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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology

by

Shelina Louise Brown

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Yoko Ono's Experimental Vocality as Matrixial Borderspace:

Theorizing Yoko Ono's Extended Vocal Technique and her Contributions to the
Development of Underground and Popular Vocal Repertoires, 1968 - Present

by

Shelina Louise Brown

Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Timothy D. Taylor, Chair

This dissertation involves the development of a theoretical framework for understanding non-normative gendered vocal subjectivities emergent within counter-hegemonic, experimental vocal performances. In particular, I choose to focus on the extended vocal techniques of Yoko Ono that were developed in the context of her late 1960s and early 1970s collaborations with the Plastic Ono Band, and later came to exert a significant influence upon underground vocalists from the late 1970's to the present day. As a theoretical foundation for my work, I primarily draw upon post-Lacanian feminist psychoanalyst, Bracha L. Ettinger's *Matrixial Borderspace* (2006), adapting her lexicon for the analysis of experimental vocalities. In proposing a musicological

appropriation of Ettinger's rubric, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which Ono's vocal performances actualize a mode of "matrixial gendered resistance," that is, a feminist aesthetic practice that works to re-contextualize the parameters of gendered subjectivity within a shared space of trans-subjective encounter. While the first two chapters of this dissertation will provide a detailed theorization of Yoko Ono's early avant-rock musical output in relation to psychoanalytic, postcolonial, and posthumanist thought, the final two chapters will trace Ono's stylistic influence through punk rock and New Wave genres of the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, concluding with a series of interviews with current Los Angeles-based underground vocalists.

The dissertation of Shelina Louise Brown is approved.

Robert W. Fink

Tamara Judith-Marie Levitz

Purnima Mankekar

Timothy D. Taylor, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and my mentor, Janice Carole Brown.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee chair and mentor, Tim Taylor, for his support throughout my time at UCLA. Tim's commitment to encouraging his students to explore critical and cultural theory has been a constant source of inspiration during the course of my doctoral studies. As a student of music with a keen interest in philosophy, Tim has instilled within me a deep appreciation for a variety of theoretical approaches in the pursuit of progressive modes of engagement with musical experience. Tim's expert training in materialist theory grounded and shaped my explorations into the field of psychoanalysis. In my third year as a doctoral student at UCLA, with the aid of the Graduate Student Summer Research Grant, Tim acted as a close mentor who was instrumental in shaping my first publication, "Scream from the Heart: Yoko Ono's Rock 'n' Roll Revolution." The article that resulted from Tim's mentorship marked the beginnings of an intellectual journey that would lead me to delve deeper into multiple theoretical models concerning cultural resistance and vocality, eventually leading to my discovery of Bracha L. Ettinger's Matrixial Theory.

In the development of my dissertation project, I am also indebted to my committee members, Tamara Levitz and Bob Fink who have each exerted a strong influence on my current work. Tamara's article on the "Unfinished Music of John & Yoko," to which I was introduced as a Teaching Assistant for her course on the Beatles, stands as one of the only academic works that engages with Ono's vocality, and was a primary source of inspiration for my current project. The questions raised by Tamara in this article provided a springboard for my own dissertation, and I value her intellectual and musical insights which have provided a model for my own interpretive work.

Likewise, Bob Fink's research on the nature of musical timbre was also a great source of inspiration for my current project, which involves a philosophical inquiry into the resistant qualities of vocal timbre. As a student in Bob's seminar, "The Relentless Pursuit of Tone," I was prompted to further consider the question of timbre as a too-often under-theorized, yet powerful aspect of musical experience. At the early stages of my dissertation writing, both Tamara and Bob were kind enough to read over my preliminary chapters, and to provide detailed feedback that helped me grow as a writer and a critical thinker. Thank you Tamara and Bob for your patience, generosity, and your invaluable critique. In addition to Tamara and Bob's helpful critique, my external committee member, Purnima Mankekar, also provided me with a detailed reading of my manuscript, offering much helpful feedback from a Gender Studies perspective. As a student of both Musicology and Gender Studies, Purnima's expert commentary was invaluable to my dissertation project, and I hope to further explore interdisciplinary connections between my own work and current trends within the field of Gender Studies.

In the fall of 2014, with the aid of a research grant offered by the Student Opportunity Fund of the Herb Alpert School of Music, I had the opportunity to attend a Symposium and masterclass with Bracha L. Ettinger in Dublin, Ireland, that forever changed the course of my intellectual journey. At the time I was only beginning to grapple with both the theories of Ettinger and Lacan, and having the opportunity to make contact with not only Ettinger, but a coterie of academics working with Matrixial Theory was a truly life-changing experience. In the month preceding my defense, I was once again able to return to Ireland to re-connect with two of these scholars, Professor

Tina Kinsella and Michael O'Rourke. The intellectual conversations we shared in Dublin, and their supportive feedback on my work were incredibly reassuring to a graduate student anxiously awaiting her defense date. The quality of their research has been a constant source of inspiration for me over the past four years, and their research and activism compels me to be a better writer, thinker, and moreover an academic that is driven by the Ettingerian values of compassionate hospitality and the need to foster shared human intellectual experience and engagement. Thanks to the recommendations of both Tina Kinsella and Michael O'Rourke, I was able to arrange a personal meeting with Bracha Ettinger prior to my defense during her visit to Los Angeles. What I thought would be a brief meeting turned into a three hour, in-depth conversation in the Biltmore Hotel lobby. My conversation with Bracha was an unforgettable, and truly humbling experience that I will cherish for the rest of my life and career. Bracha's enthusiasm for my project, her sage insights, and her kind demeanor inspires me to pursue my work further, and to aim towards making a contribution to the future of feminist psychoanalytic inquiry into musical experience.

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strictures of normative, dominant cultural paradigms. During my time at UCLA, I had the privilege of leading a “double life,” so to speak, as both graduate student and a denizen of the Eastside scene, and to simultaneously occupy the positions of academic and performer. My experiences within the Los Angeles music scene will forever shape the course of my life and I am grateful to the groundbreaking artists, in addition to the promoters, bookers, labels and countless other scene supporters who help to keep the scene alive despite the many obstacles it faces in the wake of the large-scale collapse of the music industry and the depletion of its financial resources. Special thanks is owed to my interview subjects who donated their time and helped encourage my project: artists Nora Keyes, MRK, Uhuru Ali Moor, Cameron Murray, Bebe McPherson, Anna Homler, Rachel Mason, Gianna Geller, Madam Gandhi, promoter Charon Nogues, and photographer Amy Darling, all beautiful, courageous, and free-thinking women whom I consider to be true friends and endlessly inspiring cultural activists.

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technician, both women who have inspired me with their significant talents, and offered me much emotional support throughout my time as a graduate student. I truly would not have made it through many hardships if not for these women. This dissertation is dedicated to all of the strong, compassionate women who carry the world, and offer support to one another as we together face a host of challenges that test our endurance – ultimately shining a light on our remarkable capacity for resilience and regeneration.

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Introduction

In the first issue of Riot Grrrl band, Bikini Kill's eponymous zine, published in July of 1991, drummer Tobi Vail penned an essay calling for an historical re-evaluation of Yoko Ono as a pioneering vocalist and proto-punk idol.¹ In her heartfelt account, Vail sets into motion a feminist project of "rescu[ing] our true heroines from obscurity, or in Yoko's case, from disgrace."² In Vail's analysis, Ono was cast out of rock history as a result of the endemic rock 'n' roll trope of "girlfriend-as-villain," according to which Ono was construed as the threatening gendered-racial "other" held responsible for "breaking up" the Beatles' homosocial band formation. Not only is the charge that Ono "broke up the Beatles" inaccurate, and extremely unfair, Vail contends that it reinforces a cultural tendency to view women as "outsiders" within the world of rock music, putting under erasure women's significant achievements within the genre. According to Vail, Ono's contributions to rock and punk were indeed significant; in Vail's raw, uncensored tirade, she declares: "Yoko was so fucking ahead of her time. I mean, in a lot of ways she is the first punk rock girl singer ever. What she was doing was so completely unheard of and she needs to be recognized for what she did."³

¹ In the context of this dissertation, the term "proto-punk" will be employed as a contemporary music historical category. In Ono's time, her work would have been considered as "avant-rock," or "experimental rock 'n' roll," however, with the rise of the discourse of punk history over the past three decades, both in rock journalism and academia, the respective categories of "proto-punk," "punk," and "post-punk" have come to be employed as historical categorizations that are used to legitimate past artists' contributions to the development of contemporary musical genres. In acknowledging Ono as a "proto-punk" artist, my aim is to give voice to the wide-spread sentiment within underground music scenes that her work has tended to be "written out of" standard rock and punk histories, and that there is a strong need to reclaim a space for Ono within musicological discourse.

² Toby Vail, "And a lot of guys give their girlfriends rock lessons..." *Bikini Kill*, no. 1 (July 1991). Accessed through New York University's Fales Library Special Collections.

³ Vail, "And a lot of guys..."

Needless to say, Tobi Vail was not alone in her fervent adoration of Yoko Ono; perusing the Riot Grrrl archives at the Fales library collection in New York City, one can locate countless passages in praise of Ono's vocal works, particularly her performances on *The Plastic Ono Band* (1969) and *Fly* (1971). Many young third-wave feminists of the 1990s looked to Ono as a vocalist who offered an alternative to normative, commercialized, feminine pop and rock vocalities. This perspective is reflected in feminist rock historian, Gillian Gaar's influential 1992 work, *She's A Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll*, which situates Ono as a ground-breaking, proto-punk artist. Gaar's woman-centric rock history features a "Preface" by Yoko Ono, in which the artist eloquently praises Gaar's study, expressing her gratitude for Gaar's "herstory" of women's contributions to rock that aided her in processing the "unresolved hurt" that she felt as an outsider throughout her career, and also "uplifted her spirit to realize that [she] was not alone."⁴ Echoing Vail's testimony, in *She's a Rebel*, Gaar makes an impassioned call for more research to be conducted on the topic of Ono's musical contributions. Gaar laments that although "the music of Yoko Ono would find its reflection in punk... Ono would rarely see herself listed as an influence in punk and rock histories."⁵ Gaar attributes this lack of attention to the overt racism of the media and the white male dominated field of rock journalism, as well as Ono's association with John Lennon, which placed her "directly in the firing line for near-universal condemnation and scorn, especially when it became obvious Ono was not afraid to speak her mind and

⁴ Yoko Ono, "Preface," in *She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock n Roll*, by Gillian G. Gaar, (New York: Seal Press, 2002), x.

⁵ Gillian G. Gaar, *She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock n Roll*, (New York: Seal Press, 2002), 234.

refused to remain in the background like the other Beatle wives.”⁶ Despite Ono’s elision from standard punk and rock histories, however, Gaar makes the emphatic claim that “The Plastic Ono Band did not merely define the roots of what punk rock would become, it *was* punk rock, a harsh, confrontational barrage of noise in which the instrumentation and vocals were just barely restrained from tumbling over into complete chaos.”⁷

In the present historical moment, a notable shift in the public reception of Yoko Ono’s music can be felt within underground and punk music scenes worldwide. Beginning with the Brooklyn art rock scene — spearheaded by noise rock icon, Thurston Moore — the contributions of Yoko Ono are beginning to be re-evaluated. Once seen as a pariah whose musical output was placed under constant ridicule and scrutiny, Ono is now coming to be celebrated as an influential proto-punk figure who exerted a strong impact upon underground and popular genres from the mid-1970s to the present day. Ono’s recent video, “Bad Dancer”(2013) reflects this changing image of the artist, representing her as a lithe, free-spirited octogenarian cultural icon, surrounded and supported by a cast of youth-cultural hipsters — Ono’s fellow “bad dancers” include Ad-Rock and Mike D of the Beastie Boys (both of whom also mixed the track), Questlove, Cibo Matto’s Yuka Honda and Miho Hatori, performance artist Justin Vivian Bond, Deerhoof’s Greg Saunier, and Das Racist alum Heems, just to name a few. In addition to the release of “Bad Dancer,” a slew of celebrity tribute shows honoring Yoko Ono were commissioned in the past few years, one notable example of which was held at the Orpheum Theater in Los Angeles in 2010, featuring Lady Gaga and Sonic Youth,

⁶ Gaar, *She’s a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock n Roll*, 231.

⁷ Gaar, *She’s a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock n Roll*, 234.

amongst other popular musicians. The success of such tributes led to the Plastic Ono Band reforming with Sean Lennon, and touring widely over the next few years. In June of 2011, Ono's brief appearance at the Hollywood Bowl in support of Yellow Magic Orchestra was met with a standing ovation. Such momentous occasions demonstrate that a widespread acknowledgment and praise for Yoko Ono's vocal experimentations is now coming to be shared not only within a coterie of Brooklyn hipster elites, but also, more broadly, amongst the wider public sphere.

Despite the growing interest in Ono's vocality, however, there has yet to be a sufficient response within the academy to correct what Gaar observed nearly 20 years ago concerning the lack of attention paid to Ono's position within the history of rock 'n' roll and experimental, underground music.⁸ This dissertation project thus seeks to bring Ono's works into dialogue with influential, counter-hegemonic vocalists from the late 1970s to present day Los Angeles.⁹ As will be discussed in the final ethnographic chapter of this study featuring conversations with vocalists in the current, experimental Los Angeles music scene, many contemporary artists draw inspiration from Ono's extended vocal techniques of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Furthermore, the resistant, even

⁸ Most scholars tend to focus on Yoko Ono's work as a conceptual artist and a member of Fluxus. One musicologist who has focused on Yoko Ono as an avant-garde musician as well as a conceptual artist is Brigid Cohen. The articles below situate Yoko Ono as a musician within the New York avant-garde of the late 1950s and 1960s. Cohen's work to date, however, does not attend to Ono's contributions to punk and rock history. See Brigid Cohen, "The Limits of National History: Yoko Ono, Stefan Wolpe, and Dilemmas of Cosmopolitanism," *Musical Quarterly* 97 (2014): 181-237, and "Translating Histories: Yoko Ono and George Maciunas," *Out of Bounds: Ethnography, History and Music*, eds. Ingrid Monson and Richard Wolf, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

⁹ In this vein, my work draws inspiration from feminist music historians who have sought to rescue women artists from historical obscurity. In her entry on "Feminism" in the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*, Ruth Solie qualifies such a feminist project as being committed to "critically re-examine processes of canon formation, concepts of talent and genius, and ruling standards of aesthetic value" (Kennedy et al, 2013, 664). In the contemporary moment when punk history is coming to be canonized, there is an urgent need to ensure women artists' visibility within the field, and to offer aesthetic frameworks of analysis that can account for the value of their contributions.

revolutionary potential of Ono's voice inspires a wider public audience comprised of non-musicians, as can be seen in the popular response to Ono's twitter post in the wake of the election of Donald Trump — her twitter feed consisting of a 30 second, unaccompanied multiphonic scream unleashed into her iPhone.

Arguing that Ono's vocality communicates a powerful, culturally resistant aesthetic, a key focus of this dissertation will be to attempt to qualify, and to theorize what, specifically, contributes to the experience of Ono's voice as "resistant." There is a strong need within feminist and queer musicology to devise lexicons for theorizing gender-based resistance within counter-hegemonic modes of vocal expression. This urgency to theorize the voice as a site of gender-based cultural resistance can be situated in relation to a broader trend in the discipline of musicology towards opening up a space for academic studies of the voice. Martha Feldman's recent Colloquy in *The Journal of the American Musicological Society* (JAMS) contextualizes this rising interest in voice studies as part of a gradual shift in the field of musicology over the past 30 years from what she terms a "2D" approach to music scholarship — focusing on composer and score — to a more "3D" approach to the study of music that acknowledges both embodied, affective, and ontological experiences of music.¹⁰ As a "3D" aspect of music that exists in a relational space of encounter between subjectivities-in-difference, Feldman observes that scholars are increasingly attending to the voice as a sonic and ontological referent that "exists most characteristically in the interstices of encounters, the spaces of transition, the spaces in between."¹¹

¹⁰ Martha Feldman, "Colloquy: Why Voice Now?" *The Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no.3 (Spring, 2015): 653 - 681.

¹¹ Feldman, "Colloquy: Why Voice Now?" 657.

Drawing inspiration from Feldman’s “Colloquy,” one guiding argument of this dissertation is that the transformative borderspaces that are engaged through Ono’s experimental vocal practice can bring about a critical redefinition of normative gendered subjective boundaries. In search of a non-phallogentric, non-binaristic mode of understanding such a counter-hegemonic vocality that works to challenge and resist normative boundaries of gendered subjectivity, I look to the works of post-Lacanian feminist theorist, Bracha L. Ettinger, and her body of work which has come to be referred to as Matrixial Theory. Displacing the Lacanian phallic precept of an individuated, differentiated subject, Ettingerian theory offers a re-contextualization of subjectivity as a shared, interstitial space of aesthetic encounter. In appropriating Ettinger’s theory for musicological analysis, I seek to demonstrate that the psychoanalytic underpinnings of Ettinger’s Matrixial Theory resonate strongly with the contemporary conception of vocality as an interstitial, encountural musical experience. Situating Ono’s vocality within a matrixial borderspace of gendered meaning formation, I hope to argue for the continued cultural and historical relevance of her artistic output.

Introducing Ettinger’s Lexicon

Since Ettingerian theory has not yet been widely employed in musicology, there is a need to provide the reader with a brief introduction to Ettinger’s lexicon, carefully contextualizing it in relation to other modalities of gender theory. By way of arriving at a working definition of Ettinger’s “matrix,” I would like to first contextualize her model of gendered subjectivity within the field of gender studies at large, highlighting the value of her theoretical framework when employed as a hermeneutic model for the analysis of

experimental feminist vocal repertoire. It is my contention that Ettingerian theory allows for an engagement with aspects of gendered aesthetic experience that tend to elude the two foundational, albeit contrasting theoretical approaches to gender prevalent within the contemporary academe: namely, approaches characterized by a consideration of the performativity of gender, on the one hand, and the materiality of gendered experience, on the other. As a theoretical approach promulgated by post-structuralist, Foucauldian-inspired philosopher, Judith Butler, “performativity” constitutes a conceptual rubric that interprets the gendered subject as a cultural iteration shaped by discursive power structures. In opposition to such a post-structuralist, discursive approach to gender, materialist theorists seek to situate gendered subjectivity within real material conditions of human social interaction. Whereas a performative approach to gender brings awareness to the inequity of power inherent in linguistic and social-symbolic structures that inform gendered subjectivity, a materialist approach allows us to critically engage with the aspects of gendered subjectivity that are constituted by economically based inequities of capital and the prescribed habitus of a given social field. Both performative and materialist approaches to gender are highly useful tools for feminist activism and resistance, opening up spaces within the academe for the examination of gender within reigning discursive and material power structures. It is my contention, however, that both approaches can be critiqued on the grounds that they tend to uphold absolutist conceptions of power. That is, in both theoretical models, power, whether defined in discursive or material terms, is taken as an *a priori* starting point of gendered analysis — a socio-political inevitability

whose nefarious workings can be addressed and possibly ameliorated, but not to the extent of displacing or transforming *power itself*.

In contrast to the aforementioned dominant approaches that account for the performativity and materiality of gendered subjectivity, Ettinger's theoretical work encourages us to think of gender in terms of psychological and aesthetic processes. For Ettinger, a practicing psychoanalyst as well as a visual artist, aesthetics is defined as the creative moves we make in order to arrive at, or approach, a sensory understanding of the world.¹² In Ettingerian terms, aesthetic experience functions to reinforce our contactual embeddedness within a shared psychic and corporeal experience of alterity — and this aesthetic principle forms the foundation of her theory of the “matrixial borderspace.”¹³ Considering the psychic channels that are opened through aesthetic processes, Ettinger proposes that many of these can give rise to profound, shared affects that remind us of the gamut of human psycho-social experience that precedes and encompasses, and indeed, displaces and re-contextualizes, patriarchal, socio-political formations of power.

A nuanced theoretical framework that draws inspiration from the often performative theoretical musings of Jacques Lacan, Ettinger's “matrix” is perhaps best understood through her foundational concepts of *trans-subjectivity* and the resistant

¹² Ettinger's 2007 online lecture, “Psychoanalysis and Matrixial Borderspace” details her definition of aesthetics within a matrixial conceptual framework. Also, see *Matrixial Borderspace*, pp. 147 - 150 for Ettinger's discussion of matrixial aesthetics in contemporary art worlds.

¹³ See *Matrixial Borderspace*, pp. 111, 124, 186-7, 211-12, for passages that limn a definition of the “matrixial borderspace.” Also, see pp. 2 - 7 of Griselda Pollock's “Introduction” to Ettinger's *Matrixial Borderspace*, wherein Pollock provides a précis of the “matrixial” in plain academic English. Pollock includes a visual diagram on p.7 which helps to contextualize and clarify the positioning of the “matrixial borderspace” in relation to Lacan's structural-symbolic paradigm.

potential of *subjective fragilization*.¹⁴ Within Ettinger's matrixial borderspace, a shared space of aesthetic contact, subjectivity is experienced as trans-subjectivity. Whereas the western Cartesian tradition, traced through the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, puts forward a view of the subject as a discrete entity, differentiated from its others, Ettinger offers up the radical proposition that an alternative sphere of fluid subjective connectivity both precedes and encompasses our experience of a subjectivity defined-in-difference. Whereas the Lacanian subject is delineated as a self in opposition to its others, Ettinger qualifies the experience of trans-subjectivity as being characterized by a *differentiation-in-jointness*, that is, an aesthetic experience of the emergent subject guided by the desire to link the borders of the I with the non-I.¹⁵ While Ettinger does not discount Lacan's formulation of a differentiated subject, she nonetheless moves to contextualize the Lacanian gendered subject within wider, communal psychic-aesthetic networks.

Recasting the gendered subject as a link within a chain of bordering trans-subjectivities, Ettinger offers a powerful re-contextualization of the western epistemology of the subject. In proposing a trans-subjective psychic sphere, Ettinger moves to displace Lacan's primary organizational metaphor of the *phallus* with her notion of the *matrix*, a neologism derived from a Latin cognate for "womb." Whereas Lacan proposes the phallus as the absent center of social-structural power that produces differentiated, and indeed, unequal gendered subjective positions, Ettinger proposes

¹⁴ The experience of matrixial interconnectedness must be distinguished from a Lacanian pre-Oedipal phase, which references oneness with the maternal. The matrixial sphere is not an experience of "oneness," rather, it is an experience of difference-in-severality. Such an experience of alterity is carefully distinguished from phallic, dichotomous evocations of oneness vs. plurality. This point will be further elaborated in chapters 2 & 3.

¹⁵ For key passages that engage with "trans-subjectivity," see *Matrixial Borderspace* pp.2, 5, 110, 166-7.

that the Lacanian model of gendered subjectivization can be re-situated within wider trans-subjective webs of shared alterity, shared affect, and shared psychic/embodied history. Whereas Lacan roots the emergence of gendered subjectivity in the primordial repression of the maternal, Ettinger instead argues for the consideration of shared subjectivizing impulses that are first experienced in utero, and in the early stages of infancy prior to the child's entrance into the structural symbolic realm of discourse, language, and power. While matrixial processes of trans-subjective linkage continue to unfold throughout our lives alongside our experience of phallic, differentiated subjectivity, we can only gain cognizance of the matrixial psychic sphere in moments when the boundaries of phallic subjectivity come to be fragilized.

Ettinger's Matrixial Theory thus offers a model of gendered subjective formation defined independently of phallic division, or what she terms, the primordial "cut." The benefit of a matrixial mode of analysis is that it offers us the possibility of identifying psychic and aesthetic experience that has heretofore been excluded from phallic discourse and philosophy. In this vein, Ettinger's work can be considered a continuation of the second-wave feminist project of defining feminine alterity — albeit without falling into Irigaray's tendencies towards locating the female within a mystical realm, nor Lacan's problematic notion of the undefinable — and arguably, aporic — "other jouissance." Because Ettinger attends to subjectivizing processes that unfold prior to the subject's entrance into the phallic order, however, it is crucial to distinguish and to parse out her terminology from extant philosophical vocabulary that is defined in relation to the individuated, phallic subject. Whereas difference feminism, for example, engages with the power dynamics that shape *inter-subjective* relations, an Ettingerian

engagement with *trans-subjective* relationality refuses to play within such a politicized field of discourse. Rather than making an overt, political claim to address inter-subjective power inequalities, Ettinger instead moves to destabilize the *a priori* assumption of differentiated, phallic subjectivity that undergirds such a claim. Although Ettinger works with a definition of subjectivity that resists definition according to phallic parameters, however, her theories can nonetheless be brought into dialogue with politicized models of gender and race based critique, offering fruitful re-contextualizations of difference and power beyond a phallic paradigm. At the heart of Ettinger's work is thus a life-affirming reclamation of the female body as a site of non-phallic aesthetic processes. Rather than an essentialist affirmation of the female body, however, Ettinger moves to identify an aspect of our psyche that precedes the phallic division that produces such an essentialism.¹⁶

Matrixial Hermeneutics as Methodology for the Analysis of Experimental Vocal Production

Building on Ettinger's foundational lexicon, in this dissertation I will move to employ her psychoanalytic terminology as a rubric for the hermeneutic interpretation of Yoko Ono's vocal repertoire. One key term defined in the context of Matrixial Theory is that of the "matrixial voice," a subjectivizing psychic-sensory channel that is experienced prior to our entrance into the scopic field. Within a range of psychoanalytic and philosophical traditions, however, the primary subjectivizing sensory channel is

¹⁶ In her introductory chapter to *The Matrixial Borderspace* (2006), "Femininity: Aporia or Sexual Difference?" Griselda Pollock observes: "Matrixial theory does not essentialize pregnancy as the very core of a woman's femininity. That would in fact render the womb a phallic object: something that can be possessed or lost. It does, however, elevate its re-theorized concept of matrixial feminine sexual difference to the level of a general dimension, element, or sphere in human subjectivity" (4).

considered to be the gaze, whereas the voice is seldom considered to be a psychic element worthy of discussion. Influential theories of subjective formation, ranging from Foucault's panopticon, to Homi K. Bhabha's notion of postcolonial mimicry, and of course, Lacan's mirror stage, all tend to assume the primacy of the gaze in human subjective development. According to this specular tradition of thought, the differentiated subject emerges in the moment s/he realizes s/he can be viewed by others. Ettinger, however, contests the primacy of the phallic gaze within the context of her trans-subjective framework of the matrixial borderspace. Working against the specular tendencies inherent in western thought, Ettinger argues that in our encounters with visual art, the phallic gaze can be destabilized, and furthermore, the sensory channel of sound, and in particular, the voice, can bring about a fragilizing, relational, trans-subjective space of encounter. Within the matrixial borderspace, Ettinger thus qualifies the voice, like the gaze, as a powerful, "vibrating string" that resonates between the shared borders of emergent trans-subjectivities.¹⁷ Theorizing the matrixial voice within a western musicological context can be problematic, however, owing to the cultural tendency to perceive one's voice as linked to a stable ontology as well as a stable, individuated selfhood — even to the point of expressing an authentic gendered interiority.¹⁸ Although feminist musicologists such as Suzanne Cusick have questioned

¹⁷ See Chapter 1 of *The Matrixial Borderspace*, "The Matrixial Gaze." For a concise definition of the "matrixial gaze," see pp.123; a definition of the "matrixial voice" can be found on p.185. These terms will be discussed in more depth in the following chapters.

¹⁸ Edgerton discusses the tendency to cultivate a stable vocal timbre in western art music traditions, see *The 21st-Century Voice: Contemporary and Traditional Extra-Normal Voice*, (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2004), 29-30.

such essentialist constructions of the gendered voice,¹⁹ little work has been done thus far to engage with the aesthetic processes by which feminist artists might work to resist normative subjectivizing processes in their vocal repertoire.

In this dissertation I will thus move to appropriate Matrixial Theory as part of my “close readings” of vocal works as a means of arriving at a matrixial listening practice that can aid in identifying the ways in which a vocalist might resist phallic subjectivity through aesthetic processes. While my work will be hermeneutic in nature, it is crucial to note that as a psychoanalytic thinker, Ettinger’s methodology cannot be considered to be hermeneutic. Adopting a style similar to that of Lacan or Deleuze, Ettinger’s writings and lectures consist of detailed psychoanalytic theorizations inspired in part by her own clinical practice, as well as her impressionistic takes on various cultural works ranging from visual art to literature. That is, rather than offer close readings of texts, Ettinger weaves extended psychoanalytic theory that loosely references her textual observations. In Ettinger’s psychoanalytic work thus far, she has drawn inspiration from a gamut of visual artworks and literature, ranging from Claude Monet and Paul Klee to the poetry of Paul Celan and Sylvia Plath.²⁰ According to her psychoanalytic methodology, Ettinger references such cultural works as springboards from which she might theorize moments of trans-subjective encounter that defy and resist the

¹⁹ See Cusick’s influential essay, “On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex,” in *Audible Traces: Gender, Music and Identity*. ed. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley, (Zurich & Los Angeles: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999): 25 - 37.

²⁰ See Bracha Ettinger’s “Demeter-Persephone Complex, Entangled Aerials of the Psyche, and Sylvia Plath,” *ESC English Studies in Canada* 40, no. 1 (March 2014):123-154. Also “Fragilization and Resistance,” *Studies in The Maternal* 1, no. 2 (2009): 1 - 31, on the notebooks of Paul Klee. Also her recent lecture delivered at USC on April 30, 2018, “Memory’s Wound is a Space With-in: Depthspace and Carriance Beyond Abstraction Versus Empathy.” In this lecture, Ettinger weaves together observations drawn from representations motherhood within the Old Testament, the poetry of Paul Celan, and Claude Monet’s use of light as a matrixial blurring of the scopic field.

phallogocentric scopic field, and by extension, phallic subjectivity. In her theorizations that arise in relation to the abstract artworks of Paul Klee, for example, Ettinger writes that the “intensities and vibrations [of his work] manifest their passage through encounter-events while becoming a painting. To see is not only to give up the armed eye (Lacan) but also to fragilize oneself.”²¹ A matrixial psychoanalytic methodology thus strives to pinpoint moments when the viewer can break away from the too-often visually-prescribed field of phallic subjectivity.

In a recent personal interview, however, Ettinger has expressed a great deal of enthusiasm for the development of a musical hermeneutic practice founded in Matrixial Theory. In Ettinger’s estimation, music, as an art form that is freed up from the scopic field, might yield the best means through which to expound her theory.²² Since music is an art form freed up from visuality, in my current analyses, my hermeneutic appropriation of Ettinger will thus approach the voice as a matrixial borderspace that might provide a gateway to moments of trans-subjective encounter. In search of interpretive possibilities beyond the parameters of phallic, differential, and visuocentric logic, I will instead be listening for moments of relational sonic encounter, and the sounds of subjective grains in co-emergence. The objective of such a matrixial listening practice is to to lend the interpretive ear to aesthetic experience that does not play within the parameters of phallic subjective experience. Notably, however, since the matrixial does not preclude nor deny the phallic sphere of aesthetic experience, both hermeneutic interpretive possibilities can exist as layered, co-terminous readings. As

²¹ Bracha Ettinger, “Fragilization and Resistance,” *Studies in The Maternal* 1, no. 2 (2009): 6.

²² Bracha Ettinger, Personal Interview, May 1, 2018.

Ettinger's central metaphor of the myth of Euridyce goes, as we catch a glimpse of one, the other recedes, and vice versa. This type of interpretive work thus demands a critical ear that is attuned to the shifting of borders, and the displacement of subjective boundaries, without seeking a fixed point of arrival.

Experimental vocal practices lend themselves well to such a matrixial hermeneutics: since the beginning of the 20th century, avant-garde musical practices have sought to destabilize western musical language, and by extension, the western notion of a unified vocal subjectivity. Historically speaking, such practices emerged from two sources: first, the influx of eastern & other nonwestern musical styles in the western musical sphere, and second, technological advancements in electroacoustic music that inspired composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen to question the divisions assumed between music and noise, as well as human and machine. Inspired by such developments in western art music, within the mid-century British avant-garde the practice of "extra-normal" vocal production emerged, spearheaded by rogue German vocal pedagogue, Alfred Wolfsohn and later carried on by his pupil, Roy Hart.²³ Extra-normal vocal production, also known as "extended vocal technique," marked an avant-garde attempt to explore the sonic potentiality of the human vocal apparatus, and to

²³ See "Preface" in Edgerton, pp. xv - xvi. Also Nicholas Isherwood, *The Techniques of Singing*, (Kassel, Germany: Barenreiter, 2012) 13 - 19.

redefine and denaturalize the acceptable parameters of human vocal expression.²⁴ Such techniques aim to challenge existing symbolic frameworks of musical understanding that shape the ways in which we might experience vocal subjectivity within a given socio-cultural context.

In the early 1960s, as a New York-based, avant-garde performance artist, Ono began to experiment with such modes of extreme vocal production. Her experimental vocal works from this era often had an overtly feminist political imperative; she sought to employ her voice as a means of challenging the gender and race-based discrimination she experienced within contemporary, white male-dominated performance art scenes. Inspired by avant-garde, extended vocal techniques, free jazz, traditional Japanese *kabuki* repertoire, as well as studio experimentations with electronic machinery such as backwards tape-loops and sound collage, Ono began to deconstruct the boundaries of her vocal subjectivity, and push her vocal apparatus towards what I interpret to be a matrixial, trans-subjective potentiality.²⁵ Ono's most distinctive technique that she honed during the late 1960s was that of multiphonic vibrato. First brought into the avant-garde by Roy Hart, multiphonic vibrato is a practice whereby a singular voice is able to rapidly oscillate through fluctuating partials that comprise a given pitch, thereby

²⁴ A former soldier and survivor of the horrors of trench warfare, Wolfsohn regarded such extra-normal vocal explorations as both an aesthetic pursuit, as well as a psychotherapeutic practice that enabled himself and his students to deal with past traumatic experiences. Wolfsohn's belief in the healing power of an extra-normal vocality fits nicely with the Ettingerian psychoanalytic conception of the matrixial voice as a psychic element that can bring about powerful -- and potentially healing -- experiences of matrixial self-fragilization. In opening up the voice beyond the limits of its unified, phallic subjectivity, Wolfsohn's patients were able to access what we might term, a trans-subjective vocality, or, a trans-subjective vocal resonance between the I and non-I. It is likely that such a matrixial vocality enabled Wolfsohn's pupils to conjure and release psychic trauma that could not find expression and resolution within the normative, musico-aesthetic order of unified vocal self-hood.

²⁵ See Kyle Gann's *Village Voice* interview reproduced in Alan Clayson's *The Incredible Life of Yoko Ono*, (Surrey: Chrome Dreams, 2004), 141.

deconstructing a stable pitch class referent. A multiphonic vibrato is produced by separating the function of the two primary vocal folds, so that the vocalist is rapidly alternating between vocal folds.²⁶ A vocal practice uncommon to western vocal traditions, the use of multiphonic vibrato gives rise to a trans-subjective vocal aesthetics whereby two contactual vocal subjective grains emerge in tandem.

Another matrixial vocal technique honed by Ono was that of timbral flux. In her extended vocalizations, Ono's voice often slips in and out of a range of tones and timbres. While Ono most often adopts a strident vocal tone inspired by Japanese *kabuki* song, her vocal timbre often switches from such an ethnic, human-sounding sonority into artificial-sounding, or electronic-sounding timbres. Beginning with her free jazz collaborations with Ornette Coleman, and later developed in the context of her collaborations with John Lennon's noise guitar in The Plastic Ono Band, Ono would strain her voice to match the timbres of accompanying instruments, such as the saxophone or electric guitar, giving rise to a vocality imbued with a posthuman timbral undecidability. In my following analyses of Ono's vocal techniques, I will draw attention to the ways in which the timbral flux within her voice suggests the presence of several contactual vocal subjectivities in emergence.

It is my contention that Ono's use of the extended vocal techniques of multiphonic vibrato and timbral flux together contribute to a matrixial trans-subjective vocal aesthetics — and through engaging in a matrixial listening practice, we might approach the ways in which such performances work to fragilize and resist normative modes of gendered subjectivization. Due to Yoko Ono's transnational background, and

²⁶ For detailed discussion of the mechanics of multiphonic techniques see Edgerton pp. 81 - 112. See also Isherwood, pp. 73 - 76.

the eastern, specifically Japanese, vocal-sonic referents that influence her vocal style, in the context of the present study, an Ettingerian psychoanalytic framework must be expanded to consider the ethnic-cultural dimensions of Ono's matrixial vocal trans-subjectivity. Furthermore, owing to the timbral fluctuations Ono evokes between human and non-human sounds, her vocality must also be considered in terms of the posthuman sonic grains emergent within her voice. In considering Ettingerian theory through the voice of Yoko Ono, I thus hope to position the theory of the matrixial borderspace, and the matrixial voice, in dialogue with psychoanalytic models of post-colonialism and posthumanism. Although matrixial psychoanalytic theory has thus far dealt primarily with gendered subjectivization, considering the works of a transnational figure such as Yoko Ono demands an expansion of Ettinger's psychoanalytic model to include considerations of race, ethnicity, and the ontological boundaries of the human.

In order to accomplish both a nuanced reading of Ettingerian theory in relation to the vocal experimentations and historical influence of Yoko Ono, I will begin my study with a chapter on Yoko Ono as an experimental vocalist, providing a taxonomy of her vocal techniques and influences, grounded in analyses of several key works. The second chapter constitutes a two part, philosophically grounded exploration of Ettingerian theory in the context of Ono's short film, *Fly* (1971); the first part of the inquiry will work through the matrixial, trans-subjective operations of Ono's voice, while the second portion will delve into the postcolonial and posthuman implications of her performance. The third chapter will move to an historical analysis of Ono's influence on the history of underground and experimental vocal practices, featuring analyses of artists from punk rock and New Wave scenes from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, a

time of intensified vocal experimentation within underground popular music genres. The final chapter will comprise an account of vocalists in the current Los Angeles underground scene; artists at the cutting edge of vocal experimentation, many of whom cite Yoko Ono as a key influence. Providing the reader with excerpts from interviews conducted with current underground artists, the final chapter is designed to give the reader a glimpse into emergent trends in matrixial vocality, pointing to future directions in counter-hegemonic vocal praxis and the use of the voice as a tool of cultural resistance.

Chapter 1

Matrixial Sonic Encounters in a World of Stickiness: Yoko Ono's Studio Album, *Fly* (1971) and the Proto-Ethics of Vocal Experimentation

[The] optimism of thinking that as long as one discards one's consciousness, and leaves oneself in the hands of random operation, one could immediately turn into a reed. This line of thought rubs me the wrong way... I wish not to be confused with the high-minded types who feel they have achieved Satori by becoming plant-like. I am still groping in the world of stickiness.

— Yoko Ono, *The Word of a Fabricator* (1962)²⁷

Yoko Ono's impassioned manifesto, "The Word of a Fabricator," originally published in the May 1962 issue of the avant-gardist *Sōgetsu Art Center Journal*, rails against the artistic practices of her contemporaries, and expresses her visceral reaction to a dominant avant-garde praxis that aims to transcend the human condition in favor of a "plant-like" ontology. At the time of the publication of her controversial manifesto, Ono and her husband, experimental composer, Toshi Ichianagi, were housed as artists-in-residence at The Sōgetsu Art Center, a renowned school of flower arrangement, or *ikebana*, that took on the guise of an avant-garde cultural hub in Tokyo from 1958 to 1971. Ono's repudiation of a "plant-like" aesthetic could thus be interpreted as a tongue-in-cheek jibe at the Sōgetsu establishment, although her pointed critique takes aim at a more specific target, namely, the forms of "eastern-inspired," mid-century western

²⁷ Reproduced in Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks., *Yes: Yoko Ono* (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2000), .285. Originally published in *The Sōgetsu Art Center Journal* 24, May 1962. Interestingly, the last two sentences of the above quotation, "I wish not to be confused with the high-minded types...I am still groping in the world of stickiness," do not appear in the Japanese original. In the original text, it states, "*jibun wa motto kodawatta sekai in imasu*," which roughly translates to "I live in a world of much more refined sensibilities." It seems that Ono altered this portion of her manifesto as part of her own English translation published in 1999. One can only surmise as to why Ono would not have included this sentence in the original manifesto. It is possible that Ono self-censored this line in the original, thinking it to be too much of a direct critique of Cage. On the other hand, this line could be a late addition to the text. Taken in this light, this passage could be read as Ono reflecting on the trajectory of her career, and coming to the realization that she is *still* facing many of the same "sticky" challenges that she did as a young artist.

musical avant-gardism that were insinuating themselves upon the Sōgetsu Art Center community at the time, spearheaded by New York-based composer John Cage. In Ono's estimation, it seems, such a Cageian avant-gardism reflects a disappointingly facile interpretation of eastern philosophical models, and for her, promised little in the way of true "Satori," or enlightenment.

Ironically, however, despite her apparent disdain for the cutting-edge New York School avant-gardists, it was Ono's first husband, composer Toshi Ichianagi, who was largely responsible for facilitating the transnational exchange between the Tokyo-based Sōgetsu community and the New York School of experimental composers. In November 1961, Toshi Ichianagi curated an historic "happening" that took place at The Sōgetsu Art Center, featuring a series of performances by key composers and performers of the New York School, namely, John Cage, David Tudor, and dancer Merce Cunningham. Loosely inspired by eastern philosophy — specifically Zen Buddhism and the I-Ching, a classical Chinese text that promises divination through chance operations — The New York School of avant-gardists sought to re-think musical practice according to what they perceived as the random flux of the natural world.²⁸ Enlightenment, or "Satori," was thought to be attained by abandoning the ego and leaving one's creative practice up to chance — thereby freeing oneself from the trappings of extant musical conventions.

²⁸ According to historian Helen Westgeest, John Cage was first introduced to Zen Buddhist teachings at the Cornish School in Seattle, where he was "very impressed" by what he perceived to be Zen's "insistence on experience and the irrational rather than on logic and understanding"(Westgeest 1996, 55). Cage continued his studies of Zen with renowned, transnational Buddhist scholar, Daisetz T. Suzuki throughout the 1940s and 50s. In the 1950s, Cage spear-headed a group of New York-based avant-garde composers, including Toshi Ichianagi, who attended regular lectures on both Zen and existentialist thought. Such early encounters with eastern philosophy in the post-war era tended to idealize Zen as a form of mysticism that was defined as diametrically opposed to western rationality. In employing chance operations in his compositions, Cage thus sought to achieve a "release from individual concerns in favor of Eastern forms of disinterestedness"(Joseph 2016, 166). Rather than a well-rounded, cultural relativist understanding of Zen and eastern philosophy, Cage thus drew inspiration from an Orientalist conception of Zen, one that constructed this religious practice as Other to the western individual.

Although such a chance-based, Cageian aesthetics aimed at a radical redefinition of western art music practice, Ono was highly skeptical of the liberatory promise offered by Cage's project. In her manifesto, Ono is careful to remind us that any attempt to become "plant-like" belies a tendency to disavow and repress the "sticky" reality of human embodied existence that in turn moors the operations of the psyche. Ono goes so far as to critique the state of Cageian "plant-like" enlightenment as a "fabrication" of the human mind, an avant-garde *illuſio* that dangerously distracts the artist from his/her positioning within a "world of stickiness."²⁹

To recast Ono's position in psychoanalytic terms, one might say that the move to transcend the human psyche in favor of a vegetative enlightenment results in the misrecognition of the structures — or, in Ono's words, the "fabrications" — of our unconscious that constitute the registers of our psychical subjectivity. In Ono's view, we cannot transcend or discard the human psyche, we can only hope to deepen our understanding of its elusive operations. For Ono, the pursuit of psychical self-understanding is thus central to art-making; she proposes that through artistic processes, we can catch a glimpse of the "truth" of our psychic selves and even reflect upon contemporary psycho-social operations. "Truth," in Ono's framework, then, is not an absolute, singular ideal, rather, it refers to the "truth" of human beings' psychic

²⁹ According to Alexandra Munroe, Ono was extremely disgruntled with the extent to which the Sōgetsu arts community deified John Cage, yet relegated her own works to an ancillary position. In fact, despite being invited to perform alongside Cage on many of his Japanese recitals, Ono felt "increasingly limited by her associations with her famous husband and "Jesus Christ" as John Cage was known to his followers." In the male-dominated avant-garde art world, Ono was seen only as "Toshi's wife and John Cage's friend"(Munroe 2000, 26).

fabrications brought to light — the endemic lies of our unconscious made apparent through artistic experience.³⁰

Considering her concern with uncovering the “fabrications” of the human psyche, Ono’s proposed artistic process indeed seems to evoke an aesthetics inspired by mid-20th century psychoanalytic practice. In the Freudian/Lacanian tradition, widely popularized in the European academy during the 1950s and 60s with Lacan’s influential series of lectures at the *École Normale Supérieure*, the primary objective of analysis is to ease anxieties and neuroses by bringing to consciousness the repressed operations of the human psyche. While the language of the unconscious can never be known in totality, through dialogic exchange between analysand and analyst, a relational symbolic framework emerges, wherein certain “truths” might be ascertained regarding the repressed source of a patient’s anxiety. Whereas the Freudian/Lacanian tradition of analysis tends to privilege the practice of inter-subjective discursive exchange, and also literary/textual analysis, as a means of uncovering psychological fabrications and repressed “truths,” however, Ono’s aesthetics differs from this practice in that it operates within sensory, as opposed to discursive, parameters, insisting on a much more embodied, “sticky” engagement with the human psyche. In Ono’s aesthetics, conceptual frameworks that can grant us insight into our unconscious psychological operations are thus considered to be enmeshed within the “stickiness” of corporeal, lived reality.

For Ono, it seems that there is no clearly delineated boundary between art and reality — fabrication and truth — rather, both coterminously occupy a space of sensory

³⁰ Within the Japanese original, Ono employs the term “jittai” in place of the more commonplace, Shinto-Buddhistic terms, “shinjitsu” or “makoto.” “Jittai” consists of two Chinese characters, “real” and “body,” and carries a meaning closer to “real entity” or “substance.” There is thus a markedly corporeal aspect to Ono’s notion of “truth.”

encounter.³¹ Within such a shared space, the artistic process is metaphorically characterized as a perpetual act of groping — a series of tactile encounters — “through a world of stickiness,” emphasizing the intensity and persistent viscosity of this sensory contact. The vivid, corporeal language that Ono employs suggests that for her, the artistic process is shaped by an embodied insistence through all operations of (un)consciousness and creation. Furthermore, in grounding the respective polarities of “fabrication” and “truth” within a shared space of sensory encounter, Ono’s manifesto problematizes a dialectical interpretation. Although “fabrication” and “truth” constitute oppositional constructs, they are neither *diametrically* opposed, nor mutually exclusive. Rather, they constitute co-terminous registers of psychological awareness that are set into motion through the artist’s active sensory engagement.

Notably, Bracha L. Ettinger’s “matrix” brings to mind Ono’s “world of stickiness,” a contactual sensory space wherein artists feel their way towards self-understanding.³² The emphasis that both Ono and Ettinger’s thought places on encounter and sensory contact reflects a common interest in re-thinking patriarchal models that uphold the cerebral detachment of the unified, default male subject from his embodied situatedness within the world. Just as the colorful language of Ono’s manifesto communicates a revolutionary angst, Ettinger’s evocative lexicon, too, is guided by a feminist, ethical imperative. Rather than a Levinasian conception of ethics as being grounded in an oppositional construction of self and other, however, Ettinger’s thought moves to

³² See Bracha L. Ettinger’s *The Matrixial Borderspace*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 140. “The matrixial unconscious sphere is a borderspace of simultaneous co-emergence and co-fading of the I and the uncognized non-I — partial subjects, unknown others linked to a fragmented me, partial objects — in neither fusion nor rejection.”

destabilize the primacy of the dominant phallic structural formation that produces this relation. Ettinger thus terms her mode of gendered psychic resistance as being guided by a “proto-ethics” — that is, a mode of ethical resistance that involves fragilizing the subjective boundaries of the “I” within an interconnected web, or matrix, of trans-subjective encounter.³³

Around the time of the publication of her manifesto, Ono had begun to engage in freestyle, avant-garde vocal experimentations that, in my interpretation, exemplify an Ettingerian, “proto-ethical” approach to gendered cultural resistance. As a musico-aesthetic expression that emanates from the sticky interior reaches of the human body, the voice is typically thought to be an essential evocation of one’s singular, unified subjectivity.³⁴ In her jarring vocal works, however, Ono performs uncanny timbral fluctuations and strident multiphonics that aim to denaturalize — or in what can be considered Ettingerian terms, “fragilize” — the fabrications of a unified subjectivity. In my following analyses, I will thus draw upon Ettinger’s theorizations to argue that Ono’s avant-garde vocal practice evokes a “matrixial voice,” one that holds a particularly powerful potential for enacting the psychic impulses of borderlinking and proto-ethical resistance. As noted in the Introduction, within the primordial, matrixial condition, Ettinger argues that the voice is experienced as a sonic borderlink — a “vibrating string”

³³ See “Fragilization and Resistance,” *Studies in The Maternal* 1, no.2 (2009): 1 - 31. In Ettinger’s view, a “proto-ethical” realm can be “accessed if a subject that reverberates its I/non-I transsubjective strings takes responsibility for them, so that as a subject the other is re-spected, again and again, as its transsubject and transject, and not object”(Ettinger 2009, 2).

³⁴ This western cultural tendency will be historicized and critiqued in the theoretical explorations of the following two chapters.

— that connects the I with the non-I; and it is my contention that Ono’s experimental vocality produces such an experience of a borderlinking, transformative voice.³⁵

One of the key themes of this dissertation is to consider Ettingerian trans-subjective theorizations in relation to female artists such as Yoko Ono who often occupy liminal, or transnational positionalities in the wider socio-cultural formation.³⁶ As a transnational female artist, Yoko Ono has often struggled to find acceptance within androcentric socio-cultural spheres of the east and west. While the experiences of marginalization and dis-identification often experienced by transnational feminine subjects are by no means a requirement for accessing an Ettingerian “borderlinking” aesthetics, I believe that a strong argument can be made to the effect that a lifetime of negotiating “otherness” within xenophobic, male-dominated socio-cultural structures can result in a marginalized subject prone to self-fragilization. This assertion on my part marks an extension of Ettinger’s own observation that women, as minoritarian social subjects, tend to exhibit an affinity for self-fragilization within their aesthetic encounters.³⁷ In the context of transnational, dislocated feminine subjects, it is thus highly probable that the aesthetic process of matrixial borderlinking might be accessed

³⁵ Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 184 - 5. Ettinger has remarked that her theorization of the voice begins ‘where Lacan leaves off’. In Ettinger’s interpretation of Lacan, his theorizations of the voice reach a “dead end” because he insists upon considering the voice as an originary drive-object that is related to our first experience of castration — that is, the experience of birth (Ettinger 2006, 184-5). In Ettinger’s estimation, however, the voice occupies a “different psychic sphere” beyond the phallic-castration model.

³⁶ Chapter 3 will be devoted to a theoretical exploration of matrixial theory in relation to the psychoanalytically-informed theoretical models of post-colonialism and transnationalism.

³⁷ A key aspect of Ettingerian matrixial aesthetics is that it allows for a new mode of experiencing alterity through what is termed, “matrixial borderlinking,” an aesthetic process that hinges upon a fragilization of the borders of the phallic, individuated self in order to experience the self as a co-subject linked to other emergent subjective grains. In Ettinger’s clinical experience, she finds that women are more susceptible to self-fragilization and matrixial encounter (Ettinger 2006, 181). Although such an Ettingerian “fragilization of self” does not exclusively apply to women, nor transnational persons, for that matter, I would like to consider Ono’s borderlinking aesthetics alongside her liminal social positioning as a means of arriving at a more robust understanding of her oeuvre.

as a means of therapeutically “working-through” various experiences of subjective disease.

Beginning with a biographical contextualization of Yoko Ono as a transnational child-of-war turned vocalist and conceptual artist, active within the fraught borderspaces of several coterminous art worlds, I will move to an in-depth analysis of representative tracks drawn from her 1972 studio album, *Fly*, which exemplifies the culmination of her vocal experimentations carried out during the 1960s and early 1970s. In my close analyses of the vocal techniques employed on the album, I will demonstrate how an Ettingerian theoretical framework — appropriated for musical analysis — can aid us in understanding the particular forms of proto-ethical gendered psychic resistance unfolding therein.

Biographical Contexts: Transnational Artist, Borderlinking Aesthetics

Transnational women’s lives are often colored by systemic inequities of power, gendered racial violence, and dislocation resulting from colonialist powers’ contestations over geopolitical spheres of influence. In my biographical treatment of Yoko Ono, I would thus like to begin by considering her experiences as a transnational child of war, in order to highlight the extent to which Yoko Ono’s early life was one marked by the traumas of displacement and marginalization — traumas that would directly inspire her political activism and avant-garde vocal experimentations later in life. Art historian, Alexandra Munroe, possibly the foremost scholarly authority on Yoko Ono’s life and work, tends to interpret the majority of Yoko Ono’s oeuvre in terms of the hardships she endured as a “war child,” one whose “life was transient, and often with

sudden changes.”³⁸ Despite being born into a wealthy, international banking family and spending her early years in the US, Ono was not spared the vicissitudes of the Pacific War. Shortly before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Ono family was forced to leave the country, due to the increasing hostility between Japan and the US. At this time the Ono family was torn asunder, as her father was captured as a prisoner of war in China, while Ono and her mother returned to a war-torn Tokyo.

Upon her return to Tokyo, Ono faced not only the hardships of famine and air raids, but also the cultural stigma of being branded a *kikoku-shijo*, or a “repatriate child.” The stigma attached to Yoko Ono’s perceived “westernness” was only exacerbated when military strikes against the capital of Tokyo forced the Onos to relocate to the remote, rural town of Karuizawa. Living in poverty in the Japanese countryside, Yoko Ono remembers the perpetual hunger, and the bullying she faced from the village children, who taunted her as *bata-kusai* — a racial slur once hurled at Commodore Perry and his European cohort, who were thought to “stink of butter.”³⁹ Not only was Yoko Ono a “repatriate child,” and thereby tainted by her exposure to the west, she was also a Christian, a bilingual English-speaker, and upper class — all traits that were perceived to be “other,” and therefore undesirable to the countryfolk of rural Japan. Until the end of the war, the formative years of Yoko Ono’s childhood were thus shaped by experiences of social isolation, dislocation and discrimination.

In the aftermath of the war, the reunited Ono family gradually struggled to reclaim their former, well-to-do lifestyle in the capital, grappling with the social realities

³⁸ Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks., *Yes: Yoko Ono* (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2000) 11.

³⁹ Munroe, *Yes: Yoko Ono*, 13.

of national reconstruction and the US Occupation. Despite the significant challenges she faced as a transnational, westernized young woman in an occupied, war-ravaged Japan, however, Ono was fortunate to find an intellectual and creative outlet in her post-secondary studies.⁴⁰ As a result of her family's privileged status and forward-thinking attitudes, Yoko Ono was encouraged to pursue higher education: in 1952, a young, defiant, and intellectually curious Ono received permission from her father to attend the elite Gakushuin University, as the first female student ever to enroll as a philosophy major.⁴¹ Much to Ono's benefit, the revolutionary intellectual climate of postwar Japanese academia introduced a host of new, politicized modes of thought that were particularly inspiring to a young woman who resisted conforming to the social strictures of traditional Japanese society. Within the heady intellectual atmosphere of post-war Japanese student culture, Yoko Ono came to be engrossed in existentialist and Marxist thought — progressive lines of philosophical inquiry that challenged the status quo, and called for a re-thinking and re-structuring of dominant paradigms.

Complementing her propensity for academic learning, Yoko Ono's early education was also steeped in intensive musical training. The training and encouragement she received in this area, however, was tempered by her father's gendered anxieties surrounding women's musical proficiency. Yoko Ono's father, Eisuke, was an aspiring concert pianist who was forced to give up his musical

⁴⁰ The Ono family was of a proud, progressive-thinking, noble lineage that placed the highest value on their educational pedigree. Yoko Ono's great-grandfather, Saisho Atsushi was a nobleman who fought against the feudal Tokugawa Shogunate, helping to bring about the Meiji Restoration of 1868. His daughter, Yoko Ono's grandmother, was one of the first Japanese women to attend college, completing her Bachelor's degree in English and Music in the late 19th century — a time when few Japanese women received even an elementary-level education.

⁴¹ Munroe, *Yes: Yoko Ono*, 14 - 15.

aspirations in order to take charge of the family's international banking business, and as such, he had hopes that his daughter would pursue music as a full-time career, or at least as a serious avocation.⁴² Much to her father's disappointment, however, he soon came to the conclusion that his daughter's hands were too small for her to ever to have a career as a pianist. In response to this perceived obstacle, Ono expressed a desire to pursue composition rather than performance. Convinced that women were incapable of being composers of merit, however, Eisuke Ono staunchly opposed his daughter's compositional pursuits. Yoko Ono's early musical training was thus hindered by her father's ambivalence regarding women's musical abilities: on the one hand, he desired for his daughter to "follow in his foot steps," but on the other, his support for her musical development was curtailed by his own gendered anxieties concerning women's lack of musical creativity. Eisuke's lack of support for his daughter's early musical aspirations, however, failed to discourage Yoko Ono from doggedly pursuing her passion for creative expression and intellectual development as she entered young adulthood. Although the gendered role of "composer" amounted to yet another social category from which Ono was excluded, this form of exclusion, and its attendant experience of dis-identification, was nothing new to a transnational woman who was forced to occupy a liminal positioning vis-à-vis multiple cultural spheres throughout her young life.

After only a year's study as a philosophy major at the forward-thinking Gakushuin University, Yoko Ono and her family relocated across the Atlantic once again, and at that time, she was afforded the opportunity to pursue her musical and artistic education at the prestigious Sarah Lawrence College in New York. Residing in

⁴² Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Yoko Ono* (Cologne, Germany:Verlag der Buchhandlung, 2009), 7.

Scarsdale, an up-scale suburb of New York, Yoko Ono was now close to the avant-garde art capital of the world, and quickly entered the bohemian intellectual circles of the Ivy League colleges. It was during her time at Sarah Lawrence that Ono uncovered her passion for avant-garde art, and started on a path that would eventually lead her to be acknowledged as a key figure within the bohemian downtown art scene. Upon completing two years at Sarah Lawrence, Ono left school to establish an artists' loft on Chambers Street in downtown New York, which soon became a key venue for hosting performance art events the city. The performances held at Ono's Chambers Street loft came to be hugely influential cultural events attended by key figures in experimental music and high art, including John Cage, La Monte Young, George Brecht, Marcel Duchamp, and Jasper Johns, amongst others. Referred to as "situations" or "happenings," the participatory events that took place at the Chambers Street loft consisted of musical performances and theatrical experiments designed to conceptually challenge the audience's preconceived notions regarding what constitutes art, music, and theater. The artists involved in these loft "happenings" formed a collective known as Fluxus; a group that was later credited with initiating the movement of conceptual art — an art form that aimed to democratize high art by integrating aspects of everyday life into artistic praxis.

Although one would expect such a progressive coterie of artists to appreciate Ono's contributions as a founding member of their conceptual art movement, racial and gender-based anxieties relegated Ono to a problematic position within Fluxus. In Ono's own words:

Being a woman and doing my thing in the [Fluxus] days was especially hard because I was a woman. Most of my friends were all male and they tried to stop me from being an artist. They

tried to shut my mouth and tried to get me as an owner of the loft who helped in concerts.. I was not seriously taken as an artist because I was a woman.⁴³

In a more recent interview, Ono remembers the hostility she faced from her peers in the days of her loft concerts:

It was such an incredible new thing and was so successful, everyone was upset about it. All the other artists tried to kill it - not kill the situation, they loved the situation, but they didn't want me to get the credit. 'A Japanese girl - I've heard she is the mistress of a Chinese man.' I didn't know where that Chinese man idea came from. I was not a mistress of any guy. I'm not going to go into who said what, but it was a very painful situation.⁴⁴

In the context of Fluxus, Ono's predominantly white male colleagues thus persisted in viewing her as a salonnière-type figure within their art world instead of a bona fide artist in her own right. As a Japanese woman, Ono also faced the additional burden of being type-cast as an exotic, "kept woman," despite her financial independence and her ownership of the Chamber Street Loft space. As a result of such gendered racial anxieties on the part of her male cohort who resisted acknowledging her as an equal, Yoko Ono's contributions to the Fluxus movement were consistently undermined.

In a 1992 *Village Voice* interview with critic Kyle Gann, Yoko Ono recounted the extreme dis-ease she felt within the Fluxus scene, in particular during the free improvisatory "loft concerts" that she took part in alongside key figures of avant-garde music. Ono recounts: "it was all just a head trip. The avant-garde boys didn't use the voice. They were all just so cool, right? There was also [a] very asexual kind of atmosphere in the music. And I wanted to throw blood."⁴⁵ Ono's recollection gives rise to the impression that despite the progressive ethos of Fluxus, and its desire to challenge

⁴³ Ono quoted in Midori Yoshimoto, Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers UP, 2005), 86.

⁴⁴ Ono quoted in Obrist, *Yoko Ono*, 37.

⁴⁵ Ono quoted in Kyle Gann, "The Part That Doesn't Fit Is Me (Interview with Yoko Ono)," *Village Voice*. August 11, 1992, 69.

the conventional boundaries of western art music, the so-called “free” improvisatory sessions were in fact not so free; rather, these performances were structured according to white hetero-normative assumptions regarding gendered musical practice. For men of the Fluxus generation, it was assumed that vocality was a feminized musical domain – the voice being thought of as the most deeply embodied, instinctual, and thus feminine, mode of musical expression. On the other hand, instrumental prowess and the mastery of technology was perceived to be a masculine pursuit. In her angst-filled declaration, Ono hones in on her use of the voice as a marker of her gendered alterity within this repressive cultural milieu; at the same time, however, Ono is also keenly aware that her feminized vocality could be reclaimed as an instrument of resistance against the avant-garde “boys club.” In Ono’s estimation, the masculine need to seek out musical expression exclusively through the use of instruments was an “asexual” move that assured a safe distance between their performing bodies and a cerebral, disembodied experience of “the music itself.” This perceived, masculine denial of the body was directly challenged by Ono’s desire to “throw blood” through her vocal performance, a defiant act that foregrounds feminine embodiment, and wields it as a weapon of gendered resistance. Ono’s visceral vocal disruption of such Fluxus “happenings” thus resonates with the ethos of her manifesto, “The Word of the Fabricator,” in which she argues that art is implicated within deeply embodied, and decidedly “sticky” creative processes.

Despite her dis-identification with the gender-based ideologies that defined the Fluxus’ group’s musical practices, Ono was nonetheless inspired by the movement’s commitment to encouraging audience involvement in performance art, which she

regarded as an opportunity to unite the artist and audience in a mutual “groping through the world.” Her event scores and instructional paintings composed throughout the 1960s encouraged her audiences to re-conceptualize the everyday world in implausible and highly imaginative ways. While many of these conceptual works were playful in nature, countless others were also characterized by an underlying feminist impetus to critique the naturalized, even mundane operations of patriarchy. Ono’s most famed performance piece, *Cut* (1964), for example, invites the audience to participate in a grim “play” of physical and metaphorical gendered borders, where the artist’s gradual disrobement reveals not only her nude, objectified body, but also the redolent misogyny within the audience as they relish in the objectification and ridicule of the silent artist. Feminist art historian Kathy O’Dell compares Ono’s feminist conceptual art happenings to the works of Carolee Schneeman and Kate Milet, artists who sought to challenge and redefine the very concept of the “female body” through their avant-garde art happenings. Needless to say, such women artists were often marginalized, and even excommunicated from the androcentric, and decidedly body-anxious, Fluxus scene.

As a transnational woman of color relegated to a marginal positioning within the world of Fluxus, it is perhaps a testament to Yoko Ono’s determination that she soon managed to launch a successful international career as a cutting-edge conceptual artist. In 1966, at her exhibit of instructional paintings and conceptual art installations — *Unfinished Paintings and Objects* — held at the London-based, countercultural Indica Gallery, Ono first met John Lennon, her future husband and creative partner. Upon their first encounter, Lennon immediately acknowledged Ono as an artistic equal; a fiercely independent woman who opened his mind to the possibilities afforded by the

world of experimental high art.⁴⁶ A key aspect of Ono's work that appealed to Lennon was its collaborative spirit: Ono's instructional paintings and conceptual installations demanded the intellectual and artistic engagement of the viewer. The guiding concept behind an instructional painting — an art form that was widely popularized by Ono -- is that a simple set of verbal instructions can result in a "painting," or an artistic experience to unfold within an encounteral space that emerges between the artist's instructions, and the viewer's imagination. The reconceptualization of an artistic work as a shared experience moves to dismantle the traditional hierarchy of artist and viewer, repositioning the artistic work within an interpersonal space of encounter. As a leading proponent of the 1960s youth counterculture, it is no surprise that Ono's unorthodox conceptual work held great appeal to Lennon — a progressive-thinking popular musician who was, by the mid-1960s, seeking creative inspiration in artistic experiences beyond the world of rock 'n' roll.

Just as Ono introduced Lennon to the world of avant-garde conceptual art, their burgeoning creative partnership thrust Ono, too, into a new art world with which she was highly unfamiliar — that of the rock 'n' roll counterculture. Gaining exposure to rock 'n' roll, and its associated youth cultural movements, inspired Ono to explicitly politicize her artistic and musical output. Initiating their experimental musical collaborations in 1968, the year that marked a critical, if not somewhat ominous turning point for 1960's social movements in the US and the UK, Yoko Ono and John Lennon

⁴⁶ In interviews, Lennon was often known to effusively praise his wife's artistic vision, likening her to many of the "great" artists of the western canon and contemporary pop art. In a conversation with *Rolling Stone* journalist, Jann Wenner, Lennon remarks: "Her work is far out. Has anybody understood Warhol really or understood his [films] Yoko's *Bottoms* thing is as important... But in general she can't be accepted, because she's so far out, man, it's hard to take! Her pain is such that she expresses herself in a way that hurts you! That you cannot take it! That's why they couldn't take Van Gogh and all that shit, it's too real!"(Wenner 2000, 143).

emerged as a celebrity “spokes-couple” for various pertinent political causes such as the Anti-War Movement and the Women’s Movement. Given that the 1960s marked the gradual entrance of formerly marginalized peoples into the hegemonic realm of US national politics, it is fitting that Yoko Ono, a Japanese woman, would surface as a powerful figure within the western cultural sphere at this historical moment — a cultural icon in what feminist historian, Marianne Dekoven would term, a “populist, subjectivist, multiple and diffuse” postmodern political landscape.⁴⁷

As is often the case in transformative historical periods, however, we see that despite the winds of change blowing in a new direction, certain trends of the past order still hold sway. Assuming a public position within the rock ‘n’ roll counterculture, Yoko Ono thus bore the brunt of contemporary western anxieties surrounding race, gender, and socio-cultural change. While rock ‘n’ roll promised liberation from the oppressive socio-cultural milieu of the post-war era, it was still a highly androcentric, and predominantly white cultural sphere. Throughout the 1960’s, the majority of women musicians continued to be objectified within popular music genres, often relegated to the role of the highly commodified pop singer. The mainstream media’s backlash against Yoko Ono no doubt stemmed from gendered racial anxieties that were evoked as a result of an independent-minded, Japanese woman asserting herself as equal to her partner, John Lennon, a white popular cultural “hero.”

The gendered racial anxieties evoked by Ono’s presence within Lennon’s inner circle culminated in the perpetuation of the erroneous myth that she was responsible for the dissolution of The Beatles — a particularly damaging trope that endures to this day.

⁴⁷ Marianne Dekoven., *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), xvi.

In her most recent interview, Ono recounts her frustrations with the negativity that she endured as a result of this mis-representation of her involvement in her husband's career:

It feels like I was accused of something I didn't do, which was breaking up the Beatles. That was like being somebody in prison without having done anything wrong. It's like you're accused of murder and you're in prison and you can't get out. That's why I finally came to the conclusion to use that big energy of hatred that was coming to me and turn it around into love.⁴⁸

The “big energy of hatred” that Ono describes above can perhaps be interpreted as an extreme public reaction against a female artist, and a woman of color, who could not easily be situated within a comfortable, pre-existing pop-cultural categorization. At this time, there was no contemporary western pop cultural precedent for an independent, non-conformist Asian woman artist involved in making challenging, ground-breaking experimental music.⁴⁹ Ono certainly did not conform to the ideal standards of feminine decorum set by the other blonde and demure “Beatle Wives.”⁵⁰ Her visible racial alterity, and her defiant, non-conformist persona made her a target upon which the mainstream media could unleash their anti-Japanese, racist hostilities that were lingering not-so-deep-beneath the surface since the end of WWII.

Ono's expressed desire to transform the racially inflected “big energy of hatred” back into a positive force of “love” points to a wider ethical imperative that guides her creative output. In the following quotation, Ono recounts how she was able to harness

⁴⁸ Ono quoted in Elvis Mitchell, “Yoko Ono: On Finding Peace, Love, and — At Long Last — Understanding,” *Interview: The Art Issue*, Dec/Jan 2014, 100.

⁴⁹ Given the current preponderance of avant-garde Japanese women in popular music — Satomi Matsuzaki of Deerhoof, Yuka Honda and Miho Hatori of Cibbo Matto, and Naoko Yamano of Shonen Knife, to name but a few — it can be argued that Yoko Ono was instrumental in breaking down cultural barriers for transnational Japanese women musicians of future generations.

⁵⁰ See Tamara Levitz's characterization of the “pretty, white, submissive Beatle wife,” included in her article, “Yoko Ono and the Unfinished Music of ‘John & Yoko’: Imagining Gender and Racial Equality in the Late 1960s,” in *Impossible to Hold: Women and Culture in the 1960's*, eds. Avital H. Bloch and Lauri Umansky, (New York and London: New York UP, 2005), 220.

the negative energy that was hurled at her by the mainstream media, and utilize it for a positive purpose — as a source of inspiration for her socially-transformative performance art:

I was able to go on and on and on doing what I was doing because what I was doing was rejected. So it's a blessing, in a way - a very strange blessing. Because if what I was doing back then would have been totally accepted... then I would have been dead as an artist, stuck in one place. But I couldn't get stuck in one place because people kept whipping me, so I always thought, "Go on, do another thing."⁵¹

Ono's pursuit of forward-thinking modes of artistic expression in the face of widespread rejection and persecution — a metaphorical “whipping” — resulted in her being perceived as a troublesome anomaly in late 1960s popular culture. Much to the chagrin of many Beatles fans, by the end of 1968, Ono and Lennon had embarked upon a series of experimental musical collaborations that veered into sonic territories far beyond the scope of conventional popular music. The first of these works were enigmatic sound collage pieces — *Two Virgins* (1968) and “Revolution No.9” (1968) — which stand as some of the first examples of avant-garde musical practice being made available to the general public. Splicing together tape loops with live recordings of visceral screams and troubling bodily sounds, these experimental works were shaped by Ono and Lennon's desire to disrupt conventional narrative structures of music.

Ono's avant-garde studio collaborations with Lennon soon led to the formation of the Plastic Ono Band, a live blues-rock band featuring Ono's free-style vocal improvisations set to noise-laden rock guitar stylings. Ono's intense, screaming vocality was inspired by the “Primal Therapy” sessions that she and Lennon took part in throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. This unique mode of psychotherapy was

⁵¹ Ono quoted in Mitchell, “Yoko Ono: On Finding Peace, Love, and — At Long Last — Understanding,” 102.

expounded by U.S. psychiatrist, Arthur Janov, whose influential work, *The Primal Scream*, hinges on the release of social repression through the practice of screaming. Just as Ono once metaphorically “threw blood” upon the androcentric Fluxus scene with her unbridled vocal improvisations, Ono’s primal screams with the Plastic Ono Band likewise aimed to shake-up the male-oriented, guitar-centric world of the rock ‘n’ roll counterculture. In Tamara Levitz’s estimation, Ono succeeds in this aim, as her searing vocal improvisations on tracks such as “Don’t Worry Kyōko” effectively mark a “sonic victory” over Eric Clapton’s virtuosic, hyper-masculine guitar work.⁵²

Although often met with critical scrutiny from the mainstream media, Ono’s confrontational vocal performances with the Plastic Ono Band resonated with the ethos of the contemporary Free Speech Movement (FSM), which placed a great deal of importance on “raising one’s voice” to bring about revolutionary change. The success of the FSM forged a powerful link between the vocalization and the actualization of utopic ideals in the minds of socio-cultural activists and artists in the 1960’s.⁵³ While Ono’s desire to challenge and redefine conventional styles of vocal expression is thus closely tied to her ethical commitment to progressive, feminist and anti-racist politics, in the

⁵² Levitz, “Yoko Ono and the Unfinished Music of ‘John & Yoko’: Imagining Gender and Racial Equality in the Late 1960s,” 230. Ono’s feminist political impetus to “throw blood” often resulted in her taking on a consciously disruptive, subversive, performative persona. Aside from her famed vocal “vanquishing” of Eric Clapton at the Toronto Live Peace concert of 1969, one can also think of performances such as John and Yoko’s historic appearance on the 1972 *Dick Cavett Show*, wherein Ono’s extended vocalizations play havoc with Chuck Berry and Lennon’s particularly smug, collaborative rendition of “Memphis Tennessee.” Although protesting male-dominated music culture was not her sole cause — Ono’s vocal work involved a refined aesthetic sensibility developed over a decade — she was nonetheless keenly aware of her vocal performances’ disruptive potential.

⁵³ Notably, prior to her collaborations with Lennon, Ono was also influenced by the free jazz movement. In conversation with Jacques Derrida, saxophonist Ornette Coleman defines free jazz as a politicized musical form that aimed to deconstruct western musical language and to “devise a new language of origin for the descendants of black slaves”(Derrida, 1997). In her 1968 improvisatory collaboration with Coleman, “AOS,” Ono produces a strident vocal tone reminiscent of the traditional Japanese *kabuki* vocal style, and then gradually pushes her voice to match the timbre of Coleman’s saxophone. In the interplay between the screaming voice and the wailing saxophone, there arises a timbral borderspace en-voicing layered cultural experiences of gendered racial trauma.

context of my current study, I hope to point out an attendant, proto-ethical dimension that also operates within her vocality. According to Ettinger's matrixial analytic model, whereas ethical considerations foreground the moral positioning of a unified individual selfhood, proto-ethical considerations hone in on the ways in which a subjectivity might be fragilized and repositioned within an interconnected web of trans-subjective linkage. Such a re-contextualization of the subject as a "trans-subject" poses a radical challenge to the phallogentric structures that produce the often inequitable, differential relation of "self and other." In my following analyses of Ono's representative vocal works drawn from her 1972 studio album, *Fly*, I will thus attend not only to the progressive politics that are thematized in her works, but also draw attention to the ways in which Ono's experimental vocal practice works to fragilize, fragment, and resituate her feminine vocal subjectivity within a borderlinking web of resistant, trans-subjective sonic resonance.

Yoko Ono's Studio Album, *Fly* (1971)

The title of Ono's studio album, *Fly*, references a concept that Ono has revisited and reworked in various projects and happenings throughout her artistic career. Beginning with a one word instruction piece included as an entry in her anthology, *Grapefruit* (1964) — an otherwise blank page containing the word "fly" — Ono has explained her attraction to this word in terms of her fascination with flying, and also the metaphorical notion of spiritual flight, or liberation. In the mid-1960s, Ono put together several light-hearted conceptual art "happenings" where participants were provided

with ladders of varying heights, and asked to “fly.”⁵⁴ In contrast to such “flights-of-fancy” that characterized her earlier conceptual works, however, Ono’s ambitious double-album, *Fly*, presents a set of searing experimental vocal performances that both rise to frenzied peaks and plumb the depths of the vocalist’s psychic pain. Recorded in 1971, in the midst of Ono’s involvement in Primal Scream Therapy and anti-war activism, the vocal performances of *Fly* thematize the alienation, dislocation and trauma suffered by a transnational woman artist working in androcentric cultural spheres at a time of intensified US military aggression and social upheaval. In addition, I will propose an attendant, matrixial layer to my analyses, teasing out the ways in which Ono moves to fragilize the boundaries of her unified vocal subjectivity within a repertoire of gendered resistance.

A studio album that was recorded as a series of improvisatory sessions, *Fly*, for the most part, eschews concise, standard rock song structures, and features extended, through-composed pieces that draw upon avant-garde vocal experimentations as well as an extensive use of contemporary studio effects. Backed by an all-star band comprised of John Lennon, Eric Clapton, Ringo Starr, Klaus Voorman, and a host of top ranking session musicians, Ono emphasized the importance of utilizing the first take, firmly stating, “I don’t believe in doing things over, and unless it is a really bad take, I believe in the first take.”⁵⁵ Rather than producing a commercially accessible rock album, Ono’s concept for *Fly* was thus to record raw, improvised moments in the studio. Inspired by her Janovian “scream therapy” sessions, many key tracks from Yoko Ono’s *Fly*,

⁵⁴ This playful interpretation of “fly” was later revised according to a darker set of meanings, however, inspiring a short film of a woman’s lifeless body explored by an errant fly — an unsettling visual narrative that will be the focus of my following two chapters.

⁵⁵ Yoko Ono Interview with *Crawdaddy* magazine, reprinted in Munroe, *Yes: Yoko Ono*, 282.

including “Don’t Worry Kyōko,” “Hirake,” “Why,” and “Mind Train,” include extended vocal passages that can be likened to primal screams. Delivered in a strident vocal tone inspired by Japanese *kabuki* song, or *nagauta*, Ono’s extended vocalizations evoke an “exotic,” nonwestern vocality accompanied by a conventional western rock ’n’ roll band formation.⁵⁶ As a young woman, Ono received several years of training in *nagauta* performance from her mother, and no doubt drew upon this influence in the production of her *kabuki*-esque vocality. One of the defining features of *nagauta* is its strained vocal tone, the production of which is extremely demanding on the performer. According to *nagauta* scholar William P. Malm, the vocal tone of *kabuki* originates “in the abdomen, and as it rises passes from a primarily chest tone to more of a head tone. The throat remains very tense and the tone is forced into the upper register without resorting to a falsetto.”⁵⁷

Pushing her vocal apparatus to produce such an impossibly tense vocal tone, Ono’s extended vocal phrases often break into a shrieking, multiphonic vibrato. Whereas conventional vibrato refers to the rapid oscillation between two pitches, multiphonic vibrato sounds an oscillating set of pitches that vibrate with such speed so that they seem to overlap, or occur simultaneously — that is, the pitches “do not feature complete contrapuntal independence.”⁵⁸ Physiologically, such an effect is produced by

⁵⁶ In an interview with Robert Palmer included in the liner notes of her 1992 *Ono Box* compilation, Ono has stated the following regarding her vocal influences: “There are so many ways of using the throat and vocal cords, you can use different areas, different parts of the body to express different emotions. As far as influences in my singing, I got a lot from Alban Berg’s operas, like his *Lulu*... There’s a lot of Japanese *kabuki* influence, from the old Japanese was of singing. There’s a particular *kabuki* singing style called *hetai*, [*sic.*] a kind of storytelling form that’s almost like chanting and requires you to strain your voice a bit. I also listened to tapes of my voice playing backwards and tried to make sounds like that. And I listened to Tibetan singing, Indian singing... All that mixed.”

⁵⁷ William P. Malm, *Nagauta: The Heart of Kabuki Music*, (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1959), 49.

⁵⁸ Edgerton, *The 21st-Century Voice: Contemporary and Traditional Extra-Normal Voice*, 89.

asymmetrical biphonation, or the ability to simultaneously generate two (or more) independent, audible frequencies from each vocal fold. Asymmetrical biphonation can also be employed to produce sub-harmonics, a practice adopted by Tuvan throat singers. Several of the tracks contained in *Fly*, such as “Airmale,” and “Mind Holes” evoke Tuvan multiphonic techniques such as sub-harmonics and extended pitch to air ratios. Ono’s sub-harmonics, however, are not entirely acoustically produced: she is often aided by studio technologies. Her multiphonic vibrato, on the other hand, is performed without studio effects. Prior to Ono’s use of multiphonic vibrato in the Plastic Ono Band, the use of vocal multiphonics was virtually unheard of in the western world. In the years following Ono’s multiphonic vocal experimentation, however, avant-garde vocalists such as Joan La Barbara and Meredith Monk gradually began to experiment with this technique.⁵⁹

Complementing her strident, *kabuki*-esque multiphonics, Ono’s extended vocal technique also features radical timbral fluctuations that allow her voice to slip in and out of acoustic, “human-sounding” vocal timbres and “artificial-sounding,” or “electronic-sounding,” vocal timbres. What is particularly uncanny about Ono’s timbral manipulations is that they are often performed without the aid of studio technologies.

⁵⁹ Beginning in the 1960s, some composers and performers began to investigate the modern voice through extended vocal techniques. A key aspect of such explorations was expanding the possibilities of the human voice beyond classical and popular singing styles, and also, to feature the improvisatory works of performer-composers. Extended vocal techniques were more prominent within the European avant-garde, spearheaded by the Roy Hart School. Roy Hart was perhaps one of the only figures in the western music world experimenting with vocal multiphonics in the 1960s. Although I have not been able to determine if Ono was directly exposed to his work, her use of multiphonics indeed marks an innovative departure from the extended vocal works of artists such as Cathy Berberian. Following Ono’s experimentations in the late ‘60s, artists such as Meredith Monk and Joan La Barbara began to heavily experiment with multiphonics. In interviews, however, these artists do not cite Ono as an influence. Their adoption of multiphonics may have occurred as a result of the influx of world music into the western cultural sphere from the late 60s onwards. In my estimation, however, Ono’s work is extremely innovative in that she was one of the first vocalists who incorporated the use of multiphonics within the North American musical sphere.

Ono's audibly acoustic human voice taking on a seemingly "non-human," artificial timbre has a particularly disconcerting effect that brings about a sonic deconstruction of the expected timbral parameters of the human voice. In the context of Ono's work on *Fly*, several vocal timbres often emerge within a single extended phrase — timbres that might *seem to be* arising from multiple vocal subjects or artificial sound sources. The timbral borderspaces that emerge in Ono's extended vocal performances thus give rise to an undecidable vocal subjectivity couched within a timbral matrix of shared alterity — a series of subjective timbral grains emerging within a sticky, embodied matrix of trans-subjective sonic encounter.⁶⁰

"Midsummer New York"

*Wake up in the morning, my hands cold in fear.
And midsummer New York my heart shakes in terror.
My heart, my hands, my legs, my mind,
Everything I touch is shaking, shaking, shaking, shaking,
Shake, shake, shake, shake, shake, shake, shake, oooh.*

*Wake up in the morning, the bed's wet in sweat.
And midsummer New York, scream in the mirror.
And the door, and the chairs, and the floor, and the ceiling,
Everything you see is aching, shaking, shaking, shaking,
Shake, shake, shake, shake, shake, shake, shake, oooh.
- Yoko Ono, "Midsummer New York," *Fly* (1971)*

Although not a track that features lengthy, extended screams, the album opener of *Fly*, "Midsummer New York," nonetheless gives an introductory "taste" of Ono's extended vocal technique — preparing the listener for the jarring vocal acrobatics to follow. Set against a chugging, bluesy accompaniment with conventional rock instrumentation, Ono's vocal performance on "Midsummer New York" nonetheless

⁶⁰ Ono's use of timbral flux, and the attendant implications concerning vocal subjectivity, and vocal ontology, will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

presents a radical reinterpretation of a normative, anglophone, masculine rock 'n' roll vocality. Rather than a self-assured rock 'n' roll jaunt through the Big Apple, "Midsummer New York" presents a transnational Japanese woman whose alternating vocalizations of joy and pain reflect her grappling with a set of ambivalent affective states that point to a dis-identified, feminine vocal subjectivity in crisis — the oppressive heat of the foreign metropolis functioning as a metaphor for the weight of a repressive social-cultural climate.

Before her vocal performance gradually "shakes" out of control, plumbing the depths of the subject's psychic pain and dis-ease, Ono begins her performance of "Midsummer New York" with an unbridled gusto that would seem to set the tone for an upbeat, high-spirited rock 'n' roll romp. With introductory melodic content that draws heavily on Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel," Ono's opening vocal delivery is energetic and positively effusive to the point of mania — her excitement barely containable as she greedily gasps for air between each phrase. A vocal performance that noticeably lacks the smooth, sustained crooning technique of Presley's rockabilly vocal styling, however, Ono makes no attempt to polish or restrain her vocal exuberance, nor does she work to conceal her non-western ethnic identity that is redolent within her *kabuki*-esque vocal tone as well as her thick Japanese accent. Ono's unbridled, screeching delivery combined with her unapologetic expression of her positioning as a cultural outsider suggests an empowered appropriation of a white hetero-male oriented commercial rock genre. Baffled by the cultural incongruity of a Japanese woman singing rock 'n' roll at full throttle, many contemporary critics interpreted Ono's performance as a parody. The impassioned delivery of Ono's vocals, however, seems to complicate this reading of

“Midsummer New York” — and points to contemporary critics’ inability to comprehend or accept the validity of a rock ’n’ roll vocality emanating from an Japanese, gendered racial Other.

Despite Ono’s energetic opening, however, “Midsummer New York” soon falls into a conflictual, unstable, “shaking” vocality, one that gives voice to the song’s troubling, underlying narrative of a vocal protagonist’s imminent subjective fragilization. In line with this interpretation, the most frequently recurring lyric of “Midsummer New York” is the word, “shaking” — its obsessive repetition evoking a disconcerting mantra. Considered in the context of canonical rock tunes such as Jerry Lee Lewis’ “Whole Lotta Shakin” (1957), The Swingin Blue Jeans’ “The Hippy Hippy Shake” (1963), and Presley’s “All Shook Up” (1957), the trope of “shaking” in rock ’n’ roll would typically reference a youthful positivity, in particular, masculine virility and sexual prowess. In “Midsummer New York,” however, the iconic rock ’n’ roll swagger of Ono’s initial vocality soon falls into frantic utterances of the word, “shaking,” suggestive of an unfolding psychic turmoil. Enhanced with an analog delay effect, Ono’s repetition of the word, “shaking” has a fragmentary effect upon her once confident, unified vocal subjectivity. In the context of Presley’s’ early Sun recordings, musicologist, Peter Doyle has argued that a distinctive reverb effect was used as a means of displacing Presley’s voice from the center of the sound space, symbolically recasting him as an appealing “outsider” figure — a country boy, a renegade — an irresistible “bad boy” of rockabilly. The heavy use of analog delay on Ono’s voice, too, serves to situate her voice as refracted and decentralized in the sound space, although this fragmentation of her voice carries radically different meanings for Ono as compared with Presley. Laden with delay, Ono’s

tremulous repetitions come to be imbued with subtle rhythmic and spatial disjunctures that result in a sonic impression of vocal-subjective fragilization.⁶¹ Rather than evoking a metaphorical, binaristic division between the outsider, rock 'n' roll “bad boy” and a normative “good guy” persona, Ono’s vocal fragmentation presents her not only as an outsider, but as a vocal subjectivity that refuses to play within such a binaristic framework, instead dissolving its boundaries amongst refractory, contactual “selves.”

By the end of the first verse, Ono’s fragilized vocal subject increasingly struggles with vocal-semantic utterance — stuck on a painfully choking, egressive vibrato, the word “shaking” proves to be too much of a struggle, and is shortened to its root, “shake.” Communicating a non-native English speaker’s vocality under extreme duress, Ono’s choice to drop the final conjugative syllable, “-ing,” can be interpreted as the emergence of a Japanese patois, and the artist’s performance of a her interstitial cultural positioning. Despite the pained struggles of Ono’s lead vocals, however, the bouncy accompanying rock ‘n’ roll riffage continues unabated, offering a kind of masculine containment of a central female vocalist spiraling out of control.⁶² Gripped by an intense fear, Ono’s increasingly stifled utterances of “shake” rise to a frenzy that eventually finds release in a series of two cathartic screams (at 0:54 and 1:02 respectively). The two screams successfully drown out the residual echoes of her voice — albeit momentarily — and allow the singer to briefly regain control over her fragmentary, “shaking” vocality,

⁶¹ According to musicologist Peter Doyle’s study, *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording 1900 -1960*, Presley was one of the first lead vocalists to add reverb to his voice. The use of reverb on Elvis’ voice in early recordings like “Blue Moon Over Kentucky,” in Doyle’s interpretation, reinforces Elvis’ positioning as an outsider — his voice comes to be symbolically blended with the vast reaches of the metaphorical rural landscape.

⁶² For a discussion of Susan McClary’s concept of “masculine containment” of operatic divas, see “Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen,” in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 80 - 111. This concept will be further explored in my analyses of Lene Lovich and Nina Hagen in Chapter 3.

and exert a dominance over the accompanying masculine rock band. Taken in the context of the entire album, these first two screams can be considered as truncated versions of the extended screams that Ono will unleash in the following tracks such as “Don’t Worry Kyōko,” and “Why.”

In the wake of Ono’s screams that punctuate the first portion of the song, with the onset of the second verse, Ono’s ambivalent vocal performance of summertime triumph and terror regains its momentum. Towards the beginning of the verse, Ono cries out that she is “scream[ing] in the mirror” — a particularly unsettling lyric that suggests the vocalist’s extreme dis-ease and dis-identification with her individuated self image. This troubling mirror stage is evoked, synaesthetically, in the fragmentation of her voice with analog delay. As her immediate physical environment is described as shaking out of control (*the door, the chairs, the floor, the ceiling..*) there is an implication that Ono’s fragmentary vocal persona is unravelling once again — or melting, perhaps — into a “world of stickiness” congealed together in the viscid summer heat, approaching the threshold of an encountural sonic matrix wherein the self is rendered diffuse, fragmentary, and fragilized.

“Don’t Worry Kyōko”

From the extended, multiphonic scream that opens “Don’t Worry Kyōko,” Ono takes the listener on a tumultuous journey through the pain, anguish, and rage experienced as a result of the loss of her daughter. A song written in response to a prolonged custody battle with her ex-husband, Tony Cox — ultimately resulting in his kidnapping of their daughter — “Don’t Worry Kyōko” can be interpreted as a mother’s

battle cry against the father's unlawful intervention in the maternal bond. The minimalist lyrical content of the song consists of the repetition of three words, "Don't Worry Kyōko," a mantra of feminist resistance that alternately evokes Ono's reassuring promise to find her lost daughter, as well as a threat to the wayward father. The parenthetical appendage to the song's title, "Mummy's Only Looking for Her Hand in the Snow," remains un-vocalized — representing an un-spoken wish that Kyōko will be found and brought home, as sure as her mother's snow-covered hand will re-emerge from beneath a snowdrift. Contrary to the delicate imagery of this parenthetical titular phrase, however, the searing rage expressed through the extended vocalizations of "Don't Worry Kyōko" suggest that the journey towards the reclamation of the maternal bond might not be a smooth one.

Ono's extended vocalizations in "Don't Worry Kyōko" are indeed marked by vocal techniques that conjure a resistant aesthetics. The unaccompanied delivery of Ono's opening rebel scream positions her voice at the front and center of the sound space, imbued with a powerful sense of immediacy — the backing rock band is held at bay, faded in gradually as the vocalization spirals dangerously out of control, crashing down after a 16 second torrent of cathartic multiphonic vibrato. Contrasted to a conventional, tremolo vibrato, Ono's vocal folds resist falling into a comfortable, rhythmic oscillation between two discrete pitch classes. Rather, Ono's biphonation, is predominantly asymmetrical, giving rise to an impression of two or more contactual vocal subjects fighting to emerge within her singular vocal apparatus — a technique that John Lennon famously referred to as her "sixteen-track voice." Notably, Ono's entire performance is

recorded free of studio effects, a testament to the vocal prowess exercised in her multiphonic technique.

Considering the thematic content and the extended, multiphonic passages of “Don’t Worry Kyōko,” a matrixial interpretation of Ono’s performance gives rise to an awareness of two complementary modes of gendered resistance unfolding in tandem: first, the song constitutes a feminist socio-political protest against the father’s intervention in the maternal bond (and the patriarchal judicial system’s failure to protect the sanctity of the maternal bond); second, the extra-normal vocal technique suggests a matrixial resistance to the performance of a unified vocal subjectivity. While maternal repression undergirds gendered subjective differentiation within a Lacanian symbolic structure, through the fragilization of the boundaries of the maternal vocal subject, Ono moves to assert contactual, emergent vocalities within a trans-subjective matrix. In “Don’t Worry Kyōko,” the lost maternal bond is thus recast within a resistant vocal-subjective matrix — one might even interpret Ono’s multiphonic screams as a “proto-ethical” reclamation and a reassertion of the trans-subjective bond shared between mother and daughter.

In addition to the extended multiphonics that shape “Don’t Worry Kyōko,” Ono’s vocal performance also takes the listener through a series of uncanny timbral shifts that point to a vocal subjectivity in flux. Ono’s vocal repertoire from the late 1960s and early 1970s is often characterized by her timbral mimicry of accompanying solo instruments. Tracks such as “AOS” and “Why” from *Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band* (1969) both exemplify this practice of timbral mimicry — of Ornette Coleman’s trumpet and Eric Clapton’s lead guitar, respectively. En-voicing a masculine solo instrument through her

own acoustic vocal apparatus, Ono lays claim to the power of masculine instrumental virtuosity, a form of musical power often ascribed to the male domain. Such timbral mimicry of the lead guitar is also evident on the 1971 studio recording of “Don’t Worry Kyōko;” however, there is a greater spatial separation of Ono’s lead vocals from the accompanying guitar. This spatial distance gives rise to the effect that Ono is not merely melding or blurring her voice into the timbre of an immediate, overpowering electrified instrument, but that she is evoking a distinct, hybrid vocal timbre that emanates from within the borders of her own discrete vocal subjectivity. In addition to the spatial distance that Ono’s voice maintains from the accompanying guitars, her voice also stands apart due to its clarity — it is recorded free of studio effects such as reverb and delay. Paradoxically, the spatial distance and clarity of Ono’s studio performance serve to intensify the uncanny quality of the artificial-sounding timbres that she is able to produce within her own vocal apparatus. At certain key moments in her performance, primarily towards the midpoints of each of her extended multiphonic phrases, Ono’s voice breaks into a timbre that could best be described as part human and part electric guitar (see 0:03 - 0:10; 1:07 - 1:18; 1:30 - 1:44; 2:00-11). The voice thereby assumes a fragmentary, liminal sonic ontology — its imbricated timbral layerings come to occupy a shared matrix of human and non-human, self and other(s).

Notably, the deconstructive sonic fluctuations of vocal pitch and timbre also contribute to the semantic deconstruction of Ono’s minimalist lyrical phrase, “don’t worry Kyōko.” At certain points in the performance, the lyrics, “don’t worry,” and “Kyōko” are each repeated as respective mantras; however, each time a lyrical trance is set up, it is soon disrupted by Ono’s extreme, multiphonic ululations, timbral

fluctuations, and her frequent employment of a cracked voice (2:50 - 3:00; 3:07 - 3:20; 4:40 - 4:50). The loss of the daughter, Kyōko, is thus evoked, metaphorically, through the loss of Ono's ability to voice the semantic contours of her daughter's name. As Ono relinquishes her access to the power of logos, she cedes the ability to name, control and construct her daughter's subjectivity in phallic terms. Fragmented into a multiphonic matrix, "Kyōko" ceases to exist as a distinct, named object of her mother's desire — rather, she emerges as a trans-subjective grain within a borderlinking vocality. As the fragilized maternal vocal subject undergoes the trauma of relinquishing her unified, phallic selfhood, in turn, her lost daughter is "found" within a matrixial moment of encounter.

The titular words that remain unvoiced in the context of Ono's performance, too, hold interesting implications for my current analysis. The full song title, "Don't Worry Kyōko (Mummy's Only Searching for Her Hand in the Snow)," evokes an image of a mother searching for a part of her own body that somehow remains obfuscated from the scopical field. Ono's lost daughter, Kyōko, thus comes to be conflated with the lost "hand in the snow," a missing part of Ono's embodied totality that is rendered inaccessible. Just as snow is a liminal substance, in transition from an opaque, solid state back to water, the matrixial borderspace is always in a state of emergence, its trans-subjective warp and weft revealing itself in moments of borderlinking encounter. Considered in Ettingerian psychoanalytic terms, the mother's "lost hand" can be interpreted as Ono's "groping" through a sticky maternal matrix shared between the subjective grains of mother and daughter, albeit occluded by mediating, divisive phallic structures.

In Ettinger's theorizations, the matrixial borderspace — as a psychic sphere that exists apart from phallogentric operations — is qualified as a space of proto-ethical feminine resistance. This does not, however, imply that the matrix is a unified position from whence one might lodge an ethically driven, politicized retaliation against a patriarchal social formation; rather, the matrixial borderspace marks the emergence of an alternative mode of psychic and aesthetic experience that does not conform to the structures of phallic differentiation. Matrixial, or proto-ethical resistance is not one marked by negation or retaliation: in Ettinger's words, it is “not for or against, it simply doesn't ‘play’.”⁶³ In “Don't Worry Kyōko,” however, Ono presents both forms of resistance — retaliatory and proto-ethical. On the one hand, she offers up a primal battle cry against the father, an extreme expression of feminine anger that refuses to be co-opted into the accompanying rock context. In addition, her vocal work also contains extra-normal multiphonic vocalizations, timbral fluctuations, and a semantic breakdown of the lyrics that point to another form of resistance — one that transfers meaning beyond the very building blocks of patriarchal symbolization, proposing a mode of experiencing feminine otherness as a shared space at once marked by trauma, self-fragilization, and the subjective co-emergence of mother and child.

“Airmale”

Whereas “Don't Worry Kyōko” evokes a matrixial vocality primarily through Ono's acoustically produced, extended multiphonic screams, the opening track of the second disc of *Fly*, “Airmale,” provides an interesting counterpoint in that it conjures a

⁶³ Ettinger, “Psychoanalysis and Matrixial Borderspace,” 2007.

resistant vocal-centric sound space imbued with electronically-generated multiphonic effects. The complex, layered soundscape of “Airmale” presents a phantasmagoria of troubling, otherworldly sounds that simultaneously conjure a primitivist Japanese underworld, and at other times evoke the sounds of a contemporary air raid on a Japanese community. With the aid of multi-tracking, Ono produces a layered, uncanny vocalization that I will term a “siren scream” — a baleful cry that rises and falls alongside surges of chaotic, rattling percussion. In my current analysis, I will interpret the fearsome “siren-scream” of “Airmale” as an electronically generated, multiphonic vocal subjectivity en-voicing Japanese wartime trauma as a sonic matrix of trans-subjective, shared feminine terror.

“Airmale” begins with a series of paired percussive beats of a wood block, which holds specific, yet polysemous cultural meanings for a Japanese audience. First, the beating of the wood block signals the opening of a *kabuki* play, or a particularly violent scene within *kabuki* theater. Second, the wood block is used by Japanese community fire patrols in a practice known as “*hi no yōjin*” (or, “beware of fire”) — a nightly reminder of fire safety in urban neighborhoods that are particularly prone to conflagrations. The reverberations of the wood block at the beginning of “Airmale” thus set into relief a surrounding sound space pregnant with an ominous silence. Soon enough, at 28 seconds into the track, the silence is broken as a blaring “siren-scream” erupts into the sound space. The titular pun, *Airmale*, is thus revealed as being redolent with gendered racial meanings in the context of Japan’s war time traumas. Disguised as a Japanese speaker’s possible misspelling of an English word, “Airmale” in fact marks an ironic signifier of masculine military aggression — most likely in the form of a US

military air raid, the like of which drove Ono and her family to the rural outskirts of Tokyo during WWII.

Generated within the multiphonic layerings of Ono's voice, the "siren scream" contains a lower register that sounds a sub-harmonic drone (a multiphonic technique common in Tuvan throat singing), coupled with a demonic-sounding vocal fry (an avant-garde technique produced through loosening the lower folds of the glottis). Considering the influential contemporary Japanese performance art practice of *ankoku butoh*, or "the dance of darkness," Ono's eerie, low-pitched fundamental coupled with the reverberating vocal fry can perhaps be interpreted as a primitivist evocation of atavistic evil. According to the aesthetics of *butoh*, such primitivist evocations were thought to conjure the wrath of the ancient gods in response to western military aggression.⁶⁴

Within the upper registers of her layered, multiphonic "siren scream," Ono produces a high-pitched upper partial that shifts in timbre, transforming into a strident, mechanical sounding whistle. Whereas the lower registers of the voice evoke the rage of the ancestral spirit world, the upper register thus suggest the breakdown of the boundary between woman and machine — a contemporary Japanese femininity,

⁶⁴ Within *butoh* -- often referred to as *ankoku butoh*, or "the dance of darkness" — primitive Japanese culture, such as the *yōkai* (demons) of Japanese folklore, for example, are evoked as a means of representing the horrors of contemporary warfare. Hijikata Tatsumi, the founder of *ankoku butoh*, led a dance troupe that contorted their bodies in disturbing, corpse-like poses, inspired by the atrocities of the Second World War. In *ankoku butoh*, a return to the native Japanese underworld was seen as a therapeutic means of dealing with post-war trauma — not only the unspeakable violence of the war, but also the trauma of cultural loss suffered under westernization and the U.S. occupation of Japan. The distorted, mangled bodies of *butoh* dance thus came to signify the psychological torment of the Japanese people in the wake of nuclear warfare and military defeat. Influential contemporary studies of *butoh* include Bruce Baird's *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh: Dancing in a Pool of Gray Grits* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); as well as Alexandra Munroe's *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994).

perhaps, being violently propelled into a mechanized future. In between the fundamental drone and the cyborgian higher partial, Ono unleashes an extended, anguished scream in the mid-range of her voice; drenched in delay, Ono's extended mid-range scream surges in intensity, filling the soundspace to the brim with its shadowy echoes. The "siren scream" is thus a composite vocality that straddles the borderline between past and present, woman and machine. Counter-intuitively, recorded samples of a siren are *not* incorporated into this performance: instead, the effect of an air raid siren is produced by the layerings of Ono's own voice — a layered vocality that defies unified subjectivity, and points to the emergence of a trans-subjective matrix.

Compounding the disturbing quality of this uncanny, layered multiphonic "siren scream," Ono's voice takes on decidedly infant-like timbres at certain points in the performance, particularly at the beginning of the extended screams. At 0:57, for example, Ono's vocal timbre strongly resembles an infant's cry, then soon falls back into the timbre of an adult woman. At around 3:30 - 4:30, however, Ono's screams give way to a series of gasping, infant-like vocal noises. Shifting between an infant's cries and a woman's vocal expressions of rage and fear, the timbral subject of "Airmale" is thus one that occupies a trans-subjective borderspace between child and mother. Troubling the respective timbral distinctions of human/machine, and child/mother, Ono's vocal performance thus layers the trauma of war (the clash between human life and mechanical destruction) against the feminine trauma of birth (the painful separation of mother and child). Notably, the mechanical timbres contained within the "siren scream" are not external to Ono's voice, rather, they emerge as trans-subjective grains alongside

those of mother and child. Ono's layered vocality thus evokes a matrixial web of feminine subjective grains and mechanical noise woven together in the shared trauma of wartime violence.

Ono's wailing "siren scream" occurs repeatedly throughout "Airmale," and after each release, it is drowned in a wash of fragmentary percussive sounds. The cacophonous percussive melange is performed on the invented instruments of fellow Fluxus member and iconoclast, Joe Jones. Jones' abstract percussion infuses "Airmale" with a chaotic rhythmic accompaniment, evoking the scrambling footsteps of a townspeople running to flee an impending air raid with their assorted worldly possessions in tow. Eventually, towards the denouement of the piece, the chaotic percussion gives way to propeller sounds that fade into the distance, signaling the end of the attack. After the cacophonous denouement of the air raid, however, perhaps the most unsettling moment of Ono's vocal performance ensues. At 9:27, breaking the post-raid silence, Ono's solo voice re-emerges, laden with a heavy echo effect — accompanied by the distant tinkling of wind chimes. Although the words are heavily fragmented by an echo, and difficult to discern, close listening reveals that Ono is here evoking the voice of a Japanese prostitute, calling out to a potential client: "*Ne anta, chotto asonde ikanai?*" ("Hey mister, wanna to have a good time?") The complete phrase is soon broken down, reduced to a repetition of the two syllables of the word "*anta*" — referencing "you," or "mister" — its two syllables, "an" and "ta" are further fragmented, repeatedly echoing into the emptiness of the seemingly expansive sound space, eventually fading into oblivion.

Considered in line with the thematic content referencing the Japanese underworld, and the contemporary relevance of *ankoku butoh*, this otherworldly woman's voice can be interpreted as that of a *yūrei* — a ghost from Japanese folklore. Most often represented as a vengeful woman's spirit, the *yūrei* constitutes a folkloric trope that is imbued with a feminine vocality. Typically, the *yūrei* haunts the living with her repeated chant, "*urameshiya*" ("how jealous am I"). A testament to the fate of many Japanese women marginalized and abandoned by an historically repressive, male-dominated social structure, the vengeful *yūrei* haunts the Japanese cultural imaginary in popular fiction, comics, and children's tales. In the context of "Airmale," the vengeful ghost, or *yūrei* performed by Ono taunts her potential client, as though desiring to pull him into the underworld. The ghostly prostitute's call serves as a reminder of the sexual victimization of Japanese and Asian women surrounding U.S. military bases, and the sexual slavery perpetrated by Japan's own military — dark chapters of colonialist history that are often erased from standard historical accounts of the Pacific War. Fragmentary and consisting of layered echoes, the concluding voice of "Airmale" suggests the ghostly presence of a matrix of shared feminine trauma placed under erasure.

Conclusion

A transnational artist active at a moment in history when vocal expression was considered a crucial aspect of political activism, as well as a means of bringing about the therapeutic release of psychic pain, Yoko Ono sought out unique modes of vocal production as a means of expressing her gendered racial angst and war-time trauma. Considering her long-standing commitment to political activism, and her self-

identification as a feminist, her extreme vocal works can be interpreted as driven by a powerful, ethical imperative. When interpreted through the lens of Ettingerian psychoanalytic theory, however, Ono's works can also be interpreted as offering up a form of proto-ethical resistance — that is, a matrixial resistance to patriarchal subjective formation. In this sense, Ono's extreme vocal works carry both ethical and proto-ethical dimensions — speaking to wider social issues, as well as exploring non-phallic potentialities of the gendered psyche.

According to Ettingerian feminist psychoanalysis, for an artist to go beyond a phallogocentric formation is not to voice “the unknown” or the “irretrievably lost Real,” but rather, it is to gain an awareness of the artist's psychic embeddedness within a shared matrix of psychic interconnectivity rooted in primordial, shared affective and aesthetic experience. Such matrixial resistance is attended by the associated trauma of self-fragilization; however, this mode of feminine trauma can be liberatory — it empowers one with the ability to access, or reach towards, a mode of aesthetic experience that reshapes the restrictive, male-oriented structures of phallic subjectivity. In vocal works such as “Midsummer New York,” “Don't Worry Kyōko,” and “Airmale,” Ono sounds matrixial vocalities that evoke vibrating, trans-subjective thresholds, fragilizing phallic subjectivity in search of a “world of stickiness” — one that redefines sound and subject within a moment of sensory encounter.

Chapter 2

Of Insects and Interstices: Yoko Ono's Experimental Short Film, *Fly* (1970) and the Synaesthetic Un-Mapping of the Abstract Female Nude

Part A: Woman, Fly, Gaze and Voice within a Cross-Sensory Matrix

Let a fly walk on a woman's body from toe to head and fly out of the window.

— *13 Film Scripts by Yoko Ono*, London, 1967

Starting in the mid-1960s, Yoko Ono directed a series of experimental films, each one offering a distinct conceptual meditation on the human body. In her 1970 work, *Fly*, Ono hired actress Virginia Lust to lie nude and sedated on a table, whilst over 200 flies were released into the room and allowed to explore the planes and crevices of her body. The swarming cloud of flies is not revealed to the viewer, however, until the final scene; the majority of Ono's short film employs extreme close-up camera angles that follow a single fly making its way across an abstract rendering of Virginia Lust. As with most of Ono's oeuvre, *Fly* evinces the film-maker's characteristically tongue-in-cheek feminist point of view: the displacement of Virginia Lust by an errant fly suggests a quirky reversal of the tendency in western film and visual art to focus on the spectacle of an idealized female nude. Compared with Ono's other shorts such as *Bottoms* (1965), and *Up Your Legs Forever* (1970), however, *Fly's* filmic perspective is undergirded by a darker, more deeply unsettling layer of gendered dis-ease that extends beyond an insouciant commentary on contemporary body politics. Not only is the primacy of the female nude called into question in this film, but the unfolding visual narrative of the fly's exploration of Virginia Lust conjures primordial fears of the defilement and

contamination of bodily borders. Owing to the camera's abstraction and fragmentation of Virginia Lust, her corporeal boundaries are significantly destabilized, opening the filmic space to a potentially anxiety-inducing border-crossing between woman and insect.

When interviewed by film scholar Scott McDonald in regards to the inspiration behind her short film, Ono playfully eschews a straightforward response; instead, she relates a seemingly non-sequitur anecdote drawn from a British cartoon strip. Narrating the humorous episode depicted in the cartoon, Ono retells the story of a man, his wife, and a pesky fly. As Ono's retelling goes, on a stroll in the park one afternoon, a wife catches her husband staring at another woman's breasts; faced with his wife's indignation, in a panic the man proclaims his innocence, insisting that he was simply noticing a fly resting on the woman's blouse. Pausing briefly for effect, Ono then delivers her own spin on the punch line: "I think that life is full of that kind of thing. We're always sort of deceiving ourselves about what we're really seeing."⁶⁵ A conceptual artist with a penchant for word-play and instructional anecdotes, Ono thus re-presents a contemporary piece of populist humor, hinting at its problematic gendered implications. A psychoanalytic reading of Ono's "punch line" might interpret her statement as a shrewd acknowledgment of the psychopathology of a phallic visual field, a mode of

⁶⁵ Yoko Ono interviewed by Scott McDonald, in *A Critical Cinema 2: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 155. When asked about the inspiration behind *Fly*, Ono states: "A cartoon in a newspaper gave me the idea. There's this woman with a low-cut dress, and a guy is looking at her, and the guy's wife says, "What are you looking at!" and the guy says, "Oh, I'm looking at a fly on her." I wanted the film to be an experience where you're always wondering, am I following the movement of the fly or am I looking at the body? I think that life is full of that kind of thing. We're always sort of deceiving ourselves about what we're really seeing" (McDonald 1992, 155). Also, Ono re-tells a similar anecdote in M.H.Miller's "Of Flies and Homemade Bombs: Yoko Ono's Art World," *Art News*, posted June 15, 2015, <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/11/of-flies-and-homemade-bombs-yoko-onos-art-world/>.

gendered visuality and desire that is all-too-often naturalized within popular discourse. Within her anecdotal re-telling, Ono cleverly draws awareness to the misrecognition of the woman's body through the man's gaze — first, as a fragmentary sexual anatomy that directs male desire, and second, as an insect that marks a deferral of this desire. The woman's body — layered with the troublesome insect — thus poses a conundrum of gendered-psychic perception that Ono wishes to explore within her short film.

An artist greatly influenced by Zen Buddhism, and in particular, the Zen kōan — an enigmatic parable intended to unlock new conceptual horizons — Ono's insightful re-telling of a popular anecdote can thus be considered along the lines of a kōan-esque riddle promising an entry point into her film's unique corporeal meditation. In my current study of *Fly*, I will move to engage this conceptual puzzle, and my specific line of engagement will interrogate the gendered psychic processes of the gaze that unfold within Ono's filmic conceptual art project.⁶⁶ In addition, I will expand upon such a visually-oriented psychoanalytic interpretation, closely interweaving the sonic component of the film within the scope of my analysis. The aim of this intended dual approach is to demonstrate the ways in which the gaze, as a psychic channel, holds a

⁶⁶ Ono's *Fly* was referenced as part of a larger conceptual art project curated at MoMA in New York City from Dec 1 - 15th, 1971, entitled, "The Museum of Modern [F]Art." Although Ono took out an ad in the *Village Voice*, however, the entire art exhibit was a ruse. No exhibition was actually held at MoMA, and visitors were greeted with a sign that read "This is Not Here." Ono produced a catalogue that accompanied her fictitious exhibition, including a description of the artist releasing an enormous glass jar of flies across New York. Ono states, however, that "there were no flies, and no jar. It was just in your mind" (Miller 2015). The film, *Fly*, thus constituted the focal point of this would be-installation project inspired by a semantic slippage between the two meanings of the word "fly."

multi-sensory, even synaesthetic⁶⁷ potentiality. Indeed, the fragmentary visual narrative of *Fly* is channeled through a compelling, predominantly unaccompanied soundtrack featuring Ono’s uncanny, extended vocalizations. Employing a range of experimental vocal techniques drawn from the western avant-garde as well as pan-Asian traditional singing practices, Ono’s vocal performance takes the listener through disconcerting timbral fluctuations and extended multiphonic screams that bring about aural-perceptual shifts between a woman’s voice, and strange, often mechanical, or insect-like noises. The fluctuating timbral make-up of Ono’s non-diegetic voice complements her disjunctive camera work that (de)constructs Virginia Lust into a shifting, undecidable terrain, slipping between moments of indiscernible abstraction and uncanny “close-ups” of her sexual anatomy. Set into relief against this mottled sensory backdrop of gendered ontological dis-ease, the fly makes its wayward journey across Virginia Lust — a hapless explorer flitting through a murky nebula of the human subconscious.

While the specific psychic-sensory processes that are evoked and consequently disrupted, or troubled within Ono’s short film will be the topic of my following extended study, before entering into this detailed analysis, it is first necessary to briefly elaborate and to clarify my interpretation of *Fly* as a film realized within a synaesthetic sensory context. Approaching *Fly* as a synaesthetic work, I will move to consider the psychic-

⁶⁷ A strict psychophysical definition of synaesthesia references a perceptual “condition in which a particular sensory stimulus (or even the thought of that stimulus)—the *inducer*—reliably elicits not only the normal perceptual experience but also some additional, inappropriate sensation—the *concurrent*” (Lynall and Blakemore, 2013). Though once thought of as a rare cognitive disorder affecting a small proportion of the population, extensive scientific research over the past twenty years has revealed that synaesthetic experience is in fact a commonly experienced phenomenon. An emotional response to music, for example, could be classified under the rubric of synaesthesia. Therefore, in the context of my current study, I am employing this term in its broadest sense, not as a rare neurological condition, but as a commonly experienced psychological phenomenon involving intimate interactions between the respective modalities of sight and sound.

visual disturbance of the film as part of an integrated, layered sensory experience, ultimately putting forward the argument that the psychic-visual “trouble” of *Fly* manifests in the cross-modal, contactual sensory pathways that are opened up between the visual and sonic content of the film. Rather than conceptualizing the soundtrack as *accompaniment* to the visual content, in my current study I will consider the visual and sonic content as equal players in constructing filmic experience. This approach demands an interpretive practice that attunes to the borderspaces between sight and sound, and the synaesthetic spaces of resonance that can be accessed therein.

Querying the strict division that is often assumed to exist between visual and sonic psychic-sensory experience, I will align my study with theoretical models that aim to open up a space of critique within western philosophical traditions that privilege the visual field of experience over the sonic. Beginning in the 1950s, media theorist Marshall McLuhan advanced his analysis of western society as historically dominated by a visuo-centric sensory paradigm he refers to as “visual space.” McLuhan defines “visual space” in terms of western symbolic structures that tend to uphold mastery by sight and visual abstraction; furthermore, McLuhan argues that within the context of western philosophy, “logic” comes to be structured according to “visual space,” thereby normalizing an abstract, “visual logic.”⁶⁸ In McLuhan’s analysis, the dominance of “visual space,” and “visual logic” emerged within European cultures that developed non-idiographic, abstract phonetic alphabets. Through the rise of print culture and colonial expansionism, “visual space” came to dominate the globe. Prior to colonial contact,

⁶⁸ See Marshall McLuhan’s “Visual and Acoustic Space,” in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. Eds. Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 68 - 77. Similar thoughts are also elaborated within his interview in *Playboy Magazine*, March 1969, 1 - 23.

McLuhan maintains that most tribal societies communicated within a multisensory, “acoustic space,” whereby meaning was shared and created “through the simultaneous interplay of all the senses.”⁶⁹ With the onset of settler colonialism and the intense — often violent — pressure to conform to Eurocentric socio-linguistic practices, however, tribal cultures gradually shifted towards a reliance on abstract, visual sensory modes, abandoning, or at least significantly suppressing, their former experience of “acoustic space.”⁷⁰

In the context of music studies, John Shepherd draws upon McLuhan’s analysis of “visual logic” within western culture as a key to understanding the often problematic position of the musical arts within western dominant discourse. Shepherd points out that visual space tends to acquire a privileged, masculine gendered association that

⁶⁹ Disappointingly, McLuhan offers a somewhat reductive, binaristic model of visual vs. acoustic space — imbued with problematic colonialist overtones. One might critique McLuhan’s racially-inflected, binaristic construction as evidence of his own philosophical training within a western-centric tradition dominated by “visual logic.” Despite the somewhat problematic implications of McLuhan’s terminology, however, his theorizations nonetheless offer useful insight into the historical workings of western cultural logic — and thereby provide a fruitful point of entry into the gendered racial critique of such logic.

McLuhan offers the following complementary definitions of the visual and acoustic space:

“...visual space structure is an artifact of western civilization created by Greek phonetic literacy. It is a space perceived by the eyes when separated or abstracted from all other senses. As a construct of the mind, it is continuous, which is to say it is infinite... homogeneous (uniform everywhere), and static (qualitatively unchangeable). It is like the “mind’s eye” or visual imagination which dominates the thinking of literate Western people...”(McLuhan 2004, 71).

“Acoustic space structure is the natural space of nature-in-the-raw inhabited by non-literate people. It is like the “mind’s ear,” or acoustic imagination that dominates the thinking of pre-literate and post-literate humans alike (rock video has as much acoustic power as a Watusi mating dance). It is both discontinuous and non-homogeneous. Its resonant and interpenetrating processes are simultaneously related with centers everywhere and boundaries nowhere”(McLuhan 2004, 71).

⁷⁰ Despite the current global cultural dominance of western “visual space,” McLuhan notes that with the rise of contemporary media, including sound film, telecommunications and cybernetics, the westernized world is growing increasingly accustomed to modes of communication that operate within a multi-sensory “acoustic space.” His assessment of the consequences of this transition back into a cybernetically generated “acoustic space” is, however, ambivalent. Whereas McLuhan is critical of the dominance of “visual space,” he nonetheless seems trepidatious of the loss of control that is implied by a return to a predominantly auditory mode of social existence.

results in the feminization and devaluation of acoustic space, and by extension, the musical arts. In response to such a de-legitimizing “visual logic,” the historical genre of absolute music, for example, sought to uphold the value of music by demonstrating its careful transcription into abstract written form. Reading McLuhan from a gendered perspective, Shepherd posits that western culture is thus guided not only by a dominance of the visual sensory mode, but that this sensory mode is bound to masculinity and power, which he encapsulates in the term, “male visual hegemony.”⁷¹

Like McLuhan, Shepherd links the global rise of “visual hegemony” with the beginnings of industrial print culture and European colonialist expansionism, periods of large-scale social upheaval that intensified male dominance. In Shepherd’s analysis, “visual hegemony” emerged as a socio-cultural rubric that fashioned women, the poor, and racial others as “objects” to be dominated, mapped, and contained by masculine visual control. Shepherd thus qualifies the sense of sight as “the silent and inert sensory channel which allows us... to distance ourselves from the phenomena of the world” and to objectify others and the environment.⁷² Whereas visual logic enables the objectification of others, however, Shepherd points out that sonic, oral/aural sensory experience functions to reinforce our “situatedness” within real time and communal shared space.⁷³ With the rise of “male visual hegemony,” the legitimation of the musical arts became increasingly problematic; musical genres tied to precise modes of

⁷¹ McLuhan tends to evoke gendered metaphors in describing the respective sensory fields of sight and sound. For example, in *Understanding Media*, McLuhan writes, “the world of the ear is more embracing and inclusive than that of the eye can ever be. The ear is hypersensitive. The eye is cool and detached”(McLuhan 1965, 156). Such passages reinforce the perceived masculine qualities of “visual hegemony,” a colonialist, rationalist model of sensory-cultural domination.

⁷² John Shepherd, *Music as Social Text* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 157.

transcription and visual abstraction have been historically privileged within the western canon. Shepherd maintains, however, that all forms of music, as embodied cultural experience, remind us of our positioning within a shared multi-sensory “acoustic space,” potentially denaturalizing the foundations of a visually-oriented hegemonic social structure. Just as music has been feminized within western-centric discourses of “male visual hegemony,” so too have philosophical approaches that privilege multi-sensory, or cross-modal sensory knowledge and awareness. An analytic exploration of music as an embodied, multi-sensory experience can thus provide a gateway to expanding and critiquing the “visual hegemony” that has come to be deeply embedded in the foundations of contemporary western thought.⁷⁴

My following philosophically-grounded investigation into Ono’s *Fly* will thus set out to examine the cross-sensory, synaesthetic spaces of encounter that unfold between woman, fly, voice, and gaze, as a means of unpacking the politicized corporeal meditation evoked in Ono’s film. I will begin my study of *Fly* by offering a mode of qualifying its experimental vocal performance, which I will argue, presents an “interstitial voice,” that is, a voice that resists being perceived and experienced as belonging to a unified vocal subject. Next, I will move to unpack and to theorize the synaesthetic manifestations of visual and sonic “trouble” within Ono’s short film. This line of inquiry will be carried out on two fronts, both involving substantial theoretical and analytic explorations: first, I will theorize the filmic “trouble” in psychoanalytic

⁷⁴ Casey O’Callaghan’s recent study, *Sounds: A Philosophical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007). also moves to question the western philosophical tendency of privileging the visual sensory field, which he terms, “visuocentrism.” Considered in the context of his study, however, it is my reading that O’Callaghan’s preference for the neologism, “visuocentrism” over Shepherd’s “visual hegemony” reflects his theoretical positioning as a philosopher and psychoacoustician concerned primarily with the identification of objective sonic categories — what he terms, “sonic realism” — rather than a commitment to exploring the political implications of a visually-oriented socio-cultural framework.

terms, drawing upon feminist film criticism as well as Lacanian theories of the gaze, finally arriving at a post-Lacanian, matrixial model of the gaze as a shared, subjectivising space of cross-modal sensory encounter. The second portion of my analysis will build upon the psychoanalytic interpretation, contextualizing the terrain of *Virginia Lust* as not only a site of gendered sensory contact, but also a metaphorical space of gendered colonial encounter. Central to both my psychoanalytic and post-colonial lines of inquiry, I will contemplate the fly as an undecidable, liminal entity, one that slips between the borderspaces of sight and sound, self and other, organicity and mechanicity — its movements guiding us through coterminous, bordering filmic ontologies and psychic channels. In this vein, I will propose that Ono's *Fly* presents the insect as an embodiment of radical alterity, a position that is at once liberatory, unsettling, and above all, riddled with uncertainty.

Synaesthetic Trouble in the Interstitial Voice

In describing Ono's *Fly* as evoking an “interstitial voice,” I would like to first consider the timbral interstitialities that are acoustically produced in the context of her unaccompanied vocal soundtrack. Primarily, I will focus on her vocal stylings that shift

between what might be perceived as “mechanical” and “insect-like” sonorities.⁷⁵ As detailed in the previous chapter, Ono frequently employed uncanny timbral fluctuations within her experimental vocal works of the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. In the context of mid-century avant-garde music, timbral manipulations were often employed as a means of challenging normative western musical conventions. Cathy Berberian’s *Stripsody* (1966), for example, can be considered as such an avant-garde, even postmodern work that deconstructs conventional uses of vocal timbre. As Berberian’s agile vocal apparatus rapidly shifts between incongruous snippets of repertoire drawn from a range of classical as well as popular sources, her performance gives rise to a timbral bricolage that “strips”bare the artifice behind each genre of vocal production.

While such avant-garde experimentations in timbral flux can denaturalize the listener’s experience of vocal timbre as an essential expression of a human vocal apparatus, Ono’s use of timbral flux operates on a deeper level of psychic-sensory

⁷⁵ Timbre is broadly defined as a music-analytical category that references tone, or sound quality. Whereas the science of vocal timbre tends to focus on objective analyses of various identifiable physical qualities of sound, these quantitative methods leave little promise for explaining the culturally specific, perceptual experience of timbre. In this vein, pioneering computer musician and MIT scholar, Max Mathews observes that “all of the quantifiable aspects of a sound go into making up its timbre, *the most important being the final perception of the listener*” (Mathews 1999, 86, emphasis added). Robert Fink’s forthcoming compilation on timbre promises to offer a more comprehensive take on the study of timbre, delving into the socio-culturally informed experience of sound quality. See *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music*, edited by Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

In the context of pedagogical scholarship on vocal technique, timbre can be defined as a type of vocal color (dark, normal, or bright) that can be produced through shifts in the directional enunciation of vowels (Isherwood, *The Techniques of Singing*, 2012, 103). Alternatively, timbre can be defined as shifts in adduction of the vocal folds that produce pressed breathy, or flow phonation (Edward-Edgerton, *The 21st-Century Voice: Contemporary and Traditional Extra-Normal Voice*, 2004, xxi - xxii). Timbre can also be altered with the placement of the voice to produce nasal timbres, or pharyngeal, swallowed sonorities. Such pedagogical descriptions of vocal timbre thus encompass a range of possible vocal properties that cannot be easily quantified within conventional notational systems.

In terms of my discussion of timbral fluctuations in Ono’s repertoire, what concerns me is not so much the quantifiable, objective analysis of her vocal timbre, nor a pragmatic analysis of vocal techniques she employs to arrive at a given timbre — although both of these considerations *do* factor into my analysis to an extent. Rather, I hope to delve into the listener’s unfolding perceptual experience of timbral border spaces within Ono’s vocality.

disturbance — in effect, Ono’s vocal timbral shifts work to destabilize the perceptual association that is forged between a given vocal timbre and the identified ontology of its sound source. In the early stages of development, the human mind acquires a keen ability to identify and to distinguish timbre, specifically human vocal timbre, and to instinctively attribute a given vocal timbre to a particular subject’s unique vocal apparatus. As a result, within adult human social life, there are relatively few situations in which a vocal sound source confounds immediate identification.⁷⁶ Throughout the timbral flux of *Stripsody*, for example, we are not left to wonder if the voice *belongs* to Berberian — the voice never loses its distinctive sound qualities that cause it to be perceived as female, and of course, human. In bringing about uncanny shifts into timbres that resemble mechanical noise, and even insect-like sonorities, however, Ono disrupts the audience’s ability to categorize her voice according to a stable, human

⁷⁶ Psychoacoustic research has demonstrated that timbre plays a key role in “the recognition of a musical instrument, or, in general, of a sound-generating event... the sensory dimensions that compose timbre serve as indicators used in the categorization, recognition, and identification of sound sources and sound events (McAdams and Giordano, 2009, 74). Julien Plante-Hebert, doctoral researcher at the University of Montreal has recently published studies that demonstrate that the timbre of a familiar human voice is recognized within the utterance of two words. Such studies further demonstrate the importance of timbre in terms of identifying sound sources -- and the ontological identification of a given sound source. See “Machines Have Nothing on Mom When it Comes to Listening,” *Science Daily*. Posted October 8, 2015, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/10/151008142626.htm>.

In his philosophical inquiry into “sonic realism,” or the objective qualities of sound, Casey O’Callaghan suggests that in qualifying the objective qualities of timbre, we must focus on the “characteristic manner in which [the sound] disturbs [a given] medium”(2007, 89). I’m skeptical as to whether or not considering the objective ways in which a sound source disturbs the environment would account for the psychological and socio-cultural structures that shape the ways in which a given timbre is experienced.

A much more nuanced, and politicized philosophical line of inquiry into vocal timbre is offered by feminist philosopher, Adriana Cavarero, in her influential study, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005). For Cavarero, vocal timbre is a unique, embodied quality inherent in each human vocal apparatus. Within a logocentric western socio-cultural framework, however, this embodied aspect of the voice tends to be disregarded in favor of the semantic content of speech. Cavarero argues that the unique embodied quality of the voice is experienced within a framework of mutual recognition — the unique, embodied quality of each voice emerges as multiple, or “plural unique” voices come into auditory contact.

ontology; instead, she constructs a fluctuating timbral layering that signifies a vocal alterity *beyond* the culturally-inscribed timbral category of “woman.”

Ono’s radical timbral fluctuations are often employed in conjunction with a high frequency vibrato that further intensifies their uncanny, interstitial effects. A technique involving the rapid oscillation of the vocal folds, vibrato is employed throughout much of Ono’s extended vocalizations on *Fly*. Conventional vibrato in western operatic and popular traditions is qualified in terms of pitch variation (modulation depth) and speed of oscillation. Standard operatic, bel canto vibrato tends to employ a slightly wider span of modulation as compared to popular singing styles; in both contexts, however, a modulation depth of roughly 100 cents is practiced (that is, a pitch differential of a semitone, or in some cases a microtone slightly less than a semitone).⁷⁷ Ono’s strident vibrato, on the other hand, differs radically from conventional vibrato techniques in that her voice frequently shifts into multiphonic oscillations. Multiphonic technique involves the separation of the vocal folds so that two independent pitches are produced simultaneously within one vocal apparatus. Whereas conventional forms of vibrato give rise to the effect of a singular pitch that acquires depth and resonance through modular fluctuation, multiphonic vibrato disrupts this sense of pitch singularity — and instead, suggests a pitch *interstitiality*. Since western vocal practice assumes a unified vocal apparatus with vocal folds working in tandem to produce a constant pitch referent, the multiphonic separation of the vocal folds marks a denaturaliation of normative vocal practice, and moreover, it also functions to disrupt western cultural notions of a unified

⁷⁷ See Johan Sundberg, “The Voice as Musical Instrument,” lecture delivered at The Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Music Media and Technology, McGill University, Montreal (Jan, 2009). See also Edward-Edgerton, *The 21st-Century Voice: Contemporary and Traditional Extra-Normal Voice*, 13 - 23.

subjectivity — a point to which I will return in my following psychoanalytic exploration of *Fly*. Notably, Ono’s use of multiphonic vibrato also aids her avoidance of diatonicism in favor of irregular, micro-tonal oscillations; yet another major contributing factor to the breakdown of western musico-cultural normativity within the sound track of *Fly*.

Compounding the effect of Ono’s deconstructive, avant-garde vocal stylings, the non-diegetic filmic positioning of her voice disrupts the viewer’s ability to visually identify and confirm Ono as a definitive sound source. Although the audience is contextually aware that the filmic voice belongs to Yoko Ono, the artist never reveals herself within the visual field of *Fly*. Unmoored from a visually identifiable sound source, the voice takes on a shifting metaphorical function of “giving voice” to either the sedated woman or the fly — or, at times, it can be experienced as emanating from a range of unidentifiable, non-diegetic sonic loci that lie somewhere in between.⁷⁸ Ono’s filmic vocality is thus “interstitial” both in terms of its undecidable, sonic-timbral and multiphonic qualities as well as its slippery metaphorical points of origin within the visual field. As the sonic and visual ontologies of the voice shift and recombine, a synaesthetic sensory trouble begins to manifest — disturbing the normative experience of a voice as belonging to a unified, singular, and visually discernible sound source.

Within the opening minute of *Fly*, we can immediately experience the synaesthetic dis-ease brought about by Ono’s interstitial vocality, as her jarring timbral

⁷⁸ The non-diegetic positioning of Ono’s voice causes a perceptual disturbance that might be understood according to the McGurk effect. According to this theory, since the brain recognizes speech by processing auditory *and* visual information, when either channel is disrupted, or when the two channels are thrown out of sync — such as in a poorly dubbed foreign film — the brain experiences extreme confusion in identifying a speaking subject. Although this study pertains to speech, it would appear to hold similar implications to any form of voice production, including musical performance. The inability to see Ono’s vocal performance significantly disturbs our ability to categorize her voice as in fact emanating from her discrete body. See L.D. Rosenblum, *See What I’m Saying: The Extraordinary Powers of Our Five Senses* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 2010).

fluctuations contribute to the effect of a fly's violent rupture into an amorphous visual field. As the film begins to roll, a hypnotic, blurred pink screen comes into view; for the first 2.5 seconds, the mechanical crackling of the film reel dominates the otherwise silent scene. At around 2.5 seconds, however, Ono's voice breaks the silence, intoning a series of four-note diatonic melodic phrases in a hushed, breathy timbre. The hushed closeness of Ono's voice draws the listener into an intimate corporeal encounter with a woman's suggested bodily interiority; and in these opening moments the amorphous pink background assumes a metaphorical gendered corporeality. Ono's intoned phrases consist of descending diatonic tetrachords, each note held for roughly 1 second, as though a regular meter might be established. The muffled melodic statements trace a tonal harmonic progression of I-I-V-I. Due to Ono swallowing the first and last notes of each tetrachord, however, the tonal make-up of this opening tune is somewhat obscured, and yet there is an audible shift to the V on the third repetition of the melodic statement. Considering the atonal vocal noise that is about to be performed, the opening melodic phrases can be interpreted as Ono's playful jest at the expense of the audience — her breathy tones lull the audience into a false sense of security, without preparing them for the sonic and visual trouble that is about to unfold.

Sure enough, the maternal, pink "womb-world" that is synaesthetically evoked with Ono's breathy diatonic lullaby is soon violently disrupted. At 0:23, a few seconds after the lullaby peters away, there is a startling moment of sonic and visual rupture. Two ripping sounds occur in succession, the first coinciding with the emergence of a blurred fly in the center of the visual field, and the second coinciding with the visual clarification of the fly as it comes into focus. Although contextually we are aware that

these ripping sounds are produced by Ono's vocal apparatus — two short, croaking, egressive irregular multiphonic trills that “rip” through her vocal folds — the timbre is not identifiably human. These jarring sounds of rupture give rise to the impression that the fly is physically ripping through the membrane of the pink visual field; in this sense, I would like to propose that *Fly* begins with a metaphorical birth scene. In this moment, Ono's voice shifts from that of a mother's lullaby to her unborn child, into a vocalization that synaesthetically evokes a woman's bodily interiority torn open by a monstrous offspring. The concept of flies birthing from a live human body is particularly troubling, given the common association with flies reproducing within human remains. The gendered corporeal terrain of *Fly* thus suggestively straddles the ontological categories of life and death — another point to which I will return in my following psychoanalytic exploration.

The initial “birth of the fly” is followed by a searing, extended vocalization that fluctuates through at least three contrasting timbres, each suggesting a slippage in the sonic ontology of the voice. Ono attacks the beginning of this extended vocal phrase at 0:28, letting out another rupturous multiphonic. This strident birth pang, however, soon fluctuates in timbre, and rises to a high-pitched whistle. Owing to its high registral positioning — wavering around a B₅ - this sudden shift to a whistle-like timbre marks an uncanny transformation of the sound source.⁷⁹ In technical terms, Ono's whistle falls

⁷⁹ The whistle register differs significantly from falsetto register — a whistle range begins at E-flat 6. Opera singers such as Yma Sumac and soul singer Minnie Riperton are known for integrating the whistle into their repertoire. A neutral larynx is necessary for a controlled whistle with a sustained pitch. If a singer pushes up on the larynx, a strained whistle is produced, potentially damaging vocal chords. Minnie Riperton is known for utilizing her whistle range to expertly mimic the timbres of birds and guitars. While Ono's “whistle” is not technically of a whistle register, it carries a timbre that resembles a mechanical whistle. See Julia Davids and Stephen La Tour, *Vocal Technique: A Guide for Conductors, Teachers, and Singers* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2012), 149 - 153.

short of the whistle register by about a fourth, not quite reaching the breathy heights of a singer trained in the technique of whistle production. The intensity of Ono's vocal attack, however, nonetheless contributes to a strident, excruciating whistle-like pitch that strongly resembles mechanical noise, such as that of steam being forced out of an engine. The strained whistle is held for an uncomfortably long duration, as the voice attempts to cling to a stable pitch.

After several pained seconds, however, the imperfect, mechanical whistle runs out of steam. Ono's voice soon follows a rapid denouement back into a series of fluttering multiphonic undulations. Placed in context against the preceding, abrasive mechanical whistle, however, the denouement of the vocal phrase contextually acquires a concomitant, machine-like sonority. From 0:43 - 0:50, Ono's voice rises to a high-pitched, cyborgian multiphonic that sounds in time with the movement of the fly — the rapid undulations of the voice synchronizing with the beating of the insect's wings. With this final timbral fluctuation, the voice is no longer tied to a woman's body, her birth pangs, nor to a violent mechanical presence — rather, Ono's wavering, interstitial vocality gives voice to the fly's wing harmonics, resulting in a powerful synaesthetic association forged between woman and fly.

Less than a minute into the short film, we have thus arrived at a vocality characterized by a layered contextual significance: Ono's voice has come to straddle the timbral borders of woman, machine, and insect. The undulating quality of her vocal performance contributes to its interstitial undecidability — it is a voice prone to a dangerous slippage between ontological boundaries. The formless pink gradations of the filmic terrain come to be experienced as a space wherein subjective boundaries and

ontological categorizations remain emergent, forming, interstitial, and anxiety-inducing. The remainder of Ono's 21-minute film unfolds as a fragmentary visual narrative charting the progression of the exploratory fly across the terrain of Virginia Lust. As the fly comes into contact with the nipple, mouth, and finally the vagina, the abstract corpus of Virginia Lust comes to be limned as a gendered, objectified body. Due to the ensuing sonic and visual trouble, however, this is not a normative experience of objectification -- rather, the psychic-sensory processes of objectification are deconstructed and denaturalized every step of the way. In the following portion of my study I will formulate a psychoanalytic rubric that can be employed as a means of interpreting the gendered trouble that unfolds within this synaesthetic space of corporeal encounter between fly and woman. Following the explication of this psychoanalytic rubric, I will return to the opening scene of the film, where we bear witness to the "birth of the fly," with particular attention paid to the ways in which a synaesthetic gaze emerges alongside the insect's rupture on to the screen. The successive scenes charting the fly's encounters with Virginia Lust's sexual anatomy will be the focus of the following chapter, which will expand the psychoanalytic rubric from the perspective of postcolonial theories of the gaze, arriving at an interpretation of the fly's progression as a filmic narrative of gendered racial cultural encounter.

Fly Trouble: Psychoanalytic Interpretations

Drawing upon feminist film criticism, as well as Lacanian and post-Lacanian feminist psychoanalysis, in this segment of my study I would like to explore the gendered psychic dimensions of the synaesthetic "trouble" that manifests within *Fly*.

First, drawing upon feminist film criticism, I will consider the ways in which masculinist modes of looking are subverted and disrupted within Ono's filmic meditation. Second, I will examine the ways in which Ono's film gives rise to both phallic (Lacanian) and matrixial (Ettingerian) modes of conceptualizing the gaze as a synaesthetic psychic-sensory field of encounter. My specific interest in this vein is in unpacking the ways in which phallic and matrixial modes of the gaze emerge in relation to the sensory apprehension of the female body, and how each psychic sphere of encounter carries attendant forms of trauma and subjective dis-ease. Given that the focal point of the filmic meditation presented in *Fly* is the sedated female corpus — a motionless body that occupies a liminal position between life and death — I will also query the operations of the Freudian death drive, or Todesdreib/Thanatos, as well as the matrixial evocations of the death drive undergirding the specific instantiations of destructive desire that can be located in the filmic, corporeal encounter. The following analysis is founded on the premise that *Fly* constitutes a corporeal meditation thematizing a gendered dis-ease with modes of apprehending and sensing (the female body) that tend to evoke related anxieties of subjective (mis)recognition (in the phallic sphere) and subjective fragility (in the matrixial sphere).

Before delving into an analysis of Ono's *Fly* as a site of an emergent, synaesthetic gaze, I will start by interpreting the gendered modes of looking that are presented and challenged by Ono's camera work. Ono's subversive, filmic meditation on the female body can be contextualized as a product of its time; feminist film-making, as well as feminist film criticism emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, largely inspired by the

rise of the women's liberation movement and the associated "sexual revolution."⁸⁰ Prior to the publication of Laura Mulvey's influential essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"(1975), most feminist film criticism involved a sociological analysis of women in film. Mulvey's groundbreaking essay, however, was novel in that it moved to utilize psychoanalytic theory as a "political weapon" aimed to uncover the unconscious patriarchal structures that shape gendered dynamics within mainstream Hollywood cinema.⁸¹ In particular, Mulvey's thesis centered on the Freudian conception of "scopophilia," which she interprets as a masculinist mode of obtaining pleasure through looking -- more specifically, by exerting a controlling gaze upon an objectified female figure. Mulvey writes:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.⁸²

In this formulation, a masculinist gaze, and the objectification of women are both integral aspects of a patriarchal visual culture that structures gender relations within Hollywood cinema. In Mulvey's analysis, the film is a particularly nefarious medium in the context of patriarchal visual culture, for it constructs an alternate reality, that is, an

⁸⁰ Ono was first introduced to film-making through the fluxus conceptual art collective in mid-1950s New York. Fluxus leader, George Macunias acquired an 8mm camera, and offered Ono the opportunity to experiment with it. Contemporary feminist film-makers in the New York scene who influenced Yoko Ono included Valie Export, Joyce, Wieland and Shirley Clarke. Ono's *Fly* was also inspired by the contemporary avant-garde French director, Willard Maas' work, *The Geography of the Body* (1947). In his interview with Ono, Scott McDonald inquires about the influence of Maas' piece on Ono's work, and she concurs. McDonald describes Mass's work as consisting of "close-ups of bodies, framed so that you can't quite tell what body part you're looking at -- but they all look erotic... and *Fly* is full of that effect"(McDonald 1999, 14). The postcolonial implications of *The Geography of the Body* will be a topic covered in the following chapter.

⁸¹ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.

⁸² Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 4.

independent space-time continuum “cut to the measure of scopophilic desire.”⁸³ The movement and positioning of the camera effectively demands that the audience identify with a phantasy defined according to a masculinist visual field. The pleasures that are derived from this phantasy evince deeply-rooted, misogynistic tendencies. According to Mulvey, scopophilia functions in accordance with the Freudian notion of castration anxiety and the repressed fear of sexual difference: the glamorization and fetishization of the objectified female form thus functions to mask and to assuage latent fear of the female body.

Given that most mainstream cinema is structured by such a controlling, “male gaze,” Mulvey calls upon contemporary feminist filmmakers to resist and redefine the standard modes of visual pleasure accessible through cinematic representation. Ono’s *Fly* could indeed be interpreted as such a film that sets out to disrupt the operations of the “male gaze.” Considered in this light, Ono’s premise of centering her film around the close inspection of a female nude could be taken as ironic: she is at once self-consciously evoking as well as satirizing the “male gaze” by deconstructing its operations according to a feminist imperative. The blurred, often extremely close camera angles employed by Ono give rise to a mode of looking that cannot satisfactorily distance and objectify the woman’s body as other. In its abstract evocation, the filmic nude is thus beyond the control of the scopophilic “look,” as it shifts between an indefinable haze and close, disconcerting renderings of a fragmentary female anatomy. Moreover, when the camera arrives at the vagina half-way into the film, it makes no attempt to mask female

⁸³ Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 3.

sexual difference under a scopophilic fetish: rather, female anatomy is presented head-on, with the aid of a decidedly matter-of-fact, fearlessly direct camera angle.

While the above interpretation is useful insofar as it allows us to contextualize Ono as a feminist filmmaker involved in a contemporary project of deconstructing masculinist modes of cinematic looking, Mulvey's approach might be critiqued on two levels: first, she tends to limit the operations of the "male gaze" to the visual faculty of "looking," even though the filmic phantasy is constructed by both visual and sonic sensory modalities working in tandem. Considering Ono's *Fly*, since the abstract visual presentation of the female body unfolds in tandem with a woman's vocal performance, I would argue that the analysis of the attendant "gaze" must be interpreted in terms of the emergent, synaesthetic borderspaces that arise between sounding and visualizing the female body. Second, Mulvey's analysis insufficiently explores the extent to which the "male gaze" might be implicated within a wider structural-symbolic framework of gendered meaning formation that extends beyond a scopophilic fear of female sexual difference. In my analysis, as a feminist cultural work, the gendered meanings that emerge within *Fly*'s synaesthetic spaces of encounter pose a challenge not only to the

operations of scopophilic desire, but also threaten to bring about a restructuring of normative gendered relationality within a field of psychic-sensory encounter.⁸⁴

The above critique of Mulvey's analytic model draws upon Lacan's structural-symbolic theorizations of the gaze, developed in his lectures from the mid-1940s onwards. Expanding upon Freud's conception of the scopophilic gaze, Lacan moves to consider the gaze not merely as a uni-directional, visual faculty of perception, but as a relational field of perception shaped by a structural-symbolic awareness of the Other.⁸⁵ Whereas the Freudian scopophilic gaze describes a mode of visual control exerted by the ego in response to an anxiety of female biological sexual difference, the Lacanian model of the gaze proposes a viewing subject whose gendered anxieties are rooted within unconscious symbolic structures of misrecognition and alienation. For Lacan, the apprehension of subjectivity, which can be traced back to the mirror stage in early human development, is a paradoxical process that functions to construct an imaginary

⁸⁴ Another study, aside from Mulvey's work that bears mention is film theorist, Kaja Silverman's psychoanalytic collection of essays, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1988). Silverman provides a multifaceted examination of the female voice in classic Hollywood cinema. Drawing upon a Lacanian-inspired framework, Silverman explores the different ways in which male and female voices are presented within mainstream film, concluding that the woman's voice tends to be tied to a diegetic locus, reinforcing her position as an object of male desire. Silverman also argues that the woman's cinematic voice is often denied legitimacy, or authority within a filmic context. Rather, female voices tend to be dissipated within a fragmentary "acoustic mirror." The dissipated female voice fades into an acoustic envelope that returns the default male viewer to a fantasy of union with the primordial mother. While Silverman presents a cogent analysis of the female voice within mainstream Hollywood film, in my current study I have chosen not to draw upon her work, due to the fact that I did not see a pertinent connection between the normative representation of the female voice within Hollywood film and the way in which Ono's vocal performance figures within her experimental short film.

⁸⁵ This is a reading of Lacan that I am advancing here, based on my interpretation of Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* as well as selections from *Écrits*, including "The Subversion of the Subject" and "The Mirror Stage." Whereas early Lacanian formulations of the mirror stage describe a developmental stage where an infant acquires an early awareness of subjectivity and enhanced motor control through mastery of his/her reflected image, in later works by Lacan, he advances a more philosophical interpretation of the mirror stage. In later Lacanian works, the mirror stage is interpreted as an aspect of adult subjectivity that hinges on our perceptual awareness of an imaginary order -- that is, a means of constructing our subjective selves according to imaginary projections that arise in response to our contact with other, and "the gaze of the Other."

ego-ideal, or whole self, while barring the subject's experience of oneness with the mother and the surrounding environment. In his essay, "The Mirror Stage"(1949), Lacan theorizes the reflected ego-ideal as a distanced object, a visual projection that is mistakenly apprehended to be the infant's unified subjective self.⁸⁶ This mirrored illusion of a complete, agential subjectivity is reinforced by adults close to the infant who are quick to impress upon him/her a direct subjective association with the reflected image — 'look! do you see? That is *you* in the mirror!' In Lacan's view, the infant's identification with his/her mirrored image marks a pivotal point in human development, aiding the infant's integration within the wider symbolic order. The infant's entrance into the symbolic order, however, comes at a cost — as the mirrored image is hailed as unified subject, the infant gradually 'loses sight' of the radical incommensurability that exists between his/her own sensory experience of selfhood, and the social symbolic structures that shape and determine one's individuated subjectivity.

Notably, Lacan's theorization of the infant's sensory integration into the symbolic order is not restricted to a visual mode of perception. Although Lacan proposes the term, "the gaze of the Other," as a means of qualifying the sensory dimension of the symbolic structure that hails the infant as unified subject, a careful reading of Lacan reveals that "the gaze of the Other" extends beyond the visual field, encompassing other persons' speech, gestures, moods, facial expressions, and the amalgam of intersubjective exchanges that convey a sense of how one appears - or how one might be represented - from other perspectives. In this vein, one can expand upon Lacan's

⁸⁶ "The Mirror Stage As Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York & London: W.W.Norton & Co., 1966), 1 - 7.

observations of the mirror stage to propose that “the gaze of the Other” can also manifest in sonic encounters. In his influential piece, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious”(1966), Lacan explicates his influential “graph of desire,” which suggests the presence of cross-modal sensory processes at play within the registers of subject formation.⁸⁷ Lacan’s “graph of desire” offers a topographical representation of the unconscious workings of desire that shape language and subjectivity. In the context of “the graph of desire,” Lacan situates the voice on the same vector as signification, the implication being that verbal signification is anticipated and retroactively sutured within the voice. The Lacanian Symbolic order is thus not solely based in visually abstracted linguistic structures, but rather, it runs along a cross-sensory pathway that lies between signification and the sounding of the voice. The “gaze of the Other,” then, is closely intertwined with what might be termed, “the voice of the Other,” both synaesthetic loci of misrecognized subjective formation.

Given that the Lacanian model of the gaze presents a barred subject anxiously defining his/her sensory boundaries in relation to a structural-symbolic Other, how might gender-based anxieties be interpreted within such a theoretical framework? As an analyst concerned with the symbolic structuring of the unconscious, Lacan interprets sexual difference as active or passive subjective positionalities within a libidinal economy — incommensurate modes of channeling desire. With the polemical assertion,

⁸⁷ “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink. (New York & London: W.W.Norton & Co., 1966), 281 - 312.

“there is no sexual relation” (“*Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*”),⁸⁸ Lacan stresses that within a phallic symbolic structure, sexual difference constitutes an unknowable Real, an excess of meaning that cannot be fully translated into symbolic or imaginary registers.⁸⁹ Despite the structuralist bent of his argument, however, it is crucial to note that the respective symbolic gendered positions of activity and passivity, though far from essentialist categorizations, are not to be considered abundantly fluid nor flexible. The misrecognized subject tends to assume a relatively fixed gendered positionality in an anxious response to the internalized, structuring “gaze of the Other.”

Elizabeth Grosz’s readings of Lacan as elaborated in *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (1990) provide a nuanced contextualization of Lacanian notions of the gaze in terms of feminist concerns with sexuality, desire, and the body. Although Lacan outlines passive and active gendered positionalities within a symbolic structure, Grosz moves to consider how we might position the body — and in particular, the female body — within his theoretical framework. In Grosz’ reading of Lacan, sexuality is experienced as a “triangulated desire,” that is, “desire always refers to a triangle [formed between] the subject, the other and the Other.”⁹⁰ In this formulation, the subject is assumed to be default male, and the woman’s body occupies the position of “objet petit a,” or “the small other,” within the symbolic structure. In contrast to the “small other” of the woman’s

⁸⁸ This oft-quoted statement is first made in Lacan’s *Seminar XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russel Grigg (New York & London, W.W.Norton & Co: 2006), 134. In his structural-symbolic rethinking of Freud’s Oedipus complex, Lacan comes to the conclusion that “what the master’s discourse uncovers is that there is no sexual relation.” Lacan takes up this observation again in the context of his discussion of feminine jouissance included in *Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 17 & 64.

⁸⁹ Lacan’s interpretation of feminine sexuality and gender-based difference is elaborated in *Seminar XX: Feminine Sexuality*, 83-5, 118-19, 143-5.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 80.

body, the capitalized “Other” references the “gaze of the Other,” or the totality of the socio-symbolic structure that can never be fully grasped by the misrecognized subject. Lacan maintains that our first experience of the “gaze of the Other,” or the “desire of the Other,” occurs when we ascertain that the mother’s attentions can be turned away from us — directed towards an unknown source outside of the mother-child dyad.⁹¹ In adult life, desire thus manifests as the attempt to redirect and channel the desire of the m/Other. For the default male subject, the woman’s body comes to assume the position of “objet petit a,” a mediating, corporeal other that can temporarily assuage the infantile anxieties of the loss of the mother’s attention. For a female subject, however, caught within a patriarchal symbolic structure, her path to actualizing desire is much more fraught. Since her body tends to be identified and experienced as “objet petit a,” she might seek to assuage infantile trauma by means of positioning herself on the side of the Other, as an object that can potentially satisfy male desire.

Following Grosz’s feminist reading of Lacan, a wide range of western cultural media that operate under the rubric of “patriarchal visual culture” (what John Shepherd would refer to as an aspect of “male visual hegemony”) — whether it be the tradition of the female nude in European high art, or the objectification of the female form in Golden Age Hollywood cinema — can be read as a presentation of the female body as an “objet petit a,” or an “object-body” that allows the desire of the Other to return to the default male subject through visual channels of sensory perception. In the case of filmic

⁹¹ The infant first understands the desire of the mother as that which turns her attentions away, and Grosz interprets this in visual terms, as the infant’s first awareness of the mother’s desire to look upon something or someone *other* than the infant. I would propose, however, that based on a strict reading of Lacan, the desire of the mother holds a multi-sensory potential; the infant longs for the mother to return her look, just as the infant surely longs for the mother’s voice, and the totality of her physical gestures to return their focus upon the infant.

media, however, both visual and sonic sensory modalities are involved in the triangulated structuring of desire. Rather than a strictly visually-oriented analysis, then, an expanded conception of a multi-sensory Lacanian gaze might be useful for a feminist critique of patriarchal film culture. Mulvey's call for feminist filmmakers to challenge and dismantle a masculinist "mode of looking" might benefit from being extended to encompass filmic practices that bring about a synaesthetic collapse of the phallic-symbolic configuration of the gaze, and the related model of triangulated desire. Indeed, the synaesthetic potentiality of filmic media might be wielded as a tool for displacing the visuocentrism of patriarchal cultural expression.

Ono's *Fly* exemplifies such an instance of a film that troubles the Lacanian model of triangulated desire. Whereas a phallic triangulation of desire would establish a default male filmic gaze emerging in contact with a distanced female "object-body," *Fly*'s opening "birth scene" disrupts such a model by situating the gaze intimately *within* the body. In the opening seconds of the film, Ono synaesthetically evokes a sense of feminine bodily interiority through her hushed lullaby, which comes to be metaphorically associated with a pink, granular "womb-screen." Although the presence of a feminine body is powerfully suggested, however, its contours have yet to be defined according to a clear spatial geometry — the blurred, abstract filmic background thus confounds the visual distancing of the female body as "objet petit a." Prior to the fly's rupture on to the screen, the filmic gaze thus can be interpreted as resting *on the side of the female body*, and desire fails to be channeled according to a triangulated, phallic structurality.

Upon the fly's rupture of the pink womb-screen, yet another problem is presented, as the fly comes to be visually clarified — in place of the woman — as an unlikely "objet petit a." Despite the focus on the fly as a potential object of desire, the pink womb-screen continues to suggest the emergent co-presence of a female body, as a vague spatial orientation begins to limn what might be perceived as fragmentary shots of a female nude. Without offering a definitive representation of a female form, however, Ono's camera work continues to defy a "visual logic" that would delineate a distanced female object body. Further troubling the visual triangulation of phallic desire, Ono's wailing birth pangs and wavering timbral fluctuations evoke a series of bordering sonic subjective positionalities "birthed" within the film's sound space — that of woman, machine, and fly. Couched within the warp and weft of an abstract womb-screen, these conflated sonic ontologies cannot be clearly fissured from one another — or, from one and *the Other*.

The collapsed triangulation of the phallic gaze experienced during the initial "birth scene" characterizes the majority of *Fly*, suggesting the presence of *another kind of gaze*, one that operates according to a relational realm of sensory encounter unfolding beyond that of the Lacanian "gaze of the Other." As a means of approaching a model of understanding a psychic-sensory experience of subjectivity that confounds the operations of the phallic gaze, feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst, Bracha L. Ettinger theorizes the "matrixial borderspace," a contactual psychic field that arises from primordial experiences of shared subjectivity. Within her influential collection of essays, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (2006), Ettinger qualifies the matrixial sphere as "a feminine dimension of the symbolic order dealing with... unconscious processes of

change and transgression at the borderlines, limits, and thresholds of I and non-I(s) emerging in co-existence”⁹² Subjectivity, in the matrixial psychic sphere, is recast as “co-subjectivity” or “trans-subjectivity,” drawing attention to the contactual experiences of “I” and “non-I” that pre-exist our individuation as misrecognized subjects within the Lacanian Symbolic order. Indeed, Ettinger finds that the matrixial realm continues to exert a profound influence upon the human psyche long after we attain phallic individuation. Thus, without discounting the pre-eminence of the Lacanian structural paradigm within most contemporary western socio-cultural frameworks, Ettinger nonetheless proposes a matrixial psychic sphere of “trans-subjective” interconnectivity that both precedes and exists alongside the Lacanian symbolic structure.

According to Ettinger, accessing the matrixial psychic sphere, which is possible through aesthetic encounters as well as guided clinical sessions, provides us with a means of conceptualizing the human psyche as part of a web of encounteral “trans-subjective” networks. Counter to the Freudian/Lacanian gendered model of the triangulation of desire, Ettinger observes the following vis-a-vis the matrixial psychic sphere:

...even if the encounter is between three subjects, inside this sphere triangulation is not Oedipalizing. Com-passionate matrixial empathy is not oedipalizing, yet difference is being swerved there already. Individuation and differentiation do not wait the third subject. The third in the matrix is not the one who will introduce difference inside a supposed symbiosis and thus bring about the first differentiating instances, but is the one who will also co-emerge with-in a matrixial web as an I or a non-I.⁹³

Considering the abstract, synesthetic conflation of woman and insect that Ono presents within Fly, we can interpret a powerful sense of the ontological polarities of “I” and

⁹² Ettinger, *Matrixial Borderspace*, 13.

⁹³ Bracha L. Ettinger, “Copoiesis,” in *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* 5, no. 10 (December 2005): 704.

“non-I” co-emerging in difference. Whereas triangulation occurs in key moments of the film, it is frequently disrupted, returning fly and woman into a womb-like primordial visual and sonic envelope of “trans-subjective” emergence. Within the aesthetic, cross-sensory psychic field of Ono’s *Fly*, I would argue that there are indeed matrixial subjectivising processes at play. In Ettinger’s view, cultural works that provide access to such a matrixial “trans-subjective” encountural space are valuable in that they offers us a means of experiencing subjectivity “without turning the other and the Cosmos into an object” — a worthy feminist project that brings about a formidable challenge to Lacanian phallogentrism.⁹⁴

Whereas a phallic gaze structures meaning by reinforcing a fissure between self and a distanced, gendered other, within the encountural, “trans-subjective” realm of the matrixial borderpace, *another type of gaze* manifests. Ettinger qualifies the “matrixial gaze” as a psychic sensory field that links together emergent subjective grains. The matrixial gaze is conceptualized in terms of “a link that ebbs and flows with the co-emerging and co-fading of the connected I and non-I.”⁹⁵ The matrixial gaze thus displaces the divisive renderings of the phallic order, invoking the borderspaces between co-subjects marked by the traces of a primordial, shared alterity. Ettinger’s neologism, “borderlinking,” refers to the processes of the matrixial gaze that links subjective boundaries, resisting the phallic division of the fissured, lost object. Since the matrixial sphere operates according to the impulse of borderlinking, desire is figured not as a triangulated geometry between fissured polarities, but rather, as the impulse to forge

⁹⁴ Bracha L. Ettinger, “Fragilization and Resistance,” *Studies in The Maternal* 1, no. 2 (2009): 1.

⁹⁵ Ettinger, *Matrixial Borderspace*, 124.

links within the fluid borderspaces of subjective grains. Such a radical reconfiguration of desire points to the possibility of theorizing the aspects of human gendered social life that cannot be sufficiently explicated by a phallic symbolic structure — shared aesthetic affects that arise between artist and spectator, for example, in addition to the intersubjective, or trans-subjective affects of compassion, empathy, and trauma, to name but a few.

The matrixial gaze, like the phallic gaze of triangulated desire, can assume a synaesthetic manifestation. Although Ettinger maintains that the visual field is the privileged channel of subjective definition, she also stipulates that the gaze need not be restricted to scopic pathways. As a visual artist and a visual-based theorist, Ettinger tends to focus on the borderlinking gaze of the matrixial scopic field; however, she also theorizes the operations of a matrixial voice. Within an encounteral psychic space, Ettinger proposes that the voice functions as a sonic threshold of contact between I and non-I(s). Whereas Lacan theorizes the voice as an enunciation wherein symbolic meaning is both anticipated and sutured, Ettinger theorizes *another voice*, that of the matrixial voice that sounds emergent meanings within a borderspace of contactual subjectivity. In fact, Ettinger goes so far as to argue that the “voice as a psychic element can only be accounted for in relation to an entirely different psychic sphere,” implying that human vocality holds a particular propensity for matrixial borderlinking. Here Ettinger’s theoretical workings resonate with those of McLuhan and Shepherd, who also observe the ways in which visuality tends to reinforce a spatial geometry that hinges on the division of the subject from his/her environment, whereas vocality tends to reinforce the situatedness of the subject within a matrix of contactual, shared “acoustic space.” In

Ettinger's framework, the voice, as a psychic element, is thus conceptualized as a "vibrating string," or a "threshold" that joins together the "the borderline between I and non-I."⁹⁶ As psychic conduits, the gaze and the voice thus represent the multi-sensory, or even cross-sensory modalities of matrixial borderlinking.

A matrixial sensory awareness ultimately prompts the fragilization of phallic subjective boundaries, and intensifies one's instinctive awareness of a primordial borderspace of subjective co-recognition, compassion, and shared desire. Since the phallic realm of structured meaning that dominates our everyday lives is naturalized as a normative mode of subjective self-definition, a shift into the matrixial borderspace can be attended by a particular form of trauma, which Ettinger refers to as the "fragilization of self-hood."⁹⁷ It is in line with this form of borderlinking trauma that I will interpret the anxiety communicated in the opening "birth scene" of *Fly*, as the emergent fly and woman's body are configured within the violent, rupturing sounds of Ono's interstitial voice. Fluctuating between alternate timbral ontologies, Ono's voice emerges as a matrixial vocality — that is, a synaesthetic locale in which the borders of insect, woman, and machine cease to be limned.

Whereas the opening of *Fly* establishes a matrixial mode of sensory apprehension in place of phallic structurality, the proceeding visual and sonic narrative builds tension as the audience experiences the frequent slippage between matrixial and phallic modes

⁹⁶ Ettinger, *Matrixial Borderspace*, 185.

⁹⁷ See Ettinger, *Matrixial Borderspace*, 181. Ettinger qualifies self-fragilization as carrying both traumatic as well as healing potentialities. She writes: "the matrixial impossibility of not-sharing with the other is profoundly fragilizing; it demands its price, but also gives rise to its own beauty." Also see "Fragilization and Resistance," where Ettinger observes, "in self-fragilization the subject encounters the other, and realizes its vulnerability while resisting its own tendency to turn the other into an object."

of psychic-sensory experience. At certain moments, the body of Virginia Lust is revealed as an “objet petit a,” but then she soon slips back into the formless abstraction of the matrixial womb-screen. Likewise, considering the film’s sonic content, Ono’s voice frequently shifts from feminine timbral orientations to uncanny, potentially non-human timbral orientations. These visual and sonic shifts construct an uncertain, cross-modal sensory field of gendered dis-ease.⁹⁸ At 1:29, for example we see the first example of such a slippage between matrixial and phallic sensory modes of perception. Whereas the opening of the film establishes a blurred, matrixial encounter with the feminine form, at 1:29, the camera flashes into focus, revealing a disconcertingly clear shot of a woman’s painted toes. This flash of a woman’s toes marks the first visual indication of a distanced, female object body. This brief shot of visual clarity is, however, a momentary blip within an otherwise obscure, darkened, matrixial representation of the underside of the foot — during which time the fly’s body slips in and out of the female form and the backing womb-screen, as though all three are co-emerging and co-fading within an indiscernible filmic warp and weft. Accompanying this matrixial representation of a woman’s foot, Yoko Ono vocalizes a series of curt, stifled multiphonic utterances that straddle the timbral boundaries of an adult woman’s voice, a baby’s cries, and mechanical noise — a machine-like sonority that evokes at once the creaking of a metal hinge, or perhaps the amplified movements of the the fly’s exoskeleton maneuvering across an unknown terrain. The undecidable ontology of the

⁹⁸ The shifting uncertainty of the matrixial realm is explicated by Ettinger through the metaphor of Euridyce, a Greek mythological figure who is banished to the underworld in the moment her lover, Orpheus, turns to gaze upon her, defying the instructions of the gods. The matrixial sphere is thus conceptualized as a psychic sensory plane that paradoxically vanishes from the frame of our understanding in the moment it is apprehended by a visuocentric/phallogocentric symbolic order. Since phallogocentric logic tends to create gendered meaning through the distanced of subject and object, matrixial “logic” cannot be grasped through such a lens.

vocal sounds, combined with the abstract, shifting visual representation of the female form contributes to an unsettling deconstruction of phallogentric modes of filmic desire.

Not only does the abstract terrain of *Virginia Lust* present a slippage between matrixial and phallic modes of desire, she is also presented as uncanny in that she occupies an uncertain ontological borderspace between life and death. As the abstract female nude is gradually brought into focus, the audience becomes increasingly aware of the corpse-like stillness of the body, juxtaposed against the active, encroaching movements of the fly — an insect known for its potentially necrophagous tendencies. In his influential essay on “The Uncanny”(1919), Freud proposes that this unsettling affect is evoked when one senses an imminent borderspace between life and death, and is thus most commonly experienced “in relation to dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts.”⁹⁹ According to Freud, an encounter with the uncanny is thought to bring about a liminal state wherein repressed thoughts and impulses might “recur,” or re-emerge into consciousness. There are significant gendered implications associated with the Freudian theory of the uncanny, since Freud maintains that primary repression is linked to the infant’s severed connection with the maternal body. A woman’s corporeality is thus thought to hold a uniquely uncanny, and death-like quality, inducing the anxiety of being drawn back into the womb — the ultimate dissolution of the ego.

The Freudian “death drive,” (*Todestrieb, or Thanatos*) as defined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), builds upon this notion, theorizing a destructive operation of

⁹⁹ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” trans. Alix Strachey, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, eds. Vincent B. Leitch et al. (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 2001), 944.

human desire that propels a return to a pre-subjective, primordial state.¹⁰⁰ According to Freud's theory of the death drive, living organisms are not only motivated by the pursuit of pleasure and survival, they are also guided by a primitive compulsion to repeat trauma in order to master it. Freud observes this compulsion in his grandson's "fort-da," or "gone-there" game, where the child attempts to exert mastery over his mother's absence by recreating the trauma of disappearance in play. Freud theorizes that the ultimate objective of such a "compulsion to repeat" is to be the master of one's own trauma, and by extension, the master of one's own demise. That is, in propelling oneself back to a state of non-life, one acquires the agency to effectively die on one's own terms. Seeing as the maternal body represents the origins of life, a return to an inanimate state is mediated through the female body, which comes to be misrecognized as a conduit of destructive desire, a threat to the boundaries of the individuated adult subject. In the post-Freudian tradition, Lacan's reading of the Freudian death drive recasts this precept in wider structural-symbolic terms, as a channel of destructive desire that draws us towards the incomprehensible, ontological register of the Real.

Working within the Freudian/Lacanian tradition, woman-oriented French psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva, also upholds the view that for the individuated subject, the repressed maternal body is associated with death and the destruction of the subject. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Kristeva outlines a gendered theory of abjection as an affect with a particularly disturbing potential, invoking a latent anxiety of the repressed maternal. The corpse, in Kristeva's characteristically evocative

¹⁰⁰ Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XVIII Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955).

language, represents “the utmost of abjection... death infecting life... something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us”¹⁰¹ As a female nude who straddles the uncanny boundary between object of desire and abject corpse, in the context of *Fly*, Virginia Lust comes to be such an embodiment of the feared ontological slippage between self and m/Other — the boundaries that delineate gendered subjective formation within the patriarchal symbolic order.

Considered in terms of its visual content, Ono’s *Fly* can thus be interpreted as a film that evokes a synaesthetic push and pull between life and death, a kind of Freudian “Fort-Da” game played out on a woman’s body. Beginning with an amorphous, flickering pink womb-screen, the body of Virginia Lust gradually surfaces as a shifting duality of light, fleshy planes, and dark, cavernous orifices. The hapless fly tickles her rosy surfaces and flits across her shadowed pubic regions, guided by a vocal performance that gives rise to a range of affects from orgasmic joy to primordial, abject fear. In its hapless exploration of Virginia Lust, the fly constitutes a liminal entity, diminutive and sometimes vanishing from sight, all the while mediating the spectator’s journey into anxiety-inducing, feminine corporeal boundaries. Whereas *Fly* begins with a metaphorical “birth scene,” as the would-be insect protagonist emerges from a pink granular womb-screen, approximately three minutes into the film, the fly is momentarily subsumed back into the vagina. In this “reverse birth scene,” the fly slips down the woman’s thighs, accompanied by a descending multiphonic that seems to “mickey-mouse” its movement. Ono then utters several deep, wrenching sounds and the

¹⁰¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), 4.

fly soon re-emerges atop the woman's thighs. At 3:06 the camera angle shifts, instead of facing the vagina head-on, it now shows the fly atop the woman's thigh — an abstract hill-side, looking down towards the darkened valley of her pubic region. Ono begins to repeatedly hum a breathy, seductive melody, each phrase ending with a coquettish, ascending turn that seems to beckon the fly to return to the vagina. When the fly finally drops back down the crevice of the thighs, and lands on the woman's pubic hair, Ono's vocalizations change to near orgasmic exhalations. The camera blurs the fly's body into the pubic hair, melding them into one, and by 3:40 the audience cannot tell if the fly has entered the vagina, or if it still rests atop the darkened mass of pubic hair. As fly and woman become one, the vocal performance falls silent. At 3:40, however, ever so faintly in the background of the sound space, we can hear the emergent sounds of a chaotic, reversed tape loop emerging into earshot. The whirring of the tape loop lasts for a mere 4 seconds, before Ono unleashes a pained multiphonic scream, resulting in the fly's immediate re-emergence from the depths of the vagina. As the fly quickly scampers away, Ono's voice follows it with a series of fluttering, laughter-like multiphonic phrases, as though the preceding screams of horror were merely a jest — the vagina and fly are safely kept apart from a potentially horrific, cross-species union.

Towards the end of the film, for a half a minute extending from 17:55 — 18:30, as the camera returns once again to the vagina, presenting a frank, direct shot of Virginia Lust's sexual anatomy — the longest static shot that is held throughout the film. Notably, the fly is not present in this shot. During this extended, final "vagina scene," Ono performs a kind of disjunctive duet with the accompanying reverse tape loop, which has, by this point, emerged fully into the sound space. Notably, the tape loop is

performed by John Lennon, and it consists of an electronically manipulated, backwards guitar track, similar to those found on Beatles songs such as “Tomorrow Never Knows.” In interview, Ono has revealed that the backwards tape loop consists of John playing along to her vocalizations, and then reversing them in time.¹⁰² The unsettling duet between the reversed guitar-voice and Ono’s exclamatory, multiphonic vocal cries together convey an unfolding struggle within the film’s acoustic space, as though the film’s sonic envelope has been fissured between two co-terminous, yet incompatible sound sources that occupy oppositional ontological domains. Just as the film opened with an uncertain visual spatial geometry, the sound space has now become increasingly abstract, recast as a liminal borderspace between two contactual sonic-temporal ontologies. The temporal reversal of the low-pitched tape loop played out against the visual backdrop of the vagina, evokes a baleful, primordial “return” to the interior acoustic space of the female body. As the acoustic space threatens to be turned back in on itself by means of a sonic “reverse birth,” the camera is transfixed upon shadowed gateway to the womb, conjuring a Freudian nightmare of immanent ontological destruction — a return to an inanimate state beyond phallic definition.

Within the phallic registers of subject formation, the abject, repressed maternal body of Virginia Lust threatens to subsume the fly, and re-emerge into the sound space as a “reversed sound,” an uncanny reminder of a primordial, inanimate past. But here, once again, Ono’s film confounds such a strictly phallocentric interpretation, for the figure that returns to the womb is not a Freudian default male protagonist, but a fly — an insect that can never know phallic subjectivity. Although the fly is presented, at

¹⁰² Munroe, *Yes: Yoko Ono*, 282.

times, as a default male protagonist, it never fully manifests as an individuated, personified entity; rather, it slips and shifts between the role of phallic subject, and matrixial co-subject, a contactual non-I that emerges and recedes into the blurred feminine terrain of Virginia Lust. The fly's undecidable subjective ontology thus presents an aporia that points to the concomitant possibility of *another kind* of death drive unfolding within *Fly*.

Art historian and feminist scholar, Tina Kinsella, has recently explored and interrogated the notion of the Freudian uncanny in the context of experimental feminist photography that captures female bodies blurred into inanimate surroundings.¹⁰³ Whereas extant scholarship interprets such photography as "Thanatography," evoking a destructive Freudian death drive, Kinsella argues for the use of Ettingerian theory to expand our understanding of the particular type of drive that manifests within these surreal photographic representations. Contrary to the Freudian tradition that holds the maternal body as a site of subjective obliteration, Ettinger observes that the womb, in fact, constitutes a primary site of *subjectivisation*. In her 2005 article, "Copoiesis," Ettinger presents a particularly cogent précis of her matrixial theory, explicating her notion of "copoiesis," as an aesthetic transformation of the world that occurs along the unconscious, encounteral pathways of the matrixial borderspace. Ettinger writes: "copoietic transformational potentiality evolves along aesthetic and ethical unconscious paths: strings and threads, and produces a particular kind of knowledge."¹⁰⁴ Through

¹⁰³ See Tina Kinsella's analysis of Francesca Woodman's work, "Resisting Pathologies of Individualism: Some Thoughts on Affective Community," Conference Presentation, *Social Pathologies of Contemporary Civilization 5th International Conference*, Erasmus University Rotterdam, NL, October, 2014, 1 - 13.

¹⁰⁴ Bracha L. Ettinger, "Copoiesis." *Ephemerata: Theory and Politics in Organization* 5, no. 10 (December, 2005): 703. www.ephemeraweb.org.

aesthetic encounters that open up such matrixial borderlinking paths, subjective boundaries can be fragilized and transgressed; however, owing to the fact that matrixial “trans-subjective” boundaries are shared, there is no accompanying fear of subjective obliteration. As viewers are brought into a contactual space of psychic borderlinking with experimental works that blur a woman’s corporeality, a copoietic, transformational drive can manifest. While this impulse might be referred to as a kind of “death drive,” within the matrixial sphere it is not imbued with an aggressive impulse — it functions to propel one towards a state of “non-life as the not yet emerged, the not yet becoming alive.”¹⁰⁵

Returning to the first “reverse birth scene” of *Fly*, where the insect’s body is visually blurred into the woman’s vagina, we can observe, in addition to the operations of a Freudian death drive, the emergence of a copoietic, transformational drive towards a state of non-life, or not yet becoming. Whereas the Freudian interpretation of the fly’s subsumption into the vagina gives rise to an anxiety of female anatomical difference, and the obliteration of the individuated subject, a matrixial reading of this scene would interpret it in terms of the fragilization of the boundaries between woman and fly, a cross-species trans-subjective encounter that dissolves the distance between I and non-I. In this vein, the orgasmic delight and fear that are dually expressed in Ono’s vocal performance can be thought of not only as a sublime jouissance, but more so as the vocalization of the ambivalent affective impulses that arise during borderlinking encounters, namely, the pleasure of merging boundaries-in-difference, and also the attendant trauma of subjective fragilization. Throughout the film, in the alternating

¹⁰⁵ Ettinger quoted in Kinsella, “Resisting Pathologies of Individualism: Some Thoughts on Affective Community,” 7.

close-ups and abstractions of her figure that are experienced in tandem with the timbral slippage of Ono's vocal performance, *Virginia Lust* can be interpreted as a female form guided by the ebb and flow of a synaesthetic, trans-subjective "Thanatos." Inviting the viewer into a matrixial borderspace that disrupts a normative, phallic psychic-corporeal ontology of the self, Ono's *Fly* thus gives rise to the possibility of a fragilization of the boundary between life and non-life.¹⁰⁶

In the final "reverse birth scene," as the camera focuses on the close-up shutoff the vagina, a temporally-reversed sonic entity emerges into the film's acoustic space, and a matrixial harmonics opens up between Ono's voice and its temporal other. The unsettling duet of the two temporally opposed vocalities enter into a contactual duet, their respective human and non-human, or mechanical ontologies also come into border linking contact. The sounds of woman, fly, machine are woven into a matrixial interstitiality that blurs the boundaries between various sonic expressions of life and non-life. This emergent matrixial acoustic space propels us into the unknown, a space that is incommensurate with the Lacanian Other — *another kind of Other*, so to speak — a place of primordial origins where woman, fly, and machine are at once recognized in their mutual copoietic transformation.

¹⁰⁶ A historical precedent for this type of matrixial death drive, involving the interplay between woman and fly can be read in Emily Dickinson's 1896 poem, "I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died." In the synesthetic imagery evoked in this poem, Dickinson represents her death in terms of her awareness of the buzzing sound of a fly, which leads her to a psychic space where the scope field collapses, and she "cannot see to see." This enigmatic poem could be interpreted not only as poem about a woman's death, but rather as her entering a synesthetic, matrixial borderspace between life and non-life — and as in Ono's film, the Fly comes to be her guide into this realm. The phrase "cannot see to see," is ambivalent in that it indicates not so much the loss of sight due to death, but the acquisition of a new mode of visuality. I would like to further investigate the resonances between Dickinson's poem and Ono's short film in the context of a future article.

Conclusion

Ono presents *Fly* as a film inspired by a riddle of misrecognition — “we are always deceiving ourselves about what we are seeing.” What this riddle points to, in my interpretation, is the problematic psychic-sensory make-up of the gaze, a relational field of encounter that holds both visual and sonic modalities that unfold within the borderspaces of subjectivising encounters. In my analysis of *Fly* I have thus attempted to unpack the transformational, cross-sensory borderspaces that inform the film’s content. As a film that presents a woman’s body as a central focus, an examination of *Fly* demands an inquiry into the psychic channels of gendered subjective formation that undergird western visual culture. In this chapter, I have presented two modes of psychoanalytic interpretation that can give rise to oppositional, yet co-terminous interpretive possibilities. First, the notion of the Lacanian, phallogocentric gaze as one that creates a fissure between self and other, and seeks to fill this lack by projecting desire onto a visually distanced feminine object-body. On the other hand, Ettinger’s theorizations of the matrixial gaze, and the matrixial voice, provide an alternative to phallogocentric modes of subject formation, upholding the subjectivizing possibilities of borderlinking I’s with contactual non-I’s. Phallic and matrixial interpretive possibilities tend to exist as layered, emergent theoretical rubrics. As we catch a glimpse of one, the other resurfaces, and vice versa. This type of interpretive work demands a kaleidoscopic, critical eye and ear — one that is attuned to the shifting of borders, the displacement of boundaries, without seeking a fixed point of arrival. Interpreted in such a way, Ono’s film presents woman, fly, machine, and voice within a cross-sensory, synaesthetic matrix that defies not only masculinist modes of looking, but suggests a whole-scale

displacement of naturalized phallogentric sensory modalities — what Ettinger would define as our means of feeling the way from our self to the Cosmos.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Ettinger concludes her study on “Fragilization and Resistance” with the co-poietic sentiment that “the human spirit is a string of the spirit of the Cosmos. In relinquishing one's own desire to it one is borderlinking to the spirit of the world, nourished by it, transformed by it but also transforming it” (2009, 28).

Chapter 2

PART B: Woman and Fly within a “Fourth Space” of Contactual Hybridity

The preceding two chapters have attempted to tease out the interstitial qualities of Yoko Ono’s experimental vocal technique, which I have argued, presents matrixial trans-subjective potentialities. While the first chapter focused on contextualizing Yoko Ono as a transnational woman artist whose extra-normal vocal works — particularly those drawn from the studio album, *Fly* (1970) — display a tendency towards subjective fragilization, the second chapter focused exclusively on her independent short film, *Fly* (1970), and its matrixial synaesthetic modalities. Pulling together these two investigative threads, this chapter will move to engage the thematic of colonial contact in relation to trans-subjective, borderlinking aesthetics. Considered in terms of contemporary trends in New York underground cinema, Ono’s *Fly* can be contextualized as a work in the vein of “primitivist” avant-garde film: a genre characterized by the use of early 20th century, or “primitive” filmmaking techniques, and often thematizing western colonialist notions of the “primitive.” Within Ono’s “primitivist” foray into the encounter between woman and fly, however, the figure of the insect offers up a conundrum of sorts: is the fly acting as an agent of the colonialist gaze? Or a living gateway to another “primitive” life world beyond a phallic-colonialist optics? In terms of the film’s soundtrack, the insect’s sonic ontology also presents a puzzling interpretive dilemma — while Ono gives voice to the sounds of the fly, these insect-like timbres are blended with a feminine vocality, at times evoking a melange of traditional Japanese vocal references, and at other times, shrill mechanical noise. The

mechanical timbres produced in her vocal performance contrast with the thematic of the “primitive,” suggesting an emergent borderspace between pre-industrial, pre-western sensory modalities, and the insurgent noise of industrial society.

Interpreting *Fly* as a fraught space of gendered colonial contact unfolding within both visual and sonic sensory modalities, I will employ Homi Bhabha’s theory of the Third Space of colonial contact as a means of theorizing the racially-inflected psycho-structural hybridization that arises within the metaphorical encounter between explorer and terra nullius. Furthermore, given the unusual casting of the explorer as insect, I will propose that in the case of *Fly*, the inter-species contact represented on screen gives rise to post-humanist interpretive possibilities, in particular, Jakob von Uexküll’s notion of ontology as defined according to relational, cross-species life worlds, or *umwelt*. Drawing together Bhabha’s Third Space and the Uexküllian *umwelt*, I will propose that a “Fourth Space” of post-colonial, post-human encounter emerges within *Fly*. A dimensionality that displaces and recontextualizes a phallic-colonial psychostructural economy, the “Fourth Space” pays homage to Ettinger’s matrixial psychoanalytic thought. Just as a matrixial model of trans-subjective aesthetic encounter points to new horizons of subjective definition that reconfigure phallic structurality, my analysis of Ono’s *Fly* will thus move to qualify a four-dimensional geometry of (post)colonial encounter — a geometry that arises through the mediating body — and sounds — of the insect.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Although Ettinger’s theory has yet to be appropriated in a cross-cultural or post-colonial context, in her introduction to the *The Matrixial Borderspace*, entitled “Femininity: Aporia or Sexual Difference?” Griselda Pollock hints at the possibilities of Ettingerian theory in this regard. Pollock writes: “translating into the political sphere, it is the foreclosure of the co-subjectivity that is the premise of the matrixial borderspace that forms the psychic basis of a range of racisms that fracture the human community, even as regards the right of life and death”(Pollock 2006, 29). This chapter thus marks a preliminary attempt to read Ettingerian theory alongside political theory, as well as posthumanist theory.

Ono's *Fly* in Context: Primitivism, Avant-Garde Cinema, and the Encounter of Bordering *Umwelt*

Before moving to contextualize *Fly* in terms of its more immediate, avant-garde filmic influences, it bears mention that Ono's 1970 work can be historically positioned between the release of two eponymous Hollywood blockbusters: Kurt Neumann's 1958 classic, *The Fly*, starring Vincent Price, and the later, 1986 David Cronenberg remake, starring Jeff Goldblum. Based on a short story by British science fiction author, George Langelaan, first appearing in a 1957 issue of *Playboy* magazine, both versions of *The Fly* take up the Kafka-esque trope of a man's horrifying transformation into a hybrid, insect Other. While Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" is typically interpreted as an absurdist piece, owing to the troubling lack of an explanation for the protagonist's sudden metamorphosis into a reviled insect — a "monstrous vermin" — Langelaan's short story re-frames this trope into a tale of scientific experimentation gone awry. Whereas Gregor Samsa represents a victim of tragic circumstance, Langelaan's scientist is thus very much the architect of his own demise — his transformation into a horrifying human-fly hybrid is presented as karmic retribution for his ethically questionable, even hubristic, scientific pursuits. In both versions of the Hollywood film, the horror of the transformation from man to fly culminates in the shocking visual revelation of a protagonist whose physical form has been mutated and recombined with that of an insect. Considered in terms of Freudian psychoanalytics, this monstrous fly-man could be said to represent a fearful ontology that straddles the boundary between human existence and the return to an earlier evolutionary state — a chimeric embodiment of the

primordial death drive. In the tragic conclusion of both films, man's most advanced powers of reason, rationality, and science, are thus thwarted by a nightmarish return of the "primitive."

While the Hollywood horror genre thus presents the protagonist's transformation in highly visuocentric terms, emphasizing the spectacle of a man's body reconstituted as insect, Ono's *Fly* takes a radically different approach. As argued within the preceding chapter, the union of insect and human presented in Ono's abstract short film occurs as a synaesthetic blending of visual and sonic modalities. Considered in visual terms, the borders of woman and insect are intermingled by a gentle play of light — slipping back and forth within the gradations of a matrixial "womb screen." Considering the sonic dimension of the film, Ono's vocal apparatus assumes a similar, matrixial function, giving voice to a range of timbres that shift between woman and insect. Due to the synaesthetic play between the visual superimposition of fly and woman, and the sonic timbral layering of these respective ontological polarities, a cross-modal sensory borderspace emerges that displaces and reconfigures the Freudian death drive in terms of an Ettingerian matrixial Thanatos. A feminine psychic compulsion that works to dissolve phallic subjectivity into the totality of the surrounding inanimate world, Ettinger identifies matrixial Thanatos as a powerful compulsion within the matrixial psychic sphere. Interpreted in this vein, Ono's film allows us to think past a mainstream cinematic trope, reconceptualizing the patriarchal thematics of the horror of cross-species border-crossing and the loss of masculine autonomy and rationality. Ono's *Fly*

instead presents a matrixial aesthetic experience that opens the possibility of a sensory reveling within the borderspace of encounter between human and insect.¹⁰⁹

Within Ono's filmic matrixial borderspace, the woman's body, the voice, and the fly each conjure primordial, or "primitive" origins brought into a liminal space of contact. In moving to categorize Ono's *Fly* as a "primitivist" piece of experimental cinema, however, it is first necessary to clarify the dual meanings of the term, "primitive," within the discipline of film scholarship. Defined broadly, the "primitive," in western high art culture constitutes a highly problematic reference to indigenous cultures that predate colonial contact, imbued with the perceived feminine attributes of being natural, child-like, and pre-rational. Within the context of film history, however, "primitive" film references early cinema from 1895 to around 1910 — early experimentations with film technology that are perceived as the inferior "Other" to classic narrative cinema.¹¹⁰ Exemplified by the turn of the century works of the Lumière brothers, "primitive" film is characterized by a frontal camera that remains relatively static in positioning. Narratives tend to be spliced together in an episodic, sometimes cyclical manner, and often lack unidirectional, linear plot development. Another key characteristic of early cinema is a fascination with special effects. Effects such as the close-up were often justified with elaborate schema, for example, a boy looking through a magnifying glass, as in George Albert Smith's *Grandma's Reading Glass* (1900), or a

¹⁰⁹ For a current work that engages the borderspace between human and insect life worlds, see Isabella Rossellini's series of short films, *Green Porno* (2008). A surreal take on insect life, *Green Porno* offers a compassionate representation of the life worlds of insects and simple organisms. With elaborate stage costumes, the actress transforms into various insects and theatrically re-enacts and explains their life processes.

¹¹⁰ Spearheaded by artists such as Henri Rousseau, Paul Gauguin, and Pablo Picasso. The bold colors and flattened perspectives of such works were thought to harken a return to a more "simplistic," folk cultural aesthetic that celebrated the indigenous, the natural, and the "primitive."

man peering at women through a telescope, portrayed in a comparable Smith film, *As Seen Through a Telescope* (1900). Although such techniques fell out of favor as linear narrativity and plot development came to be privileged in film, many of these early cinematic practices were later reprised by mid-century avant-gardists who sought alternative modes of filmic expression.

Bohemian filmmaker, Willard Maas's short piece, *Geography of the Body* (1943), for one, can be categorized as such an avant-garde "primitivist" experiment. Constructed as a series of extreme close-up shots of nude bodies spliced together in a non-linear, episodic manner, Maas's *Geography* presents a disjunctive corporeal mapping. The body parts featured in Maas's film are filmed in such tiny detail that they often appear as a series of landscapes. Notably, Maas claimed to have filmed his close-ups through a magnifying glass bought at a dime store — a nod to "primitive" cinema in the vein of Smith's *Grandma's Reading Glass* (1900).¹¹¹ Maas's work can thus be qualified as an example of a mid-century art film that thematizes a colonial desire for the visuocentric mapping of the "primitive" body, actualized by means of "primitive" cinematic technique. Film scholar, Bruce Elder, effusively interprets Maas's work in terms of its use of synecdoche to defamiliarize the body, and transform it "into a strange, marvelous, exotic, and wondrous landscape."¹¹² In my following interpretation, however, I would like to challenge Elder's complimentary reading of Maas's work from a critical perspective that problematizes the representation of the body as a site of exotic "wonder." Central to my interpretation is the observation that Maas's cartography is

¹¹¹ David Lewis, "Geography of the Body," *All Movie Guide*, www.allmovie.com.

¹¹² Bruce Elder, *A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 38.

overlaid with a gendered colonialist narrative of conquest — masculine and feminine body parts are construed in a way that attributes a colonial agency to the masculine body whilst representing the feminine body as the “primitive,” mapped object of desire.

Maas’s seven minute short film begins with a title sequence featuring superimposed traditional cultural references, as a clamorous gamelan orchestra accompanies the appearance of a quotation from Aristophanes’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium*. Presented as an epigraph inscribed onto a relic of antiquity, the Greek transliteration reads: “*Tou hollou out tei epithumiai kai dioxei eros onoma* (When we are longing for wholeness, we say we are in love).”¹¹³ As the gamelan fades out of the soundspace, the bombastic oration of British surrealist poet, George Barker, takes over, guiding the viewer through the ensuing close-ups of the male and female body. A surrealist, verbal montage of allusions to classical as well as colonialist literature, Barker’s narration provides an absurdist chain of non-sequiturs that accompany the disconcerting visual imagery on screen. As Maas cuts to an extended shot of a young woman’s breasts at 1:40, for example, Barker recites, “this evening I came to a west African village, in which the inhabitants, worshippers of the moon, Sappho, distraught with the frustration of her passions, gathered up her skirts.” The film then abruptly cuts to a close-up of a man’s stubbly mouth as he slowly licks his lips, while Barker continues his absurd narrative of an African Sappho, who is now “calling out in a voice that will be heard forever and threw herself off the cliff of her lover’s disdain” (1:40 - 1:50). As the camera shifts to what might be pubic hair, but in its close-up focus resembles a sylvan landscape, Barker theatrically orates, “Oh Hawaii, Hawaii, what was the color of

¹¹³ Elder, *A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry*, 39.

happiness when it inhabited your four islands?” Soon the camera jumps once again to reveal a stark representation of what is most likely an extreme close-up of a vaginal orifice, as Barker humorously recites, “almonds, what inhabits those mysterious caverns? In which a single jewel reminds us that anatomy also has its prizes,” reinforcing the notion that the sexualized female body represents a “prize” to be won by the colonialist narrative protagonist (2:30).

Barker’s speech ultimately concludes the film with a truncated reiteration of the opening quotation, albeit this time in English: “the desire for the whole is love.” The final reprise of this archaic Greek epigraph is imbued with a universalist meaning arising from the symbolic union of beginning and end, past and present. According to Bruce Elder, this framing statement can be interpreted as a meditation on the timeless, “wondrous” nature of love, one that dates back to our primordial origins — evoked within the “primitive” backdrop of nude, male and female corporeal landscapes. From a contemporary gender studies perspective, however, the paired representations of the male and female body can be seen as naturalizing the heteronormative conviction that universal “love” is shared between a heterosexual, cis-gendered pairing that together produce a “whole.” Furthermore, it is worthy to note that the identifiably masculine body parts that are featured in Maas’s *Geography* are those of mapping, consumption, and domination — the man’s eye is repeatedly featured as it hungrily stares into the camera, and his mouth, too, is featured in grotesque proximity as he licks his lips in anticipation. Furthermore, his legs are featured in a way that highlight their virile muscularity and coarse black hair. In contrast, the feminine parts that are featured are soft, hairless, and passive — including the aforementioned, lengthy focus on an idealized

young woman's breast, and an implied — albeit abstract — vaginal orifice that recurs throughout as a key point of focus, and indeed provides one of the more sustained, closing images of the film. Male sexual anatomy, on the other hand, does not directly appear in the film, implying that the terra nullius of Maas' *Geography* is configured in terms that satisfy the heteronormative male viewer. Rather than a life-affirming, “wondrous” love, in my view, the visuocentric focus on a differentiated human anatomy suggests that within Maas's film, the phallic gaze, and its mapping and containment of the feminized body, constitute the foundation of desire. Within such a phallogocentric context, the exotic allusions to colonialist literature as well as the framing sounds of the gamelan constitute safely co-opted sensory fragments of “the primitive” that function to provide a titillating backdrop to Maas's scopophilic fetishization of the woman's body — experienced as an alluring, indigenous, “primitive” terrain.

Whereas Maas's film thus presents an experimental, fragmentary cinematic experience of the body that nonetheless upholds phallic-colonialist models of desire, contemporary women filmmakers of the New York underground scene, such as Maya Deren, adopted “primitive” techniques and thematics as a means of problematizing their own alterity within the male-dominated film world.¹¹⁴ Maya Deren's most celebrated piece, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), pays homage to “primitive” film technique as

¹¹⁴ The simplicity of “primitivist” film technique held great appeal for women filmmakers of the day, for both artistic as well as pragmatic reasons. According to film scholar, Alison Butler, women have always found it easier to enter into avant-garde filmmaking than mainstream filmmaking, due to the lack of a need for “big budgets and professional training”(2002, 57). Despite their participation in avant-garde filmmaking, however, women filmmakers are seldom acknowledged in standard film histories. At the time when Yoko Ono began her career in the New York art world, there were countless influential women filmmakers active in the scene, including Maya Deren, and multimedia artists Carolee Schneeman and Valie Export, to name but a few. Other notable women filmmakers active in the mid-century New York avant-garde scene include Marie Menken, a prolific director, and wife of Willard Maas, as well as Shirley Clarke, a leading filmmaker in the scene, whose works included experimental films as well as documentaries.

part of a non-linear, cyclical narrative that explores and deconstructs the gendered racial categories of self and other.¹¹⁵ Feminist film scholar, Judith Mayne qualifies Deren as a filmmaker whose body of work aims to challenge the “logocentric dualities of Western consciousness.”¹¹⁶ In this vein, *Meshes of the Afternoon* presents a central female protagonist who is fragmented across four different incarnations of her self, each in pursuit of a mysterious Other — a dark, cloaked figure in non-western garb, possibly some form of a middle eastern abaya, who is soon revealed to possess a mirrored face.¹¹⁷ The special effects that are employed in Deren’s silent, black and white film are inspired by the early films of Georges Méliès (1861-1938), who often employed double exposure to multiply himself on screen. The mirrored face, too, is a “primitive” technique, producing a captivating filmic illusion by means of a rudimentary technology. Given that Deren’s exotified Other holds up a mirrored physiognomy to the gazing, fragmentary protagonist, the duality of self and other is thus presented as folded over, “meshed” together within the looped narrative cycle. Deren’s cyclical narrative constitutes yet another homage to early cinematic practice; with each repetition of the narrative, slight

¹¹⁵ In addition to their frequent appropriation of “primitive” film technique, according to Alison Butler, one defining stylistic feature of women’s experimental filmmaking of the era is the trope of authorial self-inscription. In Butler’s view, this trope entails “the construction of a viable speaking position which is not coherent or singular but enacts the author’s experience of selfhood and embodiment as multiple and fragmented”(2002, 61). This trope can be identified within Deren’s fragmentary protagonist in *Meshes of the Afternoon* and also within Ono’s *Fly* — the fluctuating vocal timbres of the accompanying soundtrack, and the shifting gradations of the female nude point to an undecidable, fragmentary experience of feminine subjectivity.

¹¹⁶ Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 186.

¹¹⁷ Although Deren’s original version of the film was silent, in 1959, she commissioned her then husband, Japanese composer, Ito Teiji, to score the film. Ito’s score is inspired by medieval Japanese *gagaku*, or court music. Given that Ito mainly composed western art music, it is interesting that he chose to set *Meshes* to *gagaku*. To an untrained western ear, the sparse textures of *gagaku* can be heard as eerie, owing to the lack of a discernible rhythmic regularity, or a tonal center. It is possible that this pre-western, traditional musical form was adopted as a means of highlighting the film’s central theme of the fragmentation of a western subjectivity through an encounter with a “primitive” Other.

alterations contribute to a building anxiety. Each time the protagonist falls asleep and emerges from a dream, another 'I' is born, and enters into the pursuit of the mysterious, mirrored Other. As the female protagonist gets closer to the cloaked figure, her subjectivity is thus increasingly fragmented, and brought into crisis.

In Judith Mayne's cogent interpretation of *Meshes*, she characterizes the film as portraying "a narrative vision in which the polarities of self and other, of female and male, of dream and waking are fragile."¹¹⁸ Building upon Mayne's analysis, I believe that Deren's work can be interpreted as giving rise to a matrixial borderspace that positions the female protagonist as a fragilized subjectivity encroaching upon the threshold of a contactual alterity. In this interpretation, the mirrored face of the cloaked Other holds particular significance, emphasizing the notion that what appears to be an Other is in fact a shared reflective borderspace wherein the co-subjectivities of the protagonist can emerge in contactual relation to the non-I. Notably, the fragilization of the protagonist's subjective boundaries occurs within a "primitive," cyclical narrative that defies linear directionality, while the fragmentary, bordering protagonists and the mirrored visage of the cloaked figure suggest a psychostructural relation that resists a phallogocentric triangulation of self and other.¹¹⁹ Rather than a phallic desire to pursue the Other in order to fill the lack at the center of a logocentric structure, the matrixial impulse that

¹¹⁸ Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema*, 189.

¹¹⁹ The ambiguous ending of the film bears mention here. At the conclusion of the film, the sleeping protagonist awakens to find a male figure gazing upon her. In a panic she reaches for a knife and takes aim at his face. As she strikes, it is revealed that his face is a reflection in a mirror, and it shatters into pieces. The next scene cuts to the pieces of glass being swept away into the ocean. The narrative is then recommenced from the perspective of the man, who retraces the woman's steps to her door, only to find the woman protagonist dead, covered in seaweed and shards of glass. It appears that the masculine visage that she shattered was her own. The male figure thus presents the final sight of Deren's body lying dead in her room — a female body objectified by the male gaze. Problematically, the conclusion of Deren's film somewhat emphasizes the final triumph of male gaze.

propels *Meshes*' fractured protagonist is suggestive of the desire for borderlinking — that is, an impulse to “fragilize” the boundaries of phallic selfhood in pursuit of a shared contactual alterity.

Although Ono's *Fly* seems to follow a trajectory similar to Maas's *Geography*, in my view, her work bears a closer thematic resemblance to Deren's work, as an avant-garde film that foregrounds and problematizes western cultural anxieties surrounding feminine subjectivity, and the return of “the primitive.” Notably, Ono's use of direct, frontal camera angles, crude jump cuts, and her penchant for disconcerting close-ups all work to reference the conventions of “early cinema.” Although her use of color film departs from this early cinematic sensibility, the blurred gradations of the female nude often appear as shades of a monochromatic “womb-screen.” As in Deren's work, Ono's *Fly* evokes a powerful borderlinking impulse — whereas Deren visually represents a fragmentary feminine subjectivity, however, Ono features a woman's body as a fragmentary series of extreme close-up “landscapes.” Arising in synesthetic relation to this corporeal geography, Ono sounds a fragmentary female vocality that shifts between the timbral polarities of woman and insect. Like the mirrored face of Deren's cloaked Other, Ono's “insect Other,” too, suggests an undecidable alterity that complexifies the dyadic self/other relation. Whereas the woman's body seems to offer up a “primitive” landscape to be explored by a Maasian phallic gaze, the pesky presence of the fly complicates the duality of colonizer and colonized.

Encased within angular exoskeletons that bring to mind the inanimate, cold, hard surfaces of mechanical equipment, western scientific discourse has long attributed “machine-like” qualities to the insect. In fact, when the field of biology first came to be

consolidated as a discipline in mid-19th century Europe, western science and philosophy tended to categorize the totality of the natural world as a kind of “machine,” and all of its creatures — from the most “primitive” life forms, to larger mammals — were thought to be governed by causal, “machine-like” impulses.¹²⁰ Whereas Darwinian theory falls in line with such a mechanistic view of the natural world, Estonian biologist, Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944) called for an ontological turn in biology that would challenge the dominant scientific view of animals as “machine-like” objects. Uexküll’s detailed investigations into animal behavior led him to conclude that each animal possesses a unique subjective relation to its environment. Uexküll’s conviction that each animal constitutes a unique subjectivity gave rise to his theorization of the *umwelt* — a perceptual space that comprises each animal’s distinctive experience of their immediate environment. Given that 19th century trends in biological research took a human-centric approach towards understanding the animal world, Uexküll’s move to account for animal subjectivity marked a radical conceptual and methodological shift. Rather than an objectified, “machine-like” life form, Uexküll contends that each animal, no matter how small, or how “simple,” is compelled by a subjective inner-force as it makes its way through the sensory parameters of its perceived environment. In this vein, Uexküll theorizes that “every subject spins out, like the spider’s threads, its relations to

¹²⁰ In his chapter entitled “Jakob von Uexküll’s Theories of Life,” philosopher Brett Buchanan offers an illuminating history of the rise discipline of biology, contextualizing Uexküll as a theoretical biologist whose works diverged from “conventional” 19th century and early 20th century biological thought that treated “animals as objects governed by mechanical laws”(2008,7). Uexküllian thought departed from the theoretical models of his predecessors, Karl Ernst von Baer and Charles Darwin that dominated the field of biology at the time. According to Baer’s teleological theory of evolution, largely based on studies of embryonic morphology, animals evoked according to a predetermined design. On the other hand, Charles Darwin’s more mechanistic, causal model attributed evolution to chance mutations and competition based in “natural selection.” Similar to Baer, Uexküll sees the natural environment as following a plan, but not one that is predetermined, but one that is ever-changing — dependent upon animals’ behavioral moves within bordering, encounatural *umwelten*.

certain qualities of things and weaves them into a solid web, which carries its existence.”¹²¹

Within his influential studies, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, and *A Theory of Meaning*, originally published together in 1934, Uexküll thus characterizes the superimposing *umwelten* of the natural world as web-like spaces, wherein each animal *umwelt* comes to be interwoven with other contactual *umwelten*. Evoking a musical metaphor as a means of illustrating his theory of layered, contactual *umwelt*, Uexküll likens the bordering *umwelten* of the natural world to the individual rhythmic and melodic units that together form a “great compositional harmony.” Considering the subjective environments of even the smallest microorganism, Uexküll attributes each organic cell with a unique “rhythm.” The rhythmic cadence of cells may unite to form a larger organism, which in turn carries a distinctive “melody.” As contactual spaces open up between two or more animals of bordering *umwelten*, Uexküll invites us to imagine cross-species “symphonies” played out in the wider natural environment (see *ATM* pp. 200-202).

In Uexküllian biology, *umwelt* are thus interposing and interlaced, and as such, each living entity contains a concomitant “otherness” that complements, and blends with, the qualities of an/other entity within a bordering *umwelt*. Uexküll refers to this complementary alterity as a “contrapuntal behavior” embedded within the structure of each animal environment.¹²² Inspired by a poetic turn of phrase drawn from Goethe’s *Farbenlehre* (1810), in which the poet observes, “were the eye not sun-like, It could

¹²¹ Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning*, trans. Joseph D. O’Neil (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2010), 53.

¹²² Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning*, 189.

never gaze upon the sun,” Uexküll proposes that “were the sun not eyelike, It could not shine in any sky.”¹²³ Uexküll applies this complementary relationality to all animals in bordering *umwelt*, citing, for example, that the bee is “flower-like,” and the flower “bee-like.” Theorizing the relational ontology of the fly, Uexküll observes the following: “surely, the spider’s web is configured in a fly-like way, because the spider is also fly-like. To be fly-like means the the spider has taken up certain elements of the fly in its constitution: not from a particular fly but from the primal image of the fly. Better expressed, the fly-likeness of the spider means that it has taken up certain motifs of the fly melody in its bodily composition.”¹²⁴ For Uexküll, the properties of living things are thus constituted vis-a-vis other subjects with whom they enter into relation.

Drawing upon poetic and musical metaphors, Uexküll thus presents an aesthetically-informed, relational approach to animal subjectivity — one that prefigures and anticipates the fragmentary subjectivities proposed by Lacanian psychoanalytics and post-structuralist thought.¹²⁵ Furthermore, Uexküll’s theory of an animal subjectivity enmeshed within contactual, web-like life-worlds resonates strongly with Bracha L. Ettinger’s post-Lacanian theorization of trans-subjective contactuality within the matrixial borderspace. A meeting point between the theorizations of Uexküll and

¹²³ Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning*, 190.

¹²⁴ Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning*, 190 - 91.

¹²⁵ The two key contemporary studies devoted to Jakob von Uexküll both stress the influence of this thinker upon contemporary philosophy and biology. As posthumanism is increasingly coming to be regarded as a relevant discipline within the academy, interest in the works of Uexküll will no doubt continue to expand over the next decade. Bret Buchanan’s *Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environment of Uexküll, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze* (New York: SUNY Press, 2008) situates Uexküllian thought in relation to continental philosophy, in particular stressing the points of intersection between Heideggerian Dasein and animal “being” within the *umwelt*. Carlo Brentari’s *Jakob von Uexküll: The Discovery of the Umwelt between Biosemiotics and Theoretical Biology*, posted 2015. <http://link.springer.com>, on the other hand, speaks to a less humanistic readership, situating Uexküll within the fields of biosemiotics and ecophilosophy.

Ettinger might be located within the works of contemporary continental philosophers, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "Body without Organs" (BwO) can be considered a concept that is in part influenced by — but also radically departs from — Uexküll's notion of animal subjectivity and sensory impetus within the *umwelt*.¹²⁶ Whereas Uexküll theorizes that each organism is driven by an inner force that guides it along structured sensory pathways, in Deleuzian thought, the life force that undergirds the natural world — the collective BwO — is one that resists structurality. The BwO is thus a theoretical representation of a set of rhizomatic impulses that prefigure the constitution of the structured "organism."

In Ettinger's reading of Deleuze and Guattari, the BwO is interpreted as a theoretical model that aims to accomplish a similar project to matrixial psychoanalysis, insofar as it marks an attempt to establish an aesthetic relation between desire/affect and the body that is not determined by a structure of lack, as in the Freudian/Lacanian tradition. For Ettinger, Deleuze's BwO accomplishes an "eradication of the Oedipal mechanism of castration," which comes to be replaced by processes of "presence, production, and the eternal return."¹²⁷ The reverse-castration model that is promised by a Deleuzian return to the BwO is nonetheless problematic, from an Ettingerian standpoint, since it precludes the possibility of "a non-phallic sexual difference, a feminine trans-subjective hybridity."¹²⁸ Matrixial sensory pathways thus encompass

¹²⁶ First introduced in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), the "Body without Organs" refers to a "de-Oedipalized" body that is not governed by Freudian/Lacanian phases of subject formation. A rhizomatic take on corporeal experience, the BwO is in a perpetual state of "becoming," not bound to a unified self-identity.

¹²⁷ Ettinger, "Feminine Sex-Difference in the Poietic and Aesthetic Space," in *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, ed. Brian Massumi (New York: Routledge, 2002), 219.

¹²⁸ Ettinger, "Feminine Sex-Difference in the Poietic and Aesthetic Space," 2002, 219.

aesthetic modalities that neither uphold nor deny the Freudian/Lacanian model of primary Oedipal division and repression. Comparable to the Uexküllian *umwelt*, the matrixial borderspace is a theoretical space wherein subjective entities co-emerge and co-fade as they come to be mutually determined by their concomitant, contactual alterities.

Considering Ono's *Fly*, the encounter between the insect and the female body can be interpreted as a meeting point of such matrixial contactual alterities, as the layered *umwelt* of fly and woman come to bear a relational "likeness" towards one another. The ontological slippage between fly and woman can most readily be experienced in the moments when Ono's delicate multiphonic vibrato comes to sound the fly's wing harmonics. For example, in the two and a half minute "nipple scene"(4:00 - 6:44) that offers an extreme close-up of the fly's movements atop the breast of Virginia Lust, Ono's multiphonic vibrato gradually assumes a "fly-likenes," both in terms of the speed of the oscillation of her voice matching the movement of the fly's wings, and also in terms of the timbre of her voice evoking a high-pitched, "fly-like" sonority. Notably, this vocal-ontological border-crossing unfolds as the fly rests atop the nipple, a fetishized part of the female sexual anatomy that constitutes a potentially anxiety-inducing threshold between the interior and exterior body. Given the primitivist influence that informs Ono's *Fly*, the borderspace of the nipple might be interpreted as evoking a phallic-colonialist death drive, that is, a fear of return to the primordial body, a feminized terrain signifying a foreboding "heart of darkness." Given that the exploratory agent is embodied by an insect, however, and the sounds of the insect come to emerge within Ono's vocal accompaniment, the boundary between

human and other, explorer and terra nullius comes to be blurred, producing an excess of meaning that cannot easily be reconciled within the model of a phallic-colonial cartographic desire.

In the minute preceding the “nipple scene,” the fly rapidly ascends a rugged mountain range of toes and traverses the lonely plain of a belly, as Ono’s gliding multiphonics mickey-mouse the fly’s jagged leaps across the slopes and crevices of Virginia Lust. As the fly approaches the nipple, Ono exhales a series of fluttering, feminine, even orgasmic vocalizations, giving voice, perhaps, to the sedated woman being tickled by the fly, and even deriving an effervescent pleasure from this contact. As the camera hones in on the movements of the fly, the corporeal backdrop of Virginia Lust is blurred into obscurity. As Ono fixes on an extreme close-up on the nipple, the camera remains static for almost 3 minutes (4:00 - 6:44) one of the most protracted static camera angles in the film. Providing a close-up of of the fly resting atop the nipple, the motion-less camera presents a frank visual study of insect behavior, allowing the viewer to witness the precise movements with which the fly expertly cleans each of its hind legs and forearms.

While the fixation on the nipple evokes the operations of a phallic-cartographic visual field, the prolonged, extreme close-up focus on the fly’s movements can be interpreted as producing a perceptual shift into a bordering insect life world. Ironically, in focusing intently on the nipple, Ono displaces the phallic gaze by suggesting the possibility that the nipple also carries an entirely different set of bio-semiotic meanings within the relational lifeworld of the fly. In Uexküllian analysis, we could say that the highly fetishized terrain of female anatomical difference is

displaced, and recast as a component of the fly's *umwelt*. Through the crude, static, "primitivist" extreme close-up, the viewer is invited to enter into another kind of experience of the "primitive": the world-view of the insect. From the vantage point of the fly's *umwelt*, the nipple transforms from a component of female sexual anatomy into an inanimate surface comprising the insect's terrain — a convenient flat surface where a fly might rest to clean its hands. In his detailed observations of the fly's *umwelt*, Uexküll observes that flies' sense taste and draw moisture through their feet. In this scene, the nipple can thus be interpreted as a site of potential nourishment for the insect, a somewhat unsettling outcome that results from the layering of two coterminous *umwelten*.

Accompanying the fly's lingering sojourn on the woman's motionless nipple, Ono performs a series of extended vocalizations that present a conflictual hybridity of timbres and affective impulses. The fact that this scene focuses on the fly's self-cleaning lends it an almost ritualistic interpretation, as though a "primitive" ritual is unfolding between the fly and voice. A series of ecstatic breathy vocalizations accompany the fly's expert self-cleansing routine, until these fluttering exhalations are brought to a sudden halt at 4:52, when Ono abruptly breaks into a jarring scream. Shifting into a strident mechanical timbre, Ono's extended scream conjures the sounds of metal wheels screeching to a rapid halt. Disconcertingly, Ono's sudden timbral shift is not accompanied by any visual change on screen; the camera remains static, and the fly continues its minute ablutions, oblivious to the ensuing non-diegetic scream. Here we experience an incongruous breakdown in the synaesthetic union of gaze and voice. A visceral scream that strangely bears no impact on the unfolding visual field, Ono's

extended screech violently moves to erase — and even mechanically “grind to a halt” — the delicate, passive femininity of the previous exhalations. And yet, within the higher registers of this mechanical screech we can still hear a trace of the earlier feminine voice — a vocal hybridity is thus performed, one that contains contactual — and indeed, conflictual — vocal timbres and affective impulses emerging in difference.

At 5:09, however, the violent screech is soon relieved by another significant transition in the vocal performance, as Ono slips into what resembles a mode of indigenous chant. Given that Ono received early training in the Japanese traditional art of *nagauta* singing, it is most likely that Ono’s chant-style vocalizations make reference to the inflections of this early modern genre of singing employed in *kabuki* theater. Without clear syllabic definition, however, Ono’s loose *nagauta* chant defies comprehension, and unmoored from its pre-western Japanese cultural origins, its phrasing conjures a ghostly indigenous alterity. Remarkably, at 6:26 - 6:28, Ono’s indigenous chant flutters upwards, landing on a high-pitched multiphonic that masterfully synchronizes with the fly’s delicate winging. Here we experience an entrancing moment of synaesthetic union between fly and voice: specifically, the voice of an indigenous feminine melding together with the visual movements of the insect on screen.

The question remains, however, as to how we might theorize the overarching thematics of colonial contact that also plays out alongside the slippage between bordering *umwelt* in Ono’s *Fly*. In order to account for the gendered racial meanings that inflect the space of contact and hybridization represented in *Fly*, I will now shift gears, so to speak, to an engagement with the psychoanalytic underpinnings of

postcolonial theorizations of hybridity. In particular, I will focus on Homi Bhabha's notion of the "Third Space," with the aim of expanding this rubric from the perspective of Irigarayan and Ettingerian conceptions of radical alterity, that is, contactual alterities that are not always commensurate with a phallic triangulation of self, other, and hybrid.

Towards a Fourth Space of Contact: Ono's *Fly* and the Psychoanalytic Contexts of Postcolonial Thought

I would like to begin my inquiry into the thematics of colonial contact represented in *Fly* by setting up a theoretical framework that traces the influence of psychoanalytic concepts, particularly that of the Lacanian gaze, within postcolonial theories of cultural encounter. The intersections between race and class-based critique and psychoanalysis were first explored by psychiatrist and revolutionary intellectual, Frantz Fanon, whose works provide the foundation for current postcolonial psychoanalytic thought. In his 1952 work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon develops an account of the psychological effects of racism based largely upon the experiences of black Martinicans in his homeland of the French colonial Antilles.¹²⁹ A firm critic of the eurocentrism of the western psychoanalytic tradition, Fanon takes Freud to task for not incorporating the black man's lived experience into his analysis, and for focusing almost exclusively on the white bourgeois family unit as the basis for putting forward a purportedly "universal" psychoanalytic theory. Considering the psychic development of blacks in Martinique, Fanon polemically asserts that the Oedipus complex — the foundation of Freudian and Lacanian theorization on repression and the unconscious — is *not* a black issue, owing to the matriarchal indigenous kinship

¹²⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1952).

structure of the Antilles¹³⁰ Despite the absence of an Oedipal family unit, however, Fanon diagnoses a unique form of subjective misrecognition that arises within black men of the French colonies as they come into contact with white colonial institutions and the dominant white subjectivity. Namely, the black man is faced with a colonialist culture that defines him in “phobogenic” terms, that is, as a racial other that induces phobia “due to representing the id, primordial human sexuality, and biology unrestrained by reason.”¹³¹ As a colonized subject trapped within discriminatory socio-cultural structures undergirded by white phobia, the black man misrecognizes his ego as an imperfect reflection of a “white Other.” In the colonial experience, the effect of the Lacanian gaze of the Other is thus exacerbated and figured as a psychopathology — the gaze of the white Other is one that instills a phobic anxiety of the black self that is reinforced by racist and classist symbolic and institutional structures involved in shaping and policing black colonial subjectivity.

While Fanon’s work focuses specifically on black Martinican men’s psychic experience, his rubric holds relevance with respect to other colonial and imperialist contexts. The persistent, racialized fear of Asian Americans, beginning with their arrival in North America in the late 19th century, and leading up to the years following WWII, for example, constituted a phobogenic gaze of the white Other that permeated global popular culture. This phobogenic gaze manifested in the form of harmful, racist representations of East Asians and the “Yellow Peril” within educational texts as well as the mainstream media, perpetuating institutionalized racism in the wake of the

¹³⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 130.

¹³¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 143.

internment of Japanese Americans in the U.S. and Canada during WWII. Arriving in the U.S. in the early 1950s, Yoko Ono's formative years were thus shaped by a socio-cultural climate redolent with racial anxieties. Such early experiences of phobogenic racial othering would be compounded later in life, as Ono came to be vilified at the hands of the mainstream media. The rage and trauma conveyed in Yoko Ono's extreme vocal performances from this period can perhaps be interpreted as a cultural response to such a vilifying gaze of the white Other.

Whereas Fanon's model of colonial subjectivity paints the colonized as "the wretched of the earth," the powerless victims of racist structures who can only acquire agency through a whole-scale Marxist revolution¹³², contemporary post-structuralist theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha move to theorize the possibility of the colonial subject's access to agency. In Bhabha's view, colonial subjectivities constitute complex, hybrid sites of cultural encounter with the inherent potential to resist and redefine the white colonial Other. Bhabha expands and develops Fanon's postcolonial psychoanalytics in his influential work, *The Location of Culture* (1994), articulating a mode of theorizing culture within the interstitial spaces of contact between dominant groups and colonized populations. Bhabha writes:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities... It is within the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjective and collective experiences of ...cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed "in between," or in excess of, the sum of the "parts" of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)?¹³³

¹³² This Marxist analysis is offered in Fanon's later work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963). In this later work, Fanon explores the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and capitalist imperialism upon colonized subjects.

¹³³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

In shifting the focus from “initial” conceptions of an essential, “colonized selfhood,” to a post-structuralist model of an “interstitial” experience of colonial subjectivity, Bhabha offers a methodology undergirded by deconstructive discourse analysis, as well as the Lacanian symbolic/structural approach to understanding the subject as constituted in the encounter with a societal gaze.¹³⁴ Such a fluid approach to colonial subjectivity is highly useful in considering Yoko Ono as an artist whose complex positioning encompasses her privileged early life in pre-war, colonialist Japan, in addition to her later experiences as a colonial subject in US Occupied Japan, and finally as a vilified racial minority in Euro-America. As in the case of many peoples subjugated by a white colonial Other, Ono’s experiences cannot be reduced to that of a simple narrative of domination — each colonial encounter produces an excess of meaning that resists such an essentializing analysis.

Figuring the postcolonial subject as an interstitial, “hybrid site” of struggle and negotiation, Bhabha theorizes the possibility of marginalized peoples to enact personal agency, and resist the silencing and phobogenic forces of colonial misrecognition.¹³⁵ Considering the radical hybridities that arise from such colonial encounters-in-difference, however, Bhabha avers the resistant as well as the *deeply ambivalent* potentialities that rest within the marginalized colonial subject. Shaped by institutional structures of racial, gendered, and class-based inequality, the colonial subject tends to be historically and structurally guided by the impetus to mimic the

¹³⁴ Bhabha’s work moves to recontextualize Fanon’s Marxist revolutionary formulation from a poststructuralist perspective. For Bhabha, the revolution can be enacted through discursive moves; subjects do not have to wait for the qualitative leap that will result in a full-scale Marxist revolt. In Bhabha’s view, the quotidian enunciations of colonized peoples constitute the revolutionary potential of the “Third Space.”

¹³⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 37 - 8.

cultural codes of the white Other, resulting in ambivalent, layered possibilities of compliance and resistance. In the chapter, “Of Mimicry and Man,” Bhabha borrows from the Lacanian concept of “mimicry,” defined in the essay, “The Line and Light,” as a means of arriving at a psychoanalytically informed account of the deeply conflictual psychic-symbolic processes that constitute colonial mimicry.¹³⁶ In “The Line and Light,” Lacan begins by querying the psychic dimension of human perception, positing that the full extent of perceived reality cannot be comprehended; the psychic field of the gaze thus filters and channels the perceptual world according to the desire of the Other. As a psychic-sensory being, the human subject asserts itself against a perceptual domain created by the Other, and mimics a vision of itself defined against this “mottled” backdrop. A subjectivity is thus a mimicked entity that is never fully commensurable with the “itself that is behind.”¹³⁷ Interpreting Lacan’s formulation of mimicry in terms of the post-colonial experience, Bhabha proposes that mimicry is enacted as a profoundly ambivalent, “dual articulation,” whereby colonized subjects fashion themselves in the gaze of the white Other, while also producing its slippage, its excess, its difference.¹³⁸

For Bhabha, the colonized self and the white Other are thus relational positionalities that emerge in a contactual space of hybrid cultural encounter — a theoretical locus that Bhabha refers to as the “Third Space.” A post-structuralist whose

¹³⁶ Jacques Lacan, “Line and Light,” in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, annotation by Alexandra Geiger (New York: Norton, 1978), 91 - 104.

¹³⁷ Lacan observes: “Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an *itself* that is behind.” See “Line and Light,” 99.

¹³⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 126.

methodology hinges on discursive analysis, Bhabha characterizes the Third Space as unfolding in the realm of language and enunciation — “representative of both the general condition of language, and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot “in itself” be conscious.”¹³⁹ Just as Lacan posits that symbolic meaning and subjectivity are sutured within the enunciative moment, so too Bhabha regards cultural meanings and colonial subjectivities as being inscribed within an enunciative temporality. Guided by unconscious pathways of transference and misrecognition, the enunciative Third Space is necessarily “contradictory and ambivalent,” giving rise to heterogeneous subjectivities-in-encounter.¹⁴⁰ Bhabha’s conception of the Third Space thus marks a politicized move to disrupt the myths of cultural unity and primordial historical origins that undergird the modern white colonialist state.¹⁴¹ The Third Space is an intervention that “quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force authenticated by the originary Past, and kept alive in the national tradition of the people.”¹⁴² In Bhabha’s view, cultural meanings and histories are potential sites of resistance (re)produced anew in each enunciative encounter. Considering the Lacanian foundations of his thought, we can interpret Bhabha’s Third Space as a contactual point of negotiation between a colonialist societal gaze and its others, producing new, transformative modes of being in the world.

¹³⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 53.

¹⁴⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 55.

¹⁴¹ Specifically, Bhabha is writing against Benedict Anderson’s theorization of the “imagined community,” and the proposition that nations are constituted in homogeneous, shared time.

¹⁴² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 54.

While Bhabha asserts that cultural contact inevitably results in the mutual hybridization of both colonizer and colonized, however, the question remains as to whether this assertion leaves adequate room for the possibility of cultural difference that exists apart from symbolic structures that shape the enunciative moment. As a discourse analyst, Bhabha tends to measure cultural encounters within the parameters of a western discursive-symbolic structure; his work has thus often come under the scrutiny of materialist scholars who query the relevance of his model to account for the more substantive aspects of cultural exchange.¹⁴³ My present critique does not stem from such a materialist angle, however, but rather from a psychoanalytic perspective that is concerned with identifying experiences of alterity that cannot be fully reconciled within Bhabha's Lacanian-derived model of subjective hybridization. Despite offering a progressive, transformative model of cultural change and resistance, Bhabha's Third Space persists in situating colonizer and colonized within an economy of signification that differentiates and triangulates said positionalities vis-a-vis the

¹⁴³ Neo-Marxist historian, Arif Dirlik has categorized Bhabha as part of an increasingly visible group of Third World intellectuals working within the hegemonic structures of western academia. Dirlik is skeptical of such intellectuals, whom he feels rely on theoretical jargon in place of substantial historical contextualization. In his article, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994): 328-56, Dirlik argues that the hifalutin discourse of postcolonial theory draws "attention away from contemporary problems of social, political, and cultural domination, and [obfuscates] its own relationship to what is but a condition of its emergence, that is, to a global capitalism that, however fragmented in appearance, serves as the structuring principle of global relations"(331). Postcolonialist thought has also been critiqued as fetishizing hybridity, a tendency that Marxist and materialist critics view as indicative of a complicity with capitalist reification and commodity-fetishism. In her influential collection of essays, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, (Oxford and New York:Routledge, 2004), Benita Parry problematizes Bhabha's work on the grounds that it confines the struggles against colonialism to an enunciative domain. For a range of leftist critiques of Bhabha, see also: Alex Callinicos, "Wonders Taken For Signs," in *Post-Ality: Marxism and Postmodernism*, eds Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Teresa Ebert (Washington D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1995), 98-112.) and Neil Larsen, *Determinations: Essays on Theory, Narrative and Nation in the Americas* (London: Verso, 2001).

While I do not disagree with many aspects of the materialist critique leveled at Bhabha, my concern in this chapter is with advancing a psychoanalytic critique of his framework. My primary contention is that cultural change and cultural resistance, as they unfold within art works, tap into a psychic sphere that can neither be reduced to a purely enunciative temporality, nor to the substantive conditions of social existence.

societal gaze (and the discursive symbolic structures that rest on the side of this gaze). Such a triangulation can be interpreted as phallogentric, in keeping with the Lacanian model of gendered subjectivization that divides the self from its others, and positions the phallus as the “big Other” that undergirds the symbolic structure — the ultimate guarantor of meaning through which subjectivity must be conferred. But what if cultural hybridity need not be figured in terms of such a phallogentric, subjectivizing geometry? Could it be that the excesses and incommensurabilities that arise as necessary byproducts of Bhabha’s model point to an *other dimensionality* of cultural contact beyond the Third Space? One that has yet to be qualified?

Looking beyond the field of postcolonial studies, feminist psychoanalyst and philosopher, Luce Irigaray provides a useful model that can be appropriated for developing a critical perspective that aims to think through this possible shortcoming of Bhabha’s discursive model — that is, a perspective that engages the aspects of lived experience that cannot be adequately comprehended nor fully integrated within a phallogentric symbolic structure. In her controversial 1974 work, *Speculum de l’autre femme* (*Speculum of the Other Woman*), Irigaray launches a powerful critique of not only the Freudian/Lacanian model of psychoanalysis and gendered individuation, but also, more widely, what she terms the male-centric, specular tradition of western philosophy.¹⁴⁴ Irigaray proposes that the western philosophical tradition — defined comprehensively as a tradition of thought extending from Plato to Descartes to modern continental philosophy and beyond — tends to operate according to a “logic of the same” — that is, a specular logic that involves men reflecting on themselves. In her

¹⁴⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell UP, 1985).

critical assessment of such a circuitous logic, Irigaray concludes that the foundations of western discourse privilege masculine “sameness-unto-itself” as the basis of phallic signification, and within this model, the feminine “other” exists as yet another concomitant aspect of the masculine “self” — that is, the feminine position functions as a derivative foil that bolsters and reinforces the centrality of a unified masculinity. Such a framework is problematic in that it precludes the possibility of a feminine that operates according to its own, radically different mode of signification, independent of a phallic structural economy.

A key aspect of Irigaray’s philosophical critique of the “logic of the same” is her contention that this rubric of western philosophy is undergirded by a masculine visuality that tends to elide women’s real lived experience from its scopic field of view. A psychoanalyst trained in the Freudian and Lacanian tradition, Irigaray opens *Speculum* with an interrogation of what she terms, “the one sex model,” a visuocentric theory of human sexual development that tends to place female sexual difference under erasure. In the first section of *Speculum*, “The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry,” Irigaray constructs a cogent argument that Freudian theory is based on a flawed, a priori assumption — a “dream” of symmetry between the sexes. According to such a symmetrical relation, in the pre-Oedipal phase, prior to the apprehension of the mother’s purported “castration,” all children experience a singular sexuality — the implication being that young girls are in fact nothing more than “little men.” In a Freudian context, female sexuality is thus seen as a derivative and inferior form of masculine sexuality — a sexuality that only comes into being with the early realization of the mother’s lack of a visually discernible (male) sex organ. Irigaray contends, however,

that infant children are in touch with an embodied, multi-sensory awareness of different, gendered sexual characteristics prior to the realization of maternal “castration.” Leveling a powerful critique against Freudian theoretical foundations, Irigaray proposes that human sexuality is *never* exclusively experienced as a homogeneous, symmetrical “sameness” shared between the sexes; and the lived experience of women’s sexual difference thus constitutes a significant “blind spot” within Freudian psychoanalysis.¹⁴⁵

Entrenched within a specular philosophical tradition that privileges masculine sexual anatomy as singular, unified, and visually representable, Freud’s analytic bias is to effectively elide female sexual anatomy from the scope of his analysis, or worse, to construe women as being “castrated,” or in possession of an incomplete male sexuality. Anatomically speaking, Irigaray argues that women’s sexual organs — the majority of which reside within the body, hidden from view — present a formidable “problem” for a visually-based economy of signification. Namely, the heterogeneous, contiguous parts that comprise the apparatus of female sexual anatomy tend to be experienced through a contactual sensory field that resists co-optation within a specular logic. Hence Irigaray’s oft-quoted pun (also the title of her influential collection of essays) — “This Sex which is Not One” (“Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un”) — dually evoking the incommensurability of female sexuality with phallic singularity, and the problematic positioning of women’s sexuality within a specular philosophy.¹⁴⁶ Considering that western philosophy gives rise to a cultural rubric that inventories subjectivity according to the phallogentric,

¹⁴⁵ See Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 11 - 113.

¹⁴⁶ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell UP, 1985).

sexually-grounded metaphor of the “singular” individual, Irigaray goes so far as to assert that “rigorously speaking, [woman] cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists all adequate definition.”¹⁴⁷

Despite Lacan’s symbolic (re-)interpretation of the biological foundations of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, his work is not freed up from Irigaray’s critical scope. Much to the chagrin of her academic contemporaries at the Lacan-headed, Department of Psychoanalysis at Universitaire Vincennes, Irigaray polemically extended her critique of Freud’s anatomically-derived “one sex model” to a feminist interrogation of Lacan’s wider structural-symbolic paradigm of gendered differentiation. Irigaray’s critique of Lacan elaborated in the first chapter of *Speculum* incited a formidable controversy in contemporary French academia, a response that speaks to the patriarchal stronghold that gripped the continental psychoanalytic community of the day. Biographer and leading Irigaray scholar, Carolyn Burke points out, however, that despite the harsh response Irigaray faced within her immediate academic circles, her aim in *Speculum* was not so much to *discount* Lacan’s theoretical formulations, but to *historicize* his work in relation to a western, patriarchal tradition of thought.¹⁴⁸ Rather than interpret the Lacanian model as a symbolic structure that transcends a given social and historical context, Irigaray moved to interpret Lacan’s theories of gendered subjectivization as embedded within a philosophical tradition

¹⁴⁷ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 26. A feminist thinker active in the mid-1970s, Irigaray tends to confine her arguments to a cis-gender binary between male and female. A contemporary interpretation of her theoretical model would expand her category of the feminine to include the gendered development of LGBTQ persons, who, like cis-women, fail to be defined in symmetrical relation to a default masculine heteronormative positioning.

¹⁴⁸ Burke, Carolyn. *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, eds. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (Columbia UP, 1994).

that privileges a male-centric, visually-inscribed, “one sex” perspective. For Irigaray, the displaced phallus of the Lacanian structural-symbolic model of gender formation is just as indicative of a visually-derived “logic of the same” as is the absent, anatomical phallus of the Freudian castration model. For the Lacanian subject shifting between the triangulated, symbolic polarities of “having” and “being” the phallus, the possibility of gendered psychic experience that exists apart from a phallogocentric structure remains obscured. In Irigaray’s analysis, the Lacanian phallic paradigm, similar to the Freudian biologically-determined model, is constructed according to a philosophical formulation that expresses masculine sexuality as originary, and other sexualities as derivative, incomplete, and incomprehensible.¹⁴⁹ Lacan and Freud thus represent psychoanalytic perspectives that are historically contingent upon a patriarchal philosophical tradition that delimits their critical scope ¹⁵⁰

Although Irigaray focuses specifically on the problematics of gender-based modes of differentiation within a phallic structural economy, in my view, her critique of western thought can be expanded to consider the problematics of defining a colonial alterity within a specular western philosophical tradition. As postcolonial philosophers working within western philosophical and psychoanalytic models, both Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha take on the formidable task of theorizing racialized colonial difference within wider discursive structures that leave little room for the possibility of “difference” beyond a white male-centric “logic of the same.” Fanon, for one, offers a challenge to the centrality of the white male colonial subject by re-casting him as the

¹⁴⁹ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 33.

¹⁵⁰ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 86. “The feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects. Which implies that there are not really two sexes, but only one.”

“white Other,” a subversive nomenclature that moves to re-contextualize whiteness as a peripheral alterity -- thereby asserting the possibility of a central, unified black subject. And yet, problematically, despite displacing the white colonialist as a peripheral Other, the black subject remains constituted by the colonialist, phobogenic gaze.

Bhabha’s postcolonial model of the “Third Space” attempts to advance Fanon’s model of colonial cultural contact, drawing upon a Lacanian paradigm that figures racial categories of sameness and otherness as arbitrary structural symbolic positions that can be continuously redefined, resisted, or hybridized. However, an aporia can be identified within Bhabha’s “Third Space” in the form of incomprehensible excesses and incommensurabilities that arise within the hybridized, encounteral space between colonizer and colonized. These incommensurabilities point to a specificity of lived experience that exists beyond a triangulated model of hybrid selfhood. Drawing upon Irigaray’s critique of western philosophical discourse, it thus becomes apparent that both Fanon and Bhabha are restricted by a phallic economy of signification that measures difference according to a “logic of the same,” a delimiting, relational dyad that persists in constructing the other in terms of the self.

In addition, Irigaray’s analysis of the visuocentric, specular tradition that shapes western philosophical models carries redolent implications for music studies — the visuocentrism that underlies “the logic of the same” resonates strongly with Shepherd’s notion of “male visual hegemony.” Although Irigaray and Shepherd come to their respective conclusions through different disciplinary lines of inquiry — Irigaray being a feminist psychoanalyst and Shepherd a sociologist of music — a common thread that runs through both theorists’ work is the observation that western

patriarchy functions according to a structural-symbolic system that privileges the visual. Whereas Irigaray's argumentation stays within the reach of gender-based critique, Shepherd's model draws together the gendered implications of "visual hegemony" with the material implications of a colonialist history of imperialist expansionism, the objectification of racial others, and the cartographic territorialization and dominance of others through visual technologies of mastery and exploitation.

Since the onset of western colonialist expansionism, the cartographic gaze has played a large role in structuring the world and its peoples into visually-abstracted territories subjugated under a white European centrality; and this cartographic gaze has been plotted along both gendered and racialized co-ordinates. Irigarayan feminist psychoanalysis enables us to understand the dangerous extents to which these phallic specular "mappings" are historically embedded within western epistemological foundations. Likewise, John Shepherd's notion of "male visual hegemony" draws our attention to the urgent need to critically "un-map" a territorialized, objectified world, and to (re-)situate ourselves within synaesthetic, shared acoustic space. Considering the role of music scholarship in this project, there is a strong possibility that despite the ongoing dominance of phallogentric logic and male visual hegemony, sound-based arts (and other non-visual arts) might provide us with a position from which colonialist phallic-visual paradigms might be dismantled, or reconstituted. But how can we, as music scholars, press western philosophy to be accountable for gendered-racial difference that exists beyond the purview of a phallic structural economy? And most pertinently, for the purposes of this study, can such an analytic horizon be reached

through an engagement with cultural works such as Ono's *Fly*, wherein we can identify a synaesthetic disruption of the cartographic gaze?

Considering such a line of inquiry, it is my contention that Ettinger's matrixial theoretical model — as a psychoanalytic model of gendered subjective formation grounded in shared aesthetic experience — opens up the possibility of reconsidering cultural contact in terms that exceed and encompass Bhabha's triangulated geometry of cultural hybridity. Reconsidering Bhabha's "Third Space" in conjunction with Ettingerian theory, I would argue that the matrixial borderspace is suggestive of a fourth dimension of gendered racial contact experienced as a "differentiation-in-co-emergence," or a "separation-in-jointness" between colonial subjectivities.¹⁵¹ Within such a psychic space, the hybrid colonial self is not experienced as divided, contradictory, nor ambivalent, but as an emergent subjectivity whose borders link with other emergent co-subjectivities, woven together to form a variegated web of shared difference. As a borderspace of shared subjectivisation, the "Fourth Space" of contact would be defined as a psychic borderspace wherein subjective grains — or, "I's and non-I's" — are thus dissolved and reconstituted beyond a phallogentric geometry of contact. Rather than a triangulation between self, Other, and hybrid, a "Fourth Space" of cultural contact would be based on fluid dimensional analogs arising from the Ettingerian premise of *severalty* — "a webbing of links between several subjectivities, who by virtue of that webbing become partial."¹⁵² Within this proposed "Fourth Space" of cultural

¹⁵¹ As elaborated in the previous chapter, Ettinger conceptualizes difference within the matrixial borderspace as a link that is shared between contactual trans-subjectivities. If we are to interpret such trans-subjective grains as being constituted by not only gendered, but also racial and cultural positionings, then cultural hybridity can be seen in terms of heterogeneous, trans-subjective fields of resonance. See *Matrixial Borderspace*, 124-5, 184-5.

¹⁵² Ettinger, *Matrixial Borderspace*, 140.

encounter, an interstitial cartography arises -- mapping becomes over-lapping. Notwithstanding the coterminous presence of phallic colonialist structures, the colonial subject can also access matrixial psychic channels that open up a space of borderlinking shared between subjective grains woven together in ethnic-cultural co-positionalities.

In order to demonstrate how such a “Fourth Space” can be actualized within a cultural work, I will move to consider what I refer to as the “mouth scene” (9:53 - 13:40) in Ono’s *Fly*. One of the more extended scenes of encounter within this short film, the mouth scene gives rise to layered possibilities of interpretation in terms of a Bhabhaesque “Third Space,” as well as a post-human, and matrixial, “Fourth Space” of contactual hybridity between woman, fly, and machine. The scene opens with the appearance of Virginia Lust’s mouth in majestic profile — the extreme close-up of the shot accentuates the dramatic curvature of the lips and the rising precipice of the nose, a human profile that comes to resemble a mountain range set against a clear blue backdrop. As the diminutive black body of the fly arrives at the mouth, there is a moment of complete silence in the film’s sound track. The fly carefully positions itself at the center of Virginia’s lips, silently waiting at the threshold of this borderspace between the exterior and interior bod — a new frontier. The fly then raises its fore-legs in a movement that carries anthropomorphic significance — as though the fly were a human explorer expressing a desire to open up the entryway into the cavernous reaches of Virginia’s mouth. In response to the fly’s gesticulations, at around 10:55, Ono’s omniscient voice begins to vocalize a syllable resembling “aaah,” as though she is perversely coaching the sedated woman to “say aaah,” or, open her mouth and allow the fly entrance. Although the initial “aaahs” are imbued with a saccharine, maternal tone,

as though a mother is coaxing her child to feed, these gently coaxing “aaahs” soon shift to incorporate a motion of the vocal apparatus that sounds a gagging reflex. The gagging “aaah” is produced by a harsh contraction of the stomach muscle, as a growl on the lower vocal fry is pushed through a curling motion of the tongue tightly pressed against the roof of the mouth. As the gagging series of “aaahs” increase in intensity, the sonic ontology of the voice goes through a transmutation. Namely, the voice shifts from that of an omniscient maternal figure coaxing the woman to open her mouth, to an en-voicing of the sedated woman’s own repulsion with the fly’s encroachment upon her oral cavity. These visceral vocalizations of disgust soon come to a head, breaking into a strident, sustained multiphonic scream (13:40). This extended multiphonic is delivered in an abrasive vocal timbre that brings to mind a non-human, buzzing mechanical noise, its beats soon settling into an intense, rhythmic sibilance — a kind of cyborgian “winging” -- as though insect and machine have come to be integrated within the folds of Ono’s hybrid vocality.

Drawing upon Bhabha’s notion of a “Third Space,” we can interpret this scene as a traumatogenic hybridization of woman and fly, producing an excess of meaning that cannot be understood in terms of a self-Other binary. As the fly pushes up against the borders of the feminized virgin terrain, Ono’s vocal performance causes us to experience the internal “screams” of the terra nullius — eventually coming to blend with the fly’s industrial, cyborgian winging. In this interpretation, Ono’s voice sounds the respective sonic ontologies of the “primitive” and the industrial, melded together in a strident timbral union — a hybrid multiphonic flux. Experienced as a non-diegetic, omniscient sensory threshold between ambivalent sonic positionalities — those of woman, fly,

machine -- Ono's hybrid voice indeed conveys a radical excess of meaning. While the visual focus on the fly precariously poised at the woman's sedated mouth evokes the anxieties of a cartographic, phallic gaze — a phobogenic white Other coming to penetrate, or perhaps be subsumed, into the unknowable depths of Virginia Lust, Ono's mechanical scream gives voice to a sonic-vocal alterity that in its very hybridity and incomprehensibility resists cartographic misrecognition.

As Irigaray would argue, however, the above-defined realm of “excess” is a problematic position from which to wage gendered resistance. What is the resistant potential of that which cannot be comprehended by the Symbolic order? That which effectively cannot exist? According to a feminist philosophy that critiques the logic of the same, a “Third Space” is in fact not a space of the several, or of the hybrid, but a space of the One. Although Bhabha offers a triangulation of self-other-hybrid that seems to theorize difference, he in fact only offers one tenable subject position, set against its dependent, incommensurate, and incomprehensible others. Just as Irigaray is concerned with dismantling the western philosophical tradition of phallogentrism, one of Ettinger's primary concerns is with recouping a feminine psychic sphere that has been relegated to a non-place, or an “excess,” and to reposition the feminine as a central metaphor for understanding human psychic life. As opposed to conceptualizing ontology in terms of a central unified subject and its infinite others, Ettinger instead proposes a matrixial interconnected web of several contactual subjective grains. In contrast to a Bhabhaesque “Third Space” that operates according to a triangulatory phallic geometry, the “Fourth Space” of cultural contact that I propose will thus be one that organizes encountural space according to the principle of the several. As a vocality

that evinces a matrixial interstitality, Ono's performance opens up the possibility of a "Fourth Space" of contact that need not relegate the hybrid feminine to the realm of incommensurability. According to this interpretation, within Ono's performance, the contactual timbral markers of fly, woman, and machine, can be seen as several, emergent borderlinking co-subjects. A "Fourth Space" of contact clarifies the resistant potential that can be experienced in this performance — a resistance that does not banish the feminine, nor "the primitive," to a place beyond meaning, but rather situates the feminine as the central, active site of meaning formation — a feminine psychostructural economy that exists apart from the phallic-colonialist symbolic order.

Read in conjunction with Uexküll, in my view, there is a powerful resonance between his posthumanist approach to coterminous lifeworlds and Ettinger's conceptualization of the layered psychic interconnectivity of the matrixial borderspace. Although Ettinger is not a post-humanist, it is notable that she often uses the phrase "erotic antennae" of the psyche when describing the operations of borderlinking desire within the matrixial borderspace — the antenna being a metaphor that references both insect and machine, pointing to ontological markers outside the human.¹⁵³ While Ono's multiphonic scream arouses horror as the fly encroaches upon the borders of Virginia Lust, this initial expression of horror is soon transmuted as the vocality assumes a matrixial interstitality. In this timbral transmutation, we can read the trauma of self-fragilization, and the abandonment of phallic selfhood in favor of a state of matrixial severalty and shared difference. In the buzzing insect woman's voice, a new form of

¹⁵³ See Ettinger, *Matrixial Borderspace*, 187. "The matrixial voice as affected Resonance of resonances affirms the priority of links over objects as psychic entities, and exposes the enormous scope and potentiality of the erotic antennae of the psyche to create affected transsensorial events of interconnectivity."

desire can be located, the desire to forge links — antennae reaching antennae, tracing contactual pathways to a matrixial co-recognition.

Conclusion

The ending of *Fly* is ushered in by a period of extreme visual and sonic instability — as the body of Virginia Lust is progressively limned from the abstract background, a period of visual crisis ensues. The fly comes in and out of focus at extreme close-up angles, and the backing terrain flashes rapidly between light and dark, suggesting the imminent breakdown of the cartographic gaze. At 18:30, however, the visual confusion is unexpectedly and suddenly resolved *in favor of* the cartographic gaze, as the camera pans out to reveal a stark, full-body shot of Virginia Lust. At this moment, for the first time in the film, a discernible stretch of Lust's body comes into view from head to vagina -- the closest suggestion of a complete object-body that has been shown thus far. The cartographic gaze seems to be nearing its goal. Indeed, soon thereafter, at 19:25, Ono unleashes a visceral, blood-curdling scream as the camera dramatically jumps to fully display Virginia Lust as a woman in a dimly lit room, spread-eagled on an examination table — corpse-like as a swarm of flies cover her body. The camera soon moves away from the horrific revelation of Virginia Lust, panning out to the blue sky beyond the open window. In this moment, Ono releases one last, strained multiphonic vocalization that rises into the fragile upper registers of her voice, soon fading away into the blue oblivion of the sky.

The interpretive question remains, however, as to how we are to theorize the final denouement of *Fly*. A pessimistic reading would maintain that Ono's hybrid,

synaesthetic Fourth Space of gendered colonial encounter is violently silenced as the visual cartographic project is actualized. A powerful synaesthetic correlation is indeed forged between the silencing of Ono's vocal Fourth Space and the establishment of a cartographic visual hegemony. Once an instrument of varied timbral possibilities, by the end of the film, Ono's voice peters out to its most weakened, high-pitched, child-like register -- and then fades into obscurity. The possibility of a hybrid, matrixial vocality quite literally "goes out the window."

As the title credits begin to roll across the blue backdrop of the sky, however, Ono's vocal backing track starts to replay her initial vocalizations from the beginning of the film. Set against the amorphous, potentially liberatory visual space of the sky, we now hear her vocal journey begin once more. This time, however, its meaning is contextually altered — this is now a feminine voice that softly carries on after bearing witness to the visual colonization of the death-like corpus of Virginia Lust. Significantly, given that the fly is no longer visible in the final "sky scene," the visual field is finally freed up from an exploratory agent in operation. Against the new horizon of the sky, the voice thus comes to be disassociated from a visual field of cartographic desire. A notable semantic and conceptual shift thus occurs in the final moments of the film, as the titular word, *Fly*, is now reinterpreted to signify *the other* sense of the word — namely, the capacity for liberation, escape, transcendence. The limitless blue sky here comes to evoke the horizon of the gaze, looking into a formless space that infinitely expands beyond the scope of gendered colonial structurality.

Given her positioning as a conceptual artist, it is not surprising that Ono's short film concludes with a suggested play on words. Semantic slippage is employed here as

a means of opening up a fissure in symbolic meaning, reinforcing the conception of ‘Fly’ as a polysemous play-on-words. Without a fixed definite article, the titular *Fly* references not only the insect intertwined within the operations of a colonialist gaze, but also comes to signify Ono’s implied instruction to her audience in the face of this impulse to map the female form — *fly, fly away!* As a woman of color, as well as a survivor of colonialist warfare and institutionalized violence, Yoko Ono is an artist whose works are inflected by a profound need to process gendered racial trauma, to delve into the psychic structures that constitute such trauma, and most importantly, to seek out alternative, more compassionate ways of structuring the world. In this vein, I move to interpret Ono’s *Fly* as a call for gendered cultural resistance to the operations of the phobogenic gaze of the white Other. Within a filmic Fourth Space colored by the synaesthetic interplay of bordering visual and sonic fields, Ono’s vocal performance disrupts and displaces the cartographic gaze, sounding an excess that resists integration within phallic structures of misrecognition. The ontology of the fly — in both its visual and sonic manifestations — is that of a riddle, a conundrum only just beyond our reckoning. A jest, a pest, an errant mediator, the fly presents a vantage point outside the human, recasting anthropocentric and masculinist desire within overlapping, and over-mapping, matrixial spaces of contact.

Chapter 3

Ono Soul: A Matrixial History of Feminine Cultural Resistance Traced Through New Wave, No Wave, and Experimental Underground Vocalities (1976 - 1983)

*Bow down to the queen of noise
Crayon eyes draw
Boys blood pour some of Patti's wine
Blood is love inside
Auw! melting wax on yr arm
Crayon teeth draws blood
Blood soaking up all the light
Soak me in yr life
Yr my soul, yr my soul, yr my soul
Ono soul, ono soul
Ono soul, ono soul...*

*- Thurston Moore, "Ono Soul," *Psychic Hearts* (1995)*

The video for Thurston Moore's 1995 single, "Ono Soul" opens with two disjunctive clips drawn from Yoko Ono's short film, *Fly* (1971), both shots featuring the insect accompanied by Ono's rupturous, fly-like vibrato. The rapid succession of the two film clips soon comes to a halt, and Ono's vocalizations give way to a single wavering tone of guitar feedback. Sustained in the background of the sound space for the duration of the track, this quivering, electronic noise forges a sonic borderlink between Ono's vocality and Moore's guitar. In the context of the song's subject matter — Moore's ardent homage to his proto-punk, feminist idol — his interstitial guitar tone comes to signify a living music-historical bond, the meeting point of two artists from different eras of the experimental New York underground. The metaphorical layering of past and present — Ono and Moore — is reinforced throughout the music video, as short visual

clips from *Fly* recur at one minute intervals, superimposed upon Moore's band and the Brooklyn skyline.

The loose narrative of the music video for "Ono Soul" consists of Moore's reenactment of the iconic relationship of John and Yoko. Paired with a black-clad, bohemian Asian actress, Moore traverses the Brooklyn rooftops, and engages in what appears to be an art happening akin to "bagism."¹⁵⁴ After the denouement of Moore's minimalist ballad, the guitar feedback resurfaces in the sound space, gradually subsumed under Ono's final, strident multiphonic vocalizations from *Fly*. In both its sonic and visual content, Moore's "Ono Soul" thus presents a layered sonic and visual space that bridges Brooklyn-based, 1990s No Wave-inspired noise rock with Ono's experimental vocal works and performance art from over two decades prior, book-ended by direct quotations from *Fly*.

Despite his characteristically laid-back vocal delivery, Thurston Moore's lyrics to "Ono Soul" convey a passionate devotion to his mentor, anointing Yoko Ono as "The Queen of Noise," and repeatedly expressing his desire to become one with her blood. Moore's final, hushed repetition of the statement, "Ono Soul" functions as a kind of mantra reinforcing an embodied and spiritual connection with his "Queen." In this way, Moore offers up a profound statement of devotion from a male artist to a female mentor — an unconventional reversal of the typical gendered power dynamic established between a male artist and a passive female muse. In addition to Yoko Ono, Moore also references his other proto-punk, feminist musical hero, Patti Smith, enveloping Ono,

¹⁵⁴ Bagism was a performance art happening organized by Ono and Lennon. Participants would crawl into giant black burlap sacks and roll around on the ground in various locations across New York City. Bagism was not just an absurdist, comical art happening; however, there was a politicized intention that informed this public display. In crawling into a bag, Ono sought to place under erasure all visible categories of social difference, and to equalize all humans as faceless "bags."

Smith, and himself within a metaphorical blood union. As Thurston submits to be “soaked” in the life and legacy of his feminist progenitors, he evokes a series of viscous textures, pointing to an Ono-esque “world of stickiness” imagined in terms that seem to connote the interiority of the female body. Abandoning his cultural positioning as a masculine rock star and guitar hero, Moore instead favors a return to a feminine cultural matrix — a sticky web of women’s punk history, figured in terms of an irresistible admixture of melting wax, wine, and blood.

Taking as its starting point Moore’s layering of generational and gendered positionalities in “Ono Soul,” this chapter will present a “matrixial history” of resistant vocalities in underground and experimental music scenes of the late 1970s and early ‘80s — a period of intensified music-stylistic development that exerted a strong influence on underground scenes of the following decades.¹⁵⁵ Considering music-stylistic developments from a matrixial perspective, my interest is not so much to trace a direct lineage of vocal styles leading back to “The Queen of Noise,” per se, but to propose that following Yoko Ono’s ear-splitting assault on the Toronto Rock ‘n’ Roll Revival of 1969, anti-mainstream, counter-hegemonic underground artists increasingly began to incorporate Ono-esque vocal stylings into their performances. A “matrixial history,” as I am choosing to define it, is a history that attends to the sonic layerings of past and present, one that seeks out points of contact, resonance and trans-subjective borderlinking between (and within) vocalities over time. A matrixial history marks a move away from phallogentric linearity, and re-contextualizes our relationship to

¹⁵⁵ In the context of this study I will be considering artists within US and UK underground scenes that constituted the central loci of the emergence of punk and New Wave genres. Future research into Ono’s influence upon Japanese underground scenes would be an extremely fruitful line of inquiry. This would require an extended research trip to Japan in order to conduct historical research into underground record labels, publications, and artists of the era.

history in terms of an Ettingerian aesthetics of encounter. Lending the musicologist's ear to resistant vocalities emergent in various historical and geographical contexts, a matrixial vocal history teases out webs of contactual sounds and voices that fragilize and re-situate the individual vocal subject within an ever-changing, ever-expanding web of sonic-cultural connectivity.

The overlapping vocal styles explored in this chapter are thus framed as part of a wider matrixial-feminine mode of cultural resistance. Although the cultural resistance identified here is termed "feminine," this term is employed in the Ettingerian sense of referencing the metaphorical, trans-subjective potential of the female body. Indeed, a female-oriented metaphor is fitting in this context, given that over the past half century, vocal experimentation in popular music has tended to be carried out in the female domain, due to the cultural tendency for women to choose, or be relegated to, the role of vocalist. That being said, I have also chosen to include examples of male vocalists — specifically No Wave vocalists Sumner Crane of Mars and Arto Lindsay of DNA — whose works also figure into this vocal-stylistic matrix. Arising from a multiplicity of cultural, generational, and gendered contexts, these experimental, border-linking voices resonate within a Fourth Space of encounter, where various emergent socio-cultural positionalities co-mingle and co-fade. The resistant meanings of such vocalities are continuously shifting and transmuting through layers of history, their influence extending into today's underground scenes — the current Los Angeles underground scene, for example, features a range of resistant, Ono-inspired feminine vocalities, several of which will be the focus of the last chapter of this study.

My primary aim in this chapter is thus to offer an alternative history of underground music (inclusive of the sub-genres of punk, post-punk, New Wave, and No Wave) traced primarily — but not exclusively — through women’s voices. Attesting to the cultural value of Yoko Ono’s early works that bridged the art worlds of the avant-garde and rock ’n’ roll, as well as the cultural spheres of east and west, within this matrixial historical frame, Ono will be considered as a nodal figure, a proto-punk pioneer. This move to situate Ono as a proto-punk artist is an explicitly feminist project that calls for a reconsideration of extant “standard” punk and rock histories that trace the rise of such movements primarily through the innovations of male instrumentalists. Influential histories of punk rock which have come close to being canonized in the field include Jon Savage’s *England’s Dreaming* (1995)¹⁵⁶, centered on the UK punk scene, alongside Clinton Heylin’s *From the Velvets to the Voidoids* (2005)¹⁵⁷, a comprehensive

¹⁵⁶ Jon Savage, *England’s Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, And Beyond* (New York: St.Martin’s Griffin, 1991).

¹⁵⁷ Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World* (London: Penguin Books, 1993).

study that takes a more US-centric approach.¹⁵⁸ Feminist punk historian Helen Reddington has observed that such standard historical narratives tend to convey a “male-centric and metro-centric perspective,”¹⁵⁹ honing in on a coterie of male groups that formed in the urban metropolises of New York and London, and to a lesser extent, Detroit and Cleveland. Each key metropolis boasts a distinct proto-punk lineage — London punk emerges as a more confrontational, bondage-clad reinvention of working-class pub rock, whereas New York punk arises out of the droning minimalism of the Velvet Underground and the stripped-down, noise-inflected guitar stylings of Robert Quine and Lenny Kaye. While such guitar-centric lineages can be traced to form a cohesive, even teleological narrative of the development of punk as a male-dominated stylistic movement, if we instead shift our critical lens to focus on an historical study of

¹⁵⁸ In addition to these “male-centric” studies, there are numerous biographically-oriented historical studies of women in rock/punk. Such works could be categorized as women’s alternative histories that fall in line with the second-wave feminist project of rescuing past women artists from obscurity. In this vein, Gillian Gaar’s *She’s a Rebel* (New York: Seal Press, 2002), Lucy O’Brien’s *She-Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop, and Soul* (New York & London: Continuum, 1995), and Maria Raha’s *Cinderella’s Big Score: Women of the Punk and Indie Underground* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2005), could all be considered valuable contributions. One critical shortcoming of such biographical works, however, is that they tend to focus on commercially successful female musicians, representing them as exceptional, even anomalous figures, without offering a contextualization of the various forms of female involvement within the specific music scenes of which they were a part. Resultantly, such histories tend to be seen as tangential studies in relation to “standard,” male-oriented, historical narratives of punk.

In terms of more theoretically-framed explorations of women in punk and rock scenes, Helen Reddington’s *The Lost Women of Rock Music: Female Musicians of the Punk Era* (London: Ashgate, 2007). offers a substantial ethnographic take on women’s involvement in regional punk scenes in the UK. Likewise, Mavis Bayton’s *Frock Rock* (Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 1998), offers a keen sociological study of women instrumentalists in popular music genres. Lauraine LeBlanc’s *Pretty in Punk: Girls’ Gender Resistance in a Boys’ Subculture* (New Jersey & London: Rutgers UP, 2002), also marks a significant ethnographic contribution that details young women’s coming of age within Canadian punk scenes.

¹⁵⁹ Helen Reddington’s 2007 study provides an ethnography of regional punk scenes in the mid-to-late 1970s and early 1980s UK, from the perspective of female participants. A key member of the Brighton scene of the day, performing under the name “Helen McCookerybook,” as part of local band, The Chefs, Reddington critiques standard punk histories for neglecting the diverse, vibrant regional punk scenes that flourished in the 1970s and early 1980s. In a similar vein, Angela McRobbie’s *Feminism and Youth Culture* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1991) features ethnographic work on the Au Pairs and late 1970s and early 1980s Birmingham punk scenes. Offering an alternative history of punk that acknowledges the importance of female artists and artists outside of the London metropole, McRobbie’s collection stands as one of the few influential studies of women’s participation in underground punk subcultures.

punk as a form of experimental *vocality*, our line of inquiry takes on a slightly different trajectory. I would argue, in focusing on punk as vocality, we are able to better acknowledge women's extensive contributions to the genre — and even present an historical vantage point that situates women at the epicenter of counter-hegemonic music-making in the late 20th century.¹⁶⁰

In opening up an historical consideration of punk as vocality, my aim will be to move away from a restrictive focus on the “first-wave” of punk — an approach adopted by what Reddington terms, “male-centric and metro-centric” punk histories that tend to define the punk movement in conjunction with the rise and fall of the Sex Pistols, roughly spanning the years 1976–1978.¹⁶¹ In order to eschew the “male-centric” tendencies implied by rock critics' obsession with “the first-wave,” I will instead open up my analyses to the diverse, sometimes suburban, or regional, underground subcultures that both coincided with, and followed, the rise and fall of the mid-70s punk explosion. Although the respective genres of post-punk, New Wave and No Wave are often presented as “sub-genres,” that is, secondary, feminized musical movements that tangentially arose out of “first-wave” punk scenes, this chapter will foreground these

¹⁶⁰ The proposed focus on vocality is of course not intended to undermine women's substantial contributions as instrumentalists within punk and rock genres. Mavis Bayton's *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 1998), for one, moves to exclusively consider women instrumentalists within popular music genres, in order to rectify the wide-spread tendency within rock histories to exclusively acknowledge female vocalists, while downplaying the contributions of women instrumentalists. Indeed, most of the women included in this study, including Yoko Ono, are accomplished multi-instrumentalists. My intention in this project is thus not to bolster patriarchal notions of women's lack of instrumental competency, but to demonstrate the ways in which women in underground scenes took on the conventional gender role of the female chanteuse, and reinvented this role by radically pushing the envelope of normative vocal practices. The vocal experimentations that resulted exerted a considerable influence not only upon other female vocalists, but also male vocalists in search of new modes of resistant vocal expression.

¹⁶¹ Reddington offers the following historiographical take on the movement: “I contend that punk, but its anarchic nature, existed in many forms long before and long after [the first wave]; it existed and continues to exist as a self-definition by certain people regardless of location”(2007, 1).

underground musical genres as autonomous movements arising within the interstices of diverse, contactual art worlds and cultural influences.¹⁶² Notably, in contrast to “first-wave” punk scenes, post-punk, New Wave and No Wave scenes were characterized by an increase in women’s musical contributions, and the proliferation of experimental vocalities. Beginning with a brief historical overview, my analyses of key vocalists will center on underground and experimental artists who employ vocal techniques such as timbral flux, rapid beat multiphonics, and non-western vocal tone and enunciation — techniques first brought into the realm of popular music via Yoko Ono’s improvisatory performances from the late 1960s, and later proliferated with the increasing availability of world music within the western public sphere throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. In terms of a theoretical rubric through which to interpret such vocalities, I will evoke the following concepts elaborated within the first two chapters of this study, namely, the “interstitial voice,” the voice as an instrument of “matrixial resistance,” and lastly, the voice as a gendered racial, trans-subjective, “Fourth Space” of aesthetic encounter.

In my following analyses, I will focus on three case studies of the post-punk era featuring vocal experimentations that carry significant historical and cultural import. First, I will examine the posthuman, interstitial feminine vocalities of Athens Georgia

¹⁶² According to Dick Hebdige’s canonical reading of punk, the movement tends to be perceived as a negation of dominant ideology. This standardized Hebdigian reading also resonates with the Romanticist notion that cultural innovation arises out of generational conflict, or the negation of past aesthetic traditions. Popular music scholar, Theodore Gracyk, problematizes this tendency in rock music criticism to reflect a “manifestation of the aesthetics of Romanticism.” What Hebdigian punk historians fail to acknowledge are the nuances of gender-based punk resistance that cannot be fully accounted for by the dialectical model of negation. Figured in terms of a tug-of-war between two oppositional forces — defined respectively as the dominant culture and the resistant youth subculture — the rhetorical model of negation can be critiqued on the basis that it upholds an Irigarayan “logic of the same.” Whereas the logic of negation can be seen as operating according to the dyadic tension between self and Other, much of gender and sexuality-based resistance in countercultural music genres takes aim at this very distinction, resisting phallogentric gendered tropes of the dominant culture.

New Wave band, the B-52's; in particular, I will focus on the B-52's breakthrough single, "Rock Lobster," as a work that directly references Yoko Ono's multiphonic vocality. Second, I will move to a discussion of the No Wave vocalists of Mars, DNA and Teenage Jesus and the Jerks that aimed to deconstruct punk vocality, providing a sonic inspiration for the rise of noise rock artists such as Thurston Moore and Sonic Youth in the early 1980s. Lastly, I will move to a consideration of transnational, New Wave avant-pop divas, Lene Lovich and Nina Hagen, highlighting the resonances between their vocal works and Yoko Ono's extended vocal techniques.

Outsider Vocal Aesthetics and the Athens New Wave

In the mid-to-late 1970s, the small southern college town of Athens, Georgia was giving rise to a vibrant, countercultural music scene, far removed from the punk mecca of New York's lower east side. Located over a 19-hour drive away from the Big Apple, the Athens scene would not begin to make inroads into the New York underground until the B-52's historic debut at Max's Kansas city in 1978. Surprisingly, despite the direct references to Yoko Ono's vocal techniques that formed an integral component of the B-52's first single, "Rock Lobster"(1978), Yoko Ono and her partner, John Lennon, both New York residents at the time, remained unaware of this underground hit until 1980. Since the birth of their son in 1975, the couple had taken a step back from the public sphere, retreating to their domestic life in the Dakota building on the Upper West side. Given the outsider status of the B-52's as a southern group, it is somewhat fitting that John Lennon first discovered "Rock Lobster" in another far removed locale: a disco club on the island of Bermuda. In a 1980 interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, John

Lennon remembers his excitement that night, as he realized that the band on the dance club playlist “was doing Yoko.” Despite his steadfast belief in Yoko Ono’s vocal experimentations as being ahead of her time, it was not until John Lennon heard Kate Pierson and Cindy Wilson’s multiphonic homage that he felt his belief in Ono’s creative legacy was validated. Overcome with excitement, Lennon placed a call to his wife back home in New York City, proudly proclaiming, that “he was right all along, the world was finally catching up with Yoko Ono!”¹⁶³

In a 1992 televised interview with the B-52’s Kate Pierson,¹⁶⁴ Yoko Ono fondly remembers her husband’s excitement in this moment, and remarks sentimentally that she was glad that Lennon, always the biggest champion of her vocal experimentations, finally got to experience that moment of validation — only a few months before his tragic death in December of 1980. In a charming, thoughtful exchange, Kate Pierson and Yoko Ono proceed to discuss the development of Ono’s vocal technique; Kate performs her interpretation of Ono’s multiphonic vibrato, after which Ono insouciantly praises her technique, responding in jest with a brief multiphonic screech of her own. Pierson speaks candidly of Ono’s influence upon her early work with the B-52’s, and inquires as to how Ono arrived at her unique vocal style. Ono responds that she was pushed to find her multiphonic scream by competing with Lennon’s noise-inflected guitar playing. In their collaborations, which Ono describes playfully as musical “fighting,” Lennon would produce more and more noise in his guitar playing, and in response, Ono would reach “higher and higher” with her voice, until she found her rupturous scream. Ono is vague

¹⁶³ See Jonathan Scott’s interview published in *Rolling Stone*, January 22, 1981. <http://www.john-lennon.com/1980rollingstoneinterview.htm>.

¹⁶⁴ See Kate Pierson’s Interview with Yoko Ono, 1992. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qgsaC4VEZI>

about her usage of the term “higher,” which could point to the register of her voice, but could also refer to her finding a shrill vocal tone that would cut through the noise of the guitar. Pierson nods in appreciation of Ono’s account of her musical collaborations with Lennon, and recalls a similar, competitive impetus behind the experimentations carried out in the B-52’s; Pierson remembers that together, as a band, they were pushing against each other, challenging each other to go beyond the limits of normative performance practice.¹⁶⁵

The experimental, boundary-crossing aesthetics of The B-52’s was largely inspired and encouraged by the free-spirited ethos of the University of Georgia art department of the time, of which most band members were students. The progressive art department was highly inclusive, offering low tuition costs, high admission rates, and boasting a staff of instructors who introduced students to punk and radical folk music genres as part of their curriculum. In interview, both Michael Lachowski and Vanessa Briscoe-Hay of The B-52’s “sister band,” Pylon, remember that the art school culture of the day was very egalitarian; differences in gender and sexual orientation were not seen as road-blocks to forming friendships and taking part in collaborative work within the art school culture.¹⁶⁶ Owing to a period of relative economic prosperity in the south, college towns such as Athens, Akron, and Louisville enjoyed increased enrollment at this time, and underground music scenes, largely comprised of art school students, sprang up across the region. According to historian Elizabeth Grace Hale, underground music scenes in regional areas at this time differed from those of the metropolises in that

¹⁶⁵ The B-52’s recorded a track inspired by Ono’s “Don’t Worry Kyoto,” included on their 1983 album, *Whammy!*. An electronic track loosely inspired by Ono’s original, however, “Don’t Worry” does not contain any multiphonic vibrato vocal stylings.

¹⁶⁶ Personal interviews, Michael Lachowski and Vanessa Briscoe Hay, 2017.

social connection was held up as a foundational subcultural ethos, as opposed to the urban anonymity of the metropolitan scenes.¹⁶⁷

Despite the progressive values and the supportive community networks that bolstered the regional Athens scene, for most up-and-coming performers, the town's geographic isolation was a major obstacle to overcome. Located at a considerable distance from the major underground scenes of New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles, Athens musicians were painfully aware of their outsider status — so much so that Athens bands' experience of “out-ness” came to be an integral component of their punk aesthetic. Elizabeth Grace Hale opines that the “out” aesthetic in Athens reflected the participants sense that they were somehow “outside” of the wider musical world, looking in. As such, they chose to revel in their outsider vantage point, celebrating playing “out” of tune, “out” of time, and delving into past fashions that were clearly “out.” Moreover, a key aspect of the Athens aesthetic of “out-ness” was adopting modes of gender and sexuality presentation that were clearly out of step with the traditionalist gender norms and heteronormativity of white suburban, southern culture. Hale observes that in the context of Athens' regional scene, “out” referred to the practice of “making public a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer identity (not then named as such) and to the role of drag or dressing up as a style of performance and form of cultural and political commentary.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Elizabeth Grace Hale, “Acting Out: The Athens, Georgia, Music Scene and the Emergence of a Bohemian Diaspora,” in *The Bohemian South: Creating Countercultures, from Poe to Punk*, eds. Shawn Chandler Bingham and Lindsey A. Freeman (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2017), 182.

¹⁶⁸ Hale, “Acting Out: The Athens, Georgia, Music Scene and the Emergence of a Bohemian Diaspora,” 184.

The B-52's

Arguably the defining band of the Athens scene, the B-52's breakthrough track, "Rock Lobster" can be interpreted as exemplary of Hale's above definition of an Athens "out" aesthetic. In live performances the band were often seen decked out in "out-of-style," colorful garbs of a past era; the women, in particular, donning bee-hive hair-do's and early '60s Mary Quant-style mini-dresses.¹⁶⁹ In terms of their gendered presentation, Schneider off-sets his authoritative male voice with spastic, effeminate dance moves and his predilection for excessive cowbell — a reference to gay disco subculture — while Cindy Wilson and Kate Pierson likewise gyrate erratically, their bee-hives in disarray, like possessed go-go dancers breaking out of the '60s mold of restrained femininity. With comical lyrics centered on the narrative of a shape-shifting, monstrous crustacean emerging from the Verne-ian depths of a retro-futurist nightmare, "Rock Lobster" offers up a quirky musical tapestry that is decidedly out of sync with the macho posturings of "first-wave" punk bands such as the Sex Pistols and the Ramones. Featuring a driving dance beat and a stripped-down musical texture, both key characteristics of the New Wave genre, Ricky Wilson's repetitive solo surf guitar riffs complement the reedy, often strident tones of Kate Pierson's Farfisa organ. Notably, Wilson and Pierson "camp up" their respective early 1960s instrumental references: while Wilson's guitar offers a harsher, angular take on a '60s surf guitar tone, Pierson's often staccato attack on the Farfisa is definitely at odds with the typical, Spooner Oldham-inspired Farfisa organ work one might hear on southern soul tracks of the same

¹⁶⁹ See "Rock Lobster" televised performance, featured on youtube channel, Rhino, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4QSYx4wVQg>.

era. The sparse texture and the spatial separation of the guitar and Farfisa thus creates a disjunctive feel that seems “out” of step with the robust instrumentation of early 60s surf pop and soul recordings.

The call and response interaction between lead singer, Fred Schneider and the backing female vocalists, Cindy Wilson and Kate Pierson, likewise reinterprets the doo-wop style harmonies common to early 1960s pop genres in terms of a New Wave “out” aesthetic. In response to Schneider’s absurdist lyrical statements, delivered in an exaggerated, even bombastic tone, Cindy Wilson and Kate Pierson respond with rising vocalizations of undulating vibrato, sung in unison through a shared microphone. According to engineer, Kevin Dunn, “Rock Lobster” was recorded in a tiny studio in a strip mall in Athens, the home of independent label, DB Records. Pierson and Wilson shared a basic Neumann U87 microphone, singing together in a small, insulated vocal booth. The only effect applied to their vocals was a Lexicon 45 digital reverb, one of the first digital reverb effects modules available at the time.¹⁷⁰ Singing in close physical proximity, and blended together with the aid of the Lexicon 45, Wilson and Pierson’s ululations gently bubble up into the otherwise sparse, angular musical texture, a matrixial siren call from a far-off, aquatic dimension.

Just like Ono’s multiphonic vibrato once gave voice to the fly, Kate Pierson and Cindy Wilson’s layered vibrato phrases forge a trans-subjective link to the emergent “Rock Lobster,” an alien, deep-sea creature that threatens to emerge into the “straight” world with playfully destructive consequences. In their 1986 MTV music video,¹⁷¹ the

¹⁷⁰ Personal interview, Kevin Dunn, November 22, 2017.

¹⁷¹ See “Rock Lobster,” official MTV music video, 1986, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDZy6-fMCw4>.

Rock Lobster briefly flashes across the screen as a giant gold relic, likened to an idol of worship, while the background scenes rapidly cut between parodic clips of rigid, 1960s dance moves, and shots of early Cold War-era, retro-futurist images of space exploration and nuclear destruction. One particularly unsettling scene presents throngs of identical, white middle-class holiday-makers happily cavorting in garish bathing costumes right next to a giant, looming nuclear reactor. Within this backing montage, the early 1960s are presented as an absurd, yet colorful past; a cartoonish caricature of an era stricken with the height of Cold War paranoia — a white, heteronormative, even xenophobic cultural imaginary laden with the obsessive fear of nuclear annihilation, as well as the imagined threat of alien infiltrators arriving from other worlds. Playing upon the repressed anxieties of the past generation, Schneider’s surrealist lyrics evoke the Rock Lobster as a comical anti-hero coming to wreak some indeterminate form of havoc upon “straight” American society — “lots of bubble, lots of trouble!” In possession of chameleon-like powers of transmogrification — first emerging from a man’s ear lobe, and later found under a pier disguised as a boulder — the Rock Lobster dually constitutes a parodic exaggeration of the rigidity of the white bourgeoisie, while also possessing shape-shifting qualities that seem to point to the uncertainty of its atomic constitution.

An extended rock track, “Rock Lobster” lasts almost seven minutes, and contains two breakdown sections that temporarily disrupt its quasi-apocalyptic surf pop romp. In live performance, during the breakdown, Pierson and Wilson drop to their knees as Schneider repeats the words “down, down, down...” inviting the audience to sink deep into the realm of the Rock Lobster. The surf guitar riff gradually lowers in volume, as its

timbre transmutes with the aid of a ring modulator. The psychedelic timbral shift in the surf guitar is matched by Wilson and Pierson's descending vocal harmonies, creating a matrixial space of contact between guitar and voice that together pulls the sonic context down further and further into the metaphorical ocean depths. At the end of the second breakdown section, upon the band's return to the initial verse material, Cindy Wilson unleashes an entirely unexpected, Ono-esque, multiphonic scream at full throttle. Wilson's shrill vocal tone ruptures into the forefront of the sound space, evoking an otherworldly, menacing entity that has possibly followed the band back up to the surface. In live performance footage, Cindy Wilson moves to center stage to deliver her blood-curdling scream, defiantly commandeering Schneider's lead microphone. Wilson's taking of center stage is reminiscent of Ono's iconic mic-grabbing stunt on the 1971 *Dick Cavett Show*, where, after being sidelined, Ono grabs a drum mic and violently disrupts Chuck Berry and John Lennon's smug performance of "Memphis Tennessee" — her multiphonic screech offending countless mainstream rock fans, no doubt, but also staging a fearless, proto-punk protest against the overblown rock 'n' roll "aristocracy."¹⁷²

Cindy Wilson's multiphonic scream that follows the second breakdown of "Rock Lobster" is no doubt what roused such excitement in John Lennon at the Bermudan disco bar in 1980 — in fact, I would argue that Wilson's scream elevates "Rock Lobster" from a quirky "joke rock" number to a piece that suggests a formidable, matrixial breakdown, or fragilization, of normative gendered vocal subjectivity. Drawing upon Ono's technique, Wilson produces a post-human, interstitial voice, one that serves to

¹⁷² *The Dick Cavett Show*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcU8DnorVWM>.

reinforce the song's central thematic of nuclear mutation as a potential threat to heteronormative white society. Cindy Wilson's voice contains no discernible lyrics, just the erratic contours of an Ono-esque caterwaul that rises "higher," pushing "out" and against the strictures of the accompanying dance beat, the angular instrumentation, as well as the semantic content of Schneider's parodic male vocal authority. Within a performative context brought to a peak by Wilson's experimental vocality, the B-52's conjure a post-nuclear Rock Lobster as a metaphorical, liminal creature that might bring about the possible restructuring of the "straight" world according to an "out" aesthetic — a New Wave imaginary wherein the past is reclaimed and reinterpreted, as non-normative sexualities and gendered positionalities, not to mention, posthuman subjective amalgams, find a trans-subjective mode of expression within the matrixial feminine voice.¹⁷³

Primitivism and Vocal Deconstruction in No Wave New York

The term "No Wave"¹⁷⁴ was first coined by the movement's most prominent artist and teenage provocateur, Lydia Lunch, in response to music journalist Roy Trakin's question as to whether she would consider herself to be a New Wave artist. Sarcastically

¹⁷³ In terms of Yoko Ono's influence on early '80s vocal stylings, Long Beach New Wave band, Suburban Lawns' frontwoman, Su Tissue also bears mention. Contemporaries of the B-52's, the Suburban Lawns attained mainstream notoriety with the success of their 1981 hit, "Janitor," a song that also thematizes nuclear mutation. Su Tissue was known for her unique vibrato vocal flourishes, which she employs in "Janitor" to bring about the semantic breakdown and melding of the words "janitor" and "genitals." The song offers a dark, humorous commentary on a local news story of a janitor at a nuclear reactor plant whose genitals were mutilated due to exposure to radiation. Su Tissue's post-nuclear vibrato of "Janitor" thus comes to be tied to the dissolution of male sexuality anatomy, a use of vibrato that resonates with the B-52's use of multiphonics to evoke the gender-bending Rock Lobster.

¹⁷⁴ A movement that arose in the mid-1970s in Manhattan's Lower East side, No Wave is often defined in terms of Brian Eno's 1978 compilation, *No New York*, featuring performances by Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, Mars, DNA, and the Contortions. This definition of No Wave is highly problematic, however, considering the artists' documented creative differences with mainstream producer Brian Eno, and the exclusion of other prominent bands such as Theoretical Girls, The Gynecologists, and Terminal.

rejecting Trakin's move to co-opt her repertoire under the blanket category of New Wave, a genre that she felt was too pop-oriented and commercially accessible to be worthy of a comparison to her own radical oeuvre, Lunch instead proposed that her work be referred to as "No Wave."¹⁷⁵ Lunch's negativist assertion soon came to be adopted as a generic categorization referencing not only Lunch's work with Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, but also an eclectic group of bands that comprised a relatively short-lived, nihilistic art rock scene in the Lower East side and Soho, roughly spanning the years 1976 - 1978. Since No Wave was by definition an "anti-movement," it is difficult to trace a stylistic cohesion between bands as diverse as Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, Mars, and DNA. Nonetheless, in terms of its dominant aesthetic trends, we can qualify No Wave as a more extreme, deconstructive off-shoot of the underground punk and New Wave music scenes arising out of CBGB's and Max's Kansas City in mid-'70s New York.¹⁷⁶ Unlike the first-wave of New York punk rockers, most practitioners of No Wave held close ties to the worlds of avant-garde art and film; furthermore, most were artists first and musicians second — amateur performers who drew inspiration from the minimalist textures of the Velvet Underground and La Monte Young's experimentations in noise.¹⁷⁷ According to rock journalist, Marc Masters, No Wave is stylistically related to

¹⁷⁵ According to Robin Crutchfield of DNA quoted in Marc Masters, *No Wave* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), "[Trakin] asked her if her music was New Wave, and she sneeringly responded, more like No Wave"(16). The printed source of the interview, however, has yet to be located.

¹⁷⁷ No Wave was also a movement in underground filmmaking that arose in conjunction with the music scene. Similar to No Wave music, No Wave cinema was a stripped-down style of filmmaking that emphasized mood and texture above structure and narrative. Celine Danhier's 2012 documentary, *Blank City*, features clips from representational No Wave films. A reaction to the overblown commercial sensibility of mainstream 1970s cinema, No Wave directors such as Vivienne Dick opted to use low budget, DIY techniques to chronicle the lives of musicians in the No Wave and punk scenes in the Lower East Side in the late 1970s. In his comprehensive history on the No Wave movement, Marc Masters includes a chapter on the history of No Wave cinema, see (Masters 2007, 139 - 164).

free jazz artists such as Albert Tyler, the noise-inflected guitar stylings of the Voidoids' Robert Quine, the confrontational performances of the Stooges, and in terms of vocality, No Wave is greatly indebted to "...the screeching art of Yoko Ono and the Plastic Ono Band."¹⁷⁸ In this vein, No Wave vocalists were often charged with refusing to sing in a manner that was comprehensible to listeners steeped in western pop/rock styles; rather, No Wave "singers emitted yelps, gasps, grunts, and cartoon like accents," delivering pastiche-style, non-narrative lyrics.¹⁷⁹

In terms of its philosophical underpinnings, No Wave can be categorized as a movement that was driven by two dominant aesthetic principles, that of deconstruction, on the one hand, and primitivism on the other. In order to arrive at an historical understanding of what these terms meant to the artists within the movement, I will provide a brief exposition and contextualization of each term. As a deconstructive musical form, Masters qualifies No Wave as a dual rejection of both the "three-chord rock" style of first-wave punk, in addition to the up-tempo, disco-inspired, dance pop sensibility of New Wave. According to musicologist Daniel S. Traber, No Wave bands utilized the instruments of a typical rock band formation, "but forced sounds from them that were deliberate and obviously intended as confrontational acts."¹⁸⁰ As music that was meant to challenge punk audiences, and denaturalize the experience of a punk show, No Wave spurned the notion that music should be a vehicle for escapism or entertainment. Counter to the punk and New Wave genres prevalent in New York at the

¹⁷⁸ Masters, *No Wave*, 27.

¹⁷⁹ Masters, *No Wave*, 28.

¹⁸⁰ Daniel S. Traber, "Recentring the Listener in Deconstructive Music," *The New Centennial Review* 7, no. 1 (2007): 169.

time, No Wave bands rejected the principles of chordal harmony, opted for irregular tunings, used ample distortion, and often employed repetitive single-beat rhythms that constituted more of an assault on the body than an invitation to dance. Traber argues that despite the No Wave movement's refusal of rock and pop conventions, however, their deconstructivist ethos was problematically tied to a concomitant, Romanticist rhetoric of individualism — not a surprising predilection, considering the majority of the participants were fine art students schooled in western-centric, Romanticist and Modernist ideologies of artistic creativity. According to such an ideology, true creativity was thought to be achieved by means of a fiercely individualistic break with extant musical practices and traditions.

Considered in terms of its geographical and socio-historical context, the deconstructivist trend in No Wave can also be interpreted as a cultural response to the architectural dilapidation and economic destitution of New York's Lower East Side in the 1970s. According to punk scholar Caroline O'Meara, the Lower East Side experienced a series of widely publicized fiscal and social crises in the 1970s, narrowly avoiding bankruptcy in 1975, thus becoming "a national and international symbol of the failure of the modern city."¹⁸¹ In her evocative preface to Thurston Moore and Byron Coley's *No Wave, Post-punk, Underground New York: 1976 - 1980*, Lydia Lunch grotesquely anthropomorphizes the marginalized borough of the Lower East Side as "a beautiful, ravaged slag — impoverished and neglected after suffering from decades of abuse and battery. She stunk of sewage, sex, rotting fish, and day-old diapers. She

¹⁸¹ Caroline O'Meara, "Music and the Production of Urban Space: The Bush Tetras and New York City, 1980," *American Music* 25 (Summer 2007), 1.

leaked from every pore.”¹⁸² The urban decay of New York’s Lower East side thus comes to be metaphorically linked to the gritty, nihilistic imaginings of No Wave.

While the living conditions in the Lower East side were indeed “primitive” — most bands rehearsed at James Chance and Lydia Lunch’s Delancey Street loft without running water, and with only a single stolen line of electricity — the No Wave penchant for the “primitive” was not only reflected in their rejection of the basic amenities of modern society, but more so in their burgeoning fascination with nonwestern musical forms. In the economically depressed and underserved Lower East side, there arose a great convergence of ethnic immigrant populations, and a variety of culturally syncretic musical genres proliferated. Taking inspiration from the proximity of such diverse musical traditions, in addition to the gradual increase in availability of world music records through small independent labels, No Wave artists aimed to incorporate nonwestern musical influences into their art rock sensibility. The problematic western-cultural tendency to perceive nonwestern music as “primitive,” that is, “in tune with nature,” was definitely a perspective that was echoed in interviews with No Wave performers. Lydia Lunch described her vocal technique as driven by a desire “...to vent in the most primal possible way the horrible din of [her] own torture.”¹⁸³ No Wave artists were greatly inspired by what they perceived as the “primitive” screams of Yoko Ono that communicated an unbridled rage, which they came to associate with her strident, nonwestern vocal tone and rupturous vibrato. In addition to Yoko Ono, No

¹⁸² “Preface,” Lydia Lunch, in *No Wave, Post-Punk, Underground New York: 1976 -1980*, by Thurston Moore & Byron Coley (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008), 4.

¹⁸³ Masters, *No Wave*, 76.

Wave bands were drawn to a variety of world music artists. Arto Lindsay of DNA¹⁸⁴ remarked that the chanting of Tibetan monks and the Yanomami Indians inspired his vocals — nonwestern vocal stylings that he believed opened up a “primitive” escape from what he perceived to be the music-cultural trappings of a corrupt, decaying western metropolis.¹⁸⁵ Likewise, the vocal experimentations of Mars’s Sumner Crane incorporate the tonal colors and phonemes of nonwestern languages into the folds of his English lyrics, bringing about a “primitivist,” vocal-semantic deconstruction.

Despite the problematic implications of No Wave’s fascination with the “primitive,” in the context of my current analyses, I would like to consider these works not only as western colonialist works that fetishize “the Other,” but more so as works that evoke a “Fourth Space” of postcolonial cultural contact. Rather than a triangulation between self, Other, and hybrid, a “Fourth Space” of aesthetic encounter arises when several, contactual sonic-vocal grains co-emerge and co-fade within a matrixial web of cross-cultural encounter. Although Lydia Lunch’s guttural screams and noise-laden slide guitar stylings are perhaps the most commonly referenced examples of a “primitive” No Wave aesthetic, in the context of this study I would like to begin with a discussion of the band Mars, whose experimentations largely influenced Lydia Lunch. In my analyses of the cross-cultural vocal deconstructions performed by Sumner Crane of Mars, I would like to propose that the desire to evoke a “primitive” vocality was deeply tied to the impulse to reconfigure extant western vocal-musical conventions, and

¹⁸⁴ Although Arto Lindsay’s vocal experimentations differ from Yoko Ono’s oeuvre, it is worthy to note that the DNA’s original keyboard player, Robin Crutchfield, was a performance artist heavily influenced by Yoko Ono’s performance art. His art happenings centered on using his body as a site of a “gender-bending exercise in confrontation”(Masters 2007, 51). DNA recorded a track “Grapefruit”(1978) as a conceptual homage to Yoko Ono.

¹⁸⁵ Masters, *No Wave*, 51.

moreover, western phallogocentric modes of expression. In the dissolution of such musico-linguistic semantics, I will argue that a normative western vocal subjectivity can be dissolved and reconstituted beyond a phallogocentric geometry of cultural contact. Inspired by early No Wave bands like Mars, Lydia Lunch built upon their deconstructive aesthetic, but also tapped into a “primal,” Ono-inspired feminine vocal rage. Just as Ono found her voice in competition with Lennon’s guitar, Lunch, too, arrived at an abrasive vocal tone that emerged against the cacophonous noise of her accompanying slide guitar.

Mars

One of the earliest, defining bands of the No Wave movement, Mars began rehearsing in 1974, and went through a series of line-up changes before finally performing a handful of live shows between 1977 and 1978. The core members included four art school students, lead vocalist Sumner Crane, co-vocalist and guitarist, China Burg, bass player Mark Cunningham, and drummer Nancy Arlen. While Sumner Crane’s unique, deconstructive vocal stylings later inspired the works of Arto Lindsay of DNA, amongst other key bands, China Burg’s atonal, slide guitar style came to be taken up by countless No Wave artists including Lydia Lunch. Despite all members of Mars being musical novices at the beginning of the project, the free form, iconoclastic sound they produced eventually came to be hugely influential in the world of mainstream rock — although it would not be until the early ‘90s that bands like Sonic Youth would bring aspects of the No Wave style to the attention of the wider US cultural sphere.

Mars's 1978 debut *7*, recorded by Patti Smith's guitarist, Lenny Kaye, and released on underground New York label, Rebel Records, featured two tracks sung by Sumner Crane and China Burg respectively, "3E" b/w "11,000 volts." As an early work, "3E" exhibits a discernible first-wave punk influence, heard in the rough outline of a blues progression and Sumner Crane's snarly vocals that narrate a tale of male teen rebellion against a controlling maternal figure. Nancy Arlen's single beat drum pattern and China Burg's surging slide guitar, however, point to a burgeoning No Wave aesthetic superimposed upon an otherwise clumsy, sophomoric punk tune. "11,000 Volts," on the other hand, conjures a minimalist, drone-inspired context, conjuring the early works of The Velvet Underground. In stark contrast to Lou Reed's concise poetic articulation, however, China Burg's vocal phrases are elongated and stretched to the point that it gives the effect that she is losing grasp of language. In the almost incomprehensibly drawn out statements of the phrase, "11,000 volts and you break down," there is a suggestion that the female singer is teetering on the verge of losing enunciative control. A reference to the voltage required for fatal electrocution, "11,000 Volts" might be interpreted as the deconstruction of a vocal subjectivity resulting from exposure to extreme electronic noise — or perhaps a woman's mental breakdown in the aftermath of the contemporary practice of electro-shock therapy. Both "3E" and "11,000 Volts" feature swirling slide guitar flourishes that ebb and flow across the sound space like shock waves of amplified noise, moving independently of the cadence of the vocal delivery. The disjuncture between the guitar, vocals, and the rhythm section creates a chaotic, free-form style that comes to be further developed in Mars' subsequent recordings.

After the release of their debut single, Mars continued to take their sound into more “primitivist,” deconstructive territory. Sumner Crane’s vocal performance on the track, “Helen Fordsdale,” drawn from the Brian Eno produced *No New York* (1978) compilation, evokes a powerful resonance with Yoko Ono’s experimentations from the late 1960s and early 1970s. While music critic Marc Masters dismisses Sumner Crane’s vocals as “absurd calisthenics,”¹⁸⁶ in my following analysis, I would like to propose that Crane’s unconventional vocal style gives rise to an interstitial “Fourth Space” of contact between English and nonwestern, specifically Japanese, vocal tones and phrase structures. An enigmatic track featuring horrifying imagery of a singing subject railing against the violent dismemberment of his body parts and their subsequent preservation in jars and in wax, “Helen Fordsdale” unleashes a vocal terror imbued with an otherworldly death cry. The rapid drum fills and the snaky, atonal bass line that open the song bring to mind the later “noise rock” aesthetic of Sonic Youth, albeit charged with a greater sense sense of urgency. With the entrance of Sumner Crane’s frenetic vocals, the lyrical dismemberment of the poetic subject is sonically evoked by means of a harsh deconstruction of the English language. Straining his voice in a *kabuki*-esque vocal tone, Crane’s high-pitched delivery wavers and wobbles in the uppermost registers of his voice. The tension in his throat is palpable as his voice teeters on entering a falsetto range, a strained vocal threshold characteristic of *kabuki* singing. Echoing Yoko Ono’s visceral screams and irregular, extended vibrato phrases on tracks such as “Don’t Worry Kyōko” and “Fly,” Crane pushes his voice not only into a nonwestern vocal tone, but also into an upper register that defies a clear gendered identification. Fragilizing a

¹⁸⁶ Masters, *No Wave*, 49.

hetero-normative, blues rock-inspired rock/punk vocality, Crane's vocal performance opens up an undulating vocal space wherein subjective grains of various racial and gendered positionings co-emerge and co-fade.

On "Helen Fordsdale," Crane's phrase structures rise and fall independently of the accompanying rhythmic context, not to mention China Burg's searing slide guitar that cuts through the sound space with a jarring rhythmic irregularity. The through-composed lyrics fail to provide any discernible grammatical structurality, and Crane's incomprehensible pronunciation deconstructs each words' syllables beyond recognition. The first two phrases seem to follow a delivery akin to a *fushi-jiri* style of *kabuki* song, or *nagauta*. In *nagauta*, the tail of the strained vocal phrase tends to finish on a short turn, or a mordent, that terminates in an apparent loss of breath, producing pitchless sounds. In Sumner Crane's frantic *fushi-jiri*, his voice wobbles and wavers downwards in an uncontrolled, Ono-esque mordent. In the irregular undulations of his voice, English phonemes are transmuted into nonwestern, Japanese-sounding syllabic fragments. The first two vocal phrases delivered by Crane, from 0:17-0:19 and 0:21-0:25 respectively, are barely recognizable as English. The first phrase strains his voice in the upper register resembling a feminine Japanese scream of "yah!" soon wavering into a series of phonemes ending in "o" syllables, more characteristic of Japanese word-endings than English. The second phrase begins with a discernible English phrase, "You don't have to.." but soon falls into an undulating *fushi-jiri* resembling a frantically sped-up, *kabuki* mordent. Just as China Burg's accompanying slide guitar surges and fades, the semantic content and cultural positioning of Crane's vocality thus also undergoes notable shifts. Likewise, in "Tunnels," a track also drawn

from the *No New York* Compilation, Crane rapidly chants a series of indiscernible phrases as though speaking in tongues, his words fighting to be heard over a sonic “tunnel” of guitar feedback. Each phrase seems to begin with a series of nonwestern phonemes that resolve into English logos, articulating words such as “reptilian,” and “love in cold blood.” The central image of “Tunnels” is that of the “reptilian,” a shape-shifting, monstrous entity that defies the ontological boundaries of human and non-human, just as “Helen Fordsdale” evoked imagery of a dismembered body, placing the unified ontology of the vocal subject into question. In representative tracks such as “Helen Fordsdale” and “Tunnels,” Crane’s slippery vocality slides between the ontological categories of man and woman, west and east, self and Other — ontological boundaries deconstructed and dissolved into the noise-laden matrix of China Burg’s relentless assault on the guitar.¹⁸⁷ In the shifting patterns of Crane’s vocality, there arises a Fourth Space of encountural, matrixial subjective grains that slip into and out of our sonic consciousness, permeating the thresholds of contrasting linguistic and cultural positionings.

¹⁸⁷ By the tail-end of the first-wave of punk, an influential No Wave movement also arose in the Kansai region of Japan. Featuring artists from the neighboring cities of Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe, Japanese No Wave was an even more extreme, confrontational musical form as compared to New York No Wave. Although the history of cultural exchange between the New York scene and the Kansai scene has yet to be fully documented, it was most likely due to the presence of countless Japanese art school students who went to study in New York City during the No Wave era, and returned home with a fascination for noise, and deconstructive punk rock. Key bands of the Kansai No Wave scene include Hijokaidan and the Boredoms. Taking a more extreme approach to performance, bands such as Hijokaidan staged confrontational sets that often involved the desecration of venues. The continued popularity of Arto Lindsay in Japan is a testament to the lasting influence of New York No Wave. A 1986 compilation, *Dead Tech*, includes tracks by Japan’s representative No Wave acts, including Hijokaidan, The Boredoms, Ruins, High Rise, and Zeitlig Vergelter. For a comprehensive history of the rise of Noise music in Japan, see David Novak’s *Japanese: Music at the Edge of Circulation* (2013), as well as Masato Matsumura’s online article, “The Birth of Noise in Japan,” www.daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2014/10/birth-of-noise-in-japan-feature, published October 14, 2014.

Teenage Jesus & the Jerks

Any discussion of No Wave would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of Lydia Lunch, arguably the most influential artist to emerge from the movement. Long after the break-up of the short-lived No Wave music scene, Lydia Lunch continued to reinvent herself as a multi-faceted performance artist, spoken word poet, and public speaker. In her musical collaborations she has worked with a host of notable bands and solo musicians throughout the 1980s and 1990s, including Sonic Youth, The Birthday Party, Nick Cave and Steven Severin, amongst many others. Lunch continues to perform today, her most recent Los Angeles appearance was a sold out show at the Teragram Ballroom on July 31st, 2016. Although Lunch describes herself as more of a Dadaist than a punk, she nonetheless has come to be regarded as a powerful female voice of the post-punk generation, and a veritable underground cultural icon.¹⁸⁸ Lydia Lunch stands as a formidable artistic persona within punk history, her career beginning at the tender age of 16. The epithet “Lunch” was initially a sarcastic reference to her young age when she first arrived in New York’s Lower East Side. Born Lydia Koch, punk guitarist Willy DeVille gave her the punk name, Lydia Lunch, as she had gained a reputation for shoplifting food to support herself and her scene friends including the Dead Boys, one of the rowdiest “first-wave” punk bands in town.

Despite her young age and diminutive stature, Lunch soon acquired a powerful presence in the New York underground; her early work was driven by a jarring, angst-filled nihilism that rivaled the aggressive male punk bands active in the scene at the

¹⁸⁸ See Lydia Lunch’s speech, “The Cultural History of No Wave” delivered at MOCAD (Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit), July 8, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIj8VWPHxB8>.

time. While iconic punk bands like the Dead Boys riled up their teen audiences with noisy “three chord rock” and Stiv Batros’ spastic stage antics, Lunch aimed to challenge her listeners with a reserved stage presence that set into relief the power of her nihilistic vocal “terror.” In interview, Lunch qualifies her nihilism as a reaction to her dis-identification with the dominant socio-political climate of the late 1970s US. In her own words, Lunch situates No Wave as a counter-hegemonic movement emerging in the aftermath of “the lie of the summer of love into Charles Manson and the Vietnam War,” and concluding with a characteristically snarky response to the interviewer, she adds a virulent defense of her cynicism, stating, “Where is the positivity? I’m supposed to be fucking positive? Fuck you!”¹⁸⁹ Antagonistic to the core, Lunch’s rejection of reigning socio-political structures is undergirded by the persistent presence of a visceral feminine rage, communicated through her vocal delivery and lyrics. From the exodus of blood-soaked children in “Orphans,” to the female singer’s metaphorical asphyxiation en-voiced on the track, “The Closet,” Lunch’s harrowing vocal performances communicate deep-seated psychic anxieties and gendered trauma that is difficult to discount as mere “teen rebellion.”

An undeniable vocal powerhouse, Lunch’s vocality was largely developed in relation to her accompanying slide guitar technique. Lunch’s use of feedback-laden, atonal slide guitar was inspired by China Burg’s early performances with Mars, which Lunch attended in 1977 and 1978 shortly after her arrival on the scene. Music critic, Marc Masters comments that the propensity of No Wave artists to utilize slide guitar transmuted a conventional rock instrument from “a melodic tool [into] a brush with

¹⁸⁹ Lunch quoted in Masters, *No Wave*, 31.

which to paint abstract sonic pictures.”¹⁹⁰ As such, guitarists such as China Burg and Lydia Lunch avoided learning conventional rock guitar technique, and instead developed their own style of playing that centered on manipulating the mechanism of the metallic slide to generate noise on the instrument. Rebelling against the notion of “three chord rock,” and western tonal harmony, Lunch instead sought to produce ear-splitting noise to accompany her rage-driven vocal performance; Lunch claims proudly that to this day, she has never learned a single guitar chord.¹⁹¹

Assaulting her audiences with a barrage of shrill, electric slide guitar noise, Lunch nonetheless maintained a reserved stage persona, resisting the punk rock convention of eliciting crowd interaction. In this vein, she was inspired by the somewhat antagonistic, para-punk performances of Suicide, an influential New York-based synth duo that Lunch encountered on one of her first teenage sojourns into the city. Confounding punk rock audiences with extended drone analog synth jams and drawn-out, melodramatic vocals, Suicide’s Alan Vega and Martin Rev intended to confront and provoke, drawing attention to the emerging normativization of the punk rock aesthetic. When Lunch moved to New York to start her first band, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, her goal was thus, above all, to challenge audiences, in her own words, “to have a band that was like nothing else, that was based on my primal anxiety, anger, and hatred, that caused fear and panic in those not on the stage. It had nothing to do with putting on a nice show for

¹⁹⁰ Masters, *No Wave*, 33.

¹⁹¹ See Lydia Lunch quoted in Simon Reynolds’ *Rip It Up and Start Again*. “Who wanted chords, all these progressions that had been used to death in rock?... I’d use a knife, a beer bottle... Glass gave the best sound. To this day I still don’t know a single chord on the guitar”(Reynolds, 2005, 141).

people to stand there smiling about, that was just a repulsive reaction, and the last thing I wanted.”¹⁹²

In keeping with her antagonistic performance practice, Lunch’s vocality evokes an affect of unbridled, “primal” rage reminiscent of Ono’s improvisatory works from *Plastic Ono Band* (1969) and *Fly* (1971), both inspired by Ono’s experiences undergoing Primal Scream Therapy. Also, similar to the way in which Ono’s vocal style developed through a “competition” or “fight” with Lennon’s noise guitar, Lunch also developed her vocal style in conjunction with the strident timbres of her abrasive guitar slide. Lunch’s vocality, like Ono’s, is impressive in its ability to cut through and even overpower the electric guitar. In my following analyses of two representative Teenage Jesus & the Jerks tracks, “Orphans” (1978) and “The Closet” (1978), I would like to consider Lunch’s voice as occupying a matrixial borderspace shared with her slide guitar — a gendered borderspace that reconceptualizes the electric guitar as an expression of feminine trauma, rather than a conduit of masculine virility and virtuosity. Lunch’s vocal rage co-emerges alongside the electrified contact of slide and strings, deconstructing the guitar beyond its rock-stylistic conventions, and ultimately giving rise to new sonic signifiers of gendered punk rebellion.

In the spring of 1978, Teenage Jesus & the Jerks released their debut 7” single, “Orphans,” on Migraine records, a local underground label, produced by Robert Quine, lead guitarist of the Voidoids. Drummer Bradley Field’s repeated single beat tom hits paired with Gordon Stevenson’s three note bass line provide a sparse, heavy-handed rhythmic backdrop that sets into relief the screaming, “primal” intensity of Lunch’s

¹⁹² Lunch quoted in Masters, *No Wave*, 74.

vocals and guitar. After a 0:17 second, thumping drum and bass intro, Lunch unleashes a maniacal slide guitar phrase in the upper registers of her instrument, rupturing into the soundspace with a power akin to Ono's strident vibrato cutting through the opening scene of *Fly*. Propelled by the militaristic pounding of the rhythm section, "Orphans" unfolds as a musical interchange between Lunch's primal screams and the metallic shredding of her slide guitar. At the conclusion of each verse statement, her slide solo resurfaces with intensified vigor. In the first two verses the entrance of the slide solo cuts off the final word of the stanza, "blood," amputating the voice with its metallic cut; however, in the last two verses Lunch makes a point of asserting her final word over the guitar, a symbolic conquest of "blood" and voice over the strident terror of the amplified machine.

Consisting of a minimalist, two-part song structure, "Orphans" repeats two identical verses relating the poetic narrative of a flight of orphaned children through a blood-soaked snowfield. In part a metaphorical account of Lunch's own escape from the ghetto of Rochester New York to the Lower East Side, the hawkish insistence of the drum beat and the threatening metallic noise of the slide guitar also conjures a horrifying scene of children running to evade a military attack, or some other unnamed force of murderous aggression. In Lunch's vocal delivery, "blood" is emphasized repeatedly, each verse concluding with a screaming reiteration of the phrase, "in the blood, in the blood, in the blood." The grotesque lyrical content — a gang of children drowning in a field of their intermingled blood — suggests a poetic context wherein multiple fragilized subjectivities are enmeshed within a matrix of shared corporeal trauma. Giving voice to both the screams of the bloodied orphans, as well as the

machinery that lies in their pursuit, Lunch's performance integrates the mechanical slide guitar within the deconstructed boundaries of the female voice. During the verses, Lunch matches her slide guitar with the three repeated bass notes, vocalizing in a piercing tone that closely matches, and yet still manages to cut through, her guitar's shrill mechanical noise. Given that her screaming voice, pushed to its abrasive limits, both melds with, and also "fights against" the metallic "scream" of the slide guitar, a shifting sonic-timbral borderspace arises wherein a young woman's scream comes to be a site of co-emerging human and non-human sonic grains. As the slide guitar solo returns at the conclusion of each verse, its sonic signification is thus gradually altered — what is first experienced as the "scream" of a masculine instrument of war comes to be layered with Lunch's "orphan scream," giving rise to a sonic matrix of trauma that fragilizes the boundaries of gendered signification.

Adhering to the theme of feminine trauma and primal rage, "The Closet" is another representative Teenage Jesus & the Jerks track that relates the poetic narrative of a suicidal female protagonist trapped in a metaphorical "closet." Two versions of "The Closet" exist to date; the song was first recorded with free jazz saxophonist James Chance in 1977, and then recorded again, after Chance's departure from the band, as part of Brian Eno's 1978 *No New York* compilation. Mixed by Lunch and Chance, the first version of "The Closet" probably best captures the band's live sound. Eno's rushed recording process did not allow much time in the studio, and as a result there is a lack of clarity in the overall sonic context. In the original 1977 version of "The Closet," released on the 1979 ZE Records compilation, *Pre-Teenage Jesus & the Jerks*, James Chance's saxophone supersedes Lunch's slide guitar as a sonic force that fights against her

screaming vocals. Similar to Yoko Ono's early collaborations with Ornette Coleman, "The Closet" presents a gendered, sonic tug-of-war between saxophone and voice. As Lunch begs to be released from a stifling closet of "suburban wealth" that "feels like jail," a frenetic exchange ensues between Chance's atonal saxophonic contortions and Lunch's primal feminine rage. Chance holds back at the beginning of each verse, but his instrument gradually rises in volume towards the end of each verse, pushing Lunch's screams to excruciating heights. At the conclusion of the final verse, Lunch cries, "take a bullet to my eyes blow them out and see if I die!" The rage of her suicidal scream is picked up by Chance's saxophone, as he breaks into a rising, atonal free jazz solo that ends on a final strident pitch in the uppermost register. Just as the electric slide guitar on "Orphans" comes to occupy a matrixial, gendered borderspace between a masculine machine and a woman's screams, Chance's saxophone, too, thus comes to en-voice, in turn, both a force that stands opposed to Lunch's imprisoned feminine protagonist, but also a liminal sonic signifier that lends expression to her rage. The return to primal affect in Lunch's No Wave oeuvre thus comes to be associated with the deconstruction of gendered musico-cultural boundaries, and the co-emergence of matrixial interpretive possibilities.

**New Wave Divas:
Considering the Avant-Pop Vocalities of Lene Lovich and Nina Hagen**

As quirky Athens New Wavers and nihilistic No Wave rebels pushed the limits of experimental vocality within underground scenes in the mid-to-late 1970s, there soon emerged a number of iconic new wave "divas" — underground female artists who honed

their craft within punk and art rock scenes, soon achieving global recognition as mainstream pop music stars. Two such pioneering vocalists, Lene Lovich and Nina Hagen, were able to take their punk performance practice to new heights of vocal virtuosity and visual spectacle. Both highly eccentric “avant-pop” artists, Lovich and Hagen began their singing careers as outsider artists, developing unique, even iconoclastic vocalities inspired by a range of diverse musical influences, including Yoko Ono’s vocal experimentations with The Plastic Ono band. Although too-often sidelined within mainstream pop histories, the outlandish costumes, stage antics and vocal acrobatics of artists such as Lovich and Hagen paved the way for the rise of boundary-pushing ‘80s pop divas such as Cyndi Lauper, Dale Bozzio, and Madonna. As leading New Wave frontwomen that emerged into the forefront of global pop music in the late 1970s, Lovich and Hagen soon formed a life-long friendship based on mutual admiration and support. Hagen included a German cover of Lovich’s hit single, “Lucky Number”(1978) on her second studio album, *Unbehagen* (1979), and in the same year, the two starred side-by-side in Dutch rocker, Harold Bloom’s satirical rockumentary of the Amsterdam underground scene, *Cha Cha* (1979). At the height of their international fame, Lovich and Hagen, both committed animal rights activists, co-wrote the track, “Don’t Kill the Animals”(1986), released as part of Al Jourgensen’s *Animal Liberation* compilation record in benefit of PETA — solidifying their bond in the public eye.

In terms of their respective vocal styles, although Lovich and Hagen each possess highly distinctive, iconic voices, their respective vocalities do share certain qualities in common. In their eclectic vocal stylings, both Lovich and Hagen, much like Yoko Ono, present vocalities that can easily slip into (and out of) the timbres of accompanying

instruments, suggesting a posthuman sonic-vocal borderspace wherein normative gendered and ethnic-cultural subjective positionings come to be fragilized and reconstituted. The direct influence of Yoko Ono is more pronounced in Lovich, whose frequent use of ear-splitting beat multiphonics, a strident vocal tone, and extended, piercing screams, is a key aspect of her performances. Hagen, while also known for her unconventional use of vibrato and extended vocal techniques, often employs guttural vocal stylings that draw more heavily upon the tradition of German cabaret song. While sometimes referencing the alto registers of mid-century German singers such as Zarah Leander and Lotte Lenya, however, Hagen's virtuosic vocal play also features Ono-esque, rapid timbral fluctuations and shifts in tone that lead musicologist Ken McLeod to characterize her as in possession of a "schizophrenic" vocal persona.¹⁹³

The fragmentary, often undecidable vocal subjectivities performed by Lovich and Hagen can perhaps be attributed in part to their trans-cultural positionings. Both artists' early lives were shaped by traumatic experiences of trans-national dislocation: at the age of thirteen, Lene Lovich relocated from the urban ghetto of Detroit to the London suburb of Hull, while the young Hagen was forced to live as a political exile from the repressive east German communist state. Lovich and Hagen's deconstruction of normative gendered and ethnic-cultural vocal subjectivities can thus be interpreted not only in terms of Ettinger's theory of the matrixial borderspace, but also in terms of an emergent Fourth Dimensionality of cultural contact between co-emerging gendered-racial vocal subjective positionings. In my following analyses, I will thus focus on both matrixial and Fourth Dimensional borderspaces en-voiced in Lovich and Hagen's iconic

¹⁹³ Ken McLeod, "Bohemian Rhapsodies: Operatic Influences on Rock Music" (*Popular Music*, 20, no. 2 2001), 195.

performances. Beginning with a discussion of Lovich's rise to fame on the roguish, London-based independent label, Stiff Records, and the historic release of *Stateless* (1978), I will then move to a discussion of Hagen's gender-bending, techno punk-cabaret performances on *NunSexMonkRock* (1982) and *Angstlos* (1983) that satirize the ethnic-cultural borderspaces between totalitarian European music culture and western capitalist, hedonistic disco scenes.

Lene Lovich

Known for her thick, ruddy dread-lock plaits and a predilection for expansive tulle frocks — a look that could be likened to a Rastafarian Pippi Longstockings — Lovich recalls the extent to which she stood out from the crowd as an art school student in early 1970s London. In interview, Lovich remembers that her unconventional fashion sense often drew comparisons to Yoko Ono, stating that even prior to her involvement in the music scene, strangers would often stop her on the street, calling out, “Hey, Yoko!”¹⁹⁴ After her rise to fame, Lovich's look would lead critics to liken her stage persona to that of a “drag of a feminine pop star,” an interesting proposition considering the exaggerated feminine coloratura she often employed.¹⁹⁵ Lovich's eccentric look and vocal practice can perhaps be contextualized in terms of the outsider status that she occupied throughout her life. Born as Lili-Marlene Premilovich in 1949 to a Serbian father and an English mother, Lovich was raised in a poor, black neighborhood in downtown Detroit, Michigan. Living as a racial minority within an urban environment

¹⁹⁴ Richard Balls. *Be Stiff: The Stiff Records Story* (London: Soundcheck Books, 2014), 247.

¹⁹⁵ Jason Juneau, “Innovation in New Wave: Lene Lovich” posted September 2001, <http://www.furious.com/perfect/lenelovich.html>.

of extreme violence and unrest, Lovich's home life was also characterized by a tense atmosphere due to her father's struggles with mental illness.¹⁹⁶ Lovich has commented on her upbringing as follows:

I don't really like to say this because it sounds a little sad, but I was always the odd one out as one of the few white kids in a black neighborhood, which for a start was a bit weird. Now that's not a racist thing, not at all, in fact, I thought I was black until I was about 8 and I always knew there was something different about me. I had to live in my imagination. I was never the popular one at school at all. It wasn't until I saw *The Addams Family* that I thought, 'Wednesday — that's me!' I just didn't fit in and it might sound a little sad, but you learnt keep your thoughts within you.¹⁹⁷

Lovich's recollection of her childhood situates her as a white racial outsider within a working-class black community, a highly unusual ethnic-cultural positioning within the US public sphere. Lovich's identification with Wednesday, an extremely pale, gothic — and even death-like — fictional character, reveals Lovich's dis-identification with not only "blackness" but also with a normative "whiteness." Upon her relocation to the northern British port city of Hull, however, Lovich, now amongst a predominantly white community, was still plagued by feelings of dis-location and dis-identification — intensified by the fact that she felt even more out of sync with those with whom she shared a superficial racial "likeness."

Seeking out fellow social outsiders, Lovich was drawn to art school culture, and enrolled as a sculpture student at London's Central School of Art and Design, where she would meet her life partner and life-long musical collaborator, Les Chappell. Soon dissatisfied with the conservatism the mid-1970s London art world, however, Lovich and Chappell decided to leave art school to pursue careers in music. Repeatedly receiving negative feedback on her unconventional voice, Lovich at first set out to

¹⁹⁶ Balls, *Be Stiff: The Stiff Records Story*, 159.

¹⁹⁷ Lovich quoted in Balls, *Be Stiff: The Stiff Records Story*, 159.

develop her skills as an instrumentalist. After acquiring some training on the saxophone, Lovich joined a reggae band with Chappell, The Diversions, releasing a moderately successful 1975 cover of Carl Malcolm's "Fattie Bum Bum," backed with an original track, "Jamaica." Inspired by this minor success, Lovich wrote to London's foremost underground music DJ, Charlie Gillett, seeking collaborative work as a saxophonist. Gillett, however, perhaps skeptical of the prospect of a female saxophonist, replied by asking Lovich if she "can sing," to which Lovich responded emphatically, "everybody hates my voice." Bemused by Lovich's response, and intrigued by both her unique look and the quirky backing vocals she supplied on The Diversions track, "Jamaica," Gillett suggested that Lovich should record a cover of a long-forgotten 1967 garage rock tune, Tommy James and the Shondells' "I Think We're Alone Now." Lovich had never heard the original version, which resulted in her extremely unusual vocal interpretation. Gillett, always a supporter of outsider artists, quickly passed the record on to Dave Robinson, founder of the eccentric, London-based label, Stiff Records. Within weeks, Robinson rushed to sign Lovich as the label's first female artist.

Stiff Records was an independent London-based label that sought to represent unconventional artists that would most likely be otherwise overlooked by the mainstream rock music industry. According to founder Dave Robinson:

Stiff was to be a conduit for people who could not find the music business any other way. My theory is that there's an Elvis Presley out there, but he's working in a factory in Coventry and he doesn't know how to get in touch with me. The best artists are out there, but they don't know how to connect with the music business because it doesn't tell you how.¹⁹⁸

Stiff Records achieved their initial success by compiling a roster of odd-ball pub rock acts from the London underground scene, including Ian Dury and Nick Lowe. In the late

¹⁹⁸ Robinson quoted in Balls, *Be Stiff: The Stiff Records Story*, 32.

1970s, however, Stiff attained great notoriety upon signing UK first-wave punks, The Damned. Releasing The Damned's first record just two months before rival band, The Sex Pistols, were to debut on EMI Records, Stiff garnered the reputation as the label that first "broke" punk rock in the UK. As the punk and New Wave movements in the UK increasingly brought female artists such as The Slits, Siouxsie Sioux, and Poly Styrene to the forefront of the music world, Stiff was in search of a female artist to add to their quirky line-up. Lene Lovich proved to be a highly successful investment for Stiff; Lovich's debut single, "Lucky Number"(1978), composed by Lovich and Chappell in one night, soon rose to number three on the UK pop charts, becoming one of the most commercially successful records ever to be released on the label. As part of the press release for Lovich's debut full-length album, *Stateless* (1978), Stiff records constructed a mythology surrounding its newfound female star. Playing upon Lovich's transnational status, Stiff presented Lovich as a foreboding, otherworldly, Gorgon-haired figure in the shadows of a barbed wire fence, with a caption that read: "she is stateless, and her presence in this country is only possible through elaborate subterfuge courtesy of the Stiff Secret Service."¹⁹⁹ Stiff's embellishment of Lovich's outsider status added a touch of mystique to her media image, and also positioned her as an eccentric New Wave diva, an "alien" outlaw who defied normative categorizations of gender, nationality, ethnicity, and race.

Lovich's unearthly, "stateless" image complemented her unconventional vocal style, described by feminist rock historian, Gillian Gaar, as a "topsy-turvey vocal

¹⁹⁹ Balls, *Be Stiff: The Stiff Records Story*, 161.

gymnastics.”²⁰⁰ Lovich’s distinctive, “topsy-turvey” vocal cadence can be heard in the opening verse of her first hit single, “Lucky Number.” An ode to Lovich’s outsider status, the song opens with a jerky, staccato delivery of the lines “I never used to cry 'cause I was all alone/ For me, myself and I is all I've ever known.” Lovich’s irregular, detached enunciation of the syllables almost obfuscates the semantic content of her words with frequent, unexpected hiccups into a falsetto register.²⁰¹ For the duration of the track, Lovich adopts a strained, “girlish” vocal tone, accompanied by subtle doo-wop style backing vocals, conjuring the distant influence of Detroit-based, Motown girl groups, albeit reinterpreted with a quirky New Wave swagger.

More so than Motown, however, the overall sonic context of “Lucky Number” evokes a powerful connection to the B-52’s — Lovich’s “vocal gymnastics” are grounded in an infectious dance beat (including a subtle cowbell hit) and complimented by a catchy, surf guitar riff that drives the chorus. As in the B-52’s “Rock Lobster,” anthropomorphic synthesizers interplay with the vocals throughout the track, playing up the otherworldly lyrical thematics. When Lovich sings of an “alien vibration in the atmosphere”(0:50), a backing synthesizer “vocalizes” an Ono-esque, high-pitched vibrato descending from the distant corners of the sound space — as though a far-off alien being is falling to earth. Notably, the song’s hook consists of four electronically-enhanced, staccato vocables delivered prior to each statement of the chorus (0:38, 1:11, 2:04). Delivered in Lovich’s characteristic falsetto, the iconic “oh! oh! ah! oh!” vocables mark a breakdown of language and the emergence of a high-pitched, post-human

²⁰⁰ Gaar, *She’s a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock n Roll*, 247.

²⁰¹ Notably, Lovich’s high-pitched hiccups later inspired Dale Bozzio’s vocal stylings in her mid-80s work with LA New Wave group, The Missing Persons.

vocality that is fragmented and intensified with the use of a chorus/delay effect that lends a “synthetic” timbre to Lovich’s voice — giving rise to a kind of “stateless,” alien coloratura.

Lovich’s synth-infused, space age voice can also be heard on the B-side to “Lucky Number” — a cover of Tommy James and the Shondells’ 1967 garage rock track, “I Think We’re Alone Now.” Not a widely successful tune in its original incarnation, Lovich’s New Wave reinterpretation of the Shondells’ “I Think We’re Alone Now” brought the song to international prominence.²⁰² The intricate production of Lovich’s version expertly layers synthesizers and vocals, constructing a posthuman sound space wherein feminine and otherworldly, electronic sonic ontologies co-emerge and co-fade in turn. The track begins with a dreamy, free-form introductory passage; a reverb-laden guitar line, possibly played through a classic New Wave JC-120 transistor amplifier, rings out over a subtle, low-pitched, wide vibrato of an analog synthesizer. Although the wide synth vibrato lingers in the background for the duration of the track, the dreamy space age intro is soon interrupted as the verse kicks in with the rhythmical vigor of the original 60’s garage rock original, emphasizing strong snare hits, a driving bass, and Lovich’s adrenalized, “girlish” vocal tone. At around 0:40, however, the punctuating Farfisa flourish of the original rock track is replaced by an otherworldly theramine that bubbles upwards in the sound space, once again returning the track to its space-age, New Wave context. With the arrival of the hushed chorus, the wide vibrato of the bass synth is laid bare in the sound space, as Lovich whispers, “I think we’re alone now,” her

²⁰² Inspired by Lovich’s version, 80s teen idol, Tiffany, would later choose to cover “I Think We’re Alone Now,” which became the song that launched her career and propelled her to international pop stardom in the mid-1980s.

voice gradually fading into refracted, breathy vocables that meld with the wavering bass synth.

At the onset of the song's extended outro (1:54), the high-pitched, backing Farfisa melody of the original recording is reinterpreted by Lovich as a falsetto coloratura, which she layers with her mid-range, "girl group" style lead vocals. Each statement of her backing coloratura phrase falls into a strident, Ono-inspired multiphonic vibrato — also slipping into Ono's characteristic, kabuki-*esque* vocal tone. After several statements of Lovich's coloratura, her piercing multiphonic screams are blended with the upward motion of a high-pitched synth vibrato that closely mimics the timing of her beat multiphonics as well as her strident, Ono-*esque* vocal timbre. The song's climactic conclusion is thus achieved by a layering of vocals and anthropomorphic synthesizers, conjuring a matrixial space of encounter in which the lead singer is not in fact "alone," nor singular, but in fact occupies a fragilized subjective borderspace between diverse, co-emerging sonic ontologies spanning a range of gendered, ethnic-cultural positoinalities.²⁰³

"Bird Song" from Lovich's second album, *Flex* (1979), can be considered as a study in Lovich's distinctive use of the extended technique of beat multiphonics. The exquisite sonic borderspaces evoked between high-pitched, undulating synthesizers and Lovich's rapid vibrato have led many fans and critics to consider "Bird Song" to be her most highly revered work, despite the track not attaining the chart-topping commercial success of "Lucky Number." "Bird Song" begins with an introductory passage

²⁰³ Lovich also recorded a Japanese language cover of the tune, "I Think We're Alone Now." Her phonetic enunciation of the Japanese language in her quirky vocal style coupled with her Ono-*esque* multiphonic screeches gives rise to an enigmatic fourth space of matrixial vocal encounter.

undergirded by a low-pitched synth drone, over top of which Lovich vocalizes four free-form, multiphonic, coloratura “bird calls.” Although Lovich’s voice on the recording seems to be carefully spatialized and blended with electronic delay effects, in live performance, Lovich produces the bird-like beat multiphonics with her own vocal apparatus, aided only by a subtle reverb on her microphone. After the free-form intro, Lovich delivers a series of melodic phrases consisting of the vocables “hi-ya,” each statement of the phrase ending in a rapid vibrato emulating the warbling of a bird call.²⁰⁴ In the opening passage to “Bird Song,” Lovich thus establishes a vocality that beautifully fragilizes the respective *umwelten* of woman and bird.²⁰⁵

As the verse kicks in, however, with the phrase “A little bird told me/ You were untrue”(0:42), Lovich makes a dramatic timbral and registral shift in her vocality. Abandoning her girlish, pop-inspired vocal tone of *Stateless*, Lovich taps into an alto register; the influence of contemporary goth diva, Siouxsie Sioux, can readily be heard in Lovich’s vocal tone and in the cadence of her delivery. A song about a female protagonist’s vow for a deathly revenge against her unfaithful lover, the dark thematic content of “Bird Song” also reflects the influence of contemporary goth rock; the video is shot in a grave yard, with Lovich represented as a ghostly, jilted Victorian bride. The camera repeatedly zooms into Lovich’s pallid visage, with frequent jump cuts between her expressive, crazed eyes and the gimlet glare of a menacing crow. In the breaks between verses, Lovich switches from her goth rock vocality and back into her avian

²⁰⁴ See Lene Lovich, “Bird Song,” Live Performance at Studio 54. December 4, 1981. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_Bsr2rRJnk

²⁰⁵ Whereas critic Juneau has noted Lovich’s propensity for the use of “human-sounding” synths, I would like to counter this humanist perspective with a consideration of a posthuman interpretation. Rather than synthesizers emulating a human voice, the melding of synth and voice in Lovich’s oeuvre might point to a posthuman matrixial borderspace wherein contactual sonic ontologies co-emerge and co-fade.

multiphonics. Like a spurned operatic diva in the vein of Lucia de Lammermoor, Lovich's New Wave coloratura evokes a feminine, operatic excess. In her analyses of tragic operatic heroines, musicologist, Susan McClary, interprets such feminine vocal excess as symbolizing a potential threat to the patriarchal logos, one that is often represented as in need of "masculine containment."²⁰⁶ In keeping with such a McClarian analysis, the ominous, backing male choir emerges in the sound space in the second chorus of "Bird Song," providing an operatic, "masculine containment" of Lovich's vocal excess and her implied descent into madness.

The "containing" male chorus eventually fades out, however, by the song's outro, leaving Lovich's unbridled multiphonic bird calls to ring out into the open sound space. As the end of the song approaches, Lovich's vocals are stripped of any vestiges of "logos," or discernible semantic content, instead falling into a series of Ono-esque beat multiphonics. Multiple layers of synthesizers rise up to join her shrill coloratura, mimicking her tone and delivery — blurring the ontological boundaries of the feminine voice. In Lovich's final bird calls, the boundaries between synth and voice are thus fragilized to conjure a posthuman sonic matrix, pointing to a feminine space of subjective encounter and transformation beyond the containment of the phallic order. In the context of "Bird Song," a blend of cultural signifiers, ranging from an Ono-esque *kabuki* vocal tone, an 80s goth rock vocality, and an operatic coloratura, all come to be layered within a fourth dimensional space of vocal encounter. Considered in terms of the metaphor of a bird in flight, Lovich's performance thus evokes not only a woman's escape from her confinement within a tragic love affair, but also her vocal co-emergence

²⁰⁶ See Susan McClary, "Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen," in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 80 - 111.

within a liberatory, matrixial sonic borderspace encompassing the co-terminous life worlds of woman, bird, and machine.

Nina Hagen

Like her New Wave contemporary, Lene Lovich, Nina Hagen was also an outsider artist who experienced a kind of “stateless” existence, traversing various national and cultural contexts throughout her extensive musical career. Born in the East German state in 1955, a time of great political turmoil, Hagen was greatly influenced by her stepfather, song-writer and political activist, Wolf Biermann. A fearless satirist who regaled audiences with populist folk songs that took aim at the totalitarian GDR, Hagen proudly referred to her stepfather as “East Germany’s Public Enemy #1.”²⁰⁷ Hagen’s biological father, too, was a political activist who was arrested and tortured by the Nazis during WWII. Due to her biological father’s Jewish ancestry, Hagen was raised with an intensified awareness of the Holocaust and the persistent racialized trauma that continued to hold sway over the fractured German state in the post-war years. Both Hagen’s paternal grandfather and grandmother died in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp; a familial tragedy that would inspire Hagen to define her vocal and performative work as a form of peace activism.

Whereas Lene Lovich discovered her voice relatively later in life, the young Nina Hagen was hailed as an operatic prodigy at the early age of thirteen, and embarked upon a successful career as a teen idol in East Germany prior to her eventual exile. The daughter of a famous East German actress and performer, Eva Hagen, Nina Hagen

²⁰⁷ Zara Von Burden, ed. “Nina Hagen,” In *Women of the Underground: Music Cultural Innovators Speak for Themselves* (San Francisco: Manic D Press, 2010), 143.

received early training in acting as well as opera at the Dessau conservatory, performing in televised operas beginning in her early teens. With the help of her mother and stepfather, both prominent pop cultural figures in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Nina Hagen soon formed her first band, Automobil. Their 1974 hit single, “Du Hast den Farbfilm Vergessen (You Forgot the Color Film)” was a satirical song that poked fun at the drab, colorlessness of everyday life in the East German state. The widespread popularity of Hagen and Automobil was quickly identified as a potential threat to the totalitarian establishment. Shortly after the release of Automobil’s hit single, in 1976, Wolf Biermann was stripped of his citizenship and refused re-admittance into the GDR after he had received permission to travel to perform at a televised concert in Cologne. When Hagen’s mother left to join Biermann, Nina followed suit. Fearing that Hagen was poised to become “the next Wolf Biermann,” the GDR authorities quickly issued her an exit passport, though strictly forbidding her re-entry back into East Germany.²⁰⁸

After opting to live in political exile, Hagen continued to develop her over-the-top stage persona, adopting a glamorous, punk-inspired fashion sense and touring throughout Europe with the influential Nina Hagen Band. A rising punk icon in Europe, Hagen was known for her eclectic stage attire, outlandish hair colors, and extreme, even clown-ish, New Romantic make-up.²⁰⁹ A humorist and a provocateur at heart, Nina Hagen has often referred to her own work as “funny music,” comparing her stage

²⁰⁸ See online article, “Pre-punk Nina Hagen in East Germany, 1974.”
https://dangerousminds.net/comments/pre_punk_nina_hagen_in_east_germany_1974

²⁰⁹ In addition to her confrontational stage performances and fashion, Hagen also came to be known for her outspoken, controversial television appearances. On the Austrian television show, Club 2, Hagen incited much controversy after speaking openly about female masturbation, even demonstrating some sexual poses to purposely provoke the audience.

persona to that of “a peace clown.”²¹⁰ The colorful and quirky Nina Hagen Band arrived on the London scene around 1978, and their front-woman’s eccentric style was readily embraced by the first-wave punks of the UK underground. Hagen was soon introduced to not only Lene Lovich, but also to Johnny Rotten and the Slits, to whom she gave helpful instructions on how to both project the voice and prevent vocal damage.

Although a trained opera singer, Hagen’s vocal stylings incorporated many genres, including pop, reggae, disco, avant-garde, metal, funk, and of course, punk rock. From a young age, Hagen recalls that she spent a considerable amount of time imitating popular vocalists ranging from Tina Turner to Bob Dylan.²¹¹ A gifted ventriloquist, Hagen often plays with switching between voices, rarely falling into a stable vocal persona. According to musicologist Ken McLeod, who studies the influence of operatic vocal practices on rock music, Hagen’s vocality is a “schizophrenic mix of guttural snarls, ear-piercing screams, saccharine pop-chanteuse styling, mixed with prolonged passages of coloratura.”²¹² In addition, McLeod observes the influence of the expressionist operatic style of *Sprechstimme* as used in Arnold Schoenberg’s song cycle, *Pierrot Lunaire*, amongst other modernist operas. Hagen’s vocal flexibility is indeed evocative of an avant-garde, Pierrot-esque pantomime, which she often employs with the aim of social satire.

In his analysis, McLeod posits that Hagen’s propensity for the use of a guttural *Sprechstimme* as well as the higher registers of coloratura conveys a performative

²¹⁰ “Nina Hagen: 1983 Berlin Interview.” Accessed September 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXLmXvLE3h8>.

²¹¹ Hagen quoted in Zara von Burden, “Nina Hagen,” 143.

²¹² McLeod, “Bohemian Rhapsodies: Operatic Influences on Rock Music,” 195.

desire to transgress social norms, just as operatic vocal techniques aim to defy the physical capabilities of the average, untrained person's vocal capabilities. In my following analyses of representative Hagen performances, however, I would like to expand upon McLeod's analysis; in my interpretation, within Hagen's vocal oeuvre, not only are the social norms of conventional pop vocal performance being transgressed, but also the western phallic construction of a unified subjectivity is reconstituted according to emergent, transcultural and post-human sonic borderspaces. In interview, Hagen has often spoken of the influence of UFO sightings upon her vocal work, and her identification as a "citizen of the world, the cosmos, and the beyond."²¹³ Her personal spiritual philosophy of "Planet Bearth" speaks to this cosmic, posthuman aesthetic. Signifying that all life on Earth is defined by "birth, breath, life and death," Hagen's notion of "Planet Bearth" is one that celebrates above all the maternal bond, the voice as the breath of life, and the posthuman connectivity shared between all living beings and energy forces.²¹⁴ Considering Hagen's personal conceptualization of her work as grounded in a feminine embodied metaphor of birth and (trans)planetary connectivity, I would argue that the McLeodian analysis of her vocal style as "schizophrenic" falls short in that it tends to imply an infinitely fragmentary, "disconnective" interpretation of her work. Hagen's own personal philosophy roots her diverse, fluctuating vocal personae within an underlying, interconnective matrix that situates her voice - or breath - within a shared, cosmic ecology of coterminous life worlds. Rather than employ the term "schizophrenic," I would thus like to argue that Hagen presents a matrixial, fragilized

²¹³ See "Nina Hagen Biography." http://www.browsebiography.com/bio-nina_hagen.html.

²¹⁴ Hagen quoted in Von Burden, "Nina Hagen," 146.

vocal ontology, one in which the boundaries of the feminine are “bearthed” within a fourth dimensional sound space of encounter between contactual life worlds and techno-scapes evoking the all-encompassing, and all-inclusive metaphor of “the cosmos.”

After spending the late 1970s immersed in the London punk rock underground, by the early 1980s, Nina Hagen was ready to seek out a new creative direction; with the help of Frank Zappa’s manager, Bennett Glotzer, Hagen relocated to New York City. Expanding her sound beyond a guitar-oriented, punk rock band formation, Hagen teamed up with producer Mike Thorne, known for his expertise in New Wave pop production. Thorne’s production credits included Soft Cell’s chart-topping single, “Tainted Love,” in addition to work with Laurie Anderson and synth pop trio, Bronski Beat, amongst countless other boundary-pushing, New Wave techno pop acts. Under Thorne’s direction, Hagen also teamed up with the eccentric, electropunk pioneer, Paul Roessler of The Screamers. The resultant album, *NunSexMonkRock* (1982), was a highly experimental foray into over-the-top, unconventional art rock production. Although *NunSexMonkRock* proved to be too challenging for a mainstream pop audience, it set the stage for Hagen’s following album, *Angstlos (Fearless)* (1983): a techno-futuristic, disco-opera collaboration with Giorgio Moroder that would catapult Hagen into global superstardom.

As its provocative title suggests, *NunSexMonkRock* aimed to incite controversy, its thematics taking aim at the conservatism of the Christian faith, proposing instead Hagen’s own unique brand of spirituality, one that is evoked within her musical and lyrical references to eastern philosophies, world religions, sexual freedom, psychedelic

drug use, and of course, UFOs. The cover art of *NunSexMonkRock* depicts Hagen as a cosmic “Mother Bearth” cradling a would-be baby Jesus, set against an abstract background suggestive of the dark oblivion of outer-space. Despite its lack of commercial success, *NunSexMonkRock* stands as a seminal work of New Wave avant-pop production. Each track has an improvisatory feel, and song structures seldom follow a verse-chorus pop song form; the driving force behind the album is Hagen’s virtuosic vocality, one that unpredictably shifts between diverse vocal tones, timbres, and registers, reflecting a highly unstable vocal subjectivity. Her vocals are often layered in complex tapestries that give rise to matrixial borderspaces between co-emergent subjective grains.

Within the borderspaces of Hagen’s fragilized vocal personae, an amalgam of ethnic-cultural influences also co-emerge and co-fade. Yoko Ono’s *kabuki*-esque vocal tone and use of beat multiphonics can be heard throughout the album, alongside a variety of references to East Asian vocal styles. In the jaunty, “Taitshi Tarot,” for example, Hagen adopts a faux-Japanese accent and a stereotypically high-pitched, child-like Japanese feminine voice, each line of the verse ending in an Ono-esque, warbling multiphonic vibrato. As Hagen pays homage to an array of eastern spiritual practices ranging from Tai-Chi, to Kundalini Yoga, to the I-Ching, Roessler provides a minimalist, pentatonic piano accompaniment — its percussive timbre achieved by combining a piano and Synclavier II, an early polyphonic digital sampler often employed by Mike Thorne.²¹⁵ Although most tracks on *NunSexMonkRock* consist of over-the-top production and lush instrumentation, the album concludes with a

²¹⁵ Personal Interview, Paul Roessler, Jan 11, 2017.

minimalist track in the vein of “Taittschi-Tarot,” the post-apocalyptic “UFOs.” Grounded in a repetitive, syncopated square wave synth backing track composed by session funk bass player, Karl Rucker, and incorporating an early drum machine, the Doctor Rhythm DR-110,²¹⁶ Hagen’s demonic voice conjures the arrival of flying saucers over the ancient Japanese capital of Kyoto. Hagen’s sinister vocal fry soon comes to be layered with a set of contrasting vocal personae, including a mid-register, *kabuki-esque* wide vibrato voice as well as a foreboding, robo-operatic coloratura on phrases such as “You are not alone,” “The UFO is the Holiest Spirit,” and the concluding statement, “The UFO did it.” The minimalist synth backing track shares a sonic likeness with the timbre and rhythm of a didjeridoo, an indigenous instrument based on the spiritual practice of cyclical breathing. Hagen’s improvisatory vocals thus unfold as a space-age mantra, a spiritual meditation on the arrival of UFO’s and the matrixial interweaving of world religions, heretically situating Christianity within a fourth dimensional space of sonic encounter with not only non-western forms of spirituality, but also trans-planetary beings.

Concluding with a transcendental space invasion, the spiritual journey of *NunSexMonkRock* starts off from a much more fraught, antagonistic place; the opening track, “Anti-World,” is a driving, impassioned art rock anthem that both satirizes the Christian faith, and evokes the devil as a symbol of outsider art. After a terrifying introductory passage in which Hagen gives voice to a demonically possessed man, she goes on to reference the figure of Old Man Bukashin, a persecuted Russian street artist, holding him up as the epitome of the “Anti-World” to come. The lyrics to the track are inspired from a poem by Soviet poet, Andrei Voznesenskii, a 1960s anti-establishment

²¹⁶ Personal Interview, Paul Roessler, Jan 11, 2017.

poet active during the era of the Khrushchev Thaw, whose poem, “Anti-Worlds,” stands as a protest against the repressive cultural milieu of the totalitarian Soviet state. The intricate production is replete with references to middle-eastern scalar passages featuring flat seconds, played on the synthclavier as well as vocalized by Hagen; combined with the driving, syncopated tribal rhythm, “Anti-World” is imbued with an array of nonwestern musical simulacra. Likewise, the pastiche-style chorus, built around a whole tone scale, consists of a matrixial layering of contactual subjective vocal grains, together vocalizing four statements of the ascending phrase, “Anti-World.” A menacing tritone is emphasized on the first syllable of “world,” and the last statement of the chorus adds an Ono-esque, shrieking vibrato into the vocal mix. “Dread Love,” also an anthemic track from *NunSexMonkRock*, celebrates sexual freedom and satirizes the perpetration of sexual guilt by the conservative Christian faith. Like “Anti-World,” the chorus of “Dread Love” incorporates a matrixial vocal layering. As Hagen repeats, “Praise the world everyday with dread love,” multiple voices come to be layered - a shrill falsetto, a soaring coloratura, a rough, mid-range alto cabaret vocality, and a voice in a lower, masculine register — in the climax of the chorus, all voices intensify and then meld into an Ono-esque, piercing multiphonic scream. The outro of “Dread Love” consists of a repeated chant delivered in Hagen’s ventriloquistic “male voice,” as she beseeches the listener to “do the nun sex monk rock!” — the album title thus comes to reference an absurd dance routine guiding the listener into a future of sexual liberation, gendered mutability, and fourth dimensional cultural interstitiality.

The heretical art rock tapestries of *NunSexMonRock* situated Nina Hagen at the forefront of the New York underground in the early 1980s, and yet it would not be until

her following album, *Angstlos(Fearless)* (1983), that she would attain global attention as a New Wave, avant-pop diva. Assembled under the guidance of the world renowned disco savant, Giorgio Moroder, *Angstlos* is an album of infectiously catchy, intricately produced electronic dance music tracks. On *Angstlos*, however, disco's penchant for trite romanticism and conventional pop vocality, is off-set by Hagen's fiercely satirical, transgressive vocal experimentations. The contrast of Moroder's pop sensibility and Hagen's quirky New Wave vocals proved to be a huge commercial success: "NewYork/N.Y.," the first single to be released from *Angstlos*, quickly rose to number 9 on US Billboard dance charts. As the unexpected contraction of the title indicates, "New York/N.Y." is a satirical piece that subverts the Frank Sinatra jazz standard glorifying the wonders of "The Big Apple." Penned by Leonard Bernstein for the 1944 musical, *On the Town*, the original "New York, New York" is not only an ode to the cultural offerings of the "city that never sleeps," but also a capitalist anthem that reinforces the notion of a small town man "making it" in the big city, his objective "to be #1, top of the heap." As a cultural outsider from a communist state, Hagen's version conflates this American cultural sentiment of upward mobility with the hedonism of 1980s New York club culture, offering a biting social commentary.

Despite its satirical treatment of US culture, "New York/N.Y." was immediately embraced by commercial radio, perhaps in a large part due to its bass-heavy, danceable 4/4 disco beat, off-set by Karl Rucker's catchy, syncopated funk bass line. In the verses, Hagen adopts what Ken McLeod describes as her "sleazy masculine growl," an exaggerated guttural enunciation that can be likened to that of an overzealous tour

guide, or an MC, leading the audience into a world of “disco after disco.”²¹⁷ Her delivery bordering the ethnic-cultural division between rap and *Spechstimme*, Hagen’s adopted masculine persona regales the audience with tales of a night life replete with “golden faces,” “the horniest crowd,” and an endless barrage of discotheques where everyone can be a “star.” Lene Lovich’s influence can be heard towards the end of the verse, when Hagen unleashes a series of four electronically enhanced vocables, (1:30, 3:10), reminiscent of the pre-chorus vocables on “Lucky Number.”

Shortly after Hagen’s posthuman vocables, the entrance of the first chorus (1:50) marks a pivotal shift in “New York /N.Y.” Transmuting her masculine growl to a soaring coloratura, Hagen brings about a radical shift in the song’s overall generic classification — a funky disco track has been refashioned as an operatic aria. Such generic shifts are seldom heard in commercial pop music, and moreover, operatic vocals are seldom referenced in popular music — some notable exceptions being Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody,” Klaus Nomi’s New Wave operatic cover tunes, or the high tenor lead vocals of the short-lived Scottish New Wave band, The Associates. Dramatically re-contextualizing the funk-inspired, New Wave backing track that had been established for close to two minutes, Hagen’s operatic chorus can even be interpreted as so bombastic as to be satirical. The juxtaposition of the two opposing genres of disco and opera might be taken as an absurdist, “clown-like” move on Hagen’s part, and yet these two seemingly unrelated genres do share a similar set of transgressive cultural meanings. While early disco culture was tied to gay subculture and underground, New Romantic and New Wave, countercultural club scenes, operatic culture, too, was once

²¹⁷ McLeod, “Bohemian Rhapsodies: Operatic Influences on Rock Music,” 196.

seen as a hedonistic space where normative gender roles could be challenged and redefined. Susan McClary has noted that operatic divas were historically seen as women who were transgressive of social norms — their super-human vocal powers suggesting an unbridled sexuality and feminine excess that posed a potential threat to the patriarchal social order. Hagen’s operatic chorus indeed soars above the accompanying, minimalist electronic musical context, defying containment. In the last statement of the chorus, Hagen executes a double octave leap upwards, and her voice then transforms once more into an Ono-esque, extended shrieking vibrato that returns the piece to its quirky New Wave roots.

Just as Hagen’s vocal performance on “New York/N.Y.” offers up a gender bending, ethnic-cultural borderspace wherein German cabaret sleaze and hedonistic American club culture meets feminine operatic excess, “Zarah,” Hagen’s second single from *Angstlos*, also intermixes German cultural references within a techno-futuristic sound space. An ode to Zarah Leander, a popular German songstress during the Second World War, “Zarah” is an electronic dance song that both evokes and satirizes the cultural divide between totalitarian East Germany and democratic West German culture. In interview, Hagen has remarked on the significant influence that Zarah Leander exerted upon her as a young singer. Although Leander was often accused of being Hitler’s lover, Hagen states in defense of her mentor, “Zarah was an actress during Hitler’s time, many called her Hitler’s whore, but this wasn’t true. She was a “real artist.”²¹⁸ Inspired by the sentiment of her 1942 hit song, “Ich weiss es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehen (*I Know That One Day a Miracle Will Happen*),” Nina Hagen chose

²¹⁸ “Nina Hagen: 1983 Berlin Interview.” Accessed September 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXLmXvLE3h8>.

to graffiti this phrase on the western side of the Berlin wall, a symbolic gesture in hopes of reuniting her divided homeland.

The first minute and a half of “Zarah” begins as an historical homage to Zarah Leander, with crackling, wobbly sound effects giving the impression that Hagen’s vocals are being played on an old phonograph. In the accompanying music video, Hagen appears on a black and white, 1940s sound stage, her retro coiffure and glamorous boa transforming her into a replica of Zarah Leander. After delivering the opening verse and chorus of the original song, “Ich weiss es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehen (*I Know That One Day a Miracle Will Happen*),” suddenly we hear shattering glass, and the screen falls away in broken pieces. From beyond the smashed screen, a colorful New Wave Hagen emerges, decked out in a garish gold tinsel wig and a leopard-print leotard. In this moment the sonic context is dramatically transformed, as techno-style synthesizers are layered against a 4/4 disco beat. The gold-haired Hagen is soon split into two personae, as a complementary, masculine Hagen emerges in a New Wave suit with a fashionable skinny tie and pink buzz cut. The two Hagens dance together against a psychedelic background of purplish hues, the delay in the camera shots blurring the two figures together at times, as though Hagen has been fragilized across a visual matrix of co-emergent gendered subjectivities.

As the tinsel-maned, feminine Hagen begins to sing the next verse, it is striking that her vocal timber and delivery stays identical to her opening imitation of Zarah Leander’s vocality, albeit now the verse material is set against a disco track. The camera cuts between the feminine and the masculine Hagens as they proceed to exchange verses, each adopting the identical vocal tone of Zarah; the effect is absurdist, gender-

bending fragmentation of the original performance. From 2:45 to 3:00, the camera work dissolves the Hagen faces into a psychedelic swirl, and their voices break down with electronic effects, as their voices played back in reverse are layered with analog synthesizers. A swirling visual and sonic matrix thus dissolves the boundaries of a past Germany, present day New Wave culture, and the gendered personae that co-emerge within Hagen's fragilized subjectivity. A 30 second instrumental passage ensues, featuring a sax solo spaced in the background of the sound space, leaving the bubbling, ascending arpeggios of a marimba-like synthesizer to occupy the foreground. A psychedelic visual melange of the two Hagens ensues, with other flashing images of dancing bodies, as though a drug-induced disco haze gives rise to a matrixial borderspace wherein Hagens' subjective grains co-emerge and co-fade amidst a post-human amalgam of electronically produced sounds. Hagen begins a muted *Sprechstimme* at around 3:45, which descends into a demonic cackle.

At 4:00, the screen suddenly clarifies, now revealing Nina-as-Zarah, but in color, set against a red velvet backdrop. She returns with a dramatic repetition of the song's titular phrase, the final statement of which is rendered even more dramatic with Hagen's impressive coloratura flourishes. Upon the conclusion of the vocal performance, the final 30 seconds of instrumental dance music is set against a flashing series of Hagens in different historical and contemporary disco costumes, eventually fading into a blurred black background. Nina Hagen's fragilized subjectivity presented in the visual context of "Zarah" thus comes to be a metaphorical expression of the division between the German past and the techno-futurism of New Wave disco culture. Within this matrixial borderspace, the gendered polarities of masculine and feminine, as

well as the temporal and cultural signifiers of Germany's past and present co-emerge. The overarching, aspirational sentiment of the original Leander song comes to be reinterpreted in a contemporary context — notably, the sonic and visual backdrops to Leander's voice undergo historical transformations, but Hagen's virtuosic imitation of Leander's original voice remains constant. Although fragmented across a matrixial kaleidoscope of subjective grains, the hopeful message of Leander's original song holds sway. Considered in terms of Hagen's spiritual philosophy of "Planet Bearth," we can thus interpret "Zarah" as expressing a hope for music, and in particular the voice, or "the breath," to bring about a powerful, transformative space of gendered, cultural, and historical encounter that will bring unity and peace, overcoming the divisions imposed by oppressive, totalitarian socio-political formations.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to trace Ono's stylistic influence through the performances of counter-hegemonic, experimental vocalists from the late 1970s and early '80s. Following Thurston's Moore's historical positioning of Ono as the queen of noise, a nodal figure in underground music-making over the past several decades, this chapter marks the beginning of a vocal-centric punk history that acknowledges Ono's significant contributions to the development of non-normative vocal styles. The several artists discussed in this chapter, however, mark only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, of artists influenced by Ono's vocal technique. Further studies must extend into various national and transnational punk scenes in the late '70s and '80s, as well as the early '90s riot grrrl movement, the electroclash of the early naughts, in addition to a wide array of

contemporary underground scenes. The next chapter will thus move to an ethnographic account of singers active in the current LA underground, many of whom cite Ono as a source of inspiration for their experimental work.

Chapter 4

To Yell or Die in Los Angeles: Vocal Experimentation in the Millennial Eastside Underground

“I just needed to yell — or die — that’s pretty much what it came down to.”
— Uhuru Ali Moor

This chapter will provide an overview of the current Los Angeles Eastside underground music scene, focusing on counter-cultural artists involved in vocal experimentation. The performers selected for this study were chosen based on their popularity and influence within the scene, as well as their performative personae that aim to challenge various aspects of normative rock and/or pop vocal aesthetics. The artists in this study will be considered as situated within a matrixial shared history of counter-hegemonic vocal performance. Although diverse influences inspire each artist’s musical output, their contemporary works can be interpreted as part of a wider music-historical web that encompasses Ono’s early vocal experimentations, in addition to the later vocal styles developed within punk, post-punk, No Wave and New Wave scenes over the past four decades. The vocalists examined hold strong ties to punk and underground subcultures, broadly defined as countercultural, DIY communities that promote anti-capitalist, anti-racist, queer positive, and feminist politics. The first section of the chapter will provide a brief overview of the historical roots of experimental punk rock in Los Angeles beginning in the mid-to-late 1970s. The second portion of the chapter will offer insight into the topography of the current, experimental Eastside underground music scene, centering on the pragmatic aspects — and the extreme economic hardships — of being a DIY artist in present day Los Angeles. In this

vein, topics to be covered include the socio-political realities of today's Los Angeles, in addition to the pragmatic workings of the music scene including discussions of artists' financial remuneration, underground venues, and the role of promoters, labels, and DIY networks. Upon contextualizing the millennial Los Angeles Eastside underground, the third, final section of this chapter will move to consider the oeuvre of current experimental female vocalists, situating these diverse artists within a matrixial shared history of counter-hegemonic vocal practices. The works of three representational women will form the basis of the final segment of this chapter: Nora Keyes, an iconic Eastside vocalist whose works span two decades; MRK, an up-and-coming feminist and anti-capitalist performance artist; and finally Uhuru Ali Moor, co-vocalist of the all black, queer femme punk group, Fuck You Pay Us (FUPU), whose meteoric rise to prominence within the past year is a testament to the changing ethnic-cultural dynamics of the Eastside scene.

The Roots of Experimental Punk Rock in Los Angeles

Prior to the emergence of aggressive, male-dominated hardcore punk rock in southern California in the early 1980s, the Los Angeles punk underground was characterized by a coterie of bands that espoused an experimental, outsider art aesthetic. In stark contrast to the hardcore punk of 1980s SoCal bands such as Black Flag and TSOL, the earlier incarnation of punk rock in Los Angeles featured a diversity of musical approaches, in terms of both instrumentation and style. Moreover, the scene boasted an inclusive atmosphere that was not so much driven by masculine teen aggression as it was by gender-bending, counter-hegemonic identity politics. The

epicenter of the Los Angeles experimental punk scene was the infamous Masque club, a ramshackle basement rehearsal space in the heart of Hollywood that doubled as an impromptu venue. Run by Scottish proprietor, Brenden Mullen, the Masque was frequented by a heterogeneous group of counter-cultural misfits from a range of socio-economic, ethnic-cultural, as well as generational backgrounds, all of whom strongly dis-identified with the mainstream, commercial progressive rock that dominated the radio during the 1970s.²¹⁹

In its original incarnation, the motley crew of Masque scene participants resided around the main stretch of Hollywood Boulevard — the grimy hub of punk subculture in the mid to late 1970s. Mullen remembers:

...we were literally dead center in the bowels of Hollywood. I had been trying quite hard to find a place to beat on drums and percussion anytime, any kind of drums, any kind of percussive, night or day. Punk rock, British, American, or otherwise, was not the main agenda. I recruited various runaways, musicians, welfare people, artists, and other street people from the boulevard... to help me open a rehearsal room rental business, which quickly morphed into probably the first illegal club space... since Prohibition²²⁰

As can be discerned from Mullen's above quotation, the Masque scene was not characterized by a cohesive musical aesthetic, nor did its participants define themselves according to the "three-chord rock" stylings common to first-wave punk. Arguably, one might say that the defining characteristic of the Masque scene was the heterogeneity of its participants, most of whom occupied outsider positions at the fringes of Los Angeles society. The Masque's first in-house sound person, Geza X also echoes Mullen's recollection of the eccentric characters that frequented the Masque, including "poverty-

²¹⁹ Outsider artist and founder of the punk fanzine, Flipside, X-8, Geza X recalls that "a lot of the people who hung out side by side with the new punk kids were middle-aged and from suburbia... all of us brought together by true boredom with the shit on FM radio" (Spitz and Mullen 2001, 128).

²²⁰ Mullen quoted in Marc Spitz and Brendan Mullen, eds, *We Got the Neutron Bomb: The Untold Story of L.A. Punk* (New York: The River Press, 2001), 123.

stricken, unsigned bands... bikers, freaks, runaways, early gutter punks, record collectors.. and a slew of other bizarre street characters.”²²¹ Pleasant Gehman, writer and former member of the 1980s all-female punk band, Screamin’ Sirens, also remembers how the Masque functioned as a central locus that “helped unify all the diverse elements of the early scene into one L.A. punk unit.”²²²

Operating without approved licensure, Mullen began to host shows at the Masque in the fall of 1977, featuring bands that utilized the venue as a rehearsal space; however, due to ongoing conflicts with the Los Angeles Fire Marshall, the club was shut down by the winter of 1978. In the year that followed, Mullen attempted to re-open the club at two different locations, but by 1979, the core members of the original Masque scene had dispersed, as the Los Angeles punk world had come to embrace a more hardcore punk aesthetic. In conversation with Bruce Moreland, or “Bruce Barf,” the original MC of the Masque, he recollects that despite the short life-span of the Masque scene, it was nonetheless marked by an explosion of innovative and iconoclastic artists, many of whom went on to achieve mainstream commercial success throughout the 1980s. According to Moreland, every Masque event that he curated with Mullen was carefully designed to showcase bands who were pushing against the increasing commercialization of rock ’n’ roll, whilst also actively critiquing and deconstructing normative cultural expressions of gender, race, and sexuality. Moreland, who was known for his confrontational stage antics, including wrapping himself in duct tape and once even setting himself on fire, characterizes the Masque as above all a “scene of misfits,” that is,

²²¹ Geza X quoted in Spitz and Mullen, *We Got the Neutron Bomb: The Untold Story of L.A. Punk*, 125.

²²² Geza X quoted in Spitz and Mullen, *We Got the Neutron Bomb: The Untold Story of L.A. Punk*, 127.

people who refused to fit into the extant music-cultural spheres of contemporary Los Angeles. Many participants in the Masque scene were inspired by British glam rock of the early 1970s, popularized in Los Angeles through Rodney Bingenheimer's club, English Disco. Transgender, sex positive performers as well as sex workers commonly frequented the Masque, some notable examples of which being iconic Los Angeles personality, Angelyne, as well as former model, Karen Centerfold, a mainstay of the current Los Angeles underground. Queer politics and gender-bending were thus widely accepted within the Masque, and most members of the scene identified in terms of non-binary gender identities.²²³

Considering the musical output of the Masque scene, bands reflected a diversity of musical styles. Similar to the New York No Wave scene, there was an underlying Romanticist ethos of striving towards artistic individuality; thus, each of the bands that played the Masque strove to communicate a unique aesthetic point of view. More so than the art school inspired No Wave scene, however, the Los Angeles experimental punk scene tended towards a working-class, outsider art sensibility, characterized by an eclectic grouping of artists whom espoused an array of counter-hegemonic identities. The pre-eminent band that came to be synonymous with the early LA scene was The Germs, a roguish, rag-tag team of amateurs known for their deconstructive approach to "three-chord rock." The Germs' slack instrumentation and lead singer, Darby Crash's signature, slurred enunciation were at first taken as a parody of punk rock, until eventually their chaotic, over-the-top performances won over the crowds at the Masque. Another band of historical import to emerge from the Masque scene was The Screamers,

²²³ Bruce Moreland, Personal Interview, November 20, 2017.

arguably the first “techno-punk” band, making exclusive use of analog synthesizers and altogether rejecting the notion of rock ‘n’ roll instrumentation. Nervous Gender, too, were an electro-punk, proto-industrial band that utilized analog synthesizers, led by iconic transgender frontman, Phranc. Whereas The Germs aimed to dismantle and satirize garage rock, The Screamers and Nervous Gender defined a new mode of dark, electronic music inflected by punk politics and confrontational vocals.

In terms of gender politics, most Masque bands were inclusive of women vocalists and instrumentalists, and a plethora of unique female artists emerged from the scene. Still widely active and celebrated as a vocalist in today’s Los Angeles, iconic Latina punk rocker, Alice Bag — lead vocalist of The Bags — made her mark in the Masque scene with hard-hitting vocals that broke down the cultural and stylistic divisions between the Hollywood punk underground and the ranchero-punk movement of East Los Angeles. In her early Masque days, Alice Bag often performed with her face concealed under a plastic grocery bag — a politicized statement against female objectification, and the sexist slur referencing women as “bags.” The colored balaclavas of current Russian punk rebels, Pussy Riot, can be considered as an homage to The Bags’ early Masque performances. The Suburban Lawns’ were another female-fronted Masque band who were quickly elevated to cult status within punk history, despite their short career. Lead singer, Su Tissue’s enigmatic, vibrato-inflected vocals continue to inspire current Los Angeles vocalists such as Sally Spitz of French Vanilla. Another powerful female vocalist in the scene was Exene Cervenka of the band X. Drawing upon a more folk rock and conventional rock ‘n’ roll sensibility, but infusing it with an aggressive, punk rock “edge,” X featured the structured songwriting and expert vocal

interplay between Exene Cervenka and guitarist John Doe. After the fall of the Masque scene, X would go on to achieve world-wide fame with their hit record, *Los Angeles* (1980) — the title track offering a biting critique of the urban decay and increasing violence experienced by women in the city during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Belinda Carlisle, too, was an alum of the Masque scene; as a young teenage girl, Carlisle remembers discovering punk rock for the first time during a stroll along the seedy Hollywood boulevard. Carlisle soon went on to form The Go-Go's, one of the few all-female bands of the Masque scene. Far surpassing both Alice Bag, Su Tissue and Exene Cervenka in terms of international fame, Belinda Carlisle is perhaps the most commercially successful artist to emerge out of the Masque.

The diversity of musical approaches and the gender-based inclusivity of the Masque subculture was soon overshadowed, however, due to the rising popularity of aggressive hardcore punk that first took hold of southern California towns such as Hermosa Beach and Long Beach, and soon came to infiltrate and dominate the Los Angeles underground. Penelope Spheeris's iconic documentary, *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981) charts the demise of the Los Angeles punk scene at this time, owing to the increasingly riotous, mosh-pit style punk shows coupled with the participants heavy drug use. Bruce Moreland laments this transition in the punk scene, and recalls that by conclusion of the 1970s, the more progressive, "arty" bands of the Masque scene dissipated, and moved away from punk rock in search of more inclusive, diverse, counter-cultural community networks. Moreland recalls that in the early days of the Masque, audiences were known to "pogo" dance, a punk rock dance practice whereby audience members would hop in one place and occasionally bump into each other;

however, with the rise of hardcore punk, pogo-ing soon transformed into violent “moshing” and the violent riots of the early 1980s. By the time Moreland and his brother, Marc Moreland, formed Wall of Voodoo, which would become one of Los Angeles’ most renowned 1980s New Wave bands, he remarked that he, like many of his original Masque cohort, was “over” the punk scene, largely because it had become inundated by hardcore, which he felt was far too aggressive and not sufficiently inclusive of diverse ethnic-cultural and queer social groupings, in addition to lacking a diversity of musical approaches.

By the early 1980s, along with Moreland, many of the bands of the Masque scene had thus disbursed and reformed as part of emergent New Wave, goth rock and dark-wave, electronic music scenes. Although experimental underground punk music continued to be produced in Los Angeles, these scenes remained relatively fragmented as compared to the unity, camaraderie and creative ferment of the Masque scene. The influence of the original set of Masque bands, and their musical diversity and fluid gender politics, however, can be traced within contemporary Los Angeles punk. The historical lineage between the late 1970s and early 1980s punk bands and present-day experimental punk bands is strongly reinforced by local promoter, Michael Stock’s weekly night, Part Time Punks, which frequently pairs up historically influential, past LA punk bands with contemporary bands on the same bill. Due to the popularity of Stock’s events, collaborations between current bands and punk rockers from the Masque scene have become increasingly common. Paul Roessler of The Screemers, for one, has been active in producing and promoting current experimental death rock band, Egrets

on Ergot, while Alice Bag recently put together a local band featuring players drawn from the current underground scene.

A Topography of the Millennial Eastside Scene

The Eastside music scene in Los Angeles, also sometimes referred to as the Echo Park scene, consists of a diverse set of indie rock and DIY artists, some leaning towards more mainstream, commercial aspirations, and others who are inspired by anti-commercial, counter-hegemonic aesthetic sensibilities. In the context of this study, I will be focusing on what I will term the “experimental Eastside scene” that holds its historical roots in the more experimental sub-sects of early Los Angeles punk. I will choose to define the experimental Eastside underground scene in terms of a coterie of musicians whose works espouse a DIY aesthetic as well as progressive politics; as in the Masque scene, the styles adopted by these artists are diverse, encompassing noise music, dark wave synth, death rock, garage rock, rap, and even electronic dance or pop music, albeit featuring counter-hegemonic lyrical thematics and performance practices.

Geographically speaking, the Eastside of Los Angeles includes the neighborhoods of Echo Park, downtown, Highland Park, Lincoln Heights and Boyle Heights — areas to the east of Hollywood Boulevard, which has been considerably gentrified since the days of the Masque. The Eastside scene must, however, be carefully distinguished from the “East LA” scene, which refers to Latino punk subculture in the suburbs of Los Angeles such as El Monte and El Sereno.²²⁴ Although the Eastside scene is increasingly

²²⁴ See director Angela Boatright’s 2016 film, *Los Punks: We Are All We Have*, an intimate documentary about the teens and young adults who find meaning in the thriving punk rock scene in the backyards of South Central and East Los Angeles.

spreading out further into East Los Angeles — as artists seek more affordable accommodations and rehearsal spaces — there are significant race and class-based cultural divisions between the Eastsiders and East LA punks. For East LA natives, the Eastsiders are generally thought to be middle-class white bohemians; “hipsters,” or “trust-fund babies” responsible for the gentrification of Echo Park. East LA punk scenes mainly consist of working-class Latino youth “backyard parties,” where one would encounter much harsher genres of punk rock and heavy metal — aggressive styles of music that one would not typically encounter in a typical Echo Park venue. Although ethnic-cultural and music-stylistic differences between East LA and the Eastside is palpable, it is not indicative of an absolute bifurcation of the two scenes — East LA punk bands frequently play venues in the city such as the Five Star Bar or the Redwood in downtown Los Angeles, while Eastside bands are often invited to play East LA backyard parties. Recently, East LA-based post-punk band, The Tissues, fronted by self-described “cholita,” Kristene Nevrose, rose to prominence within the Eastside scene, promoted by Michael Stock as one of Part Time Punks’ favorite bands of 2017. As in the case of The Tissues, the cultural and racial tensions that exist between East LA and the Eastside can often be tapped into as an inspiration for politicized music-making.

Given the current, strained political climate of Trump-era U.S, the Los Angeles musical underground is characterized by a heightened sensitivity to both race and gender-based social issues. The racial and class-based divisions of the city, which place most black working-class communities south of downtown, and working-class Latino communities east of downtown, situates the Eastside as a geographical point of contact between white creatives, or “hipsters,” and racial and ethnic minorities. While

mainstream hipster culture tends to uphold gentrification and exhibits a lack of awareness of white bourgeois infiltration of POC working-class spaces, the experimental offshoot of the Eastside scene is keenly aware of the need to maintain sound, progressive politics and respect of other cultural groupings that share geographical proximity with the music scene. In the wake of the recent #blacklivesmatter and #metoo movements, many scene members have become hyper-vigilant about POC visibility and gender-based abuses. Within the experimental Eastside music community, regular meetings are held by prominent members of the scene including Xe Davis of Gun/Her and Atom Brooks of Egrets on Ergot to discuss incidences of race and gender-based abuse and inequity in the scene. At such meetings, participants aim to arrive at a consensus as to how to deal with each situation that is brought forward. Musicians in the scene accused of abuse are heavily castigated, either by being “blasted” on social media or refused bookings. As well, shows and events that are perceived to be white-dominated, male-oriented, or excessively heteronormative tend to be frowned upon. The immediate success of the scene’s first all-female, all-queer, all black punk band, Fuck U Pay Us, over the course of 2017, is a testament to the scene’s strong commitment to rectifying the white hetero-dominance of past hardcore Los Angeles punk scenes. Likewise, the scene’s current boycott of a white cis-hetero male psych rock band named Black Pussy, reinforces the scene’s lack of tolerance for such problematic references to black women’s sexuality.

Although the Eastside experimental scene is predominantly white, most of its participants dis-identify with normative aspects of “white” culture — typically defined in terms of the bourgeois, commercial aesthetic of the “west side” of town — and instead

seek out counter-hegemonic modes of self-presentation. Just as the Masque scene was known to be composed of an assortment of “freaks” and “rejects” drawn from the seedy underbelly of Hollywood Boulevard, the Eastside experimental scene is equally embracing of those who dis-identify with the more normative strands of commercial Los Angeles youth culture. The Eastside scene aims to be inclusive of participants from a range of class, race, age, and racial/ethnic-cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, most scene members exhibit non-binary gender identifications, and many openly feature queer sexualities within their performances. In addition to the spirit of inclusiveness that characterizes the scene, there is also an ambivalent awareness of the proximity of Hollywood star culture. Sex-positive exhibitionism, cross-dressing, and various non-normative expressions of “glamour” are common within the Eastside experimental scene — the vestiges of which can be traced back to the gender-bending performance artists of the Masque.

In terms of the economic realities of the Eastside scene, since the decline of the music industry in the late 1990s, musicians within both the mainstream and DIY fringes of the scene have increasingly struggled to earn a living solely through their craft. The rising cost of living, too, places additional pressure on bands in major metropolitan areas like Los Angeles. As a result of a lack of financial remuneration within the Eastside scene, status in the scene is mainly based on the artist’s popularity, measured in terms of how much social media response they receive, and whether or not they can “draw a

crowd.”²²⁵ Most up-and-coming artists in Los Angeles do not expect to earn more than \$20 - \$30 per show; established bands with a larger following might be able to negotiate a guarantee of \$300 - \$1000 depending on the event. This being said, it is not uncommon for established bands to play for \$100 or less. The standard practice for both DIY and bar shows²²⁶ in Los Angeles is to pay the bands out of the funds collected at the door. Most shows featuring local bands range in price from \$5 - \$10; however, since most community members struggle to afford a \$10 cover charge, more and more venues starting in late 2017 have begun to offer free cover, which helped to dramatically increase show attendance. In the case of such free shows, bands can negotiate a “percentage of the bar,” which tends to yield more profit than a “share of the door.”

Considering the modest fees paid out to local bands, the goal of most musicians is not to earn a living through their live performances, but to be able to creatively strategize ways of seeking out other forms of part-time employment within the music industry. In lieu of getting “day jobs,” struggling artists might open home recording studios, work in sound engineering or sound design, pick up DJ gigs, or work in

²²⁵ Another means by which artists and bands might measure their success is to receive a review in a national publication such as Pitchfork or Fader. This is typically accomplished through an artist’s label hiring a Public Relations agency that has access to press contacts. A three month PR campaign with the promise of national or international press reviews runs from \$3,000 - \$5,000. There are rare occasions, however, where a particularly outstanding DIY artist will get exposure in a national publication without hiring a PR agent. In terms of local Los Angeles publications, for a band to get a cover or a feature in alternative music publication, *LA Record*, is considered to be a major achievement. Although *LA Weekly* used to be the leading alternative publication covering local artists, it was bought out by a right-wing consortium, the Semanal Media Group, in November 2017. A coterie of Orange County business men who have no ties to the Los Angeles music scene, Semanal media promptly fired most of the *LA Weekly* editors, resulting in the publication losing much of its credibility. See Lauren Raab, “LA Weekly is Being Sold to Semanal Media, A Mysterious New Company,” accessed October 18, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-la-weekly-semanal-20171018-story.html>. Also see David Pierson, “LA Weekly Reveals its Secret Owners: Mostly Men with Orange County Ties,” accessed Dec 1, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-la-weekly-20171201-story.html>.

²²⁶ Live shows in Los Angeles are either held at DIY-based communal spaces or bars. Artists tend to prefer performing at DIY spaces, since these venues are all-ages, and the artist is allowed more creative freedom.

promotions or as touring session musicians. Although such work is sporadic and often unreliable, established artists tend to be integrated into national and international networks and DIY communities that help connect them to both performance opportunities and various forms of part-time work in the industry. This type of national (and sometimes international) networking — which has been made much easier with the advent of Instagram and Facebook — affords artists further opportunities to diversify their skill set and procure paying gigs across the nation and the globe. As a result of the lack of financial remuneration within the Eastside music scene, established artists and up-and-coming artists tend to remain on the same socio-economic footing.

Given the current situation of the music industry, the role of record labels has become increasingly tenuous. Since few local indie labels offer assistance with artist development, management, or booking, most artists in the Los Angeles Eastside scene are ambivalent towards the possibility of “getting signed.” At the local level, a band would be lucky to find a label that would share in the cost of manufacturing an LP (the cost of which runs between \$3 - \$5K). Local label, Lolipop Records offers deals whereby they might split the cost of the vinyl pressing with the band, or possibly pay for the entire pressing, if the band has a large following and Lolipop is guaranteed a return on its investment. A sister label to Burger Records, Lolipop can offer artists great exposure if they choose to book them on their widely attended showcases or tours; but millennial DIY indie labels such as Lolipop and Burger offer little to bands by way of financial remuneration. Due to the lack of record labels willing to invest money in up-and-coming and experimental artists in today’s music world, performers thus struggle for many years before they become established within the local scene. Since labels seldom provide

“artist development” services in today’s music world, it is therefore up to the artist to build an audience for themselves, and to consolidate their sound and image without a label’s creative direction or financial investment. This is a difficult process for artists to accomplish without the advice of a trusted third party investor, and as a result, many “burn out” before achieving success.

Surprisingly, even the more established, mid-range Los Angeles based indie labels such as Cleopatra and Manimal do not offer artists much by way of financial compensation. Mid-range indie labels will often pay for manufacturing an LP, or possibly a three month PR campaign leading up to its release, but only if the band is established and the label is guaranteed a return. Yet, problematically, unlike DIY labels like Lolipop, Cleopatra and Manimal require artists to sign contracts where they must relinquish rights to their music. Signing to such an established Los Angeles-based indie label is thus often regarded as a “stepping stone” towards bigger indie labels with more investment capital. In signing to a label such as Cleopatra, there is a chance that an artist might be approached by national or international booking agencies. An opportunity to be signed by a booking agency is often more sought after than a record deal. Although artists seldom make money from touring — they are lucky to break even — being booked on a popular tour allows them to gain fan bases nationally or world-wide, and hopefully gain more press, eventually leading to a major indie label deal.

The significant challenges facing up-and-coming bands/artists in the experimental Eastside scene can thus be summarized in terms of the tensions that arise from a racialized metropolitan geography, the lack of financial remuneration for live performances, as well as the lack of label support. One means of overcoming such

obstacles is to maintain a strong social media presence in order to demonstrate to local labels, booking agencies, and taste-makers that the artist has a large, diverse fan base and will prove to be a solid investment. Artists thus have a constant need to maintain “relevance” in the scene, and this is accomplished with the help of professional quality photographs, video footage, and original art work that offer innovative means of visually re-inventing and/or reinforcing the artist’s image on social media. The production of promotional media can be very expensive, and so artists actively seek out social connections with photographers, visual artists, and videographers. In a music scene where few make enough money to cover the cost of living, the value of friendships and social networks is immense. Within the Los Angeles underground, for example, scene photographers like Amy Darling and Scot Free, amongst many others, play a huge role in documenting events and promoting bands. In conversation with Amy Darling, she has remarked that there is an overwhelming impression in the scene that “if Amy didn’t photograph it, can we be sure it ever really happened?”²²⁷ Given the power of social media in today’s music world, maintaining positive relationships with influential scene photographers, most of whom work for free, is crucial to an artist’s success.

Over the past decade, the Eastside scene has maintained several influential underground venues including Don Bolles’ and Nora Keys’ Hushe Clubbe, The Smell, Pehrspace, and HM 157, which have launched the careers of such notable acts as Fancy Space People, No Age, Mika Miko, and Ariel Pink. In addition to such long-standing venues, there is always an array of communally owned warehouse spaces and houses that host shows on the Eastside; most of these impromptu venues only survive for

²²⁷ Amy Darling, Personal Interview, November 18, 2017.

several months, however, since they are unable to afford the proper licensure required by the Los Angeles Fire Marshall. Former drummer of The Germs, and guitarist and founding member of both 45 Grave and Fancy Space People, Don Bolles has been active as a promoter in the LA scene since the days of the Masque. Known for his penchant for queer, outsider artists, Don Bolles' events are always an eclectic mix of performers from punk scenes nationwide. Teaming up with vocalist Nora Keys, Bolles' Hushe Clubbe, a weekly event held every Wednesday night at Hyperion Tavern in Silver Lake has come to be a mainstay of the Eastside experimental scene. Both influential figures in the Los Angeles underground, Keys and Bolles hosts an array of eccentric touring artists from across the nation, as well as garnering a great deal of support for local up-and-coming artists.²²⁸

Other iconic millennial Eastside DIY venues include Pehrspace and The Smell. Sadly, both venues struggled to stay afloat over the past decade. An Echo Park-based, communally owned art space and all-ages venue, Pehrspace closed its doors in August of 2016, after a change in the building's management decided that the subcultural venue was not a desirable investment.²²⁹ Known for hosting "ramshackle but accessible all-ages shows, art exhibits and other cultural events," the diversity of the Pehrspace scene was a center piece of the Los Angeles Eastside scene, and its closure was devastating for

²²⁸ Nora Keyes states the following: "I run the Hushe Clubbe, and I feel like it's a hub scene, where it's not really one type of interest there, we have people who are like the LA FMS people who are experimental musicians who go all the way back to the 60s, some of them, and then we have people who are punks, people who are goths, folk people, it's really runs the gamut of rock, you name it, anything is there. So it's really where I feel like it's really a place where everyone goes to meet, it's a really good medium ground." Personal Interview, October 18, 2017.

²²⁹ See August Brown, "Echo Park Punk Venue Pehrspace Gets Lease Termination Notice from Landlord," accessed Jun 7, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-ms-pehrspace-closure-20160607-snap-htlmlstory.html>.

many local artists who lost one of the few long-standing DIY, all-ages spaces to host their performances. In particular, promoter Sean Carnage's Monday night events at Pehrspace were key events that established up-and-coming bands in the Eastside experimental scene — offering an underground alternative to the more mainstream, commercial indie rock oriented, Monday night residencies at the Echo.²³⁰ Although downtown all-ages DIY punk space, The Smell, recently managed to avoid closure due to numerous large-scale fund-raising events, its future remains uncertain. In the years roughly spanning 2004 - 2010, The Smell was the hub of Eastside youth culture. During this time, there was an explosion of teenage talent that emerged from The Smell, and the all-ages venue helped put Los Angeles punk back on the map, so to speak. Teen punk bands such as Mika Miko and No Age were the precursors to the Burger Records garage rock explosion that followed the rise of the millennial Smell scene. The inclusive, all-ages ethos of The Smell helped forge a powerful network of young punks, many of whom have gone on to start their own booking agencies and promotional networks in the aftermath of the decline of their scene. Yiwei Ming, a former graduate of the Smell scene is one example of a highly successful booker active in the current Eastside music community. In conversation with Ming, who books under the pseudonym, Minty Boi, his passion for booking new talent stems from his teenage involvement in The Smell scene, and to fill the need in the Eastside for inclusive, all-ages shows that espouse progressive values and racial diversity.²³¹

²³⁰ See Liz Ohanisen's "Pehrspace in Trouble, Sean Carnage to Move Monday Nights Temporarily?" posted June 1, 2009. <http://www.laweekly.com/music/pehrspace-in-trouble-sean-carnage-to-move-monday-nights-temporarily-2406925>.

²³¹ Yiwei Ming, Personal Interview, November 21, 2017.

In contrast to the more youth-oriented venues such as Pehrspace and The Smell, HM157 offers caters to a somewhat older crowd, featuring not only musical performances but also burlesque acts and countercultural variety shows. The future of HM157, too, is on uncertain terms with the recent departure of former booker and promoter, Charon Nogues. An historic mansion located in Boyle Heights neighborhood, HM157 is not only a venue but also serves as a communal residence for many notable experimental Los Angeles artists, including current synth punk sensations, LA Drones. In conversation with Neil Martinson, author and current resident of HM 157,²³² the future of shows at HM157 is uncertain, since the venue has difficulty earning the required \$150+ per show to make it worth the while for the residents. After suffering a conflagration two years ago, HM157 made a valiant comeback, but due to financial pressures in addition to pressures from the LA Fire Marshall, it is difficult to say how much longer they will be able to continue to operate as a venue.

In terms of Eastside promoters who work out of more mainstream bars and venues, Michael Stock's Part Time Punks night at the Echo is perhaps the premier night featuring underground music at a major venue. Over the past decade, however, Stock has struggled with increasingly poor attendance due to pressures from The Echo to charge \$10+ at the door. Danny Fuentes is another influential promoter who has been highly successful in the Eastside scene for over 10 years, booking at both DIY spaces as well as established bars such as the Monty in downtown LA as well as LA's largest indie rock club, the Echoplex. His current night, Sex Cells, catering to a more goth-inspired, queer-core, sex-positive subculture has been a resounding success, featuring

²³² Neil Martinson, Personal Interview, January 31, 2018.

experimental artists from the local scene, and pairing them up with DJ sets by internationally renowned countercultural artists such as Peaches. In late 2016, a new female-oriented promotional group, Play Like A Girl (PLAG), began to operate on the Eastside. Conscious of gender-based inequalities that persist within the Eastside scene, PLAG seeks to forge “a safe space for women + non-binary musicians + creators + visionaries to connect, create and prosper.”²³³ It is notable that the two key venues on the Eastside are both run by women talent buyers, Liz Garo of the Echo and Jennifer Tefft of the Satellite; however, their practices are business-minded and not politically motivated. PLAG thus works to rectify gender and sex-based inequalities in the scene by booking line-ups at major venues featuring female and non-binary artists. In laying out the topography of the Los Angeles Eastside experimental music scene, I hope to set the stage for the following interpretive accounts of four influential female vocalists. It is my hope that the readers’ awareness of the pragmatic realities of today’s Eastside experimental scene — in addition to an awareness of the historic roots of LA punk — will prove helpful in contextualizing each artist’s oeuvre.

Matrixial Vocalities of the Eastside Underground

Over the past decade, the Los Angeles underground has produced key female artists whose vocal experimentations have garnered them a great deal of local and international success. Some the more notable examples of such women include Nora Keyes, formerly of the legendary, mid-90s underground LA experimental goth band, The Centimeters — now active in both Don Bolles’ experimental glam rock band, Fancy

²³³ See PLAG site, <http://plagrecords.com>.

Space People in addition to her own solo off-shoot, Rococo Jet.²³⁴ In terms of current up-and-coming artists, over the past several years, Madison Renee Knapp, who performs under the moniker, MRK, is coming to gain wide-spread local recognition for her powerful, often operatic vocal stylings and dramatic stage shows, including building an elaborate contraption to douse herself in a “River of Blood” — the title of her first single.²³⁵ Another overtly political artist, Uhuru Ali Moor, co-vocalist and guitarist of Fuck You Pay Us, has derived a vocal technique influenced by her work as a free-style rap artist in the south-central black musical underground, paired with her appreciation of Ono-esque “yelling,” or extended screams, as a political tool of femme liberation.²³⁶

In my following analyses, my approach will tend towards interpreting these artists’ works in terms of the philosophical models that have been outlined thus far in this dissertation, including the Ettingerian-derived theories of trans-subjectivity; proto-ethical, matrixial vocal resistance; matrixial, shared vocal history; in addition to fourth

²³⁴ Another influential experimental vocalist is Yasmine Kittles of the industrial electronic duo, Tearist, whose release, *Living: 2009 - Present*, (2011), attained a great deal of attention from the international music press, hailed as the future of the cutting-edge Los Angeles underground. Although an interview with Yasmine was not possible this year due to her busy recording schedule, I would like to include her in a future, extended article on women vocalists of the Los Angeles underground.

²³⁵ See MRK’s 2017 performance at Glendale goth club, The Complex, where she performs “River of Blood,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGfhcqLXQhQ>.

²³⁶ A note on female experimental vocalists active in the Los Angeles scene in the past five years: currently, solo electronic performance artist, Geneva Jacuzzi, as well as LA Drones, an electronic duo fronted by female vocalist, Darlingtonia Brackets, have come to dominate the local experimental Eastside scene. Both Geneva Jacuzzi and LA Drones create music that marks a definitive throw-back to ‘80s synth-pop stylings and the use of analog synthesizers and recording technologies. The weekly Hushe Clubbe night at Hyperion Tavern has offered a great deal of support to a slew of exciting new experimental vocalists including Bebe McPherson of the parodic electronic act, Department of Descriptive Services; the quirky goth pop of Cameron Murray’s Native Fauna; as well as the tribal, post-industrial performance artist, Gianna Gianna. Beyond the inner circle of the Hushe Clubbe scene, Cleopatra artist, Rachel Mason is an genre-defying performance artist whose pop-inflected vocality is paired with outlandish costumes and stage shows. Influenced by Anna Homler’s historic “Breadwoman” stage persona, Mason, an art instructor at UCLA, dons self-made masks and sculptural make-up that redefines her identity with each performance. It is my hope that I will be able to publish a future article that features the works of all of these women artists, in addition to the four covered in the context of my dissertation.

dimensional, vocal-aesthetic spaces of encounter. Augmented by in-person interviews conducted with each artist, the primary aim of the following analyses is to give the reader a sense of how current, experimental women vocalists in Los Angeles can be contextualized in relation to feminine, counter-hegemonic vocal traditions stemming back to the avant-rock works of artists such as Yoko Ono, in addition to the punk and New Wave works of late 70s and early 80s artists such as Lene Lovich and Nina Hagen.

Nora Keyes

Beginning her singing career as a member of the rambunctious, mid-90s punk gang, The Parkas, Nora Keyes soon branched off to form The Centimeters with fellow Parka, singer Greg Gomburg.²³⁷ Often described as an eccentric, cabaret-style goth rock band, The Centimeters' visual aesthetic was often likened to the Addams family — featuring Keyes and Gomburg's campy stage antics and quirky Victorian garb. A band that was known for Keys and Gomburg's vocal interplay, Keyes provided a highly mutable vocality that frequently shifted from a high-pitched coloratura, to demure girlish vocals, to a Hagen-esque, guttural cabaret voice, and frequent, Ono-esque strident vibrato. Setting into relief Keyes' mutable vocality, Greg Gomburg maintains a controlled masculine baritone — establishing a gendered vocal dynamic similar to that

²³⁷ Recalling her experiences from the early 90s Eastside scene to the present day Hushe Clubbe scene, Keyes recalls "I guess, from my perspective.. it's a really long-running scene, so I entered into this scene in the mid-90s but I also associate with people who were from the [early] punk scene, so Fancy Space was with Don, but we work with Paul Roessler from The Screammers, so when I'm with them, that's a whole chunk, I was little when they were doing all this stuff... so I see it as a very long track of stuff, and when I first entered in, it was a different time because it was post-riots, and it was post-earthquake, so there weren't a lot of people from outside of California living here and playing music, so the scene was mainly made up of locals, it had a different sense of humor, I think it was more extreme. There was a period too where there wasn't much support from the outside, it was all little, local labels... it was all very home-spun. So it moves, it changes, where all of a sudden there's a lot of outside influences and people who are very driven for fame, and all of that culminates into different energies in terms of how the scene moves."

of the B-52's, where Cindy Wilson and Kate Pierson's vocal experimentations are contrasted with Fred Schneider's authoritative, masculine declamations.²³⁸ With the support of Los Angeles punk icon, Don Bolles, The Centimeters garnered a nation-wide, albeit underground cult following from the mid-90s into the early 2000's. After the Centimeters went on hiatus in the 2001, Keyes began collaborations with Don Bolles, eventually leading to the formation of the experimental glam rock band, Fancy Space People in 2011. By this time, Nora Keyes had spent several years receiving vocal training in opera under the tutelage of Los Angeles-based instructor, Sue Ann Pinner. With Pinner's support, Keyes' developed a high pitched coloratura technique that lended a surreal counterpoint to Bolles' glam rock guitar stylings. While Bolles has taken a brief hiatus from Fancy Space People to work with Ariel Pink, Keyes has been active primarily as an improvisatory, collaborative vocalist, releasing her solo works under Rococo Jet, a name that plays with the concept of "Fancy Space." For Keyes, her vocality is an instrument of profound spiritual healing and communal — even inter-species — bonding; she frequently offers "sound baths" at HM 157 and other DIY spaces in the Eastside scene, where participants are invited to attain a meditative state through her improvisatory vocal stylings and collaborations with various experimental instrumentalists.

Keyes remembers her days with The Parkas in mid-90s Silver Lake, the beginnings of the Eastside scene, as being similar to the late '70s Masque scene, describing The Parkas as an inclusive, "crazy mob of people, drunks, drug addicts,"

²³⁸ As an example of this gendered vocal dynamic, see live performance footage of "Dracula Grey," shot at Spaceland in 1998, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKLawVfjt-k&index=4&list=RDEMBLzbTHPQTergwdhASAtnMw>.

whose “headquarters” was located above the alternative adult book store, The Circus of Books. Former Masque personality and adult model, Karen Centerfold offered to manage The Parkas, after she encountered the band at the Unnatural Fudge Factory, which Keyes describes as “a weird place where gutter punks used to pan handle you while you were playing.” Keyes fondly recalls her first encounter with the ever-eccentric Karen Centerfold:

Karen Centerfold was in the audience, and I was at first, she’s crazy, don’t go anywhere near her, and then the guy who was the leader of the band decided to befriend her, and then she decided she was our manager, and she would say, ‘you guys need to play classier places, I’m gonna get you a show at the Roxy,’ and then she would, by unscrupulous ways, by favors to security guards or sound men or whatever.

Despite Karen Centerfold’s support, The Parkas disbanded after the tragic death of one of its members in the mid-90s. Upon the dissolution of The Parkas, Keyes sought out new avenues of vocal expression, pursuing vocal training at Santa Monica College with renowned vocal instructor, Sue Ann Pinner. Of her experience studying with Pinner, Keyes recalls:

She was really encouraging to me... I had other vocal teachers that weren’t very encouraging, but she was very encouraging, and that got me interested in actually singing and not just screaming... through Sue Ann Pinner, I started studying opera, and then I took a singing techniques class. I would say she gave me a really powerful set of techniques that I’ve been able to grow on my own. I have taken other lessons from other people here and there, but hers was definitely the foundation, and really good techniques for head voice, so I sing really high, and from there I just developed that.

As a trained vocalist with a unique, powerful command of her higher register, Keyes went on to form three successive, influential projects spanning the past two decades in the Eastside scene: The Centimeters, Fancy Space People, and Rococo Jet. In her own words, Keyes describes her projects as follows: “The Centimeters, it was kind of a wild, almost possessed I would say, witch doctor sort of thing. And then Fancy Space was more the spreading of a joyous energy, and then this work [Rococo Jet] I did after my

father died, I was pretty traumatized and I used my singing to help me through the trauma, so I would spend hours at home just singing to drone music and trying to feel where the singing hit my body, and just move some of the painful energy out, and it would work. So it was part of my therapy.”

Heavily influenced by Cyndi Lauper, Nora Keyes first began to consider the spiritual potential of her vocality through reading biographical accounts of Lauper, who described signing as “singing to spirit.” Keyes observes that when she watches Lauper perform, she responds to the way in which Lauper “close[s] her eyes and.. smiles at something invisible.” The notion of vocality as a means of “connecting to something,” is thus central to Keyes’ oeuvre. In addition to finding inspiration in the notion of Lauper as a vocalist whose work is based on a moment of spiritual encounter, Keyes also studied Lauper’s method of vocal projection. Keyes states the following in regards to Lauper’s self-defined vocal technique of “shooting” her voice out to the audience:

Lauper had really interesting things to say about how she would project her voice, and one of her most interesting things I thought was at one of her first singing gigs... at a kind of dilapidated place [without] a microphone and there was one hanging ceiling tile, and the guy that owned the venue told her to project her voice and hit that ceiling tile, and it would go all over the room, which was probably a lie, but she believed it, so she just started to think about singing as though she would shoot out her voice, and when you listen to Cyndi Lauper it definitely sounds like something being shot. And so I found that was really interesting, as a way to think about sound as something that you shoot out.

When watching Keyes’ performances with Fancy Space People, there is a powerful sense of her high-pitched coloratura “shooting out” over the accompanying rock band, cutting through the timbres of the electronic instruments and reaching a euphoric register. Regrettably, the power of her “shooting” coloratura is not sufficiently captured on the Fancy Face People recordings to date, which tend to mix her voice into the backing instrumental context. In live performance, however, the power of her Keyes’ “shooting” voice is, in my experience, the most captivating and unique aspect of the band. Similar

to the way in which Ono discovered her unique screaming vibrato in competition with Lennon's noise guitar, Keyes also recalls that her vocality for Fancy Space People evolved in response to her trying to find a means of "shooting" past Bolles' electric guitar work.

In conversation with Keyes, her consciousness of her positioning within music history is strongly apparent — both within the Los Angeles Eastside scene and beyond. A life-long admirer of Cyndi Lauper, Keyes defines her work as part of an "invisible army" of female vocalists carrying on the tradition of Lauper's vocality. Keyes states:

I could never really connect to Madonna cause I felt like Cyndi Lauper was the one that was the originator, and the I-Ching had said that she had been eclipsed by the northern star, which I think is Madonna, and it said it didn't matter, though, because she had left behind an invisible army of people who were influenced by her and were carrying her message. So I guess I'm part of her invisible army?

Enmeshed within a matrixial shared vocal history with her idol, Cyndi Lauper, Keyes's performances thus present a trans-subjective vocal connectivity with a New Wave vocalist of the past. Given Lauper's historical ties to Lene Lovich, one might go so far as to say that the "invisible army" defined by Keyes can be seen as extending farther back into the 1970s.

Not only does Keyes regard her vocality as a meeting ground between her contemporary self and an "invisible army" of past music-historical figures, she also acknowledges the therapeutic power of the voice upon the psyche. In her experimentations with Rococo Jet, Keyes notes that "at a certain point I had realized I had gained a lot of focus and I had experimented a lot with sound and different tones, because when you hit different frequencies... it opens up parts of your brain and you have an "a-ha" moment of expansion of consciousness so I was seeking that, it was also part of the healing to grow out of this painful place." Keyes's regular sound bath

happenings that she stages throughout the Eastside scene, at least on a monthly basis, are thus spaces of inter-subjective — and perhaps, trans-subjective — connectivity between her voice and the audience, wherein an audial-aesthetic encounterual space brings people together for therapeutic purposes. Attending a Nora Keyes sound bath, participants are invited to close their eyes and lose themselves in the aural tapestries created by her voice and collaborative instruments, and there is a sense that at the conclusion of the one hour “bath,” one’s consciousness has shared a trans-subjective fragilization with surrounding participants.

Keyes also regards vocality as a means of channeling a post-human connectivity; in this vein, she conceptualizes her voice as having the potential to act as a vehicle for interspecies compassion and the sharing of interspecies affects — pointing to the voice as a psychic channel bordering the thresholds of different life worlds, or *umwelten*. In her recording the most recent *Fancy Space People* album, released 2011, Keyes recalls that on the track, “Frankenstein,” she channeled her compassion for a poodle she rescued from euthanization. Keyes recollects that “when I sang ‘Frankenstein’, I had to sing from the perspective of this woman who’s in love with somebody who everyone else wants to kill, so I knew exactly what this was, so I sang from the place that I felt about the poodle. So I was able to give an authentic performance.” In this regard, Keyes looks to spiritual inspiration outside of human referents to accomplish her vocal performances, thereby opening a space of trans-subjective compassion that supersedes inter-species divisions. As an artist whose vocal works holds a deep spiritual purpose, Keyes continues to “shoot” her voice to new limits, always with the aim of attaining a connectivity with other sonic and psychic spheres of experience.

MRK

Madison Renee Knapp, who performs under the moniker MRK, has quickly risen to prominence in the Eastside scene over the past three years, releasing her debut EP, *Blood* (2015) on Los Angeles-based, experimental underground label, Records Ad Nauseum.²³⁹ A solo electronic artist known for her captivating stage performances, impressive vocal range, as well as her steadfast commitment to feminist and anti-capitalist politics, MRK states that although her musical output “falls into “pop sensibilities, [she] strive[s] to push pop music to the weirdest lengths [she] can.” The EP, *Blood*, for one, tackles a set of challenging thematics relating to the psychological and physical trauma of abortion. Consisting of a seven song cycle, *Blood* explores a gamut of affects pertaining to women’s experiences of romantic love, death, and the womb within a hetero-patriarchal society. The first single, “River of Blood,” can be considered a millennial feminist anthem — a compositional tour-de-force that ebbs and flows through an intricate collage of jerky, bass-heavy, dubstep-inspired beats set against shrill, Ono-esque, electronically-enhanced vibrato backing vocals. In the layered vocalities that emerge within “River of Blood,” the Ono-esque vibrato carries both demonic, or other-worldly, as well as infantile sonic signifiers, suggesting the trans-subjective presence of concomitant vocal grains emergent within a matrixial soundspace. Sounding out over the accompanying, trans-subjective vibrato, MRK’s lead vocal persona calls for an inward journey towards an aesthetic encounter with her

²³⁹ Records Ad Nauseum was founded in 2008 by Manuel Vee & Rio Warner, owners of Hollywood-based countercultural clothing store, Glitter Death, located at the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Highland. Self-described as “The Last Inter-Dimensional Rock N’ Roll Record Label,” Records Ad Nauseum releases a range of underground, political artists, the most prominent examples of which being death rockers Egrets on Ergot, San Pedro-based duo, Terminal A, as well as a number of experimental queer noise artists such as Peter Kalisch and the sound art of celebrated underground visual artist, Luka Fischer.

hidden bodily interiority — encapsulated in the mantra-like repetition of the verse lyrics, “show me to myself/ show me to myself.” With the arrival of the resonant, booming chorus phrase, “Oh river of blood/ river of blood/ where do we come from?” MRK raises a rhetorical question that both avers the creative potential of the female body, and seeks to redress the hetero-patriarchal tendency to misrecognize the female body, placing the womb, menses, and women’s real embodied sexual difference under erasure. As “River of Blood” approaches its denouement, MRK layers her voice with a backwards vocality that comes to be swallowed up into the accompanying instrumental texture, suggesting a trans-subjective, vocal “return to the womb.” Rather than a feared, Freudian Death Drive propelling the vocalist towards the annihilation of her subjectivity, however, the conclusion of MRK’s “River of Blood” presents the possibility of another kind of subjectivity arising in the borderlinking encounter with a feminine bodily interiority. In this interpretation, the “River of Blood” itself becomes a metaphor of a borderlinking flow between life and non-life; a form of matrixial Thanatos that, in Ettingerian theory marks a “refusal to play” within the aesthetic confines of the phallogocentric scopical field.

In keeping with MRK’s politicized work to reclaim a positive, aesthetics of feminine bodily interiority, she is currently embarking on an ambitious project inspired by Kundalini energy work that focuses on “a very specific relationship that women have between the vagina and the voice.” Due to the fact that the vocal chords and the vagina are internally connected as oppositional ends of what MRK describes as “an inner tube,” she believes that a sonic bridge exists between the two ends of the female body. In order to investigate her interior bodily voice, MRK plans to record her voice from *the inside*, by means of both swallowing extremely small microphones as well as inserting minute

recording devices directly into her vagina. The goal of MRK's up-coming project, to be titled, *Insides*, is, in her own words, "to use those noises from inside of my body and also to record my voice from inside my body.. I would love to be able to mix the sound of my voice from inside of myself and from an external mic as well, I think that could be fucking insane."

Given her enthusiasm for exploring the creative possibilities afforded by the sonic interiority of the female body, it is no surprise that blood — as a feminine visual metaphor of menses and the womb — constitutes a recurring theme in MRK's photographic self-representations,²⁴⁰ stage performances, and video work. MRK's first widely disseminated professional photoshoot represented the artist naked and fully soaked in bright red, blood-like body paint, set against a white backdrop. In these series of sanguinary photographs, MRK's body is contorted in various suggestive positions, while her fearless, piercing blue eyes gaze defiantly into the camera. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, MRK's 2016 performance at Glendale goth club, The Complex, was nothing short of an historic moment in the Eastside underground, as she built an elaborate contraption on stage which doused her in a bright red deluge of fake blood during the dramatic climax of "River of Blood." Most recently, at her Bootleg theater performance on October 30, 2017, MRK appeared in an ostentatious vintage wedding gown, clutching a contraption that gradually released fake blood from between her legs during her rendition of Chris Isaak's "Wicked Games." Contorting on the stage, her wedding dress drenched in blood, MRK's reinterpretation of Isaak's popular song

²⁴⁰ Never one to be pinned down to one particular performative persona or musical style, however, with each subsequent photo-shoot since 2015, MRK has transformed her image — always choosing a persona that openly engages with and critiques stereotypical representations of the feminine. Juxtaposed against her bloodied figure, her social media pages also feature photos of the artist as a Wiccan priestess, donned in a metallic head piece with a third eye, and also as a cherubic blond ingenue set against a pink backdrop.

transformed the conventional trope of the “wicked,” femme fatale into a feminist protest against the strictures of the patriarchal institution of marriage. Her tarnished wedding gown gradually unravelling throughout her performance, MRK’s virtuosic, near-operatic rendition of “Wicked Games” conjured the vocal excess of Lucia de Lammermoor — an operatic heroine whose unbridled coloratura poses a direct challenge to patriarchal containment.

In her self-representation as a female pop singer inspired by the feminist project of reclaiming blood as a metaphor of the stigmatization of women’s unique embodied lived experience, MRK attempts to carve out a feminine space within the subcultural, punk-oriented Eastside scene that in her view, tends to privilege the masculine. In her own words:

I feel like there’s a lot in every version of a punk or underground scene that I’ve ever been a part of that specifically wants to kill femininity. In women and in men. And I.. all the things that I have disliked about those scenes have been in my opinion because of that exact issue. It’s something that masculinizes all the tendencies of communication and interaction down to things like dress and appearance... and then when I discovered Patti Smith, I was like, agh, my voice is too soft and too pretty and no one will ever take me seriously. And that’s exactly what happened to me in those scenes that I was involved in! All the punk kids thought I was too prissy and too feminine even though I wasn’t really...

In order to counter-balance the difficulties MRK has faced as a female artist within punk-oriented scenes, she has chosen to associate herself most closely with a subset of the Eastside scene that she defines as more “art-driven.”²⁴¹ Artists that are part of this sub-set of the scene are predominantly of non-heteronormative, cis-orientations, and espouse a great deal of concern for both feminist and queer politics. A key aspect of the “art-driven” sub-set of the scene is that most of these artists refuse to play bars, or

²⁴¹ Artists that MRK references as part of this “art-driven” subset include Gianna Gianna, Rachel Mason, Geneva Jacuzzi, and queer male vocalist, Crooks.

commercial drinking establishments. MRK explains the reasons behind this choice as follows:

One reason I made that decision was that, I don't personally think that my music and my performance vibe very well in those spaces, because those spaces are not spaces that people go to pay attention. [Bar patrons] go to drink and to release and to meet new people and things like that. And also [bar owners] usually charge people more money at the door, and then you don't get hardly any of that money, so what's the point? I'm a much bigger fan of the DIY spaces, and the art gallery spaces, they pay their artists more generously, people go there to have an experience, not just to get wasted. And they also are usually surrounded with some other type of medium as well, so if I'm performing at a gallery there's a good chance I'm performing for an opening of someone's show, or a closing of someone's show where someone's work is displayed, or maybe it's multiple artists' work that is displayed, and that's probably my favorite thing because it gives so much attention to so many different types of artists all at once. Because to pretend that we're different seems a little foolish to me.

In MRK's view, the focus on the artists's performance is thus severely curtailed within a profit-driven, capitalist marketplace, where alcohol is the primary commodity, and the performer is used as a prop to help improve sales at the bar. Furthermore, MRK comments that performing in more mainstream, commercial venues, she often encounters audience members who tend to sexualize her as a performer, and question her abilities as a composer. MRK remarks:

Yeah, people will be like, so, do you have any original material that you've written? And I'm like, did you hear everything that I just did? Cause that was all me, that's kinda why I'm the only person on the stage.

As MRK incredulously observes, many sub-sets of the Eastside scene are still plagued by sexist attitudes that assume women to be incapable of compositional practice. Such attitudes are more commonly encountered, however, within the more commercial venues and commercially-oriented coteries of the scene. The correlation of sexist attitudes and commercially-driven music-making thus seems to hold true even within underground scenes. A feminist as well as an anti-capitalist, MRK's iconic single, "Burn the Money," released shortly after her debut EP, *Blood*, highlights the need for women to liberate themselves from capitalism before true gender-based equality can be

achieved. Currently on a private label, MRK finances her own PR and marketing; she has, however, been fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with a renowned producer, Bill Burke, who was so impressed by her work that he has offered his studio and services to her for the past seven months pro bono. She hopes that working privately with Burke will help her to maintain her artistic integrity and political point of view, and to develop as an artist free from the pressures of the commercial music industry. As a feminist and an anti-capitalist performer, MRK's career trajectory must be carefully navigated, especially considering that her art directly critiques the dominant gender politics, as well as the profit-driven economics of the commercial music industry. In a recent interview with online music publication, *Dark Beauty Magazine*,²⁴² MRK conceptualizes her music as an aesthetic outlet that enables her to constantly develop and advance her feminist politics within the ever-changing socio-political landscape of contemporary U.S. society. MRK states:

Who I am as an artist is who I am as a person: I am a woman in and out of love, I am a white female in and out of politics, I am a human in and out of society. My goal is to constantly explore these inner and outer workings that I may more deeply understand myself, the world and my place in it all.

MRK's politicized musical output can be characterized as extremely vocal-centric both in terms of her performance practice as well as her compositional process. On her bandcamp page, MRK characterizes her unconventional oeuvre as experimental, alternative dream-pop-rock. She states: "My music comes from a visceral and personal place. I strive to be both melodramatic and minimalist, soft and wild. Because the voice is my first instrument I am always seeking to use it for my expression in new ways." As a vocal-centric composer, MRK began her career as a teenager in Washington

²⁴² Magnetic, Mikee, "MRK," *Dark Beauty Magazine*, December 19, 2017. Accessed February 16, 2018, http://www.darkbeautymag.com/2017/12/_mrk/.

state, performing original compositions *a cappella* at open mic nights in Seattle, donned in various eccentric costumes. Later on as she gradually mastered the use of recording software such as Ableton, her process continued to be dominated by her vocality. In terms of her compositional process, MRK relates how oftentimes her electronic beats and melodies are created by utilizing samples of her improvised vocal performances:

I really love exploring language and sounds with my voice, so sometimes I'll just go into the vocal booth, and I'll have a super weird effect on my voice and I'll start riffing on that to a click track, for like I mean, I would do it forever, but probably for like 15 minutes.. and, sometimes I'll just take what I've done and put that into Ableton and put that into a keyboard and sample it down and create a beat with it.

Given that the commercial music industry tends to draw a gendered distinction between women as vocalists and men as composers and producers, MRK thus occupies an intriguing middle-ground as a woman composer who creates complex electronic compositions that arise from her sampled vocalizations. In the case of MRK's compositions, the voice is interwoven throughout almost every aspect of the recording, giving rise to a trans-subjective borderspace in which her vocality is fragmented and reconstituted as diverse, yet co-emerging sonic entities.

Despite working with contemporary electronic music technologies, MRK is highly conscious of her position within a history of feminine vocal experimentation that dates back to the proto-punk vocalists of the 1970s. In MRK's view, proto-punk female vocalists were pushed to seek new modes of vocal expression as a mode of cultural resistance against contemporary cultural pressures for women to achieve vocal perfection, whereas male rock vocalists never were never burdened with the same expectation. MRK thus sees the emergence of vocalists such as Yoko Ono and Patti Smith as "a huge backlash to the fact that popular female vocalists of the past forever have been infantilized, like it's more about having this smaller, more infantile sounding

voice, or like, the big powerful beautiful voice, but always focused in this realm of perfection, in a way, that really only started to break away in the 70s.” MRK recalls that around the age of 15 she was first introduced to the works of Patti Smith, and how she “had never heard a woman sound like that, ever, and it blew [her] mind.” Thanks to the pioneering experimentations of proto-punk vocalists like Ono and Smith, MRK observes that there is now a tradition of women vocalists who can sing in opposition to what has historically been considered “beautiful and pleasant,” women who are experimenting “with the different levels of intensity of the voice and.. exploring all different facets of.. what is ugly and jarring and all of those things.”

Despite the strong influence exerted on MRK by artists such as Yoko Ono and Patti Smith, MRK is very conscious of the mainstream media’s lack of acknowledgment of such artists’ contributions. In response to a recent article on popular artist Sia, MRK critiqued the author’s lack of historical knowledge of proto-punk female vocal history:

...because Sia’s image is kind of arty and interesting. And she has that frye to her voice, that sort of guttural, raspy... but reading that article, it was like, really? Do you not remember Bjork, or even Janis Joplin? Or like, Yoko Ono, or like any of these amazing amazing women that have come before this?

A one-time resident of the Yoko Ono dormitory at Sarah Lawrence college, MRK relates the profound relatability of Ono’s work upon her own creative impetus as an artist:

For sure, Yoko, like, every time I’m really upset, if I can just listen to a Yoko song, whether it’s like “Woman Power,” or “Yes, I’m a Witch,” or “Goodbye Sadness,” or almost any fucking song of hers, it just makes me feel better. She just makes me feel like, like someone else understands it, she’s such a great focal point of female creativity and frustration and sanity.

A fearless, political artist with a strong ethical commitment as well as a grounded knowledge of her position within a shared history of proto-punk female vocal experimentation, MRK continues to develop her craft within the Eastside underground.

Her next EP, *Tears*, is due out in late March 2018, upon the completion of the first video, and a full-length EP, *Flowers* is soon to follow.

Uhuru Ali Moor

A self-described “protest artist,” Uhuru Ali Moor, co-vocalist for the all femme, black, queer punk band, Fuck You Pay Us, and formerly of the punk-rap group, Snatches with Power, began her career as part of the KAOS Network in South Central Los Angeles. A rehearsal space as well as a meeting ground for local, counter-cultural creatives, the KAOS Network has been a mainstay of the South Central Los Angeles underground hip-hop scene for over 30 years. Located in Leimert Park, bordering the Compton neighborhood of South Central, the KAOS Network was founded by Ben Caldwell²⁴³, a cultural leader in the black community, and has been a venue for a series of popular underground hip-hop nights over the past two decades, including The Good Life, and more recently, Bananas — considered Los Angeles’ premier underground hip-hop event.

Arriving in South Central Los Angeles from Kansas City several years prior, Moor immediately gravitated towards the KAOS Network to be her home base, but nonetheless sought out performance opportunities across the city. Moor comments that she draws inspiration from the socio-economic diversity of Los Angeles, and the diverse music scenes that the city has to offer:

...you know, being in the city, matters, the city, I would really hope everybody is impacted as much as I am but the city, like the city itself is a hot bed for inspiration for lyrics, cause you’re gonna see so much classism, also so much community, so much diversity and beauty, like LA

²⁴³ Ben Caldwell is a filmmaker and black cultural activist, known for his involvement in "The L.A. Rebellion." Caldwell contributed largely to the “L.A. Rebellion Movement” creating films that focused on Black culture in Los Angeles, California.

itself, everything's here, it's lit, so then that matters, too, the actual environment, and I perform all over the city, so I kind of get around it all, and then I just try to pick it all up and put it into vocals.

Soon after her arrival in Los Angeles, Moor founded the rap group, Snatches with Power, with three other femme MC's who also frequented KAOS Network events. A double-entendre on the slang term, "snatch," a derogatory reference to the vagina, as well as the verb, to "take," or "snatch," Snatches with Power was a hip-hop project centered on the political project of black femmes "snatching back the power" from white cis-hetero patriarchy. As part of Snatches with Power, Moor discovered her passion for what she terms, "punk screaming," a confrontational vocality that defined Snatches with Power as a punk-rap group.

Raised in a predominantly black community, Moor recalls that she was never introduced to punk music as a youth, and she maintains that even now, her punk vocal stylings arose organically in response to her need to "yell" in response to her experiences as a black femme in a racist white patriarchal society. That being said, during her time performing across Los Angeles, Moor was gradually introduced into various punk and experimental sub-sects of the city's underground scene. Moor has thus come to identify as a "punk vocalist," but her arrival at this self-definition is nonetheless fraught with a sense of racial dis-identification with white dominated punk subculture. Moor states the following in relation to the development of her punk vocal technique:

...no one played punk in my community, so it was kind of like, you know, my punk did happen in a vacuum, you know what I'm saying? So it really was my true experience, it was just the things that I would experience from being poor in LA, or being black and countercultural in LA, being in a subculture, already with musicians and artists you're already in a sub-culture, in and of itself, but then when you're also queer, black, poor, hanging out with punk kids... And so ultimately it was just my experiences, really, I just needed to yell, or die, that's pretty much what it came down to.

Moor's development of a punk vocality "in a vacuum" is thus a testament to the lack of presence of punk rock within black communities, which contributes to the lack of black women's participation in punk music-making. Moor's resultant dis-identification with the history of punk is to be expected; nonetheless, as a black protest artist, Moor tapped into a powerful need to "yell or die," a punk sentiment that she both appropriates and reinterprets as an expression of black femme trauma. Considered from the Ettingerian perspective of a shared matrixial vocal history, Moor's instinctual affinity towards a punk vocality might be considered as a trans-subjective borderlinking with grains of femme punk vocalities she might have encountered within the varied countercultural musical spaces of the Los Angeles underground.

Moor herself muses on the lack of black involvement in punk scenes, stating that this racialized barrier stands in opposition to her belief that "nothing could be more punk than blackness." Moor explains her position as follows:

... to me, nothing could be more punk than blackness. Because.. ok, punks, we're all about DIY culture, anarchy, resistance to the government, these principles, you know, who's gonna be more that than a black person? You know what I'm saying? Who's resisting the government more strategically, wisely, and by force than a black person? Because the government exists with laws written in it to oppress black people. You have to be sharp to survive, you know, you have to be.. you're naturally kind of an anarchist, you're born into anarchy.

In her provocative statement, "what could be more punk than a black person?" Moor thus emphasizes the extent to which the black experience in the U.S. resonates with the punk ethos of resistance to institutionalized structures of cis-hetero white oppression. Moor goes on to proclaim that white-dominated punk scenes should look to black cultural resistance as a model for their own cultural production: "by nature, blackness kind of parallels punk culture, everything that punk culture could want to be and strive to be, they could refer to the black culture to see what's up, you know?" Breaking into

laughter upon making this polemical assertion, Moor is obviously tickled by her subtle dig at the white-ness of the punk underground, and the limitations this white-ness places on the resistant potential of said “white” punk underground. Her laughter slowly subsiding, Moor emphatically proclaims: “being black is punk as fuck!”

Despite her conviction in the punk-potential inherent in black protest art, Moor laments that she never felt accepted within the underground punk spaces in the Eastside underground, which tend to be white-dominated. Moor states: “I never found any space in those white punk spaces, like I’ll take up space, but I was never like, oh yeah, we just vibing, you know what I’m saying?” In Moor’s experience, she thus communicates a keen awareness of the distinction between the physicality of “taking up space” in a scene, and the feeling of inclusivity implicit in being a part of a subcultural punk space — and how true inclusion in a punk space is often precluded from those of non-white, racial and ethnic-cultural backgrounds. Due to the tendency of black femmes to feel a sense of dis-ease within white-dominated punk scenes, Moor is extremely selective in terms of the venues where she chooses to perform, tending to only work with anti-commercial, DIY, community-based venues.

We usually create our own spaces, or we work with spaces that have proven to be autonomous spaces, that are safe for femmes and black people, brown people, trans people, so if it’s not that, we’re not gonna be there, or if there’s someone on the line-up that’s counter-active to that, then it’s not happening. Because why would we drag ourselves into situations where we’re not respected as humans to play? It doesn’t make any sense, so ultimately Human Resources in Chinatown is somewhere that we do a lot of regular events, and it’s an autonomous space that supports local artists, and they do a lot of international art shows too but they always hold space for local artists, so we did our Fuck the Motherfucking Election Day punk party there, we did Halloween there, we did our Reparations tour fundraiser show there, we do a bunch of shows there.

Moor’s stated need to find safe spaces where her band is “respected as humans” belies the acute reality of race and gender-based aggression that is common not only to black populations within Los Angeles, but also to black communities within white-

dominated societies world-wide. In our interview, Moor's speech took on a darker tone as she recalled the attack her band endured at the hands of white neo-Nazis on FUPU's recent UK tour. Perpetrated in the "hipster" neighborhood of Shoreditch, the violent, racially-motivated assault resulted in severe physical injuries sustained by the drummer, Tianna Nicole, and the cancellation of the bulk of FUPU's UK tour dates. Moor remarks disdainfully that white people, oblivious to the racialized violence endured by black communities, often comment on the "shocking" nature of the attack. I, myself was guilty of making this remark in the context of our interview, and Moor passionately reminded me that this type of violence is not "shocking," but actually an everyday reality of black existence in white-dominated societies — a reality of racialized violence and trauma to which white subjects remain oblivious. The Neo Nazi attack on their London tour inspired FUPU to include the need for self-defense training for black femmes as part of their political mission statement going forward. Moor states:

We brought in the need for free self-defense into our mission statement. So ultimately, initially our mission statement was solely focused on reparations for the African holocaust, so specifically we would like to have land reparations, as the government promised 40 acres and a mule, that would be great to receive, so we can get on to having free safe space for black people, where we don't concentrate them into Skid Row, like a concentration camp, we can actually heal people and feed them fresh food, do what the government is refusing to do. So following that incident we added in, free self-defense for femmes. Cause women should be empowered to defend themselves cause it makes no sense to raise femmes to expect some man to protect them, when that's going to be the man who's abusing them.

The comprehensive mission statement for race-based reparations and femme self-defense outlined by Moor adds a deeper significance to the band name, Fuck You Pay Us. Not only is this confrontational statement — drawn from hip-hop culture — a demand for black economic emancipation, it also encapsulates a politicized demand for historical reparations for blacks across the U.S. who continue to struggle under a white settler colonialist regime.

In the wake of the attack, Moor recalls the commercial media's inhumane attempt to sensationalize the story in mainstream publications, capitalizing on the current "hot topic" of racialized violence and the "black lives matter" campaign in the US. Expressing her strong opposition to the mainstream media's insensitive treatment of black women's trauma, Moor laments the lack of control that POC artists often experience in relation to the commercial media:

I mean especially after.. for example, I mean especially when we talked about what happened to our band in London, that's a real personal attack, that's a real personal attack that four individuals have to deal with, trying to keep mental health intact, and then it's treated like a publicity stunt, motherfuckers think it's publicity, people want to publish it, I mean people are calling us from local LA newspapers, like Teen Vogue, saying can we publish this story? And it's like, why? Why is this such a hot topic when this is actually real trauma for the people involved? And that is what I'm talking about, commercialism is just this monster, of like, just it's not humane, you know?

Given the commercial incentives that drive the white-dominated US mainstream media, and the current propensity for the sensationalization of racism, Moor is highly skeptical of the media's capacity for offering a culturally sensitive treatment of the ongoing cultural trauma of racism. Moor states:

Cause it's a hot topic right now, that racism is happening, because of Donald Trump, whatever, as if this has not been a re-occurring thing, you know, I think people are sensationalizing racism right now, so naturally when this happens with my band, people want to sensationalize that incident, and it's like, it's not sensational, this is real life. And someone really got their nose broken by a man, and they were under 115lb, they were 5"1', like this is real trauma, this is not a sensation, it's not just something for people to read about on the internet.

In addition to her commitment to opposing racially-motivated violence, Moor's songwriting contributions to FUPU also include songs that inspire audiences to consider the many micro-aggressions sustained by black femmes. In regards to the FUPU song, "Don't Touch My Hair," a crowd favorite at their shows, Moor states the following:

"Don't Touch My Hair" is all about the micro-aggression of white femmes thinking they can touch black femmes' hair. And I'm sure it's more than just white femmes, I think it's just white people, period, but I think it probably happens more often with femme to femme, where it's like, oh, I love your hair, I love your afro, oh my god, these braids, and it's like, it's a violation of someone's personal space. So that song came about because we know it's a micro-aggression that

everyone is exhausted with, yet it continues to happen, so then why wouldn't we make a song about that?

Another fan favorite, the FUPU song, "Nappy Black," has become something of an anthem amongst underground queer and POC audiences in Los Angeles. Moor offers the following back story that inspired this song:

I remember riding on the bus, and like, just this white man was taking up so much space, and you know, if you take the bus in LA, you know if you take LA metro, you know, it's a reflection of the city, it's black and brown, poor people, mostly, and you know, this white man was on there, you know, just taking up so much space, I mean doing it all, just man-spreading, like he was the cream of the crop You know how they have that quote about 'wake up with the confidence of a cis white man,' you know.. and anyway he did some rude shit to someone who was black, that wasn't directed towards me, but I had beef with him in my mind because he was just doing the most and then I was just like, you know, "suck my nappy black pussy." Like, because ultimately you know how men always say "suck my dick," you know, "suck my dick," is such a patriarchal term, so I just went into word play with that, simultaneously go off on this man, who's just taking up too much space, so it just came out, "suck my nappy black pussy.

In addition to a humorous reversal of the sexist epithet, "suck my dick," and a reaction against the cis-hetero practice of "man-spreading," "Nappy Black" came to speak to women of color in the wake of the recent Women's March where white feminists donned pink "pussy hats," provoking women of color to chant in response: "not my pussy." Moor comments that audiences came to embrace "Nappy Black" as a song that filled the need for expressing the sentiment of black women's sexualities being marginalized even within the feminist movement. Moor remarks:

... it's a classic, like people love that song, people love that song because at the women's march, they made those pink hats, and then all the black femmes were like, "not my pussy." Like, that was the clap back to these white pussy hats for the feminist march, was like, that's not my pussy, so anyways, people connect to that song because it *is* their pussy, they're like, yeah, it's nappy, it's black, it's mine, it's not a white pussy which has been often portrayed as the standard, and even non-binary as well as transgender can connect to that song because it's not really about a physical pussy it's about the sentiment of turning the patriarchy on its head. Even we switch it around sometimes, and we say, "suck her curly brown," or "suck her straight hair white pussy," but ultimately, you know, saying suck my dick is no longer gonna, like, do anything for anyone after that song. It snatches the power. Snatch Power.

As a protest artist who strives to "snatch the power" back from a white cis hetero establishment, Moor conceptualizes the voice as a transformative space of politicized encounter. In Moor's view, the voice constitutes a meeting ground between the singer

and listener — a point of contact wherein racialized socio-cultural barriers might be overcome. Moor comments on how political dialogue often results in white people's defensiveness, whereas music has a potential for raising consciousness:

You know, if I'm telling some white person about touching my hair, they're not gonna hear the shit I'm saying, they're already gonna be trying to defend themselves, they'll already be taking it personal, they're already gonna be, 'I'm not racist!' you know what I'm saying, like, it's gonna get personal, but if they hear a song, you know, they might be like, oh, I should really be conscious about not just touching peoples' hair, like nobody wants that, you know what I'm saying. Anyways, I do think... writing music, being a vocalist, as an underground person is really all about an experiment, not only is it experimental music, but I'm also experimenting socially, or like, sociologically, with my music, I'm literally experimenting to see how this message will be received by people, and how can it help impact what's happening in the world, to make it better, you know, open up peoples' mind, and thus, I'm experimenting with revolution in my music.

As a revolutionary tool for awakening political consciousness in her listeners, Moor considers her songs, as well as her voice itself, as a metaphorical space that can bring about social change. In this vein, Moor describes her acts of politicized yelling as “sheer magic” — an unexpected vocal expression that “catches everybody off guard,” capturing the audience's attention and bringing about an intense moment of aesthetic encounter between vocalist and listener. Interpreted in Ettingerian terms, Moore's conceptualization of her black femme punk voice can be likened to a fourth dimensional, vocal-aesthetic space of encounter. Rather than a hybridized point of contact, producing a triangulated polarity between the phallic categorizations of white and black, right and left, straight and queer, Moore experiences the voice as a space that offers freedom from such binaristic models. As Moore “yells” to survive, her voice evokes the contactual subjective grains of the black femme and the white punk, producing a trans-subjective experience wherein her listeners' subjective grains co-emerge and co-fade, uniting in the moment of “sheer magic” produced by a politicized scream. In this way, Moore's black punk vocality evokes a shared matrixial history that layers the raw emotion of black historical trauma with a history of women's vocal protests in the punk tradition.

In terms of the future of her career, Moor observes that the current historical moment, defined by the ascendance of an overtly racist, white supremacist government, brings about an urgent need for the expression of marginalized peoples' voices — this is where FUPU's politicized mission comes into play. Moore observes: "I feel that people are seeing and desiring to hear femme expressions, like the femme voice coming out more, I think we've all worn ourselves out with hearing the male voice come through... I think we really need to start trying to hear from the voices that we oppress, you know. And I mean I think that's what I'm doing, yelling, as a protest artist, and I hope people we can't speak for, will start yelling, too." With FUPU's rise in the scene, we can only hope that Moore's politicized music-making continues to inspire other marginalized voices to "start yelling." FUPU have been booked to open for Pussy Riot in a sold-out show at a major commercial venue, The Echo, on April 1st, 2018. The event promises to be an historic moment for the Los Angeles underground. Guided by a revolutionary political ethos, FUPU are poised to emerge as an act of great social and historical import — one that promises to "snatch back" the power of punk, and re-appropriate punk vocalicity for the cause of liberating black queer femmes.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a brief ethnographic and historical contextualization of the current Los Angeles punk rock underground, centered on the Eastside scene. In my discussions of three representative experimental vocalists, I hope to have demonstrated some of the future directions in underground music-making that are particularly promising from a progressive, feminist standpoint. Nora Keys, an

historical figure in the Los Angeles underground, provides a bridge between the early Masque scene and current experimental sub-sects of the experimental Eastside. MRK, a committed feminist and vocal experimenter, grapples with issues of feminine corporeality in her music and performances, striving towards non-phallic modes of vocal-centric, pop music-making. Lastly, Uhuru Ali Moor wields her black punk screams at audiences across Los Angeles, as a revolutionary move that opens up a transformative, encounteral, fourth dimensional space that promises raising consciousness of black femme trauma. These diverse artists each utilize their voices as a means of redefining normative feminine vocality, and as such, each tap into a shared matrixial history of vocal praxes that encompass Ono's screams at the Toronto Concert for Live Peace in 1969, as well as the countless punk and underground vocalists that followed. The resonances produced by such fearless, revolutionary feminine voices promise not only the possibility of contributing to raising public consciousness of gender and race-based social issues, but also promise a proto-ethical modality of resistance — the co-emergence of new modes of aesthetic expression that point to a horizon of meaning formation and aesthetics beyond phallic-structural understanding.

Conclusion

This dissertation has provided a historicized musicological analysis of Yoko Ono's extended vocal techniques, charting her influence upon underground artists from the late 1970s to present day Los Angeles. Proposing a musicological appropriation of Bracha L. Ettinger's theoretical rubric, I have demonstrated the ways in which Ono's vocal performances actualize a mode of "matrixial gendered resistance," that is, a feminist aesthetic practice that works to re-contextualize the parameters of gendered subjectivity within a shared space of trans-subjective encounter. In the first chapter, I offered a biographical contextualization of Ono as a transnational artist who worked on the margins of several contactual art worlds. I also provided an elaboration of the artist's own aesthetic theory, interpreting her notion of "the world of stickiness" in the context of Ettinger's theory of the "matrixial borderspace." Analyzing representative works drawn from Ono's studio album, *Fly* (1971), I have demonstrated the ways in which her extended vocal techniques gave rise to a matrixial borderspace of aesthetic encounter between several vocal co-subjectivities in emergence. I also hope to have demonstrated the ways in which the interpretation of Ono's vocality as a matrixial borderspace allows us to theorize her vocality in terms of "proto-ethics" — a mode of gendered resistance to phallic subjectivity that compliments ethically driven socio-cultural feminist resistance.

In the second chapter, I provided an in-depth, two-part exploration of Ono's vocal techniques employed within her short film, *Fly* (1970). The aim of this two-part analysis was to bring Ettingerian theory into dialogue with both postcolonial and

posthuman thought. Considering the short film, *Fly* as a synaesthetic space of encounter, I moved to position the voice as a cross-sensory matrix wherein a range of aesthetic experiences unfold within a space of gendered, racialized, and posthuman contact. In contrast to the in-depth theorizations of the second chapter, the third chapter offered a more historically-oriented analysis of Ono's stylistic influence within underground, punk, and New Wave genres of the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. Building upon the Ettingerian lexicon delineated in the first two chapters, the third chapter moved to situate Ono's extended vocal techniques within a shared matrixial history of trans-subjective vocal-stylistic contact within the experimental punk and New Wave underground. In this vein, the final chapter provided a contemporary insight into Ono's continued influence within the current Los Angeles Eastside music scene.

By appropriating Ettingerian matrixial theory to a musicological context, this dissertation advances a music-analytical lexicon that can be employed as a means of exploring non-phallogentric modes of aesthetic subjectivisation unfolding within musical works. Given that the voice tends to give rise to experiences of ontology and subjectivity as relational and interstitial — or, to recapitulate Martha Feldman's observation, the voice tends to exist within “the interstices of encounters, the spaces of transition, the spaces in between” — a matrixial framework lends itself nicely to the analysis of vocalicity as borderspace.²⁴⁴ This being said, it is my hope that future lines of musicological inquiry will take up and expand upon the Ettingerian lexicon defined herein, and propose new ways of adapting her matrixial theory to the analysis of a

²⁴⁴ Martha Feldman, “Colloquy: Why Voice Now?” *The Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no.3 (Spring, 2015): 657.

variety of musical experiences beyond the realm of vocality. A major contribution put forward in this dissertation is the concept of the “Fourth Space” of encounter, which derives from placing Ettingerian matrixial theory into dialogue with both Bhabha’s “Third Space” and the Uexküllian posthuman notion of the *umwelt*. As an interstitial space of aesthetic encounter that provides a pathway towards identifying cultural processes that resist both Lacanian phallic subjectivisation and the associated tendencies towards constructing the category of the subject as an exclusionary, racialized and speciesist demarcation wrapped up in an Irigarayan “logic of the same,” the “Fourth Space” of encounter marks a move towards theorizing aesthetic contact in a globalized age when the consideration of borderspaces and interstices have grown increasingly pertinent to philosophical inquiry.

Future Directions of Research

In terms of future directions of research, throughout the course of my study, I have identified two topics that I would like to include as additional chapters in my final book project. In addition, there are four future article projects that I would like to pursue in relation to the subject matter engaged in my current study. One chapter that I would like to add to my current work would consist of an exploration of the commonalities shared between Ono’s extended vocal techniques of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the mid-to-late 1970s avant-garde vocal experimentations of Joan La Barbara, Meredith Monk, and Diamánda Gálás. Around 1975, both Joan La Barbara and Meredith Monk, both vocalists regarded very highly within the New York avant-garde,

began to experiment with multiphonics and nonwestern vocal tones.²⁴⁵ Several years later, experimental artist, Diamánda Gálás arrived on the New York Scene, recording her first record with Disc O'Dell's renowned underground label, Y Records. Not only do the multiphonic, layered vocalities of Gálás's *Litanies of Satan* (1982) bear a striking resemblance to Ono's earlier work, the thematics of transnational dislocation and feminine wartime cultural trauma can also be interpreted as a point of commonality shared between the two artists. While my current study has examined Ono's influence on underground, punk, and popular music genres, this proposed future chapter would explore Ono's matrixial vocality in the context of vocalists active in the intersections of avant-garde and underground art worlds in mid-to-late 1970s New York.

I would also like to include a chapter on popular male vocalists of the era who were involved in Ono-esque extended techniques, theorizing the implications of how a fragilized masculine vocal subjectivity might be interpreted within an Ettingerian lexicon. Ettinger observes that subjective fragilization can be accessed by all persons, regardless of gender; however, it is my conjecture that a masculine proto-ethical resistance would give rise to a differing set of psycho-social meanings that must be explored and contextualized in relation to each male vocalist in question. In this vein, I am interested in analyzing John Lydon's work on PiL's influential album, *The Flowers of Romance* (1981), as well as Mark Stewart's vocal work as part of the iconoclastic post-punk outfit, The Pop Group, specifically his work on their iconic album, *Y* (1979). In addition, I would like to examine the work of Italian prog rock vocalist, Demetrio Stratos, focusing on his use of operatic extended vocal techniques throughout his

²⁴⁵ See Meredith Monk's *Key* (1971), *Our Lady of Late* (1973), and Joan La Barbara's *Voice is the Original Instrument* (1976).

oeuvre. Given that vocal experimentation in popular music has predominantly been carried out by female performers, I believe that an examination of male vocal experimenters will bring forward a new set of gendered interpretive possibilities that will significantly enhance my study.

In terms of future article projects, it has become apparent to me that more research has to be done to uncover to what extent, and through what channels, nonwestern vocal repertoires were made available to the west prior to the world music boom of the mid-1980s. Although the gradual infiltration of East Indian musical styles into mainstream rock music has been documented since the mid-1960s, in this article I am more interested in researching the channels by which a range of other nonwestern musics might have infiltrated the western music-cultural sphere — focusing on vocal-musical styles from Northern Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Africa, and beyond. In conversations with Anna Homler, a Los Angeles-based experimental vocalist active in the early 1980s under the stage name “Breadwoman,” she recalls that various genres of nonwestern vocal music — mainly recordings drawn from the Folkways collection — were available through public radio stations and selected record stores across Los Angeles since the early 1970s. More work needs to be done, however, to investigate what labels, record stores, and radio stations disseminated nonwestern music at this time, and to what extent avant-garde and underground experimental artists were exposed to this type of music. This vein of research would require an ethnographic study of DJ’s active in public radio of the 1970s, key record store owners and music distributors of the era, both avant-garde and underground music scene participants, and also the location

of archival sources pertaining to the dissemination of nonwestern musics from the 1960s onwards.

Notably, in the context of this dissertation I have chosen to focus mainly on artists within US and UK underground scenes that constituted the central loci of the emergence of punk and New Wave genres. Future research into Ono's influence upon Japanese underground scenes, however, would be an extremely fruitful line of inquiry. This extended article project would require travel to Japan in order to conduct historical research into Japanese underground record labels of the late 1970s and early 1980s, in addition to music publications, venues, artists, and scene participants of the era. Although the history of cultural exchange between the early New York No Wave and noise rock scenes and the Kansai noise music scene has been somewhat documented, there were many diverse punk and post-punk scenes that sprang up across Japan during the late 1970s and early 1980s that have yet to be documented in the context of academic musicology — in Japanese musicology, or within the western academe. Cross-cultural exchange between US and Japanese punk scenes would be a fruitful line of research that would highlight the transnational developments of the punk underground.

Expanding upon the final chapter of my dissertation, I would also like to compose a more in-depth, comprehensive article on current Eastside LA underground singers, including Latina vocalists in the Eastside scene, as well as queer and transgender vocalists. I have already conducted close to a dozen interviews with a range of such vocalists active in Los Angeles today, and I would like to craft these interview responses into a more detailed, comprehensive article on the scene. Currently the Los Angeles Eastside scene is at the forefront of vocal experimentation, a highly politicized

underground scene that, in my view, contains many voices that need to be documented. Latina vocalist, Kristene Nevorse for example, is making great headway in the scene as the frontwoman for her post-punk band, The Tissues, who just wrapped up a successful tour of SXSW in March of 2018. Solo electronic performance artist, Geneva Jacuzzi, continues to be one of the most sought-after vocalists active in the Eastside today, along with Persian-Israeli vocalist, Yasmine Kittles of influential noise duo, Tearist. The '80s synth-pop stylings of Catalonian electro-punk duo, LA Drones, fronted by Darlingtonia Brackets, have also come to dominate the local experimental Eastside scene, a platform they utilize to communicate their strong stance on the politics of immigration reform. The weekly Hushe Clubbe night at Hyperion Tavern has offered a great deal of support to a slew of exciting new experimental vocalists including Bebe McPherson of the parodic electronic act, The Department of Descriptive Services; the quirky goth pop of Cameron Murray's Native Fauna; as well as tribal, post-industrial performance artist, Gianna Gianna. Beyond the inner circle of the Hushe Clubbe scene, Cleopatra artist, Rachel Mason is a genre-defying performance artist whose pop-inflected vocality is paired with outlandish costumes and stage shows. Influenced by Anna Homler's historic "Breadwoman" stage persona, Mason, an art instructor at UCLA, dons self-made masks and sculptural make-up that redefines her identity with each performance. It is my hope that I will be able to publish a future article that features the works of all of these women artists, in addition to the four covered in the context of my dissertation.

Another more philosophically-grounded article project I would like to pursue involves the appropriation of the Ettingerian theory of trans-subjectivity for the interpretation of the works of non-binary, transgender vocalists. In light of the rising

visibility of transexual and trans-gender artists in popular culture, and especially within underground scenes, there is an urgency to develop new theoretical models to interpret non-binary persons' aesthetic experience. While I believe that the Ettingerian notion of subjective fragilization and proto-ethical resistance holds a particular relevance to non-binary peoples' experience, much work has to be done to parse out the distinctions between Ettinger's use of the prefix, "trans," and the politicized use of the prefix as a socio-political demarcation of gender-based identity. Arising out of differing theoretical trajectories, I believe that the matrixial theory of trans-subjectivity can be adapted for the purposes of theorizing trans-genderism, providing a useful mode of analyzing the aesthetics of non-binary vocalities. Given that my current dissertation project marks the first musicological appropriation of Ettinger's theories, I believe that it constitutes a starting point from which a variety of approaches to vocality and music might be derived in the contexts of future projects.

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