

From “No Future” to “Delete Yourself (You Have No Chance to Win)”: Death, Queerness, and the Sound of Neoliberalism

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Introduction

Death is one of the West’s oldest philosophical problems, and it has recently been the focus of heated debates in queer theory. These debates consider the political and aesthetic function of a specific concept of death—death as negation, failure, an-arche, or creative destruction. However, as Michel Foucault (1990) argues, death is an important component of the discourse of sexuality precisely because it *isn’t* a type of negation. The discourse of sexuality emerges when “the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was,” he argues, “replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death” (Foucault 138).¹ “Sexuality is the heart and lifeblood of biopolitics” (Winnubst 2012: 79) because it—or rather, as other scholars like Laura Ann Stoler (1995), LaDelle McWhorter (2009), and Jasbir Puar (2013) have demonstrated, racialized sexuality—is one of the main instruments through which liberalism “fosters” or “disallows” life. So, insofar as it pertains to sexuality, death isn’t a negation or a subtraction of life, but a side effect of a particular style of life management. In late capitalist neoliberalism, “death” only appears indirectly, not as a challenge to or interruption of life, but as its unthinkable, imperceptible limit.² What are the theoretical, political, and aesthetic implications of neoliberalism’s reconceptualization of death as divested, or “bare,” life?³ What if we reframe ongoing debates about queer death, futurity, and antisociality by replacing the punk metaphors of “No Future” with the cyberpunk/digital hardcore mantra “Delete Yourself (You Have No Chance To Win)”?

Asking the question in this way, I use some methods, concepts, and problems from queer theory to think about a few pieces of music; I then use my analyses of these musical works to reflect back on that theory. Taking Atari Teenage Riot’s “Delete Yourself (You Have No Chance To Win)” as the basis for theorizing queerly racialized *biopolitical* death, my method involves pushing what Tavia Nyong’o calls “the fundamental and

productive misprision between punk [music] and queer [theory]” (107), and what José Esteban Muñoz calls the “sticky interface between the interracial and the queer” in punk performance (93). Beginning with the role of the Sex Pistols’s (1977) “God Save the Queen” in Lee Edelman (2004) and J. Jack Halberstam’s (2010) debates about queer death and failure, I follow a *musical* motive (the main guitar riff) from the Pistols track to its reappearance in Atari Teenage Riot’s (ATR’s) 1995 “Delete Yourself (You Have No Chance To Win).” In this song, as in much of ATR’s work from the 1990s, overlapping (and often appropriated) queer and Afro-diasporic aesthetics condense around the idea of death or “bare life.” ATR’s musical strategies treat this death as a form of *de-intensification and divestment*—not, as in Edelman or the Pistols, as a form of negation (of the future or the political). I will show that ATR’s musical recontextualization of the Pistols’s riff mirrors the *political* recontextualization of queerness and queer death from negation to disinvestment. Pushing this misprision or sticky interface between cyberpunk, queer, and Afro-diasporic *musical* aesthetics, I use ATR’s music to consider how queer death *might* work as a *political* response to neoliberal demands to invest in “normal” life.

In what follows, I first discuss the traditional concept of death as negation in both the Pistols song, and in Edelman and Halberstam’s formulations. I then argue that “Delete Yourself” describes a neoliberal, biopolitical concept of death, death as carefully administered divestment. Finally, I use Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) discussion of drugs, and Ronald Bogue’s (2004) Deleuzian reading of death metal to identify and explain how “MIDIjunkies” and “Into the Death” complicate the biopolitical/neoliberal management of death by reworking traditional black/queer critical aesthetics. In these songs, ATR undermine biopolitical neoliberalism’s demand to invest in and intensify regular “normal” life: rather than treating death as a nadir of intensity, they *intensify* it—that is, they go *into the death*. This strategy of going “into the death” is one possible queer necropolitical response to neoliberalism.

I Wanna Be An-Arche: Death as Negation⁴

Because it emerged during the Enlightenment, liberal humanism has been the West’s dominant epistemic and evaluative paradigm. It organizes the world in ways that privilege the ideals of teleological development, authenticity, rationality, and autonomous agency, or choice.⁵ Many well-known queer theories and theorists respond to, critique, and try to queer not

“hegemony” in general, but a *classically liberal* conception of hegemony. For example, “no future” is a radically queer claim only in a context where teleological development and progress are hegemonic ideals (similarly, “anarchy” is radical only in response to a rigid insistence on *arche*). The musical structure of The Sex Pistols’s “God Save the Queen” makes this clear. This song, with its refrain, “no future,” has been central to Jack Halberstam’s critique of Lee Edelman’s 2004 book *No Future*, and to Halberstam’s own concept of queer failure.⁶ Especially because Halberstam’s primary critique of Edelman is the latter’s “excessively small archive” (Halberstam *Queer Art* 109), it is interesting that neither Halberstam’s initial critique nor Edelman’s response addresses the song’s music; they only discuss lyrics.⁷ This is a particularly narrow approach to analyzing a *song*. Attending to the song’s music helps to clarify some theoretical limitations of the debate about “death” and “no future” as queer rallying cries.

So what goes on, musically, in this track? Though its lack of guitar solo and stripped-down aesthetic make it a conventionally punk reaction to glammy excess, “God Save the Queen”—especially its harmony, formal composition, and instrumentation—is a rather conventional tonal rock song in the key of A. The A chord is easy to play on the guitar, hence its common use in punk songs. The song begins with a riff that plays the leading tone, G#, against the tonic, A. A very powerful and common way of creating tension, the same strategy is used in the well-known *Jaws* theme. This riff also concludes the song. The journey from and back to this riff includes a foray into E in the two bridges with lyrics, and into B in the instrumental bridge near the end. E is the dominant (V) of A, and B is the dominant of E. So, the song uses a lot of very conventional harmonic gestures, like modulation to the dominant, to compose an even more conventional overall song structure. Though this song might have been very different than then-mainstream radio rock, its use of tonal harmony is rooted in 200-plus years of Western musical tradition. We can thus criticize the Pistols’s music for the same flaw that Halberstam identifies in Edelman’s text: it “does not fuck the law, big or little L” (*Queer Art* 107). In its use of harmony, “God Save” “succumbs to the law of grammar, the law of logic” (Halberstam *Queer Art* 107).⁸ This song (like many punk songs) does not fuck the laws of tonal harmony so much as distill them to their essence.⁹ “God Save” isn’t *musically* an-archic.¹⁰

“God Save’s” conventional tunefulness distinguishes it from Edelman’s example of the sonic properties of queer death. Working from Hitchcock’s *The Birds*, he argues that queer death *sounds* like

meaningless repetition, "random signals," white noise, or "electronic buzzing."¹¹ Following from what he identifies as the "repetitive insistence of the sinthome (*No Future* 56), Edelman argues that meaningless, un(re)productive repetition is key to the critical force of queerness or, in his terms, "sinthomosexuality (*No Future*, 33)." Western sexual, epistemic, and aesthetic structures overemphasize "reproduction" to conceal the presence and importance of repetition. Reproductive futurity is "blin[d]" to "its own 'automatic reiteration' of the logic that always tops our ideological charts," i.e., to its own compulsion to repeat and reinstall itself.¹² In more Freudian terms (1927), "reproduction" is the fetishistic recognition and *disavowal* of "repetition."¹³ For Edelman, queer death is the negation of teleological rationality, the *an* in *an-arche*. To conventionally trained Western ears, it *sounds* anarchic.

This is more or less the exact claim that African American Studies scholars Tricia Rose (1994) and James Snead (1981) make about the way Western music "secrets" repetition. According to Rose,

Snead claims that European culture "secrets" repetition, categorizing it as progression or regression, assigning accumulation and growth or stagnation to motion, whereas black cultures highlight the observance of repetition, perceiving it as circulation, equilibrium . . . : "In European culture, repetition must be seen to be not just circulation and flow, but accumulation and growth. In black culture, the thing is there for you to pick up when you come back to get it. If there is a goal . . . it is always deferred; it continually 'cuts' back to the start . . ." (69)

As Rose and Snead indicate, Afro-diasporic musics tend to foreground repetition and, rather than trying to create a sense of evolutionary continuity—what Edelman calls "the genealogy that narrative syntax labors to affirm"—use "cuts" to create loops, which are then repeated over and over again (Edelman, *No Future* 23.) In the same way that a DJ cuts into the breakbeat and loops it back to the beginning, sinthomosexuality is a "textual machine . . . like a guillotine," that uses the cut to "reduc[e] the assurance of meaning in fantasy's promise of continuity to the meaningless circulation and repetitions of the drive" (Edelman, *No Future* 23 and 39). The mutual privileging of repetition and "the cut" is one of the main ties between Edelman's theory of queerness and Afro-diasporic cultural and cosmological views. The queer-critical potential of looping, cutting,

and the rejection of teleo-evolutionary development is also central to J. Jack Halberstam's work on queer/trans cinema. For example, "queer time" involves the refusal of "growing up" (subjective evolutionary development to "normal" adulthood), and the "reveal" of a transgender character breaks linear narrative development by forcing viewers to revisit prior scenes in light of new knowledge about a character's gender identity.¹⁴ If, in white heteropatriarchal hegemony, blackness and queerness are mutually implicative, the similarities between Edelman, Halberstam, and Snead and Rose should not be surprising. They are not just responding to the same interwoven networks of privilege and oppression, but to a specific way of understanding power: "reproductive futurity" and the European ideology of teleological "accumulation and growth" are both classically liberal frameworks whose centering of wholeness, resolution, development, and assimilation encourage the elision and misconstrual of "repetition."¹⁵ Negation is a counter-hegemonic response to this supposedly coherent *arche* of teleological development, accumulation, and growth. Destroying is radical only if hegemony wants you to build.

These queer, Afro-diasporic strategies of repetition, cutting, and meaningless noise are not responses to power in general; rather, they are specifically targeted critiques of a classically liberal concept of power. Sounds are meaningless, random, and "noisy" only when evaluated against a specific standard of audiological significance, logic, and musicality.¹⁶ Noisy *an-arche* sounds queer and illogical only to ears tempered by a *logos* that privileges development, teleology, euphony, virtuosity/perfection/mastery, and rationality. Neoliberalism, however, doesn't care about linear progress. It has a different logic, one that co-opts classically queer negation, redistributing it and putting it in the service of privileged groups. In the next section, I examine Atari Teenage Riot's use of the Pistols's riff from "God Save." The riff's musical recontextualization demonstrates that the queer/Afro-diasporic negations of classically liberal ideals of teleological *arche* have, in the intervening twenty years, been used to condense queer/black assemblages around a different kind of logic of death—death not as negation (the *an* in *an-arche*), but as disinvested, "bare" life.

You Have No Chance to Win

Atari Teenage Riot is a German digital hardcore band active from 1992–2001, and sporadically since then.¹⁷ In this section, I contrast ATR's and the Pistols's uses of the guitar riff from "God Save." This contrast

clarifies the difference between sinthomosexuality and bare life—that is, between classical and neoliberal configurations of death and queerness. If, in the classical conception, death takes the form of negation (repetition, cutting, the *an* in an-arche), in neoliberalism death is what happens when society refuses to make sufficient investments in your life—resources are carefully diverted away from you because it is not in society’s interest to make you live.¹⁸ On ATR’s first album, 1995, the band’s reworking of classically black/queer musical strategies like maximalized repetition, cutting, and noise/distortion parallels then-contemporary shifts in the politics of queerness and nonwhiteness, which were assembled around a biopolitical notion of death.¹⁹ These assemblages helped the reunifying German state triage its damaged citizenry, disarticulating “healthy,” resilient neoliberalizable East and West Germans from fatally precarious and/or inflexible ones who should be left to decay and fade away. In this way, “Delete Yourself” reworks the *musical* terms in which Edelman and Halberstam theorize queer death as negation so that these terms describe instead the biopolitical concept of death.

Delete Yourself

Atari Teenage Riot’s 1993 “Delete Yourself (You Have No Chance To Win)”²⁰ reproduces the main guitar riff from the Pistols’s punk classic and uses it—both the riff itself and the melody implied by the riff’s chord progression—as the basis of a cyberpunk-y digital hardcore track. I will first discuss their *musical* reworking of the riff, and then consider the reworked riff together with the rest of the song.

ATR use the A-D-C#-D-A riff in two ways: they directly cite it, and they rework it into a mid-pitched, arpeggiated synthesizer melodic motive. First, the instrumental melody in the chorus (the parts where the song’s title is repeatedly sung) is a loop of Alec Empire playing, on an electric guitar, an exact copy of the “God Save” riff. Second, the riff’s chord progression is the basis of the verses, though this time it is programmed into a mid-pitched arpeggiated synth. Each verse consists of eight repetitions of this progression. In both the choruses and the verses, the original guitar riff is broken up and interrupted. In the choruses, the sample is overshadowed by percussion, most notably by a bass synth, which is just as much a part of the musical foreground as the guitar riff. The bass in “Delete Yourself” has more of a rhythmic than a harmonic function: the bass doesn’t outline the chord progression (as in a traditional tonal song); rather, it punctuates and

embellishes the riff's rhythms. Because both bass and riff are competing in/for the musical foreground, the bass track obscures and interrupts the cohesiveness of the riff. In the verses, the pitches of melodic/harmonic progression are literally arpeggiated; the timbre is also modulated over the course of the verse. In both instances, the "smooth flow" of the riff is broken up, interrupted, contorted. "Delete Yourself" uses rhythm to *interrupt the functionality of the riff's harmonic progression, to defunctionalize the harmony*.

ATR's defunctionalized treatment of the riff is a microcosm of "Delete Yourself's" overarching compositional structure. In "God Save," the functionality or teleological *progression* of the chords is what organizes the song: we start out with consonance, and it is challenged by various dissonances, but ultimately we return to consonance. "Delete Yourself" uses the same musical material (the riff) to a different effect. By defunctionalizing the riff's harmony, it takes the "progress" out of "chord progression." "Delete Yourself" doesn't really "progress." The modular alternation among verses, choruses, and the break is more determinative of the song's structure than any development or goal is.²¹ The major source of tension and release in the track comes from the alternation between verses and choruses, not from some big hit or climax. Put simply, "Delete Yourself" takes the teleological harmonic element of "God Save" (i.e., the riff) and interrupts it, undoing its ability to structure the song as a progressive development through dissonance. "Delete Yourself" abandons classically liberal ideals of teleological development—there's no chance to win because there's nothing to win in the first place.

Importantly, the techniques ATR uses to de-functionalize the riff's harmony—cutting, looping, rhythmic repetition—are features of *both* black electronic music aesthetics and queer anti-futurity/negativity/failure. The "digital hardcore" aesthetic is significantly indebted to Black Atlantic genres like techno, hip hop (the "into the red" or overdrive aesthetic Tricia Rose identifies in hip hop), and jungle (e.g., in the use of hyperfragmented and complexly reworked samples of the "Amen Break"). These strategies are also similar to the techniques and effects Edelman identifies as "sinthomosexual"; for example, "electronic buzzing" results from feedback, overdriven effects, and dead air. However, in appropriating these strategies, ATR has repurposed their negativity so that it works like (dis)intensification. In the next two sections (ii and iii), I'll explain how biopolitical death functions as a logic of intensity, and how this logic manifests in ATR's music.

You Have No Chance to Win

These *musical* differences indicate “Delete Yourself’s” deeper *ideological* and *philosophical* departures from “God Save.” “God Save,” both in itself as a year-zero punk song, and as it has been used in postmillennial queer theory, remains within the confines of a classically liberal humanism that posits death as the negation or interruption of teleological progress. For example, “futurity” (or the lack thereof) is relevant to Modern/Enlightenment subjects who develop and progress. However, the classically liberal enlightenment subject is *not* the subject of biopolitical neoliberalism. For this subject, *life itself*, not progress or development, is the primary point of identification and organizing structure.²² Or, as Jeffrey Nealon explains it, the classically liberal subject is concerned with *maintaining its integrity as it progresses through the future*, whereas the neoliberal subject is concerned with *optimizing its life*.²³ The classically liberal subject is concerned with *authenticity of experience* (all leads back to me, to my true [inner] Self) whereas the neoliberal subject is concerned with *optimized intensity of experience*, wherever that may lead.

All this is to suggest that “No Future!”—in both the Pistols’s and Edelman’s declarations—is a critique of the *classically liberal subject*, and the *classically liberal state* (e.g., the sovereign figurehead herself). The Pistols are charging that the promise of a future is bankrupt, i.e., that the liberal bourgeois British state and all its trappings have no future. “Delete Yourself,” on the other hand, is a *critique of the neoliberal subject and the neoliberal state*. ATR uses the idea of “death” to critique the biopolitical/neoliberal administration of *life*. As they say in their 1995 track “Into the Death,” “life is a video game you have no chance to win.” “Delete Yourself” fleshes out this claim. The song begins with a spoken exposition, which establishes that:

This is not just another video game
One day will come you enter the cyberspace
And you never want to get out
'Cause reality is shit and cyberspace is gone

“Cyberspace” here is not the 1990s virtual reality world of goggles and immersive images. “Cyberspace” can be read as a metaphor for the data-fication of “meatspace.” Meatspace, or embodied “real-life” existence, is increasingly expressed and understood in terms of *data* (birthrate, death rate, obesity rate, credit rate, unemployment rate, Facebook profile, etc.).²⁴ In neoliberalism, “meatspace” *life* is a *biopolitically administered*

phenomenon; life is data, data is life. In “Delete Yourself,” “cyberspace” is the reduction of meatspace-life to data. The last line of the exposition collapses meatspace and cyberspace into one another because this is what biopolitical neoliberalism already does. We can interpret the introduction to “Delete Yourself” as claiming that *we already exist in “cyberspace.”* The possibility or impossibility of the future is irrelevant in “cyberspace” because it already is “futuristic.” Moreover, futurity (i.e., teleological progress through conflict toward resolution) is a null and void question for neoliberalism. As Steven Shaviro (2010) notes, neoliberalism demands that subjects live in the moment: nobody can make future plans because they have to be ready to respond to last-minute, “just-in-time” demands. The command to “delete yourself” is a response not to the classically liberal demand to reproduce and progress toward the future, but to the neoliberal demand to live or let die.

The song, indeed, the entirety of 1995, is addressed to those left to die, those for whom “life is like a video game with no chance to win.” The addressee here is one who lacks the requisite “human capital” necessary for a chance at “winning.” The song thus describes the situation of neoliberalism’s “others,” those who are “left to die” so that privileged subjects have the chance at a “successful” life.²⁵ Some might call this group relegated to death “bare life.”²⁶ For example, early 1990s Berlin was a place where one could easily see the ways in which the neoliberal “New World Order” revitalized some at the expense of others. I’ll address this more extensively in the next section, but for now, I just want to emphasize the difference between “Delete Yourself’s” and “God Save’s” conception of society’s “others”: the latter treats them as excluded, the abject “flowers in the dustbin,” whereas the former treats them as bare life, the players who are in the game but have “no chance to win.” In a way, ATR are upgrading Pistols-style white hipsterism, identifying with and appropriating *marginality* or *precarity* rather than exclusion and abjection. In this view, ATR romanticize the experience of social death and appropriate styles and techniques from underground scenes—upgrading “love and theft” (to use Eric Lott’s [1995] term) for the digital age. Negation—regular, conventional cutting, looping, repetition—had already been so thoroughly co-opted by mainstream pop music that it no longer sounded or felt avant-garde. To make sonic death properly “hardcore,” ATR had to *intensify* these negative strategies until they became something other or more than simple negation. Anyone could play at being an “outsider,” but it was more radical and avant-garde to assert one’s *precarity*.²⁷

Following the guitar riff from “God Save” to “Delete Yourself,” my reading of “Delete Yourself” suggests that it is not only Edelman’s archive that is too narrow, but also his understanding of how death works to support the flourishing of white heteropatriarchy.²⁸ Negation is an historically and epistemically specific concept of death (the power to take life) and social nonbelonging (abjection, constitutive exclusion). It is also poorly equipped to handle accounts of multiple, interrelated systems of oppression. In a way, “negation” is the other side of what feminists sometimes called the “additive model” of identity.²⁹ This additive model treats race, gender, sexuality, bodily ability, nationality, religion, and all other identity categories as, to use Elizabeth Spelman’s (1988) term, “further burdens” cumulatively added to one another (123). Negation would be the inverse of this: the more burdens you have accumulated, the farther you are removed from privilege. It is the “subtractive” model of social belonging. But, as feminists and queers of color have argued for decades, these phenomena are not additive or subtractive, but mutually constitutive “intersections” (Crenshaw [1991]) or “assemblages” (Puar). Following Jasbir Puar’s account, we could say that biopolitical queer death is not negative, but “contagious.”³⁰ As a contagion, death *intensifies* death; so, as Puar argues, blackness can manifest as queerness, queerness as ethnic or national nonbelonging. In this way, biopolitical neoliberalism scrambles traditional identity categories to further amplify white supremacist patriarchy. Death is concentrated and compounded so that privileged lives can be even more vibrant. The next section examines biopolitical death as both a political and a musical technique. I discuss how contagious, intensificatory death works as a strategy of white supremacist patriarchy, and how ATR’s music represents or expresses this strategy.

The Biopolitics of Death

When the Berlin Wall fell, the new German state had to decide how to best allocate its resources. Whose lives were worth fostering, and whose weren’t? Without a clearly drawn national border to separate “healthy” individuals and institutions from precarious, unsustainable ones, the distinction had to be made in other terms. Similarly, the color line, the glass ceiling, and sodomy laws are the wrong tools for the job of administering a supposedly postracial, postfeminist, posthomophobic society.³¹ As Puar has argued, in biopolitical regimes racial nonwhiteness and queerness work together, in assemblage, to define a new population of marginals—those who neoliberalism would “let die.” “Death” isn’t

exclusion from the social, but divestment. You're allowed to play the game, but you aren't given enough resources to finish it, because your flourishing is not sufficiently beneficial to society to justify further investment. Queer/black assemblages can represent or symbolize biopolitical death because this death is the fate of whatever or whomever was too racially and sexually "unruly" (to use philosopher Falguni Sheth's [2013] term).³² to reproduce and support postracial, postfeminist, "homonational" society. Using reunification as an excuse to neoliberalize, Germany redistributed its resources to invest in both those groups/individuals who could be competitive and successful in globalized liberal democratic capitalism, and in its own image as a progressive, multicultural liberal democratic state.

It is still the case that "whiteness functions as the implicit precondition for inclusion in the national citizenry within the German context" (Weheliye 2005: 166); however, with neoliberalism, whiteness moves from being a strictly phenotypical category to a more complex, overtly intersectional or "assembled" one. Multiracial white supremacy conditionally and instrumentally "folds," to use Sheth's language, the most privileged segments of black and postcolonial populations into white privilege; this inclusion advances white supremacy, in large part by hiding it behind the veneer of multicultural inclusion ("The Irony"). This veneer isn't just decorative, but functional—it marks class distinctions among whites, separating viable white elites from those poor and working-class whites who must also be left to die (they are, so to speak, queerly white, not white *enough* or not white in the right ways). German national identity is still normatively white; however, neoliberal whiteness claims to be "tolerant" and "inclusive" of (some) racial Others. Elite whites claim to have overcome past racism. Those whites who continue to exhibit spectacularly racist behavior—like neo-Nazi youth, or poor southern US whites—are thus considered "backwards" and unreconstructed. Multiracial white supremacist patriarchy actively if covertly encourages racist speech and violence by less privileged whites, precisely to mark them as less privileged, and to reinforce the elite status of educated whites who "know better."³³ Similarly, it encourages sexist and homophobic speech and violence from queerly racialized "terrorist" populations, like "Muslims" or poor urban black and Latino men (Puar *Terrorist Assemblages*) while erasing the presence of queers of color. The nation's multicultural whiteness isn't a pure absence of color, but the combination of all hues within a strictly limited range of frequencies. Instead of constitutively excluding impurities, neoliberal white supremacist patriarchy maintains the ideal balance of diverse elements by

divesting itself of those who cannot successfully keep up with the demands of modern life. Live in a way that doesn't upset this balance, or we'll leave you to die. In multiracial white supremacist patriarchy, death is biopolitical.

Though the political effects of this shift to biopolitical racism/sexism/homonationalism were amplified by 9/11 and the subsequent Great Recession, ATR's 1995 suggests that biopolitical death was already put to work, even if in nascent form, in the mid-1990s.³⁴ ATR's 1995 is, in many ways, an album about the biopolitics of death. First, the lyrics indicate that the band understands hegemony in terms of what theorists like me call biopolitical neoliberalism. Foucault emphasizes that this form of power is "the power over life," the power to "make live and let die" (*Sexuality Volume 1* 143). Such an understanding is reflected in "Into the Death," which claims that "our life is what they control," and that it is controlled not by repression but by disinvestment. If, as Elias sings, "there's no good reason to keep you alive," you are left to die. In other words, you aren't given the resources—or even the opportunity to procure the resources—you need to pull yourself up by the bootstraps. For those left to die, "life is like a video game with no chance to win."

This concept of biopolitical death is connected to queerly racialized assemblages both through the album's *music*, and through the band's explicit political statements on the album and in interviews. Musically, the connection manifests as a resignification of traditional death as negation. The band uses the overlapping black/queer techniques I discussed earlier, such as repetition, looping, and noisy overdrive ("into the red," as Rose puts it). Their compositional and performance strategies draw directly on techno, jungle, and hip hop practices, and "sinthomosexual" aesthetics. This is evident from my earlier analysis of "Delete Yourself." In this song, representations or expressions of death as negation are "remixed" to work biopolitically. Cutting, looping, and distortion do not interrupt but overwhelm—they work less like deconstruction (breaking down grand narratives) and more like a distributed denial-of-service attack (overloading servers with excessive demands). Tom Briehan's (2013) *Pitchfork* review describes how their emphasis on repetition, noise, and rhythmic/timbral overdrive come to be interpreted as experiences of biopolitical death. "Their specific chaotic combination," he argues,

added up to German-accented ridiculousness ("Deutschland! Has gotta! Diiieeee!") screamed over hyperspeed 808 pounds and digitally treated guitar fuzz; it seemed scientifically engineered to

annoy as many people as possible. It was impossible to dance or talk or read or drive or do *anything else* while they were playing.

In Briehan's experience, ATR's "hyperspeed 808 pounds," the "fuzz," and their "scientifically engineered" sonic nuisances are all *overwhelming*—they interrupt his ability to perform at all, let alone at his best. Their music is so intense (so fast, so densely noisy) that it jams both hegemony's and Briehan's ability to invest in and capitalize on himself. It makes him, in other words, precarious.³⁵ His attention is so overwhelmed by ATR's music that it is just on the verge of failing (at dancing, talking, reading, or driving). This feeling of precarity, then, is an affective expression of biopolitical death—the biopolitical death that multiracial white supremacist patriarchy puts in assemblage with blackness/queerness. This is one way that the musical aesthetics and compositional choices on 1995 express or reflect the experience of queerly racialized biopolitical death.

To further explore ATR's use of intensification to express the phenomenon of biopolitical death, its racial/sexual politics, and the group's role in the mainstream appropriation of queer/black critical responses to biopolitical death, I consider, in the next section, an interpretation of two more tracks on 1995, "MIDIjunkies" and "Into the Death."

Taking Midijunkies into the Death

"MIDIjunkies" and "Into the Death" form a triptych with "Delete Yourself." They share musical material and lyrical references; for example, the apparently nonmetrical noodling at the end of "MIDIjunkies" fades into "Delete Yourself," and "Into the Death's" line "Like is life a video game with no chance to win" summarizes "Delete Yourself's" lyrical content, just as "Into the Death" includes the line "MIDIjunkies gonna fuck you up." These songs are essential components of "Delete Yourself's" account of biopolitical death. In "Midijunkies," an allusion to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* illustrates exactly how neoliberal "control societies" control for biopolitical death.³⁶ "Into the Death" suggests one way to jam these mechanisms of control, illustrating how the queer necropolitics of "No Future" can be upgraded to effectively engage neoliberal discourses of biopolitical death.

In neoliberalism, death is a precise level of intensity that is either just above or below functionality (overdriven or broken down). "Into the Death" *musically* intensifies sonic overdrive and breakdown; I read this as an

analogy for the *political* embellishment (over- and under-production) of bare life or precarity. In this way, “Into the Death’s” music suggests one method to politically queer neoliberal technologies of investment in “normal” (white, hetero/homonormative, patriarchal) life.³⁷ However, because their queering of death relies on the appropriation of black Atlantic underground musics, “Into the Death” also suggests that neoliberal race/gender/sexuality politics complicates already fraught histories and politics of cultural appropriation among straight black, white queer, and queer of color musical subcultures.

MIDIjunkies

The queer repetition, looping, and electric buzzing that, in classically liberal regimes, were illegible to hegemony, and thus opposites or alternatives to it, are, by the 1990s, registered as deviances that are always already controlled for. Specifically, they’re preprogrammed right into MIDI interfaces, VSTs, sequencers, samplers, and all sorts of other electronic music media. MIDIs (and other electronic instruments) give easy access to biopolitical death, in the form of both (i) the black/queer critical strategies of repetition, looping, and electronic buzzing, and (ii) the ability to use those strategies in ways that mimic biopolitical death.³⁸ They give us access to intensities that are excessively high or excessively low, to what is illegible and imperceptible to neoliberal hegemony, and thus to what might *appear* to undermine hegemony’s attempts to manage it. However, as “MIDIjunkies” warns, this is only a faux subversion: it fucks *you* up, not hegemony.

As Deleuze and Guattari argue in *A Thousand Plateaus*, drugs can induce a sort of faux subversion of neoliberal logics of intensity (in Deleuze’s terms, “control society”). According to them, getting fucked up on drugs mimics the experience of radical critique—what they call “deterritorialization.” Drugs “change perception,” altering its speed and intensity, and can thus reorganize epistemic and perceptual frameworks (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 282), making perceptible what was, in hegemonic regimes, imperceptible. Psychedelics do this, amphetamines do this, even alcohol and caffeine do this. However, Deleuze and Guattari argue that in drug use, “the deterritorializations remain relative” (*Plateaus* 285) because highs are finite and everybody comes down sometimes. Human physiology and drug chemistry are hard limits; drug use happens in “the context of relative thresholds that restrict” drug use to the “imitation” of deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 284). Drug addiction even further restricts the possibilities opened up by drug use: addicts go

“down, instead of high . . . the causal line, creative line, or line of flight” opened by drug use “turns into a line of death and abolition” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 285). In other words, drugs fuck up *junkies*, not hegemony; the trick is that hegemony convinces these “junkies” that their dejection is actually transgressive, even though it is carefully accounted for and managed. Junkies deviate in ways that are already standardized and accounted for. These losers fail in hegemony’s terms: as in a video game, losers might have shitty profiles full of losses and deficient in wins, but they still have a profile that the system tracks.

“MIDIjunkies” treats MIDIs as drugs in the Deleuzoguattarian sense. MIDIs can be used in ways that make artists feel like they’re fucking shit up, subverting hegemony’s *arche*, but they do so in very carefully controlled and limited ways. One might think these electronic tools allow us to intensify repetition and noisiness beyond the limits of human perception or kinesthetic capacity. However, all hardware and software have limits: knobs only go up to 10, so to speak (and however you measure it, potentiometers do have mechanical and electrical limits). In Deleuzoguattarian terms, MIDIs make planes of consistency *within* a plane of organization (i.e., the technological and mechanical limits of the MIDI program, the potentiometers on the control devices, etc.). The most prominent example of this is the song’s use of apparently unmetred sound. To the casual listener, the last part of the song—about four minutes in, after the bass drops out and all that’s left are various treble synths—might appear to abandon the song’s solid 4/4 and veer off into nonmetric noodling (the same noodling, notably, that begins “Delete Yourself”). There is no regular bass or percussion pattern to follow, so casual listeners could easily lose the downbeat. This section seems to exemplify what Deleuze and Guattari call, “a liberation of time, Aion, *a nonpulsed time for a floating music*, as Boulez says, an electronic music in which forms give way to pure modifications of speed” (*Plateaus* 267, my emphasis).

But these sections are not unmetred. The noodling still falls into four-bar phrases: every four bars, the musical motive changes slightly. The song itself is only *superficially* nonmetric. Moreover, most listeners were not casual—they were fervently dancing, pogoing up and down to the beat and keeping meter with their bodies (in lieu of the bass and percussion tracks doing it for them).³⁹ This apparent foray into the nonmetric shows that what appears as unregulated improvisation is in fact possible only because of a very tightly managed foundation. Similar approaches are found in African American music. For example, in the *Moonwalker*

(1988) version of Michael Jackson’s “Smooth Criminal,” there is a vocal breakdown that, to the casual listener, is composed of aleatory, nonmetric groans and moans. As the video’s staging shows, Jackson is in control throughout, carefully orchestrating what looks like unmanaged chaos (e.g., he keeps time by snapping his fingers or moving his body). As the *music* in “MIDIjunkies” shows, this apparent transgression of metric *arche* isn’t, in fact, a transgression. Drug-induced excesses are, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, ultimately faux deterritorializations.

I think it is important to read “MIDIjunkies” through Deleuze, Guattari, and Bogue not only because ATR had explicit connections to Deleuzian thought (e.g., Empire’s involvement with Mille Plateaux records), but also because its critique of druggy, free-floating, meterless time clarifies one of the main limitations of José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of ecstatic queer utopianism. Muñoz theorizes ecstatic utopianism through both queer/punk performance and through comparisons to MDMA, once commonly referred to as ecstasy (“molly” is the preferred street name nowadays). For Muñoz, ecstasy—literally ek-stasis, excessive, ornamental, nonfunctional pleasure that transgresses the limitations of straight time and commodity capitalism—is both a critique of and alternative to Edelmanian negativity. Instead of the negation or rejection of the future, ecstasy is, as Muñoz explains via Marcuse (1974), “the liberation from time” (133), and specifically from the linear progressive rationality of “straight” capitalist time (as represented, for example, by Marcuse’s concept of the performance principle).⁴⁰ Queer ecstasy is an excessiveness that works, like a drug, as “a surplus that pushes one off course, no longer able to contribute labor power at the proper tempo” (Muñoz 154). However, what both Deleuze and Guattari and “MIDIjunkies” demonstrate is that this druggy, irregular temporality is, in neoliberalism, decidedly not queer—it is the very measure of healthy deregulated economy (of capital, of desire) in which rigidly controlled background conditions generate increasingly eccentric foreground events. This deterritorialization is only relative; not even time is liberated because in neoliberalism, labor power is *supposed* to be offbeat and irregular.⁴¹

The real junkies here are the ones addicted to classically liberal concepts of death and resistance as negation—the ones who think “flowers in the dustbin” are actually oppositional, and not the compost fueling neoliberal biopower. Nonmetrical music is an-archic, and like the Pistols, treats death or negation in a classically liberal framework. Because neoliberalism always already co-opts death, randomness, and an-*arche*, these strategies do not challenge biopolitical hegemonies. Neoliberal regimes use biopolitical

administration to regularize death; a normalized variable, death is not a form of distortion. The task, then, is to *distort death*. This is what happens on “Into the Death,” which *hyper-intensifies* biopolitical or metric regulation.

Into the Death

Drug users believed that drugs would grant them the plane, when in fact the plane must distill its own drugs.

– Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 286

“Into the Death” distills death, makes it *too intense*. Instead of negating, opposing, or anarchically deconstructing biopolitical death, the song approaches it in its own terms—intensification and divestment, making live and letting die. Plugging the mechanisms of “life” (investment, amplification) into death, “Into the Death” distorts biopolitical death beyond the parameters hegemony has set for it. Sonically, these distortions manifest as what bandleader Alec Empire calls “riot sounds” (Hadfield [2013]). In this section, I’ll first explain what ATR mean by “riot sounds,” and then use “Into the Death” to illustrate how they work sonically. Finally, I will consider how “riot sounds” might work as a model for antiracist queer political responses to neoliberalism. A “drug” distilled from biopolitics’ own plane, investments in death bend the circuits of neoliberal white supremacist patriarchy, inciting a riot in the management of life.

If an-*arche* is the negation of order, “rioting” is the *intensification* of order. Empire describes “riot sounds” as “functional music,” a sort of biohacking. “With the way we program the beats and use certain frequencies, it has this effect on your adrenaline,” Empire explains (Hanson). ATR use MIDIS and other biopolitical/algorithmic tools to produce abnormal, inappropriate effects and affects:

It’s the riot sounds, man There’s something about distortion when it’s applied in a certain way . . . that creates these overtones, and it does something with the brain. It triggers certain senses that we can’t explain with normal music science, the way we know it maybe from Western European music (Hadfield).

ATR do not reject management—they’re distorting sound waves in “certain way[s]” to hack into and distort brainwaves. Rioting is

counter-hegemonic management. It takes the tools biopolitical neoliberalism uses to invest in life, like algorithms (statistical data, synthesizer patches), and applies them instead to death. It carefully, microscopically, and vigilantly *intensifies death*. So, for example, while neoliberal management strategies invest in promoting flexibility and adaptability, riotous, queer management strategies invest in the opposite—stringent, uncompromising order.⁴²

If, as Steven Shaviro argues, neoliberalism requires subjects to be infinitely flexible and adaptable, rigidity, precision, and exact quantization can undermine this demand.⁴³ Neoliberalism uses biopolitical management to optimize flexibility. Musically, this flexibility is evident in Cage's aleatory pieces or Reich's process pieces: strict overarching material or compositional parameters allow for a great degree of variability in each performance of a piece. "Into the Death," however, is quite rigidly composed in all aspects. For example, the meter is a constant 4/4 throughout; even though the sections without a bass synth on every beat might *seem* to have a more relaxed tempo than the sections with it, the song's tempo is a consistent 188 bpm. The rigidity allows the MIDIs—or, in this case, the TR-909s—to distill their own drugs/distortions. Machines can be more precise than human perception; they can, as Ronald Bogue puts it, "accelerate (or decelerate) metrical regularities until they" *appear to* "collapse or run out of control" (97). Blast drumming is a particularly clear example of intensified metric regularity. As Bogue explains, blast drumming is one "tactic of accelerating meters to the point of collapse," produced through the "cut-time alteration of downbeat kick drum and offbeat snare, the accent being heard on the offbeat but felt on the downbeat" (99). According to Bogue, blast drumming uses ultra-precise rhythmic patterns to scramble listeners' ability to perceive the established meter. The meter, in this way, distills its own "drug," its own distortions.

Blast drumming is a common feature of death metal, and ATR use it on "Into the Death."⁴⁴ On this track, the already overwhelming percussive "blasts" are intensified and exaggerated even further. ATR uses drum machines to accelerate blast beats beyond what a human drummer can perform.⁴⁵ In the version on 1995, hyperaccelerated blast beats appear at 0:14–0:15, 1:02–1:04, 2:12–2:13, 2:17–2:18, 2:20–1, and at the very close at 3:12–13. The cluster of blasts in the middle of the song coincides with lyrics that critique classically liberal models of resistance. Elias says, "maybe we'll sit down and talk about the revolution and stuff / But it doesn't work like that," the "but" emphasized with the 2:17–18 blast. Because ATR juxtapose these blasts with a critique of traditional leftist ideas, we can interpret the

blasts as an alternative model of critical political practice. But what's critical and political about these blasts?

Bogue claims that blast-style metric destabilization produces Deleuzian bodies without organs—i.e., a complete scrambling or rollback of organizational structures, an-*arche*.⁴⁶ It has a different effect on “Into the Death.” This song does not produce a body without organs, but a precisely engineered political tool.⁴⁷ In ATR's song, dissolution is not the point. The TR-909 never actually devolves the meter into actual or apparent chaos. The drum machine manages rhythm so precisely that it becomes, from the perspective of hegemony, unmanageable. Neoliberalism manages to optimize flexibility; on “Into the Death,” these managerial techniques and instruments work *too perfectly*, producing *rigidity* rather than flexibility. This hyperquantization and intensification of metric regularity articulates a counter-*arche*. It is a way of queering biopolitical management, managing for ends other than the “normal” ones.⁴⁸

How exactly is this hyper-exact management an intensification of biopolitical death? This is where the second form of “riot sounds” factor in. ATR's work remixes or reroutes the networks that regulate the distribution of life-intensity (privilege or death), so that management produces “abnormal” results. They intensify precisely what shouldn't be intensified—bare life. Hegemony manages death to make sure it stays at a specific level of intensity (e.g., “equalized” in relation to other levels/channels). Instead of plugging death into the intensification of privileged lives, which is what neoliberalism does, “Into the Death” reroutes the engines of intensification and plugs them into death. In the same way that riot sounds are made by rerouting sound signals through MIDIs, samplers, and drum machines, riots are made by rerouting investment from life to death. Rioting is an intentional bending of the circuits of power.

In neoliberalism, the critical potential of queerly racialized death is not found in negation, in turning power down or off; rather, it is what arises from following ATR's command to “TURNITUP!”—it, here, being death.⁴⁹ If “life is like a video game with no chance to win,” then the only place to go, the only thing to do, is go into the death. Instead of playing the game to win (or to lose), you play the game's algorithms themselves (as, for example, Cory Arcangel (2002) does in *Super Mario Clouds*). This involves plugging the resources normally put to capitalization (i.e., winning) back into death, overdriving it so that it does something the original algorithms haven't accounted for. The product is not necessarily chaotic or unintelligible, as nonmetric time/body without organs would be

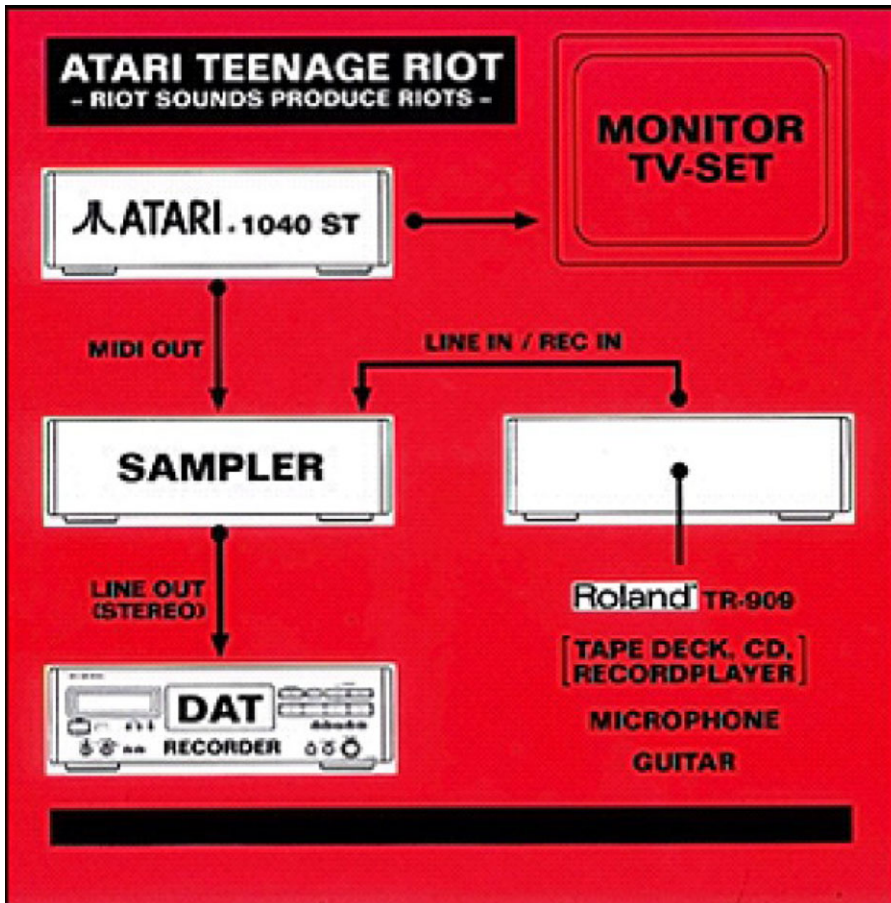


Figure 1: “Riot Sounds Produce Riots” Image posted to Atari Teenage Riot’s Tumblr account; originally published in 1995.

(aesthetically, Arcangel’s piece is rather conventionally modernist)—it is just not the optimal outcome for maintaining and maximizing hegemonic relations of privilege and oppression. Thus, this intensification of death is what starts a riot. Overdriving death, turning death up, will affect and distort “life”: keeping with the signal metaphor, alterations to the nadir of a curve or sine wave will also affect its apex. If death is something controlled to better manage life, then inhabiting death queerly will fuck neoliberal hegemony’s algorithms, fuck up its management of life.⁵⁰

Death is technically illegible to neoliberal “power over life,” as biopolitics is primarily focused on administering and investing in *life*.⁵¹ However, if death is beyond neoliberalism’s grasp, it could be a site of counter-hegemonic insurgency. So, neoliberal hegemony has a vested

interest in managing death, in co-opting and feeding death back into life.⁵² “Into the Death,” then, incites a riot by making death newly illegible, at least for a while. Death, in this song, is no longer an indirectly perceptible side effect, but an excessive blast of perceptual data. Hegemonic institutions aren’t equipped to handle that surge of input, so they cannot stop it from blowing the monitors, so to speak. At the level of gender/race/sexual politics, intensified death blows up the processes that channel success to already successful populations, and away from precarious ones.⁵³ It distorts the assemblages that balance and equalize flows of privilege, resources, life—and death. Death is no longer (at least momentarily) distributed in a way that allows for the successful reproduction of multiracial white supremacist patriarchy. The bent circuits do not manage life and death in ways that maintain an optimal balance of white supremacy, patriarchy, and hetero/homonormativity.

Bending the Circuits of Biopolitical Life Management

ATR’s 1995 shows us, in both its music and its lyrics, how the circuits of biopolitical intensification and divestment work, and how they can be bent. I use this reading of ATR to contextualize and put into perspective recent debates in queer theory about the relationship between queerness, death, and punk music, not just with respect to popular music studies, but also with respect to political theory. Although I’ve spent most of the article discussing the first-order musical and political stakes of biopolitical death, there is also a metatheoretical dimension to my project. Queer, trans, feminist, and critical race theories are not just things to be applied to the study of popular music, noise, and sound. Popular music, noise, and sound studies are also methods of queer, trans, feminist, and critical race theorizing. As I have tried to show in this article, opening our analyses not just to music, but also to technical discussions of how songs work *as music* can really help our theorizing about other things, like death and politics.

ATR’s 1990s work articulates exactly how queer and Afro-diasporic aesthetics get associated with neoliberal, *biopolitical* death. This biopolitical death is a *different concept of death* than the one generally discussed in the debates about Edelman’s “No Future” thesis. Thus, following the *musical* line of flight from classic 1970s punk to 1990s cyber(ish)punk does more than just expand our archive: it recontextualizes the *political* conversation. In particular, it clarifies how queer death (i) is not limited to sexuality, to gays

and lesbians, but is assembled with specific configurations of blackness, and (ii) is not inherently, but only strategically, counter-hegemonic. Not only is "queer death" controlled for and managed as a condition for the "life" of homonationalist whites, but actual death as "queer" (in the sense of illegible) is also systematized and accounted for by the power over life. "Queer death" is an already standardized deviation. Thus, it must be intensified beyond the point of standardization to be a resource for critical theoretical and political work. ATR's work responds to neoliberalism by *going into the death*. Interpreted in this way, their work on 1995 queers the biopolitical management of life (and death).⁵⁴

To do this, ATR didn't have to invent new strategies out of thin air; they often drew from work by black punk and electronic musicians. Hanin Elias's vocals are influenced by X-Ray Spex's Poly Styrene, and Empire's composition is influenced by Underground Resistance.⁵⁵ If the punk/hip hop/disco explosion represented the mainstream co-optation or gentrification of black/queer negativity, then ATR's digital hardcore could be considered cyberpunk's co-optation of biopolitical death.⁵⁶ Appropriating black/queer aesthetics in a mutually intensifying assemblage, ATR could stay ahead of mainstream co-optation, still sounding hardcore even as house, techno, and hip hop entered mainstream pop aesthetics. From this perspective, ATR are like the hipsters who move in to an economically disadvantaged neighborhood—the aesthetics of biopolitical death—and revamp it just enough to make it attractive for large-scale redevelopment and gentrification. ATR's musical appropriation of biopolitical death precipitated its wholesale cooptation by mainstream pop (Lady Gaga, Kanye West's *Yeezus*, dubstep). In biopolitical neoliberalism, death can only be tolerated when it is put in the service of privileged lives. So, just as the mid-20th-century blues-rock practices of white hipness fetishize some styles of gendered racial subalternity as means to white bodily pleasure and receptivity, millennial hardcore genres appropriated and homonationalized formerly "queer" death, using it as an index of radical, alterna-boy cred.⁵⁷ For example, the cover of Marilyn Manson's 1998 album *Mechanical Animals* condenses goth, death, and genderqueer embodiment into the primary symbol for white heteromale countercultural oppositionality. Nevertheless, queerly intensifying death or bending the circuits of biopolitical life management *might* still be viable responses to multiracial white supremacist heteropatriarchy. However, this is going to *sound* differently in 2013 than it did in 1995.

Notes

1. According to Foucault, while classical conceptions of power treat it as a “subtraction mechanism” (136), and regard death as the taking of life, “there has been a . . . shift in the right of death” (136). In this new administrative regime, “this formidable power of death . . . now presents itself as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (Foucault 137).

2. “Death is power’s limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most ‘private’” (Foucault 138).

3. For more on the relationship between “biopolitics” and “bare life,” especially as they pertain to race, gender, and sexuality, see Ziarek.

4. In a way, the Pistols’s sneer “I wanna destroy passers-by” (on “Anarchy in the UK”) is really a rejection of the social contract: I want the war of all against all, not this Elizabeth-as-Leviathan bullshit. Because 18th century social contract theory (and contemporary Rawlsianism) is the theory of classical liberalism, the Pistols are clearly operating within a classically liberal framework.

5. Jeffery Nealon characterizes classical liberalism as a logic of “expansion and assimilation” that proceeds by “conquering or assimilating new territory” (81). In this model, difference is resolved back into the underlying whole. Moreover, conquest is teleological: one progresses through difference back to assimilation (the point of the *Odyssey*, for example, is not the battle of Troy, but Odysseus’s return home).

6. “God Save” makes its first and most extended appearance in these discussions in the 2005 MLA conference session “The Anti-Social Thesis in Queer Theory,” printed in *PMLA* 121.3 (2006): 819–28. Print. See also Edelman *No Future* and Halberstam *Queer Art*.

7. Edelman’s response is printed in the *PMLA* article referenced above.

8. “God Save” also succumbs to the law of musicianship. Its performance is, especially relative to other first-generation British punk records, conventionally musicianly. Other than Lydon, the Pistols were experienced musicians. Their performance didn’t have the noisy, clunky, amateurish aesthetic of failure that characterized early punk records.

9. The Sex Pistols’s “Johnny B. Goode/Roadrunner” track is an (the?) exception; shit does break down and get fucked up here, as Rotten stumbles through two tracks whose words he claims to forget. It is also worth considering The Slits’s “So Tough” more carefully in this light. This track was supposedly written about

Sid Vicious, as a mocking jab at his "radical" macho posturing. "So Tough" might be an insightful feminist critique of negativity as macho posturing.

10. As musically conservative as it was, the song *was* widely regarded as shocking and radical. On the one hand, the other aspects of the song—the lyrics, the band's visual appearance, their performance practices, album art, and other related media—were more unconventional and disruptive than the music itself. On the other hand, the song's musical minimalism could be interpreted as a postmodern challenge to the modernist aesthetics of prog and glam rock, as well as the modernist ethos that grounded then-mainstream constructions of white heteromascularity. "Progressive" avant-gardism was an ideal for both artistic practice and white masculine subjectivity: great art, like great men, was revolutionary—it disrupted convention and charted new, innovative courses. In this context, "God Save"'s minimal musical aesthetics would appear as regressions to a more primitive state, a shocking departure from prog/glam decadence. However, the Pistols's superficial rejection of the norm actually reinforces it. They're not rejecting white heteromascularity, but a specific proggy, glammy articulation of it. The Pistols are still generally interpreted as radical, disruptive, innovative, and avant-garde precisely *because* they challenged then-accepted notions of what constituted avant-garde practice. From this perspective, the Pistols, like generations of hipsters before and after them, disidentified with then-mainstream white masculinity as a means to establish elite status in white heteropatriarchy. Despite the outward appearance of radicality, these race/gender/sexual politics are not very disturbing at all. Halberstam addresses some of the limitations of traditional punk masculinity in *The Queer Art of Failure*, and also in the "What's That Smell?" chapter of *In A Queer Time And Place*. See also Willis, *Beginning*.

11. According to Edelman, queer death "works to reduce the empire of meaning to the static of an electric buzz . . . Such an absolutely inhuman and meaningless language could only sound to human ears like the permanent whine of white noise, like the random signals we monitor with radio telescopes trained on space, or perhaps like the electronically engineered sound with which Hitchcock ends *The Birds*" (*No Future* 153).

12. Edelman, *No Future* 142. "Why marvel that reproductive futurism repeats what it poses as passing beyond? . . . To 'know the world's the same': though purporting to be wed to the value of difference in heterosexual combination and exchange."

13. For Freud's discussion of the structures of fetishism, see his "Fetishism" essay.

14. See Halberstam *Queer Time*.

15. I need to clarify that I'm not arguing that what these scholars identify as "queer" and "black" strategies are in actual fact identical. Each set of performance traditions have their own histories, that sometimes overlap, and sometimes don't. However, from the dominant perspective, a perspective from which each performance tradition is generally unintelligible, they both appear to be unintelligible in apparently similar ways and for apparently similar reasons.

16. Though this is not the place to develop this claim, I should at least note that Edelman's psychoanalytic framework also orients his critique to classical liberalism. Freudian and Lacanian concepts of "death" are very different from biopolitical/neoliberal conceptions of "death."

17. Though fronted by white West Berliner Alec Empire, women and people of color have key roles in the band: Hanin Elias, a Syrian-raised female vocalist and instrumentalist, and Afro-German Carl Crack founded the band with Empire; Japanese-American noise artist Nic Endo joined in 1996 and continues her involvement with the band.

18. As Foucault explains, in neoliberalism "it is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility. Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor; it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemies of the sovereign from his obedient subjects; it effects distributions around the norm" (144).

19. See Winnubst (2012).

20. The track was officially released in 1995, on an album titled 1995, but it was recorded in 1993; the version on 1995 was recorded at a Glasgow concert in 1993.

21. Ronald Bogue attributes this "modularity" to death metal generally. Digital hardcore is often considered a close relative of death metal, grindcore, and other hardcore metal genres. Moreover, this modularity is a key feature of what Lev Manovich calls "The Language of New Media."

22. This distinction could also be expressed in terms of humanism: the classically liberal subject is a humanist one—wholeness, authenticity, and self-presence are fundamental assumptions. Neoliberal structures of subjectivity do not require wholeness, authenticity, and self-presence—they may accommodate, even require, opposite assumptions. (The "entrepreneurial subject" easily accommodates posthuman forms of corporeal and cognitive enhancement, for example.) For more on the subject of neoliberalism, see Read.

23. See Nealon *Empire*.

24. According to Foucault, neoliberalism uses “bio-power to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit *calculations* and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (143, my emphasis). These calculations were both literal (statistics, big data, biofeedback) and abstract.

25. I think it’s important to consider the historical and geographic location in which the lyrics were written. Early 1990s Berlin was a place where one could easily see the ways in which the neoliberal “New World Order” did not include everyone. Some East Berliners/East Germans were certainly welcomed into the fold of globalized liberal democratic capitalism, but many were simply left out.

26. See Agamben.

27. For example, Patti Smith’s “Rock & Roll N****er,” with its line “outside of society, that’s where I want to be,” was 17-years old in 1995.

28. Muñoz has also made this critique, as have Winnubst and Halberstam, among others.

29. For more on the “additive model” see Spelman.

30. In Puar’s view, “all bodies can be thought of as contagious or mired in contagions: bodies infecting other bodies with sensation, vibration, irregularity, chaos, lines of flight that betray the expectation of loyalty, linearity, the demarcation of who’s in and who’s not” (*Terrorist Assemblages*, 172).

31. Anthropologist Angela Jancius notes a shift from the “Wall” to “unemployment” as technologies of social stratification. Reporting her fieldwork in Leipzig, she explains: “Pastor Wolf opened the discussion by telling us that the 40th anniversary of the Berlin Wall’s construction (Tag des Mauerbaus) had brought an appropriate symbolism to the forum. In 1961, a physical wall had been built, dividing the country. He hoped that post-re-unification Germany would not also become a society that built walls separating people—walls, such as the symbolic one created by unemployment” (Janicus 218). Here, “unemployment” functions like the Wall once did—to separate the “successful” members of global liberal democratic capitalist society from the erstwhile failures.

32. See Sheth, *Towards*.

33. If multiracial white supremacist patriarchy requires its elites to perform overtly feminist, anti-racist, and homonationalist politics, ATR could both maintain an overtly anti-Nazi politics, include female, black, and Asian members *and* be *received* in ways that reinforce rather than critique multiracial white supremacist patriarchy (regardless of what the band’s actual politics or intentions were).

34. They may have been particularly attuned to these developments for several reasons. First, band members Cark Crack, an Afro-German, and Hanin Elias, a cis-woman, had firsthand experiences of racism, nationalism, and sexism. Second, ATR widely appropriated from underground and avant-garde artists of color; the musical techniques and aesthetics they appropriated could contain knowledge and critiques of contemporary race/gender/sexual politics.

35. “The lived experience of ambient insecurity” (Horning), precarity is the condition of being barely able to keep up with all the demands made of you, so that you stay just in the black but never have anything left to “put aside” for an emergency or to “invest” in bettering your situation.

36. For more on Deleuze’s concept of “control society” see Deleuze, “Postscript.” It is important to theorize ATR with and through Deleuze’s work because the band directly and intentionally interacted with it. Empire released a number of solo recordings with record label Mille Plateaux, for example.

37. Whether or not ATR *explicitly* intended this interpretation is not my concern. Artworks, unlike other forms of communication and cultural production, are *expected* to suggest and support interpretations beyond the one(s) explicitly intended by the artists who created them. Because my argument is about the work (the songs) and not about the band, it is sufficient, for my purposes in this article, that the works themselves provide grounds for my interpretations. The historical question about the band’s intentions is a different project, probably best left to someone with more training and interest in purely historical work than I have.

38. This is largely because, as Tricia Rose argues, “in this process of techno-black cultural syncretism, technological instruments and black cultural priorities are revised and expanded. In a simultaneous exchange, rap music has made its mark on advanced technology, and technology has profoundly changed the sound of black music” (96). Late 20th-century recording and production technology was influenced by the black musical and cultural priorities embodied in hip hop. Companies wanted to make equipment that hip hop artists and producers would use.

39. As Empire explains in his AV Club interview, “And that was when we founded Atari Teenage Riot. That was in the beginning of 1992, when there were a lot of attacks from the Neo-Nazi movement on foreigners and immigrants and stuff.” (Hansen).

40. The performance principle is, according to Marcuse, “the violent and exploitative productivity which made man into an instrument of labor” (199).

41. As Winnubst argues, “Despite ongoing lip-service to the sacred cows of a Protestant Work Ethic and utility, we respond to their interpellation as a faint

nostalgic call, heeding rather the *kinetic circuit of interests*, in whatever guise they may don: compulsive work-outs at the gym; latest hip trends of diet or fashion; quick new fixes for enhanced mental stimulation, whether organic, synthetic, or virtual; and, of course, savvy market transactions, no matter the object or market of exchange Unbounded pleasure is the distinguishing promise of neoliberalism, no longer something to be feared, avoided, moderated, or domesticated” (91, my emphasis).

42. Both in their emphasis on uncompromising order and their co-opting of the logic of intensity, ATR’s practice of “into the death” resembles (and perhaps can be seen to anticipate) the political ideology currently called “accelerationism.” This resemblance does not go very far beyond the surface. Whereas accelerationism advocates practices that create “a positive feedback loop of infrastructural, ideological, social and economic transformation, generating a new complex hegemony, a new post-capitalist technosocial platform” (Section 19), ATR’s musical practices create *negative* feedback loops—mastery undercuts itself. See Williams and Srnike, *Accelerate*.

43. Shaviro argues: “In the control society, or in the post-Fordist information economy, forms can be changed at will to meet the needs of the immediate situation. The only fixed requirement is precisely to maintain an underlying *flexibility*: an ability to take on any shape as needed, a capacity to adapt quickly and smoothly to the demands of any given form, or any procedure, whatsoever” (15).

44. This is not surprising, because in the same way “Delete Yourself” is based around the Pistols’s “God Save” riff, this song takes the main guitar riff from death metal band Thanatos’s “Bodily Dismemberment.”

45. The copy of the liner notes posted on discogs.com lists them as using a Roland TR-909 drum machine.

46. “What death metal musicians seek in this volume is a music of intensities, a continuum of sensation (percepts/affects) that converts the lived body into a dedifferentiated sonic body without organs” (Bogue 88).

47. Even though we both agree that death is not nothingness or negation, but “zero intensity,” Bogue and I have different concepts of this null point. He understands death as “the catatonic body’s zero intensity . . . an ecstatic, disorganized body of fluxes and flows” (105). For Bogue, zero-intensity means dissolution and disorganization. In my view, death is always highly regulated and managed—it is the bare life that biopolitics has an interest in managing, even if indirectly. So, for me, zero-intensity is a carefully produced effect. This effect fundamentally relational—it seems like zero-intensity compared to what, in a specific regime, counts as high intensity. So “death” has no inherent or necessary

content or form; anything can be made to count as zero intensity. Our differences can probably be attributed to our different source texts: his, Deleuze and death metal, mine, Foucault and digital hardcore.

48. The queerness of rigidity and hyperattentive discipline in neoliberalism seems like a productive lens through which to examine the associations between industrial/EBM masculinities in 1980s/1990s bands like Nitzer Ebb and DAF, and masculinities in queer subcultures.

49. “TURNITUP” is the only lyric on “Cyberpunk Is Dead.” This suggests a correlation, in ATR’s mind, between biopolitical (cyber-) death and intensification.

50. Over/underdrive is a different model of excess than Muñoz’s very modernist concept of ecstasy. Muñoz is significantly indebted to the Frankfurt School—Bloch and Marcuse are central to his work. His concept of “ecstatic” utopian negativity is somewhat comparable to Marcuse’s notion of the aesthetic dimension or Adorno’s theory of autonomous art: a practice is queerly utopian insofar as it stands outside of the everyday normal lifeworld. “Queerness,” he argues, “is essentially about the *rejection* of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (Muñoz 1, my emphasis). As, perhaps, my reliance on Foucault instead of Marcuse indicates, I’m trying to push past modernist frameworks and think with and against neoliberalism in its own terms: not counter-modernisms, but queerly racialized biopolitics. On “Into the Death,” excess doesn’t negate or reject, but *overdrives normal, everyday life-and-death reality*. Its aesthetic dimension isn’t outside or beyond political reality, but is an *intensified* version of it. Excess doesn’t get tossed out or rejected, but recycled. So, ecstasy wouldn’t function as ek-stasis, but as feedback or distortion. If art resisted industrial modernity by being (heteronomously) autonomous from it, it contests biopolitical neoliberalism by fully participating in it, warping and bending its circuits of intensification.

51. Foucault argues that, in neoliberalism, death was “disqualif[ied]” and “carefully evaded” because “death is power’s limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most ‘private’” (138).

52. As Foucault argues, with the advent of biopolitics, “the randomness of death . . . passed into knowledge’s field of control and power’s sphere of intervention” (142).

53. It’s doubtful that ATR’s work actually realizes these race/gender/sexual politics. Their “riot sounds” tend to fuel a love-and-theft hipstersim. However, I do think the concept or practice of bent circuits is a productive means for theorizing counter-hegemonic race/gender/sexual politics. It’s not the bending itself that makes this practice critical and counter-hegemonic—like ATR’s largely white, straight,

cis-male fan base, or neoliberal feminist Sherly Sandberg, one can “lean in” to the circuits of power so that they bend in ways that amplify one’s role in privilege.

54. The interpretation I offer here is very different from their general reception, which easily subsumed their work in a hetero-white-boy, avant-gardist rockism. In the same way that the queer elements of classical punk often got resignified as part of subcultural straight white masculinity (Nyong’o), the potentially queer elements of ATR’s 1995 were commonly interpreted by their largely white, hetero, male fan base as means of performing their identities as radical, avant-garde, white straight men. Though the band was superficially inclusive of women and men of color, and the music was even theoretically queer, these elements were tolerated as part of the performance of a postfeminist, postracial neoliberal subject, who was still homonormative, white, and masculine. From this perspective, ATR’s fanbase interpreted their music as part of the multiracial white supremacist patriarchal project I described in part 3, section c.

55. Empire cites both influences in his AV Club interview.

56. As Tavia Nyong’o explains, “1970s punk represents the moment at which those specifically male homosexual associations [the relationship between john and hustler, rough trade] lose their exclusivity and punk becomes a role and an affect accessible to people within a range of gendered embodiments who deploy punk for a variety of erotic, aesthetic, and political purposes” (110).

57. Homonationalism is, as Puar defines it, a “brand of homosexuality [that] operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects” (*Assemblages* 2). More simply, it is “homonormative nationalism” (Puar, *Assemblages* 38) or “national[ist] homosexuality” (Puar, *Assemblages* 2).

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