

# ‘Nor did I socialise with their people’: Patti Smith, rock heroics and the poetics of sociability

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## Abstract

*From her time as a young performance poet in New York in the late 1960s to her current position as punk rock’s éminence grise, Patti Smith has foregrounded the image of the poet as privileged seer. This essay seeks to read Smith’s romantic impulses within the context of her activity in the Poetry Project at St Mark’s Church, the pre-eminent public face of the Lower East Side poetry scene of the 1960s and 1970s. Ultimately, this essay will argue how Smith’s complex negotiations between her understanding of the Poet as Visionary and the adamantly playful, diffuse and collaborative aesthetic characterising downtown New York’s poetic community fed into the development of Smith’s performative stance as proto-punk rock icon.*

## Introduction

Some may wonder what a paper focusing on Patti Smith’s early career as a poet is doing in a journal devoted to close study of popular music. My explanation may not satisfy everyone, but nevertheless I propose, however modestly, to use this occasion to open up the conversation between poetry and poetics on the one hand and popular music on the other, rather than doom this particular essay to the ghetto of literary studies. I say this particularly because the boundaries demarcating ‘poetry’ from ‘music’ were treated consistently by the countercultural avant-gardes of the 1960s and early 1970s as inherently – and productively – porous.<sup>1</sup>

To insist on a relationship between poetry and rock music is, of course, to state the obvious in some ways. One need only mention names like Bob Dylan or Leonard Cohen to understand how rock stars and (particularly) music critics in the 1960s used the authority invested in the purportedly high art form of the poetic lyric to imbue representative rock’n’roll lyrics with a status that might otherwise be unavailable were they read strictly within the context of popular music. Christopher Ricks’ decades-long effort to place Bob Dylan’s lyric output alongside the poetry of Milton, Marvell, T.S. Eliot and others is the proverbial case in point (see Ricks’s *Dylan’s Visions of Sin*, for example, in which Ricks attempts to redeem the fairly banal lyrics to Dylan’s ‘Lay Lady Lay’ by reading the song alongside John Donne’s poem ‘To His Mistress Going to Bed’). Again, these kinds of efforts to redistribute cultural capital in relationship to musicians like Dylan are perhaps not that

surprising, considering many artists' positioning of themselves as near-shamanic figures via references to Rimbaud, Verlaine, Artaud and others. What is surprising is how the discourse circulating around New York punk – developed in large part as a reaction *against* the increasing pomposity attendant to the late 1960s rock spectacle and the nascence of 'art rock' typified by the growing popularity of bands including Pink Floyd and Emerson, Lake & Palmer – relied similarly on aligning pop music with poetry in an effort to inscribe value into what might otherwise be dismissed as vulgar.

In terms of early New York punk, we find a number of critics insisting that punk was significant not just because of its reinvigoration of a demotic garage-band aesthetic and not just as a reaction against the growing popularity of disco and stadium rock, but because New York punk negotiated interestingly between the 'low' genre of popular music and the 'high' genre of poetry. Even The Ramones were not immune from being graced with the authority of poetry. After describing a Ramones live set at CBGBs (a club on the Bowery in New York's Lower East Side that is touted as the birthplace of American punk), critic Stephen Anderson quoted an audience member (whom he presumed was a New York University political science undergraduate) complaining about the Ramones' 'simple chords, the vocals, the drums, saying that anybody could play that and ending with the usual "it's just a lot of noise"'. Anderson's effort to counter this apparent philistinism is telling, given what will be my subsequent focus on Smith's incorporation of poetry-as-discourse into her career as a rock musician: 'My second impulse (the first is to kick him and call him an asshole) is to run to an English literature anthology and quote lines from [T.S.] Eliot that might be pertinent to the Ramones. Or maybe the cinematic philosophy of Godard. Or Artaud's theater of cruelty' (Anderson 1976, p. 16).

Not all music critics rushed to their bookshelves to justify punk through poetry, of course, and some musicians bridled at the association when it was suggested to them. Responding to a young Jim Jarmusch asking him, 'Is the idea of rock'n'roll being art repulsive to you?', Dave Thomas, then better known as Crocus Behemoth, lead singer of the seminal Cleveland-based proto-punk band Pere Ubu, responded, 'Poetry is repulsive to me. Rock'n'roll is terrific. Art and rock don't mix' (Jarmusch 1977, p. 36). And yet, how seriously are we to take Thomas's repudiation of poetry and art more generally speaking? After all, Thomas named his band *Pere Ubu* after Alfred Jarry's 1897 play, hailed widely as a major precursor to Dada and the Theatre of the Absurd. This type of ambivalence – sometimes justifying the new music by aligning it with the historical avant-garde, at other times rejecting such affiliation in favour of asserting a purist rock'n'roll integrity – characterises much of the conversation around early punk in the 1970s. Indeed, in his attempt to define a new movement in music that seemed equal parts abjection and erudition, punk cheerleader and renowned music journalist Lester Bangs made an effort to liberate punk icon Richard Hell from anything approaching a debt to poetry even as he couldn't help but point out – *a la* Ricks's aligning Bob Dylan with John Donne – how Hell's lyrics in his song 'Down at the Rock & Roll Club' echoed Baudelaire's decadent narcissism. '[...] Hell has found solace in late 19th century French Symbolist poets, in fact he fancies them his muses or mentors. But, though I fantasise on them, too, at length, I must say no, because Lautréamont or even Baudelaire would be incapable of following up "Rip off my shirt/Watch the mirror it flirt" (Baudelairean, admittedly) with "Scotch and soda!"' (Bangs 2005, p. 9).

As far as early New York punk was concerned, then, the 1960s were not quite over, at least in terms of the ways musicians were framed by critics as important in part because of their relationship to high poetic culture. But what *part* of the 1960s are we talking about here? Many of the key predecessor figures of the 1960s for New York punks – Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground, Jim Morrison of the Doors, Ed Sanders of The Fugs immediately come to mind – set the stage for punk's yoking of poetry to rock music. These musicians summoned the bad boys of poetry (respectively Delmore Schwartz, Arthur Rimbaud and, in Sanders' case, poets ranging from Blake to Allen Ginsberg) in order to justify their then-shocking tendencies to write lyrics and make sounds that refuted the laws of logic, work that would be more appropriate in Bedlam than it would be in Bethel, New York.<sup>2</sup> These musicians' propensity for using howls, shouts, whines and roars – noise, really, albeit an ecstatic and at times terrifying noise – made previously illogical songs like Sam the Sham and the Pharaoh's 'Wooly Bully' or Little Richard's Dadaist ejaculation 'A whop bop a loo bop a whop bam boom' seem positively tame by comparison. This is especially so when we consider the romantic negativity characterising these performers' works during the late 1960s. A 1967 *Time Magazine* feature on Jim Morrison, for example, pointed to the destructive impulse behind some of the more ambitious music. Morrison was quoted opining, 'I'm interested in anything about revolt, disorder, chaos, especially activity that has no meaning. It seems to me to be the road to freedom' (*Time Magazine* 1967). Wallace Fowlie rightly argues that Morrison is drawing here on the 'words of Rimbaud, Artaud (*Theater of Cruelty*), and possibly Lautréamont' (Fowlie 1993, p. 78). No peace, love or flowers here. Extending a complex discourse developed in the 1960s that found brutal rock sounds complicated by significations of poetry, a kind of interpretive field around purportedly outlaw poets was developed, which ultimately came to inform early New York punk of the 1970s. This particular strain of 1960s popular music culture – simultaneously anti-ideological, romantic, poetic, nihilistic, vatic – is what Patti Smith drew on to a great extent in her subsequent role as musician.

As I show, from her time as a young performance poet in New York in the late 1960s to her current position as punk rock's *éminence grise*, Patti Smith foregrounded the image of the poet as privileged if dissident seer, and used this stance to inform her own projection and reception as rock'n'roll star. This, I will argue, was predicated on Smith's initial attraction to, subsequent argument with, and ultimate rejection of an adamantly grass-roots poetry culture based in downtown New York, committed to a poetics of sociability – a term I will illustrate on subsequent pages. By reading Smith's investment in poetry within the context of Smith's activity in the Poetry Project at St Mark's Church, the pre-eminent public face of the Lower East Side poetry scene of the 1960s and 1970s, we can begin to see how Smith's complex negotiations between poetry and music fed into the development of her own brand of proto-punk rock.<sup>3</sup>

## Making a mark at St Mark's

Smith moved to New York City in the late 1960s not to be a musician but to be a poet. Quick to figure out where the action was, Smith soon began frequenting the vibrant literary scene based at the Poetry Project at St Mark's Church in New York's East Village. She developed friendships with poets including Anne Waldman (Director

of the Poetry Project from 1966 to 1976), filmmaker, writer and Andy Warhol collaborator Gerard Malanga, and Beat figures committed to the Project including Allen Ginsberg (author of the ground-breaking long poem *Howl*) and Gregory Corso (an important Beat-affiliated poet in his own right and regular figure within the downtown scene throughout the 1960s and 1970s). Smith's first public poetry performance was on 10 February 1971, when she opened for Gerard Malanga at St Mark's. And yet, in recollecting this early performance, Smith discloses what seem to be some pretty ambivalent feelings about being absorbed into the coterie:

[...] Robert [Mapplethorpe] was determined to get me a reading. He spoke on my behalf to Gerard Malanga, who was scheduled to read at St Mark's Church in February. Gerard generously agreed to let me open for him.

The Poetry Project, shepherded by Anne Waldman, was a desirable forum for even the most accomplished poets. Everyone from Robert Creeley to Allen Ginsberg to Ted Berrigan had read there.<sup>4</sup> If I was ever going to perform my poems, this was the place to do it. My goal was not simply to do well, or hold my own. It was to make a mark at St Mark's. I did it for Poetry. I did it for Rimbaud, and I did it for Gregory. I wanted to infuse the written word with the immediacy and frontal attack of rock and roll (Smith 2010, p. 180).

While Smith acknowledges here that the Poetry Project was *the* place for exciting poetry during this period, I want to pause on that word *even*. 'Even' as it is written here connotes improbability, a kind of latent 'can you believe it!' that subtly but firmly positions anything resembling a group effort (as embodied in words like 'Project' and 'forum') as secondary to individual accomplishment. That Smith then goes on to assert her desire to 'make a mark at St Mark's' emphasises her desire to in effect transcend absorption into community by metaphorically scoring or wounding the very edifice that houses the 'Project' – to make one's mark on a place, after all, is to alter it, not fit into it. Smith is reading at the Poetry Project not to further ingratiate herself into a material and highly active literary grouping that was pushing conceptual and collaborative writing to its limits through publications including Vito Acconci's and Bernadette Mayer's *0 to 9* or Larry Fagin's *Adventures in Poetry*. Rather, Smith is in effect getting ready to stage a reactionary, romantically inflected intervention in a dominant postmodern institution whose members would in all probability question anyone using the word poetry with a capital 'P'. Smith's positioning, after all, was in stark contrast to writers running the show at the Poetry Project. The impulse toward community there, far from being predicated on the kind of heroicising gestures favoured by Smith, were instead based on far more casual effects. We might look to the lines 'Don't be horrible sourpuss/Moon! Have a drink! / Have an entire issue!', included in Ted Berrigan and Ron Padgett's collaboratively produced poem 'Waterloo Sunset', as a kind of metaphor for the overall ambience of Project-related poetry – lines like these point to the way in which the agency for the creation of meaning and pleasure in the text is offered metaphorically to the potentially cranky and overly serious Moon/reader, as opposed to being linked materially to a site of privileged authorship. Poetry Project-affiliated writers deflated seriousness in an effort to enact an especially diffuse and amenable mood.<sup>5</sup>

Smith, on the other hand, worked aggressively to reinstate uniqueness to the figure of the poet. We see this through her isolation of two male literary figures – Rimbaud, Gregory Corso – whom she will 'do' her reading for. Poets who are read consistently as agitating if not outright repudiating affiliation with a collective, Rimbaud and Corso are famous as much (if not more so) for their outlaw auras as

they are for their poetry. Rimbaud's dramatic departure from the poetic sphere for a life of trading and gun-running in the Horn of Africa has become the stuff of legend. Corso's reputation as the bad boy of the Beat Generation, replete with endless retellings of his heckling poets at the Poetry Project, his womanising, his thieving and drug use, are similarly well known and often overshadow the merits of much of his poetry.<sup>6</sup> All this is by way of saying that Smith – even within the context of nostalgic retrospection as we find it in *Just Kids*, her memoir detailing her friendship with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe – emphasises her affiliation not with the group but with solitary outlaws. This position-taking would ultimately serve her well in the mid-1970s as Smith retooled her work for an audience accustomed to the heroic stance typical of the late 1960s rock star as opposed to the community- and collaboration-oriented figure embodied by writers like Ted Berrigan, Bernadette Mayer or Anne Waldman.

I emphasise this particularly because I am struck by the way in which Smith here has domesticated Waldman by portraying her as a shepherd. Waldman is rarely mentioned in *Just Kids* as an interesting and important poet in her own right. Rather, she is the tender of the flock. While 'shepherd' is not necessarily gendered male or female here, we can at the very least think about her status as shepherd in the context of *genre* – specifically, the pastoral. Traditional hierarchies of genre place the pastoral at the bottom of the three-rung ladder made up of, respectively, pastoral, georgic and epic (Weller 1999, p. 143). Smith, aligning herself with male figures for whom poetry was always uttered with a capital 'P', is very much drawing the line here between a pastoralised poetics of sociability typical of the Poetry Project scene and her own favoured world populated by literary outlaw deities. Corso, Rimbaud and related figures are practically epic demigods for Smith, whose heroic individualism she contrasts, in an implicitly disparaging way, with the cheerful flocks assembled at St Mark's.

Smith used the occasion of her debut reading to distance herself from ideations of community, as she admits in *Just Kids*. After describing the make-up of the audience – the crème de la crème of New York's downtown scene including Andy Warhol, Lou Reed, Joe Brainard and Bernadette Mayer – Smith explains how she

dedicated the evening to criminals from Cain to Genet. I chose poems like 'Oath', which began, 'Christ died for somebody's sins / But not mine' [...] We finished with 'Ballad of a Bad Boy' accompanied by Lenny's strong rhythmic chords and electric feedback. It was the first time an electric guitar had been played in St Mark's Church, provoking cheers and jeers. As this was hallowed ground for poetry, some objected, but Gregory was jubilant [...] The reception had its thundering moments [...] But afterward I was so filled with adrenaline that I behaved like a young cock. I failed to thank Robert and Gerard. Nor did I socialise with their people. I just high-tailed it out with Sam [Shepard] and we had a couple of tequilas and lobster. (Smith 2010, p. 182)

Smith's regret, expressed through the autobiographical prism of nostalgia, nevertheless fails to conceal remnants of the triumphalist tone she employed for her poetic coming-out party. Phrases like 'It was the first time' emphasise Smith's privileged difference in comparison to the staid, presumably acoustic poets. (I for one read Smith's phrase 'It was the first time an electric guitar had been played' as pointing back to Bob Dylan's controversial use of an electric guitar at the Newport Folk Festival in July 1965 and in the Manchester Free Trade Hall in May 1966). The reader senses Smith's glee in challenging heretically the 'hallowed' ground of both the literal

church (St Mark's) and the secular church of avant-garde poetry (The Poetry Project at St Mark's). This kind of youthful arrogance very much set the pattern for Smith's setting herself apart from the poetry pack. Rejecting collaborative community in favour of reaching towards stardom, Smith acted like a cock in an effort to keep from being herded into the Poetry Project by shepherdesses like Waldman.

In fact, a recording of the reading confirms that Smith approached the evening with real nervous aggression. After a polite introduction by Anne Waldman, Smith hit the stage with 'OK, first I want to say if um, anytime like you can't hear me, like tell me, cuz like um I don't want to beat off up here by myself, that's really dumb, just tell me. OK, um, today is like Bertolt Brecht's birthday, and um, February 10, and in tribute to Bertolt Brecht first thing I want to do is like um just a little version, *my* version of like one of his great masterpieces ... oh fuck, don't even got it! ... great masterpieces *Mack The Knife*.' Lenny Kaye then began a syncopated rhythm on his guitar as Smith started barking out a ham-fisted version of Brecht's *Mack*, complete with faux-German accent and off-key shouts of 'around the *corner*, here comes *Maggie*'. This kind of patter was consistent throughout Smith's set. Following 'Mack the Knife', Smith went on with her 'Dedication' described above. This part found a young snarling Smith insisting on aligning herself with a motley pantheon of outlaws:

This reading is dedicated to *crime*, all that is criminal. [...] To the rhythms of prison! The great escapes from Devil's Island. The petty thief. The whores of Mexico. To Anne Powell the only woman Genet could love. [...] The pool hall hustler, the pirate saint the crimes of passion the dance of the boxing ring. The masters of Russian roulette ... Johnny Ace, Jackson Pollock, James Dean, Mayakovski, the 38 of the Cowboy, Gene Krupa, Mary Magdalene, the only woman who could make our savior weep. And to Christ himself, Christ! The great escape artist! Greater than Houdini. And the finest faggot in history having 12 men to lick his feet. The radio, the movie camera, Blaise Cendrars, the electric guitar, and Sam Shepard. (Smith 1971)

Most poets at the Poetry Project begin their sets by thanking the organisers. Not so Smith. Her brusque entry suggests she was already beginning to carve out a performance aesthetic for herself as a rocking iconoclast aligned generally with romanticised non-conformists.

Despite her behaviour, or perhaps *because* of it, Smith soon established herself as a significant figure in the downtown scene affiliated with the often interrelated communities attached to the Poetry Project and the Warhol-dominated Max's Kansas City. All that said, Smith did not publish in the journals affiliated with St Mark's (for example, *The World* and *Angel Hair*). Instead, her poems and music reviews were published in nationally distributed magazines including *Creem* and *Rolling Stone*. By 1973, Smith was increasingly well known downtown – thanks to her agent Jane Friedman, she was even hired as the opening act for the New York Dolls shows at the Mercer Arts Center. 'Performing poetry night after night to an unreceptive and unruly crowd who were primed to see the New York Dolls proved a challenging education [...] I read my poems, fielded insults, and sometimes sang songs accompanied by bits of music on my cassette player' (Smith 2010, p. 218).

Smith recognised that community could in fact be limiting to an artist determined to situate herself within a privileged lineage of literary and musical heroes. By January 1973, Smith had grown out of the very social milieu that played such a

large role in establishing her public persona. During a New Year's Day event at the Poetry Project, Smith recalled,

Later that evening I sat on the floor of St Mark's for the annual marathon reading. It benefited the church and went on from early afternoon to well into the night, with everyone contributing to the perpetuation of the Poetry Project. I sat through much of it sizing up the poets. I wanted to be a poet but I knew I would never fit into their incestuous community. The last thing I wanted was to negotiate the social politics of another scene. (Smith 2010, p. 214)

By 1975, the year she released her now-legendary album *Horses*, Smith had managed to be both part of the Poetry Project while maintaining her distance from it. At another New Year's Day reading, 'Patti Smith's transformation from rockin' poet to poetry-infused rock performer' was complete. 'Walking up to the podium, she passed Victor Bockris, her publisher at Telegraph Books. "You owe me money, motherfucker!" Smith bawled, spitting on the ground before him. At the close of her set, with Lenny Kaye's incendiary guitar noise resounding around the room, she stepped off the stage, walked through the audience and right out through the door. Goodbye, genteel poetry gatherings; hello, rock-star postures' (Paytress 2006, p. 122). This moment was, in hindsight, a long time coming. Where did Smith's aggressive iconoclasm come from, why did she continue to participate in poetry events at the Church (as she does to this day) in spite of her hostile posture, and what, in the end, can this teach us about the links and tensions between the purportedly 'high' and 'low' art forms of poetry and rock'n'roll?

### 'Different then most of you guys'

Even during the early period of Smith's tenure in New York during the late 1960s, Smith was grappling with the fact that the aesthetic at St Mark's conflicted with her own sense of what was important in poetry. An undated letter from Smith to Waldman (here excerpted) written when Smith had recently arrived in New York shows Smith consciously setting herself apart from the surface cool she associates with Frank O'Hara and the St Mark's poets who followed in his wake:

Dear Anne,

I'm sending you the book you wanted, I'll also read it myself. Right now I'm reading Flaubert. not Madame Bovary but his Tales. He's really neat cause he really knows sound. O shit maybe the guy who Translated him does.

Anyway it's great to find music in unsuspected places. listen to this part, it's like a Dylan song (John Wesley Hardin type) (I'm quoting from memory but I'm sure it's pretty close) He came to her. He said he was sorry how he behaved. She wanted to run off but straightway he began talking of the crops. Shit I think he's great.

I'm Telling you this to sort of introduce you to my feeling of poetry. I believe it's quite different then most of you guys. I love Frank O'Hara but I also love Vachel Linsey (who is shoddily Treated in Frank's personalism essay). It may be arbitrary To love Them both but it's just that I take my music personally.

I pretty well hate most of the stuff you guys do cause it seems you not only violate sound but disregard it completely. I also love you guys cause you keep poetry alive. I think it's real neat what you're doing, I just got different theories. I was raised on Little Anthony + The Imperials and Dylan Thomas + what I do is sort of an intentional combinations.

Right now The stuff THE BAND does, Dylan + Flaubert is my most loved stuff. I must say I read you guys avidly. I'll Tell you I like That one you writ called Late Mescaline Sonnet. Especially The last couple of lines.

Maybe it's kinda presumptuous of me to say this stuff but I don't give a shit. I'm Taking The Time off to write you cause I Think you're a real neat girl. Oh I like the red haired guys' poems too.

This letter is, in essence, a performance where Smith juggles a variety of literary and social modes. She positions herself as amenable to the Poetry Project, the dominant alternative poetry institution of the time. Simultaneously, she distinguishes herself from it through self-consciously unfashionable references to writers frozen out of respectable avant-garde circles. To begin with, Smith's reference to early 20th-century poet Vachel Lindsay refers knowingly to O'Hara's essay 'Personism', in which O'Hara asserted cheekily, 'Now, come on. I don't believe in god, so I don't have to make elaborately sounded structures. I hate Vachel Lindsay, always have; I don't even like rhythm, assonance, all that stuff' (O'Hara 1995, p. 498). Now, while Smith is perhaps taking O'Hara's dislike of Lindsay a bit too seriously, nevertheless her decision to place her chips on Lindsay is, in hindsight, a fascinating premonition of Smith's eventual transformation from a rock-obsessed poet to a poetry-referencing rock star. Lindsay was perhaps best known for what he called his 'singing poetry' and was invested in adapting the history and iconography of the medieval troubadour to his own period. (Throughout his career Lindsay was known as the 'Prairie Troubadour'.) For the troubadour, poetry was designed to be literally sung rather than inscribed for the discreet pleasure of the solitary reader. Lindsay wanted essentially to reinvigorate that intimate link between a populist audience and performer, travelling by foot throughout the USA declaiming his verse (Hatfield 1933).

One might argue that Smith's isolating Lindsay as distinct from what 'you guys' (Waldman and, one might assume, related figures including Lewis Warsh and Bernadette Mayer) were doing in the 1960s was in fact unfair given the fact that the Poetry Project was itself a site for the public performance of poetry. The Project, featuring at least three public readings per week, certainly maintained a space for poetry as a primarily performative act. Yet we need to make a distinction in terms of the *audience* associated with a troubadour like Lindsay *vs.* the people who participated in the Poetry Project scene. As has been described previously, characteristic practices of the collective second-generation poetry scene that Waldman 'shepherded' included commitments to: the collaboratively produced poem (of which there are dozens in *Angel Hair* magazines and books and related publications, such as the Poetry Project's still extant 'house magazine', *The World*); the collaborative book (which threatens privileged authorship and the fetishisation of the book as organically connected to a single person in favour of a more collective vision); the intersocial text (poems drenched with the proper names of those writers in the 'scene' and/or serving as initiative rites welcoming new poets into the community); and the foregrounding of the public poetry reading as the primary mode of literary reception.<sup>8</sup> Such a communal approach to the production and distribution of texts positioned writers and readers/audience members affiliated with St Mark's as a collective whose members worked in conscious interrelation to each other. As poet Lewis Warsh clarifies in his introduction to *The Angel Hair Anthology*, *Angel Hair* magazine and St Mark's more generally aimed to in part create 'a community based on a feeling of connectedness that transcended small aesthetic differences' (Warsh 2001, p. xxvii). Performance in this context was part of the overall 'turn to friendship' recognised more recently as a central value in the New York poetry scene of the 1960s.<sup>9</sup>



Now, this is a very different approach to the oral transmission of a poem compared to the one that Smith takes on through her privileging of Vachel Lindsay and Dylan Thomas. In Smith's world, poetry should provide a space for someone like Thomas or Lindsay to enthrall a receptive audience while whipping up demotic doo-wop passions *a la* Little Anthony. One need only listen to the famous Caedmon recordings of Dylan Thomas, for example – particularly his sonorous rendition of 'And Death Shall Have no Dominion' – to understand that Thomas (love him or hate him) was devoted to transmitting himself as an enchanted, oracular Poet with a capital 'P'. John Brinnin's recollections of a typical Dylan Thomas reading – in this case, one of Thomas's performances in New York's YM-YWHA – illustrates how Thomas's orality was very much in the service of extending Thomas's practically shamanistic persona:

...at the appointed time he walked on to the stage, shoulders straight, chest out in his staunch and pouter-pigeon advance, and proceeded to give the first of those performances which were to bring to America a whole new conception of poetry reading [...] When he concluded the evening with a selection of his own works – encompassing both tenderly lyrical and oratorical passages with absolute authority, it was difficult to know which gave the greater pleasure, the music or the meaning. Some of his listeners were moved by the almost sacred sense of his approach to language; some by the bravado of a modern poet whose themes dealt directly and unapologetically with birth and death and the presence of God; some were entertained merely by the plangent virtuosity of an actor with a great voice. In every case the response was one of delight. Ovations greeting him as he came on and as he went off were tremendous, but the sweat on his brow flowed no less copiously either time. It was my first full and striking knowledge of the fact that Dylan was alone, that he had been born into a loneliness beyond the comprehension of those of us who feel we live in loneliness, and that those recognitions of success or failure by which we can survive meant nothing to him. (Brinnin 1957, p. 18)

This is in essence a familiar – and fundamentally conservative – vision of the Poet as isolated seer, a figure summoning ecstatic social response and union while maintaining a shamanistic separation from community. With its mass readings, its political poetry-reading benefits, its call-and-response ethos, nothing could be further from the values developing at the Poetry Project through the 1960s than the aura built up around Thomas in the 1950s.

Now I don't want to give the impression that all the poets who read at the Poetry Project in the 1960s and 1970s rejected high oratory and 'bravado' as constituent parts of a performative stance. Some of them embraced such a position. Many of them – Ted Berrigan and Anne Waldman during the mid to late 1960s, John Ashbery, Bernadette Mayer, Charles Reznikoff and others – didn't. The point is that readings at the Project were often performed as a kind of localised event between friends rather than a *tour de force* performance. Listen to recordings at the Project included on, for example, *The World Record* uploaded onto the UbuWeb:Sound site (featuring a number of important poets reading at the Project during the early to mid-1970s; UbuWeb 1968–1980), and you will note that audience participation was typical, as was the given performer's tendency to pause in the middle of a line, ask a question, make an extended digression, and so forth. This is in marked distinction to Lindsay and Thomas, who were celebrated in their own time precisely for their recuperation and projection of the Poet as highly individualistic, romantic and wild, beyond sense.

These kinds of qualities affiliated with Thomas and Lindsay were, if not entirely discredited at the Poetry Project, nevertheless not part of the overall culture there.

This resistance to romantic wildness can in many ways be seen as an inheritance from the first generation New York School of poets. Frank O'Hara, for one, had identified the assertion of a privileged self-enacted through performance as, well, embarrassing. 'I can't stand all that Welsh spit', is what O'Hara had to say about Dylan Thomas (quoted in Schuyler 1993, p. 286). While O'Hara and the younger crowd at the Project were not by any means hostile to Beat generation figures, the Project in effect deflated the potential self-importance of a figure like Allen Ginsberg through strategies that emphasised his place within the coterie. (Ginsberg's 1979 participation with Kenneth Koch in a spontaneous rhyming poetry contest centred on the imaginative exploits of Popeye and William Blake is one example of the ways Ginsberg, via the Poetry Project, steadily moved away from a centred, visionary self he had devised for himself in poems including 'Howl' and 'A Supermarket in California' towards a more diffuse, conversational aesthetic evident in his work in the 1980s and 1990s; Ginsberg and Koch 2001.) It was this radical rejection of the mechanisms of stardom in favour of a poetics of sociability within the poetry community in New York that Patti Smith was to find so dispiriting. Even as she recognised the Poetry Project was 'the place to do it', she determined she should transcend it. In a remarkably candid interview with Victor Bockris, Smith laid out her goals as they related in part to her negotiation with the Poetry Project at St Mark's:

*v*: you're a writer in the middle of a literary scene and you're totally ignoring the literary scene around you. how long can you keep going on your own?

*p*: I can keep going because I'm constantly stimulated by earth's glitter. I'm constantly stimulated. I'm not at any loss for material. (Bockris 1972, p. 11)

As we see here, Bockris was somewhat agog at Smith's choice to remain aloof despite her all-access pass to a desirable coterie ('in the middle of a literary scene'). After all, it is not the writers who are 'totally ignoring' Smith. Rather, it's Smith who's 'totally ignoring' them. Bockris continued pressing Smith on this question by asking her explicitly about whether she could learn anything from the downtown poets:

*v*: does the fact that you don't find any younger writers you learn from depress you?

*p*: they're life styles don't attract me. I think I'm ballsier, a better performer. I think they can learn from me.

*v*: so you feel the people you can learn from are the rock and roll scene?

*p*: yeah in the sixties it was jim morrison, bob dylan, now its still the rolling stones. there was smokey robinson. I can still get excited about humphrey bogart. I like people who're bigger than me. I'm not interested in meeting poets or a bunch of writers who I don't think are bigger than life. I'm a hero worshipper, I'm not a fame fucker, but I am a hero worshipper. (Bockris 1972, pp. 12–13)

Smith's candour here is refreshing, if pretty reactionary when viewed in the context of the neo-Dada collaborative scene then ruling the day at St Mark's. Not for her the collating parties, the group readings, the self-published small-circulation anonymous and pseudonymous publications. Rather, rock'n'roll as a model for performance poetry helps Smith re-establish and celebrate the divide between privileged stage and underwhelming page. Rock'n'roll, particularly by the late 1960s and early 1970s, had essentially become a vehicle for deification rather than a celebration of the quotidian, when the small-scale clubs, halls and streets made way for the Romanesque grandeur of the amphitheatre and festival. Rock in the late 1960s and 1970s celebrated mass-market values attendant to the seduction and economic

exploitation of huge crowds. (Woodstock, after all, was an economic catastrophe not by design but due to the organisational failures of its backers.) While much can be said for Smith's starting her music career in tiny clubs like CBGB's, we should not forget that the end goal was to play – as the Patti Smith Group did, eventually – in large venues in the USA and Europe. That Smith wanted to essentially invest poetry with the bigger than life theatrics of the rock'n'roll stage show suggests a real intervention into and critique of the avant-garde poetics and attendant ethics of the period.<sup>10</sup>

Bockris went on to question Smith on her own terms. Employing the kind of terminology we associate with rock'n'roll, Bockris asked Smith which poets she would like to 'tour' with:

*v*: if I was to offer you a reading tour with three other poets who would you choose as the three other poets?

*p*: jim carrol, bernadette mayer, and muhammed ali.

*v*: why?

*p*: because they're all good performers. ali's a good performer. he's got great rhythms. [...] he's entertaining. bernadette mayer because I like what she does conceptually. she's a real speed driven poet sometimes I don't like her because she's overly political and too influenced by st marks, but she's also a good performer. jim carrol because I think he's one of the best poets in america. [...] it kills me he's 23 he wrote all his best poems the same year of his life as rimbaud did. he had the same intellectual quality and bravado as rimbaud. he's a junkie. he's bisexual. he's been fucked by every male and female genius in America he's been fucked over by all those people. he lives all over. he lives a disgusting life. sometimes you have to pull him out of a gutter. he's been in prison. he's a total fuck up. but what great poet wasn't. I think the st marks poets are so namby pamby they're frauds they write about today at 9:15 I shot speed with brigid sitting in the such and such they're real cute about putting it in a poem but if jim carrol comes into the church stoned and throws up that's not a poem to them that's not cool. if you could play with it in your poetry that's okay but if you're really with it that's something else. they don't want to face it. (Bockris 1972, pp. 15–16)

Performance, as far as Smith is concerned, takes precedence over poetry. Very little of Smith's response relates in any serious way to what goes into the poetry of Ali and Carroll. When Smith does acknowledge Mayer's writing (as opposed to her lifestyle) it is framed almost entirely as critique. Mayer is problematic because she is overtly political. Mayer is maybe not so great because she doesn't stand out from the St Mark's crowd enough. And what's the problem with the St Mark's poets? They are 'namby pamby', and for two interesting reasons. One is because they all have a group style predicated on the 'I do this, I do that' mode popularised by First Generation New York School poet Frank O'Hara. Two is because they are frauds – Smith accuses the St Mark's crowd of pretending to be dissolute, speed-shooting *poètes maudits* when in fact they can't handle a *real* drug-addicted, vomit-spewing writer like Jim Carroll.

It seems here that Smith looked to poetry not so much for what the art had to offer her as a model for her songwriting, but for what the *discourse* of poetry could provide her with in terms of thinking about how to make actual lifestyle and performance choices. In a related interview with Victor Bockris, for example, Smith acknowledges why she was initially drawn to French poetry and fiction. In response to Bockris's question, 'Why are your influences mostly European: Rimbaud, Cendrars, Celine, Michaux?', Smith replied, 'It's because of biographies. I was mostly attracted to lifestyles, and there just wasn't any [sic] great biographies of genius

American lifestyles except the cowboys.' Smith went on to explain that she was writing a 'poetry of performance' because 'of Victorian England, how they crucified Oscar Wilde. Poets became simps, sensitive young men in attics. But it wasn't always like that. It used to be that the poet was a performer and I think the energy of Frank O'Hara started to re-inspire that. I mean in the Sixties there was all that happening stuff. Then Frank O'Hara died and it sort of petered out, and then Dylan and Allen Ginsberg revitalized it' (Bockris 2000, p. 42).

Poetry as lifestyle played a very real role in Smith's self-fashioning. In her numerous articles on literary figures from Blake to Rimbaud to Corso, Smith was as likely to stress these writers' outrageous antics as she was to refer to their actual poetry. In her foreword to Gregory Corso's *An Accidental Autobiography*, for example, Smith opens with an anecdote that illustrates and celebrates Corso's anti-establishment gestures:

I first encountered Gregory long ago in front of the Chelsea Hotel. He lifted his overcoat and dropped his trousers, spewing Latin expletives. Seeing my astonished face, he laughed and said, 'I'm not mooning you sweetheart, I'm mooning the world.' I remember thinking, how fortunate for the world to be privy to the exposed rump of a true poet. (Smith 2003, p. xi)

Interestingly, Smith continues in her foreword to align herself materially with Corso: 'My living space was akin to his – piles of papers, books, old shoes, piss in cups – mortal disarray' (Smith 2003, p. xi). This raggedy bohemia, in evidence most ideally in the rebellious figure of a poet-outlaw like Corso, would be absorbed and redirected by Smith into what would soon be called punk rock.

Smith did not limit her adoration of underground writers to relatively recent influences, but reached back to the 19th century. Smith recalls a particularly momentous lunch break in her young life as a South Jersey factory girl:

[...] I went across the railroad tracks to this little bookstore. I was roaming around there, looking for something to read, and I saw [...] the cheap paperback of *Illuminations* by Rimbaud. I mean, every kid has had it. There's that grainy picture of Rimbaud in it and I thought he was so neat looking. Rimbaud looks so genius. I instantly snatched it up. I didn't even know what it was about, I just thought Rimbaud was a neat name [...] I thought he was so cool. [...] I just really fell in love with [*Illuminations*]. It was gracious Son of Pan that I fell in love with, cause it was so sexy. (McNeil and McCain 1996, p. 108)

In Smith's narrative, we don't even necessarily have to read poetry before we understand its latent dissident power embodied in a sexy cover photo and a 'neat' name. These signs offered Smith an early 'out' of the mundane working-class life she initially thought she was doomed to.

Despite Smith's ambivalent and at times openly hostile attitude towards the St Mark's scene, Smith nevertheless chose to work within the loose institutional structures related to the Poetry Project. Crucially, Smith's first poetry book *Seventh Heaven* (1972) was published through the Telegraph Books imprint, edited by Bockris and for the most part committed to publishing figures affiliated with the Second Generation New York School and the related Warhol scene. By 1972 Telegraph Books had published books including Ted Berrigan's, Tom Clark's and Ron Padgett's collaborative book *Back in Boston Again*, Bockris's *Face*, Gerard Malanga's *Poetry on Film*, Brigid Polk's *Scars*, Tom Raworth's *Heavy Light*, Aram Saroyan's *The Rest*, Tom Weatherly's *Thumbprint* and Andrew Wylie's *Tenderloin*. Most of these little books emanated affection for a loosely defined experimentalism characterised by

sociability. This ethos manifested itself in a number of ways. Berrigan's, Padgett's and Clark's *Back in Boston Again*, for example, asserted itself most obviously as a collaborative effort. The fact that no line was ascribed to any one individual only served to emphasise the willingness on these writers' part to allow any semblance of privileged authorship to recede into the background as a talky, cheerful aesthetic came to the fore. A book like Aram Saroyan's *The Rest*, despite the preponderance of many of Saroyan's radically compressed poems (two poems in *The Rest* read, in their entirety, 'leukemia' and 'guarantee' (Saroyan 2007, pp. 206, 207)), also engaged with a poetics of sociability. One of Saroyan's poems, for example, asserts in its entirety 'Ron Padgett / would approve / this idea' (Saroyan 2007, p. 203). A poem such as this does not point inwards towards some semblance of subjectivity and core sentiment ascribed to an individual, but rather points outwards to an implicitly larger social grouping responsible for interpreting and assigning value to texts.

Even something as odd as Polk's *Scars* (1972) resonated with the collaborative turn in poetry. *Scars* is composed 'from a selection of Warhol superstar Polk's collection of ink prints she made of celebrities and her friends' scars with accompanying explanations of the wounds by those who'd been scarred' (Cooper 2007). Thus, like the Berrigan/Padgett/Clark work, the idea of this book as something related to a stable subject named 'Brigid Polk' is very much compromised as the reader scans through a number of personages' scars including: Peter Fonda's foreskin scar; Jonas Mekas's thumb scar resulting from a 'cut', as Mekas explained, made 'deeply with an axe at age ten' (n.p.); Genevieve Waite's burn scar; Gerard Malanga's testicular scar ('undescended testicle / until age 13 / operation successful'; n.p.), and so on. Most interestingly in the context of this particular essay, Patti Smith is also included in this all-star roster. Her contribution really sticks out – not because of the nature of her scar, but because of the tone and diction of her submission: 'Scar Left side. patti smith. On april 26 1967 / I bore my first baby / and ripped up the / left side of my belly / FUCK YOU JESUS' (n.p.). The heretical petulance of FUCK YOU JESUS alongside the oddly outdated phrase 'bore my baby' agitated very strongly against the otherwise faux-naïve, gentle and generally whimsical contributions of the other featured figures. Even here, Smith is visible as both in- and outside the in-crowd. Smith's inclusion in a book studded with 'superstars' (to use Warhol's semi-ironic term) is a testament to her place among the glitterati of New York's cultural undergrounds. And yet, her decision to use a somewhat archaic diction alongside a punk posture that anticipates her cover version of Van Morrison's 'Gloria' (beginning with Smith's line 'Jesus died for somebody's sins but not mine') marks Smith's refusal to become fully absorbed into the group sign of the book. Smith doesn't want to 'fit in' too well, as such acceptance runs the risk of erasing the heroic, individualist persona Smith was so committed to. And yet, rubbing metaphorical shoulders with figures like Polk, Malanga, Warhol and Mekas certainly adds counterculture sheen to Smith's name. This 'both/and' approach to rejecting and participating in a wider artistic community was to characterise Smith's negotiations between the literary and musical spheres for a number of years.

The primary way Smith defined herself outside the potentially limiting circles of the downtown avant-garde was to embrace heroic representations of rock'n'roll stars and project them via the purportedly 'high-art' form of the poem. In a letter to Michael Brownstein and Anne Waldman written in the early 1970s, for example, we find Smith declaiming: 'MUSIC another Smith fight for musical poetry speech. I don't consider my stuff songs I'LL rebel god dammit I'll call them poems even if they

get on the top ten AM radio. I want to get music back like YEATS YEATS DYLAN THOMAS ELDER EDDA JESSE JAMES sunny and the sunglows. I'll fix you guys'. 'I'll fix you guys', addressed as it is to Waldman (then Director of the Poetry Project) and her partner the poet Michael Brownstein, clearly works to set Smith up as the voice of authenticity and poetic rebellion looking to enlighten the implicitly staid world at St Mark's.

Now, this is not to say that downtown poets affiliated with St Mark's were not themselves challenging the distinctions between high and low art. As coterie affiliation became one of the key conditions for publication, poets in that scene could be seen as challenging the very idea of literary value, particularly if that value was determined outside friendship networks. Rock'n'roll was visible in the pages of Second Generation New York School work; celebratory references to contemporary rock musicians including the Rolling Stones, the Kinks and Neil Young appeared increasingly often in the representative poetry. (There are multiple references to rock'n'roll throughout the poetry of St Mark's affiliated figures. For a sampling, see Lewis Warsh's and Tom Clark's collaborative series *Chicago* (Warsh and Clark 2001); Ted Berrigan's poem 'Bean Spasms' (Berrigan 2001); Berrigan's and Padgett's collaborative poem 'Waterloo Sunset' (named after The Kinks song; Berrigan and Padgett 2001); and Tom Clark's *Neil Young*, a series of poems that relineate Neil Young lyrics verbatim; Clark 2001). These phenomena all worked to effect a serious if temporary challenge to the hierarchies that would situate poetry as a primarily privileged form. But for all the demotic chatter around avant-garde poetry in the late 1960s and early 1970s, no poet affiliated with the scene approached the synthesis of rock'n'roll with poetry with the single-mindedness of Patti Smith. However, I am not claiming that Smith somehow succeeded where all the other poets associated with St Mark's failed. Rather, I want to point out that Smith worked to redistribute cultural capital by insisting on rock'n'roll as a *primary* influence for the composition of poetry.

Smith's emphasis on the heroic nature of rock'n'roll – and her subsequent efforts to seed poetry with heroic significations – is significantly different from incorporating references to Gus Cannon or The Kinks alongside cribs from John Ashbery's or Rimbaud's or Shakespeare's work. Second Generation New York School poets were advancing and complicating the aura around poetry as a privileged art superior to more populist forms by questioning in the first place why one might situate, say, Neil Young 'below' Rimbaud. Crucially, the opposite was true as well, as individual lines from a Neil Young or Kinks song took on a numinous energy when recontextualised as poetry. Smith, on the other hand, was doing something that in retrospect was far more conservative if, on the surface, paradoxical. She was retroactively attempting to *reinscribe* the culturally laden figure of the poet as shaman (or, at the very least, Muse-inspired visionary) back into the poetry community. Popular music, far from being a hindrance to her efforts, was in fact fundamental for Smith, thanks to music fans' uncritical craving for and acceptance of that figure closest to a modern-day deity – the rock'n'roll star.

### 'Boy rythums'

Opposed to Smith's efforts to imbue a vatic romanticism back into poetry was the problematic of femininity. What Smith had to do, in the end, was to challenge

what she perceived to be an inherently feminised aesthetics of (to borrow from Cixous) diffusion and effervescence, an aesthetics that urges us to write outside self, outside centre – in other words, an aesthetics that Smith understood to be at the core of the cutesy poetics affiliated with and promoted by the St Mark's scene.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Smith's 1972 debut *Seventh Heaven* shows Smith aligning herself with relatively conservative literary practices including straightforward narrative, a monologic speaker, and a general tendency to associate creative power with an idealised masculinity. Ultimately, as she put it in the opening stanza of her poem 'female', Smith was committed to 'boy rythums [sic]'. The second stanza of the poem continues in a complicated way to idealise creativity (here analogised with 'barbarity') as male gendered:

I ran around with a pack of wolves. I puked on every  
pinafore. Growing breasts was a nightmare. In anger  
I cut off all my hair and knelt glassy eyed before  
god. I begged him to place me in my own barbaric race.  
The male race. The race of my choice. (Smith 1972, p. 44)

'Work your ass off to change the language', former Poetry Project director and poet Bernadette Mayer famously advised her students, adding, 'and don't ever get famous'. Patti Smith, who began her public career at the Poetry Project on St Mark's Church – a scene defined in great part by a curious and challenging emphasis on linguistic innovation, locality and collaboration – flouted Mayer's rules. Far from working her ass off to change the language, Smith, as we see in 'female' and related poems including 'mustang sally', 'fantasy (for allen lanier)' and 'death by water' (Smith's paean to Jim Morrison), adhered to some fairly conventional literary practices in the service of both idealising a pantheon of star-touched men and (for the most part) relegating the female, when she did appear, to the status of abject embarrassment, muse or doomed beauty. And as so many of her idealised figures – from Rimbaud to Artaud to Jim Morrison to Keith Richards – were men, part of Smith's process was working out how to align her own femininity with a value system that, as she wrote 'female', privileged the 'male race'.

'Female' anticipates Smith's later transformation into the gorgeous, boyish figure gracing Robert Mapplethorpe's stunning cover for Smith's 1975 album *Horses*. Shirt, suspenders and jacket strategically covering Smith's large breasts, the outline of a slight moustache visible on her upper lip, a vaguely confrontational expression on her face, and her 'narrow hipped' figure accentuated by her tight pants, Smith's self as it is enacted here embodies the pose practised initially within the pages of Smith's poetry.

Smith insisted, 'I aint no women's lib chick. so I cant write about a man because I'm under his thumb but a woman I can be male with. I can use her as my muse. I use women' (Bockris 1972, p. 9). As contemporary reviews of Smith's poetry performances in the early 1970s attest, such attitudes informed Smith's own masculinist public style. 'Looking like a female version of Keith Richards [...] Patti Smith is the poet as macho woman – hip, tough, sexy, raging' (McCarthy 1974). Even then, though, fans of Smith the performer recognised that the poetry was in the service of performance, and that performance would ultimately be realised most ideally as song. 'Still, Patti Smith is better heard than read. So see her if you get the chance. And hope that someday soon an adventuresome record company will sign her up and really give her a chance to wail' (McCarthy 1974). Beginning her life as a performer in the

context of a sprawling, community-oriented poetry scene 'shepherded' by a woman, Smith worked hard to define herself apart from it even as she used its stages to promote her developing style.

### 'I'm gonna be a big star'

What resulted from her efforts, of course, was *Horses*, a record that can be defined without fear of histrionics as a major and often lyrically profound musical achievement. Readers, however, have probably detected a critical tenor to this article. Where is that critique coming from? Smith insisted that anyone who dared call himself a poet should be, ideally, an outlaw, a seer, a visionary. 'I'm gonna be somebody, I'm gonna get on that train, go to New York City, / I'm gonna be so bad I'm gonna be a big star and I will never return' Smith exulted in 'Piss Factory', featured on Side B of her debut single. And that's what she did. Is there an unavoidably problematic element to such self-fashioning, predicated as it is on the mechanics of stardom and the reification of hierarchies that always and forever raise the performer – materially and ideologically – above the audience? Maybe it is partly due to these performative stances that Smith's influence can be detected more within the 'arty' circles of post-punk and 'indie' music (Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore as Parnassian poetry-penning guitar god; R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe as poetic tortured soul) than in the ideologically driven, punk-inflected and avowedly feminist 'riot grrrl' phenomenon of the late 1980s and 1990s, a scene indebted more to the style of British punk bands like The Slits and The Raincoats than it was to Smith's comparatively baroque efforts.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps, then, the critical tone implicit in this article is based on the disappointment one feels when faced, yet again, with how easily efforts to create a community that at least attempts to resist a star system – whether it is in poetry or in punk – are compromised. I suggest this even despite the fact that Smith's music affected me deeply and wonderfully from the instant I heard Smith sing out 'Suddenly! Johnny! Was surrounded by! Horses . . . horses . . . horses . . . horses . . .'. I am also not quite so naïve as to think that, for all their demotic chatter, poets affiliated with the St Mark's scene didn't have their own forbidding mechanisms determining status. And yet, at least the St Mark's crew provided a model of sociability that questioned inherited values regarding seriousness generally speaking, the status of poetry as an autonomous art-form, and the 'visionary' as a necessary part of what defines an authentic 'artist'. The narrative of Smith's rise to stardom was, as I have argued, predicated on the initial engagement with and ultimate rejection of a poetics of sociability that determined one didn't have to be an inspired visionary to engage with poetry. One didn't even have to be a 'self', as it were, as poetry could be made in groups, could be part of the fabric of a local, ever-shifting, autonomous community/coterie. Smith pushed back on all that. She pushed back hard.

### Endnotes

1. Such porosity in 1960s performance can be illustrated by pointing to poet Jackson Mac Low's 'simultaneities' featuring collaborative reading and singing of poetry scores, to Allen Kaprow's art/sound-art/performance hybrid 'Happenings',

to multimedia events like Andy Warhol's 'Exploding Plastic Inevitable' (featuring simultaneous screenings of Andy Warhol's films, psychedelic light shows, live music by the Velvet Underground and on-stage dancing by Gerard



- Malanga and Mary Woronov), and to the legendary spectacles in London's UFO Club. In these and related cases, loose adherence to genre was the rule rather than the exception within the counterculture. See Stephen Fredman (2010) for a nuanced reading of some of the major manifestations of the multi-genre collage aesthetic as it informed post-war American artistic practice.
2. See, for example: Lou Reed's 'European Son', which was dedicated to Delmore Schwartz and included on the Velvet Underground's debut album *The Velvet Underground & Nico*; Jim Morrison's repeated framing of himself as following in the footsteps of Rimbaud (see Fowlie 1993, for an extended consideration of this imaginative relationship); and *The Fugs First Album*, which included sung versions of William Blake's poem 'Ah Sunflower' next to proto-punk anthems like 'Boobs a Lot'.
  3. The Lower East Side is the name that has historically been applied to that area of downtown Manhattan east of Broadway, bounded by East Broadway to the south and, if one includes the 'East Village' area north of Houston Street, 14th Street to the north. Regarding the Poetry Project, established in 1966 at St Mark's Church on 2nd Avenue in Manhattan, see my book *All Poets Welcome* (Kane 2003) for an extended history of the first five years of this poetry institution, still going strong after 45 years.
  4. Robert Creeley was a poet aligned during the early part of his career with Black Mountain College, an experimental institution of higher education especially active in the 1950s, whose students and teachers included the poet Charles Olson, composer John Cage, choreographer Merce Cunningham and architect/visionary Buckminster Fuller. Ted Berrigan, author of the highly influential book *The Sonnets* (first published in 1964) was the self-anointed head of the Second Generation New York School of poets, a group influenced by a slightly older set of poets aligned under the rubric 'New York School', which included poets Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch and James Schuyler.
  5. See Kane (2004, pp. 345–6).
  6. As Smith herself notes, Corso often heckled poets in the downtown scene: 'Gregory took me to the St Mark's Poetry Project, which was a poets' collective at the historic church on East Tenth Street. When we went to listen to the poets read, Gregory would heckle them, punctuating the mundane with cries of *Shit! Shit! No blood! Get a transfusion!* In watching his reaction, I made a mental note to make certain I was never boring if I read my own poems one day' (Smith 2010, p. 138).
  7. The 'red haired guy' was in all probability poet and post-punk troubadour Jim Carroll, with whom Smith was soon to become romantically involved.
  8. See Kane (2004, pp. 334–5).
  9. See Lee (2007), for a definition of the term 'turn to friendship' in the context of his review of recent books looking at coterie, friendship and community in New York School-affiliated poetry.
  10. New York punk, like its British counterpart, was not in the end committed to an 'independent' ethos free from corporate organisational structures. Most of the proto-punk bands coming out of CBGBs, including Patti Smith's group, Blondie, the Ramones and Talking Heads, courted mainstream success unselfconsciously and signed to labels including Sire Records (owned and distributed by Warner Music) and Arista (owned and distributed by Sony Music). We should remember that the punk-influenced 'DIY' musical scene of the 1980s (out of which sprang bands like Fugazi and the Minutemen) was radically different to punk's first wave. Members of Fugazi, for example, rejected any attempts by major record labels to sign them, preferring to maintain their relationship with the independent record label Dischord and to play in mostly small performance spaces.
  11. Cixous argues for an understanding of women's erotic pleasure and power as emanating out of the biologically determined decentredness inherent in women's libidinal and procreative abilities. 'Unleashed and raging, she belongs to the race of waves. She arises, she approaches, she lifts up, she reaches, covers over, washes a shore, flows embracing the cliff's least undulation, already she is another [...] She has never 'held still'; explosion, diffusion, effervescence, she takes pleasure in being boundless, outside self, outside "center"' (Cixous and Clement 1986, pp. 90–91).
  12. It is worth reminding ourselves that Johnny Lydon, then Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols, derided Smith specifically for her poetic pretensions and apparently overt debts to 1960s counterculture. As Jay Dee Daugherty of the Patti Smith Group recalls, following a Smith gig at London's Roundhouse Theatre, 'some friend of Lenny [Kaye's] said, "You guys should go down to this club on Oxford Street and see this band, the Sex Pistols" [...] So we get down there and it's this dive [...] The Sex Pistols] comes on and we're like, "WHOA." Before they even play the first song, John [sic] Rotten says, "Did anybody go to the Roundhouse the other night and see the hippie shaking the tambourines? Horses, horses, HORSESHIT"' (quoted in McNeil and McCain 1996, pp. 244–5). Lydon remains dismissive towards the New York poetry punks. In a recent interview in *Metro* (a free newspaper distributed on the London Underground), Lydon was asked 'If the Pistols hadn't existed, would punk have happened?' His answer was unambiguous: 'No. There's confusion about this from people who should know better. Whatever was happening in New York was being done by much older people than us who were interested in the poetry of Rimbaud or glam rock – which isn't where we were. Older acts claimed it came from them first, which isn't right' (Lydon 2011).

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