

69,280 individuals killed or disappeared according to a complex calculation offered by Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. X gets situated and refuses to fit. Pleasantries gone, the violence of X is sometimes necessary and always situational. It stands indirectly proportional to

punk and revolution

7 more
interpretations
of peruvian
reality

the concrete violence of the state's God-like image and the abstract violence of the militant that promises utopia will follow from revolutionary tyranny. Stripped of all they are, the actors that operate with X patch a number to their black jackets and scream aloud, pushing back and forth, smashing into various no-futures, yes-futures, and maybe-futures. $X = 3,443,514$.

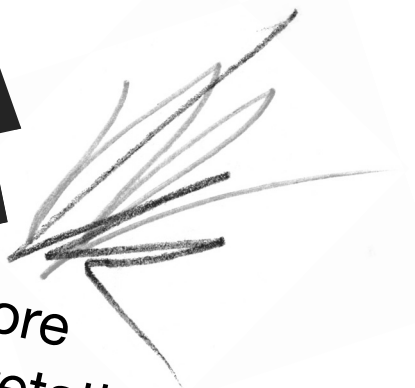
shane greene

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by Mindy Basinger Hill

Typeset in Garamond Premier Pro by Tseng Information Systems, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Greene, Shane, [date] author.

Title: Punk and revolution : seven more interpretations of Peruvian reality / Shane Greene.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016024764 (print)

LCCN 2016025627 (ebook)

ISBN 9780822362593 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 9780822362746 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN 9780822373544 (e-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Punk culture — Political aspects — Peru. | Peru —

Politics and government — 1980- | Political violence — Peru —

History — 20th century. | Sendero Luminoso (Guerrilla group)

Classification: LCC F3448.5.G74 2016 (print) | LCC F3448.5 (ebook) |

DDC 985.06/4 — dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016024764>

Cover art: Shane Greene (design); Shad Gross (photography).

Duke University Press gratefully acknowledges the support of the University of Indiana, College of Arts and Sciences, and Department of Anthropology, which provided funds toward the publication of this book.

The very word revolution, in this America
of small revolutions, lends itself to a lot of error.

José Carlos Mariátegui

Hay que destruir para volver a construir.

Narcosis

dedicated to x

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thanks go to . . .

The ghost of Mariátegui for putting up with me.

Aaron and Marshall Bachelder for turning me
into a punk sometime around 1983.

Shad Gross for rad techniques made in Ohio.

Leigh Bush for mastering the web.

Motown for tongues, tears, and trumpets tied together
with dog collars.

Two “anonymous” readers for reading knowingly.

Gisela Fosado for saying yes Duke can, Lydia-Rose for
making stuff happen.

Las Perras de Bogotá por morderme sin intención de matar.

Marisol de la Cadena for the alienation effect.

Sandro Dogma for the MRR hook-up.

MRR for bringing the punks
(but not the decision to cleanse GG’s original title).

Newton Mori por darme una idea sin querer.

The people at Tepo who laughed when they were supposed to.

Alfredo Márquez porque al fondo siempre hay sitio.

Julio Durán por traducir semejante huevada.

Roos, Sonia, Olga, and Eric for helping Julio traducir
semejante huevada.

Leo Escoria por no molestarse (tanto) cuando robo su mostrito.

Richi Lakra por ser un poeta que asalta.

Olga Rodríguez Ulloa for the Thai food in NY and the seafood in Seattle.

Dalia Davoudi for thusly striking at my fine indeedness.

Fabiola Bazo for all the intercambios.

Richard Nossar Gastañeta por invitarme sus sutilezas.

Manolo Garfías por el contacto con el gaucho rocker.

El gaucho rocker, Christian Van Lacke, por producir el gringo que no tenía plata.

Jesse Shipley and Marina Peterson for synchronizing their JPMS.

Pedro Tóxico por no ser tóxico.

Iván Santos Paredes por haberme ayudado llegar al fondo del tema T-ta.

Matt Van Hoose for the sax solo and the eight-letter word.

María Elena and Tony for the occasional grunge nostalgia.

Jennifer Boles for driving all the way from Chicago.

Claudia Alva, alias Blue, por ayudarme fastidiar.

Chiki y Chovi por insultarme y abrazarme y insultarme de nuevo.

Sydney Silverstein and Leigh Campoamor for the chismes about Lima.

Rodrigo Quijano for always being on Facebook.

Miguel Angel del Castillo and Raschid Rabi por varios diálogos subterráneos.

Támira Bassallo por ser simplemente amable.

Álex Ángeles por las lentejas.
Miguel Det por no estar dead yet.
Analucia Riveros por las consultas Quechistas (y todos los besos mandados a Samik).
Emma McDonell for the beer bottle.
All the subtes that submitted to, or refused, an interview, or gave me stuff, or did not.
Ian McKaye and Martín Crudo for picking up the phone.
Everyone that spilt ink for Interpretation #6 (Project X).
Everyone that got upset and rejected prior versions of Interpretation #4.
Eduardo Restrepo por ser más anarco-editor que es@s pinches gring@s.
The Newhouse Humanities Center for the freedom to begin writing.
The Bishop for selling cheap alcohol at the corner of Walnut and 4th St.
My guitars for always sassing back.
Samik for sassing back (but only sometimes).
P.J. por compartir un pedazo de su revolución caliente (y su jugo) conmigo (anoche soñé contigo, hoy también).

warning!

My work has developed as Nietzsche would have wished, for he did not love authors who strained after the intentional, deliberate production of a book, but rather those whose thoughts formed a book spontaneously and without premeditation. Many projects for books occur to me as I lie awake, but I know beforehand that I shall carry out only those to which I am summoned by an imperious force.

José Carlos Mariátegui

I bring together in this book seven Interpretations concerning some essential aspects of punk and revolution within what José Carlos Mariátegui once called Peruvian reality. Anyone dumb enough to think he meant it to refer to the nation-state as a “unit of analysis,” or to attach the adjective “national” to his peculiar brand of Marxist thought, has completely missed his point. I say this irrespective of—although admittedly in slight annoyance with—all the global speak and transnational turns that have so many US-based academics eager to fashion themselves beyond the nation. A universalist thinker deeply concerned with the particularities of context, Mariátegui meant it as a gesture of conviction. His main commitment was to ground any theoretical account within specific social structures and historical conditions. Inevitably, this requires leaps of interpretation since such realities shift according to moment and circumstance.

Peru of the 1980s and early 1990s is the historical context for these seven Interpretations. The focus is largely on how Lima punks lived and died amid “the people’s war” that the Communist Party of Peru, popularly known as the Shining Path, declared in 1980 in Ayacucho and that soon engulfed the entire country. The atmosphere of hard-line Marxist militancy, daily political violence, and state terror that resulted, and proved to be the bloodiest period since independence from Spain, was inevitably enmeshed in broader

processes. These other phenomena are not at the core of the analysis but necessarily appear as contextualizing factors: the Andeanization of Lima, as a decades-long process of migration from highland provinces to urban slums intensified amid uncontrollable violence and economic collapse; the resulting invention of a *chicha* culture full of Andean, creole, and Caribbean musical fusions, tabloid newspapers, and informal street markets; radical left journalism and Marxist organizing in many public universities; new social movements trying to defend communities from violence and hardship, such as the women-led communal kitchens in Lima slums or the peasant community patrols in the countryside.

Most of those involved in the eighties punk scene are from families with deep Lima roots. If their families hail from the provinces it is typically from provincial cities (Arequipa, Piura, etc.) rather than rural areas. The vast majority fall somewhere on the continuum of upper- to middle- to lower-middle class and reside in Lima's core urban districts. Few, if any, grew up in the precarious shantytowns that now surround the core of the city after undergoing vast expansion during the eighties, populated overwhelmingly by Andean migrants, or *cholos* in Peruvian speak. In fact, after dozens of interviews, incursion into many homes to access personal collections, and attendance at lots of shows, I have yet to meet a single punk from the eighties generation that was exposed to Quechua in any significant way. Their surnames suggest complex permutations of Spanish, Basque, Italian, German, Japanese, and Lebanese descent much more often than Andean ancestry in a country with a sizeable indigenous, or indigenous-descended, population. Despite this similarity in certain sociological terms, and the smallness of a scene that probably numbered only a few hundred at the time, Lima's punks generated an extraordinary diversity of responses to the chaos of Peruvian reality during a war over the future. This included everything from rock-n-roll apathy toward "real-politik" to radically ambiguous aesthetic provocation to anarchist militancy with liberatory aims. In these varied responses I locate distinct kinds of revolutionary hope and document different experiences of historical nightmare.

Parts of the book have been published in, or rejected from, proper academic venues. Others came out in punk 'zines, all in a mix of Spanish and English. Some parts were released as PIY (Publish-It-Yourself) *arte/facts*, aesthetic announcements of my ongoing actions of Interpretation. They circulated as digital files instantaneously via the Internet, more slowly via the postal service with cut-up cardboard protectors, or with fewer mediators thanks to hand-to-hand exchanges. These anticipatory tidbits were also sold, copied,

given, and probably thrown away in those informal markets in Lima that specialize in underground paraphernalia (comics, 'zines, T-shirts, bad horror movies, pirated rock music). The "PS!" at the end provides more details on why they were done and points to a companion website (punkandrevolution.com) where these and still other interpretations can be found, soundtrack included. The majority of the book remained unpublished until I convinced editors of a press to lend me a space where I might inhabit these voices, try to say something about how interpretative explorations of punk and revolution allow us to rethink the sordid political history of Peru and the world.

The resulting whole, if it can be called that, turned out less how I originally intended it and more just how things shook out. So it should be with a book in direct dialogue with Mariátegui. In compiling his famous *Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality* he declared himself in conversation with Nietzsche and "warned" readers not to expect recognizable formulas, to engage instead with his idiosyncratic divergences from Marxist dogma and academic convention. At the end of a multiyear process, one witness to spurts and bursts of writing, booms and busts of revising, and fits and starts of aesthetic intervention, a process that also entailed more than one personal crisis and lots of laughter with the frustration I feel amid academe's overly enlightened ways, and many passionately false promises that I was "80 percent done," I finally became aware of what I was doing. More or less.

I was appropriating Mariátegui's form, and some of his content, for a reason. I wanted to imagine one of Latin America's most creative Marxist thinkers—the one exiled to Europe in 1920 only to return to Peru further radicalized three years later; the one that founded Peru's first Communist Party the same year he published his famous *Seven Essays*; the very same one whose traumatically injured body bound him to the materiality of a wheelchair for most of a very short life—as possessing the spirit of a punk contrarian. It was some Lima punks I know that inspired the thought. They gave me floors to sleep on and argued with me vigorously over beer. They were the ones to visualize something distinctly punkish in Mariátegui's peculiar way of viewing the world, along with Peru's particular and universal place in it.

I also started thinking in terms of intertextual, subtextual, and countertextual dialogues between Mariátegui and a horde of other intellectual misfits: this problematic graduate student with the thesis that pissed off the Soviet intellectual establishment (Bakhtin); that most dangerous of dangerous women in the history of the United States (Goldman); a suicidal German Jew never entirely on board with the whole Frankfurt thing (Benjamin); a

French vandal without much of a father figure (Debord); even that exiled German philosopher mooching off his friend Friedrich's British capital to create *Capital* (Marx). Clearly, the implications of the book extend well beyond the precise geopolitical confines and specific history of the nation-state called Peru. Or, rather, the point is that the particularities of Peruvian reality provide us the chance to rethink more universal dilemmas.

It was only toward the end that I realized I wasn't producing something that could be called "Seven Essays," since only the first five really correspond to that genre. Numbers 2 and 3 make direct allusion to those Mariátegui writings that represent the core of his creative reinterpretation of historical materialist thought. Number 4 has three prior lives, all of which I claim but only one of which appears here. Number 6 is a series of twenty-four situations that reflect the most sensitive topic in the book. Half "posters" I designed and half "field notes" I took, there's an entire multitude behind their construction. Together, they would be better appreciated if displayed on an appropriately sized wall. Number 7 started out as Number 1 and went through a mass metamorphosis. The result is a dialogue between two thinkers with much in common, upstairs and down, since both used the imaginative power of their intellectual superstructures to challenge the distinct fragility of their material bases.

Even then, amid these seven distinct Interpretations, there were still other stories and less elaborated notes on Peru's *rock subterráneo* ("underground rock") movement of the 1980s and early 1990s. These fragments simply appear here and there to add countertextual testimony. Nonconformity with the singularly distant, arrogantly all-knowing, and overly calculated voice of the scholar was as much the product of idiosyncrasy as it was intention. I am of course dependent on this very same institution — the professor's paycheck and assorted privileges. But I often feel "far removed from the academic techniques of the university," as Mariátegui (1971, xxxiv) once put it.

Dissonance, some chaos, rough juxtapositions, a bit of repetition of the same chord, some melodramatic irruptions: Aren't these things one might want in a book about punk rock? Inevitably, punk suffers plenty from its own internal contradictions. It has an authenticity complex. It has a highly contradictory politics of race, class, space, and gender even while pointing toward a horizon of anarchic all-inclusiveness and primal aesthetic freedom: a living beyond the limits while still being forced to live within them. Punk also has its metadiscourse about dying and being reborn, an implicit theory of history and revolution as dialogic becoming rather than the rapture of

rupture. But you'll hopefully find only a mandated minimum of academic correctness and no fucking promises of truth or reconciliation.

I did want to delocate punk and then relocate it somewhere else. I aimed to remove it from its overly familiar place in the history of Anglo popular music forms and the Euro-American avant-garde. I thought it was high time we get past other context-specific dilemmas — a decaying New York, a nihilist London, a superficial LA — so often assumed to explain why punk held global resonance in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Underground rock, the phrase initially used to describe Lima's punk-inspired music and art scene, emerged in the 1980s just as Peru converted into a battlefield, a war of wills to state power and a bloody fight between Marxist militants (principally the Maoist-inspired Shining Path, and to a lesser degree the Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru, MRTA) and a faux democratic apparatus quick to reveal its authoritarian dark side.

The unique roles — sometimes militant, other times oppositional or even apathetic, often times ambiguous and anarchist — played by those in Lima's underground music and art scene represent a largely invisible chapter in Peru's war. I try to tell it here in these seven different ways to demonstrate a couple of basic points. First, punk's political possibilities, like its creative drive to irrupt, are greater than many have thought. The emergence of an urban subculture in the context of revolutionary proposals and radical political instability make this clear. Second, Peru's war is not nearly as two-dimensional as most postconflict narratives construct it — Marxist subversives versus the state and a civilian population "caught in between." Factoring punk anarchists into the mix results in telling the war otherwise and incites the interpretative imagination with the possibility of a political praxis that defines the revolutionary differently — and history with it.

"This is all that I feel honestly bound to tell the reader before he begins my book" (Mariátegui 1971, xxxiv). Yeah, that about covers it.

Lima

2014

shane mariátegreene

interpretation #1

on the risks of underground rock production

Where in the world does punk come from? Typical answers point to particular moments in US and British rock history: the proto period of sixties US garage rock followed by punk “proper” when the term became linked to New York’s midseventies underground club scene and was then exported to London where it exploded into public scandal thanks to the Sex Pistols’ infamous “filth and fury” (McNeil and McCain 2006; Savage 2002). More than a collection of musical sounds, punk is a conglomeration of bands and shows, fanzines and fliers, social relations and political statements held together loosely by desires to subvert mainstream cultural production with a gritty aesthetic and a do-it-yourself ethic. Like any form of resistance it is difficult both to sustain and to predict its future lives.

Ultimately, this speaks less to the reports that “punk is dead” (so said Crass in 1978 shortly after its official birth in 1977) or rejoinders that “punk’s not dead” (so screamed The Exploited in 1980 two years after its death) than to a clarification. In significant part what punk means is relative to time and context. In this essay, I ask: What in the world is the importance of punk as it emerged in Lima, Peru in the 1980s? It is the radical difference in context that permits us to entertain other theoretical possibilities about punk’s place in the world. Let’s get this straight. I’m not talking about what punk *is* in essence. Rather, I have an interest in thinking about what punk *intends* to be, punk as a peculiar way of *directing one’s attention*. Similarly, the issue is less about defining who punks essentially are — and punks really do hate it when you tell them who they are. It’s really more about who I think punks aim to be, even if inevitably intentions never perfectly match outcomes.

Dick Hebdige’s (1979) now classic semiotic analysis of punk as a subversive “style” appeared shortly after the UK punk explosion of the late seventies, influenced by the poststructuralist turn and cultural studies debates about youth subcultures as ritualized expressions of systemic discontent, constituting symbolic transgression but not a potential for “real” revolutionary change (Hall and Jefferson 2006; cf. Interpretation #2). Contemporary

perspectives suggest different readings of punk, from those fueled by gender critique and the transnational approach to the Americas to those searching for a theory of the global city (Nyong'o 2005, 2008; Muñoz 2013; Habell-Pallan 2004; LeBlanc 1999; Nikpour 2012; Nguyen, 2012; Brown 2011). Collectively, they theorize punk as constituted by more diverse voices and multiple global contexts than what the dominant "whitestraightboy punk" (Nikpour's [2012] shorthand) narrative often suggests.

What happens when we encounter punk in one of the rock universe's global elsewhere? Certainly Lima is such a place despite a history of rock that stretches back to the sixties. The condition of geomusical marginality is one of which Peruvian punks are deeply aware; they rock out in a world region most often associated with Latin rhythms, Afro-Peruvian beats, and Andean folklore. I deal then in rock from a peripheral vantage point but one that also reveals something crucial about punk's global intentions. There is the curious case of Los Saicos, a midsixties garage rock band from Lima that only began making headlines in the 2000s for having anticipated punk's primitive sound and boundary-pushing lyrics. A band named Anarkia began playing punk cover songs in Lima clubs in the late seventies—singing the Ramones, Sex Pistols, and Dead Boys tunes in their "bad" English. Yet Peru's punk-inspired music did not come into its own until the mideighties, when it took on the much more particular identity of *rock subterráneo* ("underground rock"). In fact, it is in this translated idea of "underground rock" that we can identify something about the global importance of rock's subterranean circuits and punk intentionality writ large—the things punk wants to do everywhere even when punks try, succeed, and fail to do them in very particular ways from within specific historical contexts.

On the Risk of Underproduction and Undercutting

The act of naming Lima's punk movement "underground rock" was largely the result of a 1984 flier announcing a show called "Rock Subterráneo Ataca Lima" (Underground Rock Attacks Lima) in which several foundational punk bands played: Leusemia, Narcosis, Guerrilla Urbana, and Autopsia (see figure 1.1). This movement from "underground," an English term with connotations of subversive intent since at least the era of the Underground Railroad, to *subterráneo*, a Spanish term typically used literally rather than with the connotations of terms such as *subversivo* ("subversive"),



FIGURE 1.1 “Rock Subterráneo Ataca Lima” show flier, 1984.
Courtesy of Leopoldo la Rosa.

is more than simply direct translation. Most notably, the term “subterráneo” gave rise to a very peculiar urban identity in eighties Lima known as the *subte* (“under”), a distinctly Peruvian way of talking about punk rockers. A subcultural moniker still used thirty years later, “subte” is rather unique compared to the more direct appropriations of the term “punk” as auto-affirmation in most other global contexts. Fusing Fernando Ortiz (1995) with Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (2006), we might see this as an act of transubculturation — a gesture that transgresses global cultural boundaries (e.g., Spanish vs. Anglo, Latin vs. Euro-American) while simultaneously subverting the hegemony of global cultural forms that circulate across borders in mainstream circuits (e.g., rock culture as mass commerce across geopolitical borders). This explains why I use this Lima phrase “rock subterráneo” as interchangeable with “punk rock.” The phrase presumes an exchange that takes place across and below the surface of the borders of language, nation, culture, and global commerce.

The subte irrupts into the global dialogue about punk rock using a Peruvian *voz* (“voice”) that struggles to be heard since it is relegated to multiple margins: punk’s relative obscurity within popular culture generally, and rock subterráneo’s distinct invisibility within the global circuits of a rock culture completely dominated by Anglo expressions from the United States and England. Yet the subte’s voice demands to be heard, and in doing so it suggests something distinct about punk’s simultaneously universal intentions and contextual conditions.

We might recall that punk is part of a longer genealogy of subversive aesthetics and critical political desires. In the wake of Dadaism and Situationism (G. Marcus 1989), or as the preferred soundtrack for today’s global direct-action movements (Graeber 2009), punk positions itself as critique of the mass culture generated by global capital. To capture at least a partial view of this quest to find and defend a rock underground, we can identify at least two basic intentions that result from punk’s fusion of material, political, and aesthetic strategies. I think of these as punk’s tendency to creatively under-produce while discursively undercutting public values.

I offer these initial thoughts on punk intentions, inspired by the “under” in “underground” and the “subte” in “subterráneo,” as relative theoretical guidelines rather than absolute principles. The point is precisely *not* to suggest there is a means to measure punk’s underground status by a fixed material, stable aesthetic, or historically objective standard. Rather, the degree of *how punk* a particular aesthetic commodity, form of expression, or type of

action might be is subject to divergent interpretations at different moments. That relativity derives from the fact that the material dimensions and interpretative registers of aesthetic production exist across different contexts, forming multiple dialogues in which differently positioned voices offer alternative interpretations according to the moment.

Following this more dialogical metaphor we might revisit Simon Frith's history of rock-n-roll. If, as he suggests, punk asks of rock one critical question, "What is the *risk* of this music?" (1981, 84), I suggest the question was never as rhetorical, nor as limited to rock-n-roll, as he posed it. Instead, this reveals something about punk's intentions in searching for an answer even as the conditions of risk necessarily change — both the riskiness that punk intends to represent to the world and the metarisk of no longer appearing very risky that punk frequently faces. One of punk's core theoretical dilemmas then is deeply dialogical in nature: an ongoing conversation about how something that risks being "under" in one moment risks surfacing into the "over" in another or, for that matter, going back under in yet another.

At one level, punk proposes a means of underproduction, a concerted attempt to intervene crudely but creatively into the problem of overproduction. I mean this in José Carlos Mariátegui's "heroically creative" Marxist sense rather than any dogmatically technical one.¹ Marx famously summarized capitalism as "a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over man, instead of the opposite" (Marx 1977, 175). In essence, he means that the concentration of capital and the systemic barriers to making processes of production socially visible result in a fetishized view of productivity as a whole. They serve to suppress a more conscious realization, and more equitable organization, of the potential for human creativity that production entails. It is precisely this potential for creativity that is held captive in a system organized around a monopolization of the means of production. The entire system is ideologically governed by highly economic logics that value "being productive" over "being creative" at virtually every level. When "successful" forms of creativity do emerge, they are quickly subsumed into the process of mass production; this assures the route toward homogenous commodification and that any material benefits accrue to the owners of private property that command "productive" labor.

We might build further on this understanding of underproduction by calling attention to the specifically aesthetic connotations in the opposite terminology. Beyond the strict political-economic frame, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, another familiar definition of "overproduce" is to "record

or produce (a song or film) in such an elaborate way that the spontaneity or artistry of the original material is lost.”² We immediately think of excessive editing, too many technical interventions, or a surplus of special effects employed in the industrial spaces of cultural commodity production (studios, editing rooms, etc.). At one level, aesthetic overproduction is the perceived result of various kinds of technical mastery among aesthetic “experts” (producers, managers, editors, engineers, etc.). It is driven by the particular “class” of aesthetic professionals who claim the specialized skills — and control access to the material means — to intervene in aesthetic production in order to generate the standards by which artistic creativity, or simply mass aesthetic appeal, are judged and controlled by the various cultural industries. At stake in this is an underlying opposition between secondary (tertiary, etc.) elaborations of the creative act and the idea (or at least ideal) of creativity in more mundane, spontaneous, and cruder expressions.³

Amid industrial drives to professionalize art, standardize creativity, define aesthetic appeal, and monopolize the channels through which cultural expression becomes massified and marketable, the grounds for creative resistance include punk’s reclaiming of creativity in more “primary” forms — meaning less materially alienated, more socially direct, and aesthetically scaled down. In a system where “production has the mastery over man” the everyday human creator is faced with this dilemma: the more one feels seduced by how cultural commodities are being creatively produced, amid tendencies to aesthetically overproduce and reinforce particular industrial standards of cultural consumption, the more alienated one feels from one’s own capacity to spontaneously engage in a creative process. The Situationists called this the problem of a society organized around commodities as spectacles, provoking reactions of consumptive awe rather than encouraging the impulse for active and spontaneous creative engagement.

Punk intends to intervene in this arena of aesthetic overproduction by defetishizing the cultural industry norms and processes that surround creative production via whatever DIY strategies are available to it: bands using cheap instruments, punks spreading subculture via fanzines, musicians distributing recordings through independent labels, or punks arranging shows through informal social networks. Punk operates on the premise that aesthetic professionalism and monopolization in the creative industries ultimately destroy, or at least inhibit, the creative acts of the “ordinary” creator. One of punk’s recurring worldly desires then is to envision one’s creative “limitations” — even the explicit limits of one’s material means to produce something — as

the very grounds on which to express one's liberating creative potential. In sum: it is through the intent to celebrate aesthetic crudeness, and materially resist the cooptation of autonomous forms of creativity, that punk is a means of underproduction.

If the punk means of underproduction are relative rather than absolute, surely the meanings of punk — its semiotic strategies and discursive intentions — are as well. The point is not to look for a special punk vocabulary, series of master symbols, secret list of bands, or definitive style as the way to theorize punk intentionality. I say this despite, or precisely to spite, that very real tendency within subcultures to reify authenticating discourses: the endless petty debates about real punks versus posers, true revolutionaries versus weekend rebels.

Instead, I see punk as starting with a particular kind of discursive intention — this desire to use its means of underproduction to construct an irruptive voice that undercuts public discourse. Here, I would cite certain street definitions. For example, under the heading for the slang phrase “punk as fuck” — clearly one intended to connote a maximal degree of punkness — urbandictionary.com users rank these as the top two definitions: “not giving a fuck,” followed closely by “not giving a fuck if you are punk or not.”⁴ In other words, to be maximally punk one starts by disregarding the accepted definitions of others, *including* at the metapunkish level the very definitions of what punk is or can be. Punk's primary discursive intention — what one *means* to say when one engages in a punk *means* of underproduction — is to disregard. To negate regard. To refuse to respect. To repudiate rather than hold in esteem. So punks start with acts of creative refusal and then try to figure things out from there.

Rather than reaffirm this negation as punk's oft-noted nihilism, we might see it more precisely as a desire to disregard specifically what others consent to as hegemonically neutral public values. To reiterate, this necessarily includes what is publically assumed about what is or is not punk, since punks also, quite inevitably, construct their own internal normative publics (hence the recurring problem of purists and posers). Clearly, I am thinking of Michael Warner's Bakhtinian-inflected discussion of publics and counter-publics, emergent spaces of circulating discourse based on voluntary associations rather than the seemingly more fixed social categories of race, class, gender, and so on. Warner identifies the relation as being defined by constant tension rather than smooth conversation. “The discourse that constitutes it [i.e., a counterpublic] is not merely a different or alternative idiom,