> *TV Party*, "Premier Episode," 18 December 1978, Brink Film, 2006, DVD.

<sup>114</sup> *TV Party*, "Sublimely Intolerable Show," 8 January 1978, Brink Film, 2006, DVD.

Kate Simon responds, “When you say something is uplifting, it’s vague...there’s this kind of moralistic tone to reggae along with the best percussion I’ve ever heard. A very kind of free, imaginative thing that is, shut up! (to audience), the point is Arjemand Levi has a great record, and, ah, if you don’t like reggae, you just don’t make it.”<sup>115</sup> Silver and Simon critique the same narrow-minded tribalism that Leonard Abrams experienced at the James White and the Blacks concert. White commentators shared the screen with black artists.

Fab Five Freddy took on a more important role as the show progressed. Freddy used his time on the show to fine-tune his persona, according to O’Brien: “Fred trained on *TV Party*. He went from being a self-conscious cameraman, (his first on camera moments remind me of stammering, tongue-tied Ralph Kramden going on TV on the “Honeymooners”) to the slick emcee of the shiny hip hop world which was the light at the end of the next tunnel.”<sup>116</sup> Freddy went from being sarcastically introduced as the “token black that’s going to be telling us about what’s happening in Bedford-Stuyvesant.”<sup>117</sup> On an early episode of the show called “The Crusades Show,” Fred performed the “Holy Land Funk” rap as the Monk of Funk. The episode was filmed in February of 1981 shortly after Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) rejected an Egyptian peace plan designed to quell tensions stemming from holy wars. The rap was less a rap in the MCing sense of the word, and more of a rant with repeated ramblings about how the holy land was funky. The performance lacked the structure of a

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Glenn O’Brien, “The *TV Party* Story” liner notes to *The TV Party Story*, Brink Film, DVD, 2006, n.p..

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

cypher, or rap circle, but it introduced audiences to the frenetic energy with which cyphers operated. Fred was also responsible for bringing graffiti artists on *TV Party*.

Glenn O'Brien came up with interesting concepts as the show grew in popularity. One example was "The Heavy Metal Show" recorded on February 24, 1981, which parodied heavy metal culture. Amidst cacophonous guitar solos and the cast and crew performing a mock concert in which Fab Five Freddy postured like Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock, three prominent graffiti artists were in attendance: Futura, then known as Futura 2000, ALI, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Leading up to his appearance on *TV Party*, Futura's fame was growing outside of train yards. His work was exhibited as part of group and solo shows at Fashion Moda in the South Bronx, the Mudd Club, and Soul Artists Alternative Space, the headquarters of a group called the Soul Artists and founded by ALI. ALI shared African American and Cherokee Indian heritage and grew up in Manhattan. He made a name for himself in New York with the proto-hip hop song "Shoot the Pump" in 1981 under his alter ego J. Walter Negro and the Loose Jointz. "Shoot the Pump" utilized a disco rhythm section informed by touches of salsa music. Jean-Michel Basquiat, meanwhile, was a frequent member of the *TV Party* gang since 1979. By 1981 he was on the cusp of becoming the public face of graffiti art in United States.

Basquiat was born in Brooklyn to a Haitian father and an Afro-Puerto Rican mother. He lived in Puerto Rico for two years then left home when his family moved back to New York. He began tagging buildings with spray paint on the Lower East Side with his partner Al Diaz using the tag "SAMO." He turned to music in 1979, co-founding the electronic experimental group Gray with performance artist and resident

*East Village Eye* hip hop writer Michael Holman. Gray's sound was harsh and sparse, akin to England's Throbbing Gristle. It predated the industrial genre of music that sounds like the inner workings of a factory. Gray made a name for itself in New York circles playing CBGBs, Hurrah's, and the Mudd Club. Later that same year Basquiat befriended Glenn O'Brien and joined *TV Party* in various capacities. Sometimes he worked the camera; sometimes he painted phrases and poems on the set wall like "MOCK PENIS ENVY" for "The Heavy Metal Show"; sometimes he improvised digital poems on screen; and sometimes he participated in segments. Audiences also knew him for a fiery temper after he and Freddy got into a fight over a guitar on camera.

Like Freddy, Basquiat's ambition was to be a visual artist. In June 1980 Basquiat got noticed at the *Times Square Show*, an exhibition held in an abandoned massage parlor at 41st Street and Seventh Avenue in Times Square. The show, organized by a group of artists operating under the moniker Colab, or Collaborative Projects, featured more than 100 artists. In addition to Basquiat, Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf, Jenny Holzer, and David Hammons, as well as Lee Quinones and Fab 5 Freddy captured the public's attention as rogue artists bringing bold, innovative styles to the stagnant art world. In February 1981, Basquiat's aura shown even brighter at Diego Cortez's New York/New Wave exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art's PS 1 location in Queens' Long Island City neighborhood. His growing notoriety and position at the nexus of several underground scenes made Basquiat the ideal lead for Glenn O'Brien's film project, which sought to capture this dynamic moment in New York City history when music and art were evolving at a fever pitch.

*Downtown 81*, originally titled *New York Beat Movie*, was O'Brien's endeavor to bring the chaotic elements of *TV Party* into a single film. He wrote and co-produced it with Maripol, a French filmmaker and fashion designer who went on to formulate Madonna's "Boy Toy" and "Like a Virgin" looks in her early career. ZE Records' Michael Zilkha served as the film's Executive Producer and photographer Edo Bertoglio directed it. Unlike most films being made in New York in the late seventies and early eighties as part of the New Cinema movement, O'Brien's project started out with a six figure budget.

Filmed in 1980 and 1981, the story is a day in the life of Basquiat. It is told by the fairy godmother played by Deborah Harry. Basquiat is a surrogate for the audience, as viewers take a tour of this dream world. The young painter and graffiti writer plays himself, wandering a desolate Lower East Side that looks like "we dropped a bomb on ourselves,"<sup>118</sup> looking for a benefactor to purchase one of his paintings for rent money. Viewers go along with Basquiat as he encounters a series of interesting characters and locations. He moves fluidly from the Peppermint Lounge at a James White and the Blacks concert to a Kid Creole and Coati Mundi concert at the Mudd Club. He then heads to a basement hip hop party where Lee Quinones and Fab Five Freddy write graffiti on the wall outside and welcome Basquiat inside to see the MCs and b-boys. The film illustrates a contemporary Manhattan culture that evolved in well beyond the white supremacism in the punk and early postpunk scenes that Lester Bangs lamented. In "The White Noise Supremacists," published in 1979 he writes:

The music editor of [the *Village Voice*] has theorized that one of the most important things about New Wave is how much of it is almost purely white music, and what a massive departure that represents from almost universally

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<sup>118</sup> *Downtown 81*, Dir. Edo Bertoglio, New York Beat Films, 2001, DVD.

blues-derived rock of the past... But there is at least a grain of truth there[:] the Contortions' James Brown/Albert Ayler spasms aside, most of the SoHo bands are white as John Cage, and there's an evolution of sound, rhythm and stance running from the [Velvet Underground] through the Stooges to the Ramones and their children that takes us farther and farther from the black-stud postures of Mick Jagger that Lou Reed and Iggy [Pop] partake in but that Joey Ramone certainly doesn't.<sup>119</sup>

Bangs points out that American punk and New Wave bands' major break was with blues and r & b-influenced classic rock of the sixties and early seventies like that of the Jimi Hendrix Experience, the Who, and the Rolling Stones. He defines the majority of New York musicians led by the Ramones from 1976, when he first arrived in Manhattan from Detroit, to 1979 by their attempts to break free of black musical influence. The Contortions are mentioned as an anomaly, suggesting that any intersection between punk and James Brown-inspired funk and/or Albert Ayler-inspired jazz had no long-term sustainability. Bangs cites Joey Ramone's self-conscious presentation exhibited through terse gestures and a refusal to dance in opposition to the traditional 1960s white rock star coolness of Mick Jagger, Lou Reed, and Iggy Pop who maintained a cock-sure machismo appropriated from black rhythm & blues, funk, soul, and jazz artists. The work done by No Wave, mutant disco, and punk funk artists from 1978 to 1981 reintegrated black musical influences and established communicative artistic networks with black collaborators. But *Downtown 81* ultimately comments that this cultural utopia was a work in progress that did not yet translate to spaces outside of the city.

At the end of the film Basquiat heads down a dark alley, finding a homeless lady asleep in garbage. She notices him and reveals that she will grant his every wish he desires in exchange for a kiss. Skeptical at first, Basquiat gives in, and the homeless

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<sup>119</sup> Lester Bangs, "White Noise Supremacists," *Village Voice*, 1979, posted on *Up the Downstair*, accessed 7 January 2014, <http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/PoMoSeminar/Readings/BangsWhite.pdf>, 5.

woman magically becomes the beautiful Deborah Harry. She provides him with a suitcase of money, which he uses to buy a Cadillac Eldorado with the graffiti tag “Gold Wood” on the side panel. Basquiat drives into the sunrise “Like I was driving to the end of a dream.”<sup>120</sup> The dark alley symbolizes the journey from underground obscurity to mainstream success. The pervasive tension for many musicians working in New York after the global success of punk, during a period when homegrown disco music offered a path toward financial success and nascent hip hop injected a sense of authentic experience into the artistic ether, was how to maintain local bona fides while also making a career. Basquiat cannot resist the temptation to embrace financial security, so he accepts the money and buys a car to exit the underground. It is telling that the car he purchases is an “Eldorado.” The name itself, translated from Spanish as “the golden one,” is intercultural. El Dorado was used by Europeans to describe an indigenous chief named Muisca in Columbia, South America who covered himself in gold dust during rituals; and the term entered popular imagination when European explorers used it to describe a legendary city of gold in the New World with exponential riches in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>121</sup> Taking the name “El Dorado,” the vehicle performs the role of circum-Atlantic myth, embodying ideas and practices from African, Native (Latin) American, and European cultural histories. Basquiat becomes one with this myth when he enters the car and leaves town. The fact that the audience is no longer able to travel with Basquiat as he exits suggests that the promised land of mainstream pop success and multicultural artistic integrity could not yet exist outside of New York. Inclusiveness was still ahead of its time in early 1981. It is ironic that Deborah Harry plays the role of the

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Willie Drye, “El Dorado Legend Snared Sir Walter Raleigh,” *National Geographic*, accessed 28 November 2014, <http://science.nationalgeographic.com/science/archaeology/el-dorado/>.

fairy godmother who makes Basquiat's success possible. As the homeless woman she is unpleasant, almost grotesque, and hard to understand. Basquiat's, and by extension the audience's, initial response is aversion. Through his embrace, she becomes an enticing figure who exudes desirability. Harry's transformation is the embodiment of No Wave's transition from cacophonous experimentation to mass-market popularity. It is fitting that Harry and her band mates in Blondie packaged and released three years of revolutionary music to radio and television.

### **And Then Came "Rapture"**

On the sets of *TV Party* and *Downtown 81* that Chris Stein and Fab Five Freddy cultivated a personal and professional relationship. Stein and Deborah Harry discussed working with Freddy in a 2013 Red Bull Music Academy interview. Harry characterizes Freddy by saying, "He was a very entrepreneurial character and just was adventurous and he likes connecting the dots."<sup>122</sup> Freddy's consistent maneuvering meant crossing boroughs. Stein recalls:

in 1977 he took a bunch of us uptown to the Bronx, to a Police Athletic League, which is like a youth centre, a neighbourhood youth centre, and we saw this big event, this big rap event, which was super exciting. It was just phenomenal and it was a game-changer for me, certainly. I saw that it was paralleling what was going on downtown, but we didn't know much about it....It was like a gymnasium-type thing with a stage and it wasn't just a gig by one group, it was a bunch, it was kind of a festival where there were a bunch of groups, [Grandmaster] Flash and the Funky Four, and maybe [the] Cold Crush [Brothers], I can't even remember.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> "Debbie Harry and Chris Stein - Picture This: Blondie's Founding Members Recall '70s and '80s New York," Red Bull Music Academy Interview, Red Bull Music Academy, accessed 14 April 2014, [http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/blondie?-template=RBMA\\_Lecture%2Ftranscript](http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/blondie?-template=RBMA_Lecture%2Ftranscript).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

With more deliberation to clear his foggy memory, he told biographers Dick Porter and Kris Needs:

“We were the only Caucasians in attendance; even Freddy was razzed by the crowd for wearing a then-unfashionable porkpie hat and white shirt and tie - a sort of dread [Jamaican] style that at the time hadn’t been seen outside the UK. At the time, the hip hop uniform had to be topped off by a massive wool stocking cap that often had cardboard in it to make it stand up higher. But everyone there was quite polite to us. I overheard some kids talking who thought we were part of Kool and the Gang.”<sup>124</sup>

It is odd that people at the event would mistake Stein and Harry for members of the all-African American funk band Kool and the Gang. Most likely it was a symptom of an overall discomfort between both parties. In 1977 this would have been one of the first times white people experienced a happening in the Bronx. The tension confirms the significance of this major moment in cultural history. Blondie’s close association with Freddy and his cohorts in the Bronx, a conscious effort to maintain a presence in the New York underground, and the coalescence of years of cultural mixing on *TV Party* influenced Stein and Harry to write the song “Rapture” in 1980.

“Rapture” brought together the influential musical forms present in the city since punk’s decline. It is a euphoric disco reverie of sugar-coated melodies built on a funky rhythm section. The album version of the track is dance-floor friendly, clocking in at six-and-a-half minutes, and the disco remix grooves for a satisfying 10 minutes. The song keeps with the theme of satirizing disco nightlife that Blondie started with “Heart of Glass” on the lines, “Dancing very close/ Barely breathing/Almost comatose.” But “Rapture” is most pivotal for the lengthy rap in the middle, which opened white audiences to black uptown culture. Chris and Deborah (Debbie) devoted a large chunk of

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<sup>124</sup> Porter and Needs, 197.

their 2013 Red Bull Music Academy to its discussion. Here is a section taken from the transcript:

**Debbie Harry:** You know, the rap thing is more of a tribute than an actual thing.

**Chris Stein:** It's an homage.

**Debbie Harry:** It's not really very good. I mean, it was interesting to a lot of people, but I think that the real rappers were a little bit uptight, pissed off about it, initially. But I will say, this is the first rap song that had its own song, its own music, because up until then they were scratching and taking licks from Chic and everything. This had its own embodied theme as well.<sup>125</sup>

Stein and Harry are modest about the song's success. But it presented the idea that hip hop songs could go beyond samples, that they could have their own musical DNA instead of being collages of existing songs. Fab Five Freddy was quicker to acknowledge "Rapture" as boundary breaking: "It was the first time that a mainstream audience had a peek at what was about to become this huge movement called hip hop."<sup>126</sup> Stein's public sentiment regarding the song was self-effacing. In a more intimate moment, however, he opened up, offering a heartfelt vision for the song: "We wanted to make music that would cross over. I would like to see the record help resolve tensions by bringing different audiences together. When the new wave kids and the rappers get together, that'll be something. Eventually, they'll all meet up in the middle, where you'll have a strong race of young people that won't be divided by stupid racial issues."<sup>127</sup> His hope for integration rose from the New York underground and reached a national mainstream audience on March 28, 1981, when "Rapture" climbed to number 1 on the

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<sup>125</sup> "Debbie Harry and Chris Stein - Picture This: Blondie's Founding Members Recall '70s and '80s New York."

<sup>126</sup> Fab Five Freddy qtd. in Porter and Needs, 200.

<sup>127</sup> Chris Stein qtd. in Porter and Needs, 201.

Billboard Hot 100 Singles Chart. It is the first song to feature rapping to top the pop chart and the first song to feature rapping to air on MTV when it premiered on August 1, 1981. The video exposed mainstream America to graffiti art and introduced Freddy and Jean-Michel Basquiat, both of whom make cameos. A new era in popular music dawned.

### ***CONCLUSION: TOM TOM CLUB ON NEW YORK'S BLACK RADIO***

Both the *East Village Eye* and the *New York Rocker* devoted their January 1982 issues to summarizing the significant cultural crossings that happened the previous year. In his "Letter from the Editor," Leonard Abrams writes to his readers that the *Eye's* intention was to do a "'ghetto issue'"<sup>128</sup> that performed an in-depth analysis of hip hop culture. But he used the "ghetto" as a metaphor for disenfranchisement and personal insecurity that New Yorkers on the Lower East Side could understand, as they were being forced from their homes by shady landlords. In addition to covering the usual current events and community concerns, the issue places hip hop culture in a broader context. It features interviews with Fab Five Freddy and Afrika Bambaataa about the origins of graffiti, DJing, and MCing; a centerfold exhibiting the art of Futura 2000; a guide to b-boy break dancing; and tips on how to pull off the latest fashions popular among b-boys. The *New York Rocker* chose a more focused approach, articulating genre-mixing on its cover with an image of Talking Heads' bassist Tina Weymouth arm in arm with DJ Grandmaster Flash. Several markers within the cover imagery suggest Weymouth, a white woman, has been accepted into the hip hop world. They both hold boom boxes, or "ghetto blasters," like the ones young blacks and Latinos carried with them on city streets blasting music. The background is stylized to look as if Weymouth and Flash are

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<sup>128</sup> Leonard Abrams, "Letter from the Editor," *East Village Eye*, January 1982, 11.

standing in front of a graffiti mural with the phrase “Holiday Rapping” over Weymouth’s right shoulder. And to complete the black and white photo of the two figures, Weymouth wears a black top, and Flash wears a white top, a subliminal suggestion that an equal creative partnership existed between the two races.

The sentiment of successful crossover was furthered in the *Rocker*’s featured articles. Kristine McKenna interviews Weymouth and husband Chris Frantz, fifty percent of Talking Heads, about their side project Tom Tom Club. Tom Tom Club was riding a wave of two successful singles in 1981. McKenna advances why she considers the music so progressive:

Because of its simplicity, playfulness and cool dance groove. Tom Tom music is winning fans from all walks of life. Tom Tom songs “Wordy Rappinghood” and “Genius of Love” can be heard percolating out of ghetto blasters as well as groovy new wave disco sound systems, and these songs have also received the ultimate accolade - they’re hits on soul radio.<sup>129</sup>

Here “soul radio” is code for “black radio.” Tom Tom Club, McKenna argues, was cool; African American audiences embraced the band in the way that the male character in James White and the Blacks’ “Almost White Pt. 1” desired to be accepted by black listeners. Marc “BEAM” Williams remembers Tom Tom Club as one of the most popular white artists among black listeners along with electronic artist Thomas Dolby and former Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren.<sup>130</sup>

Steven Harvey performs a complementary profile of Grandmaster Flash. In “Spin Art” Harvey reveals Flash’s practices of “backspinning” and “phasing” on the turntables so he can isolate and mix sections of songs down to a single word. Flash pursued his passion and changed the art of DJing: “He continually studies music, searching for new

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<sup>129</sup> Kristine McKenna, “Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz Start the Tom Tom Club,” *New York Rocker*, January 1982, 14.

<sup>130</sup> Marc “BEAM” Williams, interview by the author.

elements to add to his quick mix, and practicing his turntable moves. Though Flash is confident about his position in the uptown DJ world, he's still naive about the critical accolades he's garnered from the white music press."<sup>131</sup> Flash himself was unaware of the adulation he was getting from rock publications like the UK's *New Musical Express*, the *Village Voice*, and now the *Rocker*. Blondie first introduced him to this demographic with "Rapture" ("Flash is fast/ Flash is cool). But it was his solo single "The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel" that showcased his talent. Flash mixes "Rapture," the Furious Five's "Birthday Party" Chic's "Good Times," and Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust." He took the club method of mixing whole playlists and localized it to one song, using existing songs like individual instruments to generate new tracks. Harvey's piece ends by addressing Flash's plans for the future:

Right now Flash enjoys all kinds of music for mixing and listening. He's applied the quick-mix to recent disco hits like Teena Marie's "Square Biz" and Debbie Harry's "Backfired." He's been studying Kraftwerk's "Pocket Calculator" to incorporate into a mix (although he feels their early disco hit "Trans-Europe Express" is one of the few tunes sufficiently pre-mixed to play all the way through). He's also looking into "punk rock" for possible mixing on the album he's putting together with the Furious Five.<sup>132</sup>

Flash looked to pay back his fans by using music they already enjoyed, diving into punk and German Krautrock bands like Kraftwerk that inspired Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force's hit "Planet Rock" in 1982. Radio became the center of this musical exchange.

Marjorie Karp reported that by the early eighties the airwaves were increasingly complex. She cites the New York area's top-rated FM radio stations WBLS, WKTU, WRKS (going by the call letters "KISS"), and Newark, New Jersey's WNJR-AM as

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<sup>131</sup> Steven Harvey, "Spin Art: Here's the Story of Grandmaster Flash, A DJ who Mixes with Panache," *New York Rocker*, January 1982, 26.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

delivering the most progressive programming centered around postpunk, post-disco, and hip hop musics. She relates that curious listeners tuning in would hear:

Primarily R & B, funk, rap, disco--primarily “black product,” if you insist. But be aware that the color line has been crossed; you’ll hear Blondie, B-52’s, Kraftwerk, Modern Romance, Go-Go’s, Queen, Tom Tom Club. And the line has been recrossed as well. Dirty funk groups have a true garage sound that provides, in music, lyrics and attitude, nearly all that punk once promised. Synthesizer and production on superclean funk cashes in on the best of the new wave. There’s a feel of tying up some loose ends in New York music, uniting its various factions and literally integrating it. There’s rock in funk and funk in pop.<sup>133</sup>

These “loose ends” fused in the next discernable wave in New York music that developed in dance clubs. Musical forms used between 1978 and 1981 were synthesized into an electronic sound that became the bases for modern pop for the rest of the 20th century.

Madonna’s stardom throughout the 1980s and 1990s is the most visible confirmation. Her first single, “Everybody” (1982), was a more synthetic-sounding version of club-ready pop inspired by “Rapture” with disco/funk grooves of Tom Tom Club. Throughout the rest of the decade and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century Madonna carefully crafted her persona as the biggest pop star in the world on the strength of danceable tracks with global appeal. In 1987 she took on a Latino influence for the first time on the hit “La Isla Bonita.” And in 1990 Madonna returned to her roots in the New York underground, enlisting dancers from the African American and Latino drag ball scene for her video “Vogue.”

Throughout the 1980s several artists using a multicultural, dance-oriented sound achieved mainstream commercial success. For four weeks in late 1983 former member of the Commodores, Lionel Richie topped the pop charts with “All Night Long (All

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<sup>133</sup> Marjorie Karp, “All Mixed Up: You Read About Flash, Now Here’s the Rest About the DJs who Cut the Best,” *New York Rocker*, January 1982, 29.

Night).”<sup>134</sup> The song morphs near the end into a section of Caribbean percussion, ideal for isolation as breakbeats, Latin-pop group Miami Sound Machine featuring Cuban-born Gloria Estefan scored its first hit with “Conga” in 1985, reaching Number 10. Another major Latin-infused track to storm the mainstream was Los Lobos’ version of “La Bamba,” the Mexican folk song originally adapted to English by Richie Valens in 1958.<sup>135</sup> Sheena Easton’s Prince-penned “Sugar Walls” hit Number 9 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and Number 1 on the Billboard Hot Dance/Club Play chart on February 23<sup>rd</sup> of the same year.<sup>136</sup> Its hip hop-influenced beat and sexual allusions resulted in the song being targeted by the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) as one of its Filthy Fifteen, a list of songs the PMRC targeted as the most offensive in popular music.

Artists from abroad even came to the United States to capitalize on the electronicized pop sound that was born in New York. Simon Reynolds notes the role Manhattan music played in transforming Joy Division into New Order after original singer Ian Curtis’ suicide:

their music gradually assimilated its various dance floor sounds, including postdisco; the brash, synthetic style known as Latin freestyle; and electro, a hip-hop subgenre heavily influenced by Kraftwerk and based around drum machines and synths. Thanks to their America tour manager Ruth Polsky, who also worked as a booker for Hurrah’s and Danceteria, New Order encountered a kind of chic but cool nightclub totally different from the tacky discotheques and rock ‘n’ roll pissholes they knew in the U.K.”<sup>137</sup>

New Order parlayed this musical mixture into a string of Dance chart successes, including “Ceremony” (1981), “Blue Monday” (1983), and “Thieves Like Us” (1984).

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<sup>134</sup> “The Hot 100 – 1983 Archive,” *Billboard*, <http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1983/hot-100>.

<sup>135</sup> “The Hot 100 – 1987 Archive,” *Billboard*, <http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1987/hot-100>.

<sup>136</sup> “Billboard Dance Club Songs – 1985 Archive,” <http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1985/dance-club-play-songs>.

<sup>137</sup> Reynolds, 275-276.

The influence spread to Northern Europe, as well. Eccentric Austrian artist Falco had Number 1 pop hit in 1986 with “Rock Me Amadeus.”<sup>138</sup> The squelchy beats sound as if they were a product of August Darnell’s studio wizardry.

Hip hop was the most profound musical firestorm in the wake of “Rapture.” For many mass media viewers who loved MTV, the collaboration between Aerosmith and Run DMC was the first marriage of rock and hip hop music. The music video for “Walk this Way” featured Aerosmith singer Steven Tyler literally breaking down a wall between, on one side, himself and guitarist Joe Perry, and, on one side, Run DMC with DJ Jam Master Jay on the other. This profound gesture of inclusion spoke to changes in mainstream consciousness, but it was far from revolutionary. Furthermore, depicting Tyler as the gatekeeper of cultural acceptance perpetuated the white supremacist idea that white rockers had to invite black rappers to rise up for equality. New York underground postpunk artists and hip hop artists, on the other hand, merged musical styles in a collaborative environment. “Rapture” was the manifestation of that relationship and prepared mainstream America for more diverse musical tastes to come. In the 1990s, through the success of megastars like Tupac Shakur, the Notorious B.I.G., Sean Combs, eventually Eminem, hip hop became the backbone of pop music, blurring the color line where No Wave bands once contorted it.

My goal with this thesis was to shine a light on a moment in New York music history that often goes ignored in larger narratives. The period of 1978 to 1981 is the missing link between the 1970s punk movement and 1980s pop music. Within that time, punk’s desire for intellectual, artistic, and cultural rebirth came to fruition through social and musical integration by a group of artists who used every resource at their fingertips.

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<sup>138</sup> The Hot 100 – 1986 Archive, *Billboard*, <http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1986/hot-100>.

Moreover, it espoused a philosophy of inclusion that bridged political divides from the New York City underground to American popular culture.

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Ike Yard, *1980-1982 Collected* (Acute Records), 2006.

James Chance and the Contortions, *Buy* (ZE Records), 1979, (ZE Records), 2004.

James White and the Blacks, *Off-White* (ZE Records), 1979.

Kid Creole and the Coconuts, *Off the Coast of Me* (ZE Records), 1980, (Universal Island Records), 2002.

Konk, *The Sound of KONK (Tales of the New York Underground 1981-88)* (Soul Jazz Records), 2004.

Liquid Liquid, *Liquid Liquid* (GR2 Records), 2008.

Lizzy Mercier Descloux, *Press Color* (ZE Records), 1979, (ZE Records), 2003.

Lounge Lizards, *The Lounge Lizards* (EG Records), 1981.

Lydia Lunch, *Queen of Siam* (ZE Records), 1980, (Atavistic Records), 2009.

Material, *Memory Serves* (Celluloid Records), 1981.

New Math, "Older Women" b/w "The Restless Kind" (Brain Eater Records), 1980.

- Nina Hagen, *Fearless* (CBS Records), 1983, (Koch Records), 2007.
- Nitecaps, *Go to the Line* (Sire Records), 1982.
- Raybeats, *Guitar Beat* (Bar-None Records), 1981, (Orange Mountain Music), 2014.
- , *It's Only a Movie*, (Shanachie Records), 1983, (Orange Mountain Music), 2014.
- Sylvain Sylvain, *Syl Sylvain and the Teardrops* (BMG Music), 1981, (Wounded Bird Records), 2007.
- Tyrone Brunson, *Sticky Situation* (CBS Records), 1983, (Funkytowngrooves), 2013.
- Various Artists, *A Complete Introduction to Sugar Hill Records* (Sanctuary Records Group), 2010.
- , *Downtown 81 Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* (Recall Records), 2007.
- , *Journey Into Paradise...The Larry Levan Story* (Rhino), 2006.
- , *Larry Levan Live at the Paradise Garage* (Strut, West End, Garage Records), 2000.
- , *N.Y. No Wave* (ZE Records), 2003.
- , *Nicky Siano's The Gallery: The Original New York Disco, 1973-1977* (Soul Jazz Records), 2004.
- , *No New York* (Antilles), 1978, (Lilith Ltd.), 2005.
- , *Philadelphia International Classics: The Tom Moulton Remixes* (Harmless), 2012.
- , *The Casablanca Records Story* (Cigar Aficionado), 1994.
- , *The New York Singles Scene* (Reach Out International Records, Inc.), 1982.
- Waitresses, *Just Desserts: The Complete Waitresses* (Omnivore Recordings), 2013.
- Was (Not Was), *Was (Not Was)* (ZE Records), 1981.

***NEW YORK CITY CONTORTED COLOR LINE CLUB MIX***

This playlist is meant to accompany the thesis so the reader can create her or his own multimedia experience. It is only a mix containing contemporary songs that reflect the cultural crossings taking place in the late 1970s and 1980s. Most of these songs were recorded by New York artists; the others were directly influenced by the city's music. This mix does not include James Brown, Parliament/Funkadelic, Sly and the Family Stone, the Ramones, Kraftwerk, and a number of other artists influencing young bands at the time. I would need many more pages for that.

The Nitecaps - "Go to the Line" (1982)  
 The Contortions - "I Can't Stand Myself (When You Touch Me)" (1978)  
 James White and the Blacks - "Almost Black Pt. 1" (1979)  
 The Contortions - "Contort Yourself" (1979)  
 James White and the Blacks - "Contort Yourself (August Darnell Remix)" (1979)  
 Lizzy Mercier Descloux - "Wawa" (1979)  
 Brian Eno and David Byrne - "America is Waiting" (1980)  
 Kid Creole and the Coconuts - "Mister Softee" (1980)  
 Blondie - "Heart of Glass" (1978)  
 Blondie - "Rapture (Special Disco Mix)" (1981)  
 Peech Boys - "Don't Make Me Wait" (12" Extended Version) (1982)  
 Gwen Guthrie - "It Should Have Been You" (12" Vocal Version) (1981)  
 Chas Jankel - "Ai No Corrida" (1980)  
 Chas Jankel - "Glad to Know You" (1981)  
 Tom Tom Club - "Genius of Love" (1980)  
 The Raybeats - "Tight Turn" (1981)  
 Liquid Liquid - "Cavern" (1983)  
 Grandmaster Melle Mel - "White Lines (Don't Do It)" (1983)  
 Coati Mundi - "Que Pasa" / "Me No Pop I" (1981)  
 Sugarhill Gang - "Rapper's Delight" (1979)  
 Chic - "Good Times" (1979)  
 Chic - "Le Freak" (1978)  
 Nina Hagen - "New York/N.Y." (1983)  
 ESG - "Moody" (1982)  
 Delta 5 - "Mind Your Own Business" (1979)  
 The Waitresses - "I Know What Boys Like" (1982)  
 Richard Hell and the Voidoids - "Blank Generation" (1977)  
 Talking Heads - "Take Me to the River" (1978)  
 Suicide - "Cheree" (1977)  
 Coati Mundi/Jean Michel Basquiat - "Palabras Con Ritmo" (recorded approx. 1980, released 2007)  
 Material featuring Nona Hendryx - "Bustin' Out" (1981)  
 J. Walter Negro and the Loose Jointz - "Shoot the Pump" (1983)  
 The Clash featuring Futura 2000 - "Overpowered by Funk" (1982)  
 Fab Five Freddy - "Change the Beat" (1983)  
 Futura 2000 featuring the Clash - "The Escapades of Futura" (1983)

Grandmaster Flash - "The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel"  
(1981)

The Gladiators - "Dreadlocks the Time is Now" (1978)

Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force - "Planet Rock" (1982)

Tom Tom Club - "Wordy Rappingood" (1981)

Gichy Dan - "Cowboys and Gangsters" (1979)

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