Dan Graham

# *Rock My Religion*

Kodwo Eshun

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# Dan Graham

# *Rock My Religion*

## Kodwo Eshun

cover and previous pages

Dan Graham,
*Rock My Religion*, 1983—84,
single-channel video tape, black
and white and colour, stereo sound,
55min 27sec, stills
Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery,
London

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## On First Encounter

Close-up, bare-chested and livid, Henry Rollins bangs his head in time to inaudible riffs. He is performing onstage along with the other members of his band Black Flag, but the image is silent. Rollins untangles his right arm from the microphone lead and moves left across the frame while his body fires another short burst of spasms. He pauses for a few seconds and tenses his torso once more, gathering himself to headbutt the air, when the sound of an electric guitar chord bursts forward (fig.1). The camera pulls back through the thick of body-slamming fans, allowing us to briefly see more of the stage. The frame goes black, and we are left with just the guitar's reverb.

A work song ousts Greg Ginn's distorted guitar and, after a few more seconds, a white text, scrolling upwards, fills the black with the doctrines of Puritanism (fig.2). A voice-over introduces Ann Lee, the founder of the Shakers, while a second sound channel is abruptly added; it is Sonic Youth's song 'Shakin' Hell' (1983), which plays on while archival images interconnect the Shakers with illustrations of the making of the English working class (fig.6—9). These shots are in turn interrupted by additional footage of the Black Flag gig and a brief sequence of Joe Strummer performing on stage taken from *Rude Boy* (1980), a part-fiction, part-documentary film following a Clash fan who becomes a roadie for the band. *Rock My Religion*'s title appears three times in this opening sequence, in yellow capitalised font, firstly for ten seconds at 0:58; then again after an image of an etching of Shakers performing the Ring Dance; and finally for less than a second, just before Black Flag reappears, saturated by a crimson light. The author's name, Dan Graham, can also be seen then in red capitalised font, for one second at 2:11, looking as if it were due to a minor malfunction or seizure of the equipment.[1]

The Patti Smith Group is then introduced. Their outdoor performance becomes the background for the transcribed text and a live version of Patti Smith's song 'Piss Factory' (1974; fig.10). The movement in the footage is jerky, as if frames had been dropped from the original video recording to give the impression of stop-motion animation. This is followed by footage of a water turbine and the exteriors and interiors of an unidentified historical Shaker settlement, soundtracked by Glenn Branca's 'The Ascension' (1981). A detail of the contorted faces of Adam and Eve from Masaccio's *La Cacciata dei progenitori dall'Eden* (*The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, 1424—25; fig.11) is accompanied by Johanna Cypis's and Graham's voices explaining Ann Lee's Biblical diagnosis of the oppression of the working class and women, while white text on orange background scrolls upwards, describing her divine revelation (fig.12).

Another Patti Smith performance — this time paused as frames — becomes the background for the transcribed translation of Arthur Rimbaud's letter to Paul Demeny in 1871, in which the poet proclaims his revolutionary theories of poetry and life (fig.13).[2] A live recording of Smith reciting 'Histories of the Universe' at St Mark's Church in the Bowery on 1 January 1975 can be heard. Later, a scene of a white religious congregation dancing is visually echoed by a sequence showing a Native American man spinning in the snow and by another with Black Flag fans swinging their white arms in the dark. The band's 'Nothing Left Inside' (1984) accompanies the images.

This accumulation of moving images and sounds, texts and pictures, explanations and interruptions continues for nearly one hour, the elements building upon each other to construct a historical narrative that focuses on a specific form of popular culture (rock music, in its broadest sense) and places it at the centre of the construction of an idea of America — a construction that starts with the religious communities that left the England of the Industrial Revolution (and even earlier) for the New World, and that finds a culmination of sorts in the social formations that emerged after World War II, shaped by new urban structures, mass cultural production and unprecedented forms of consumerism.



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Although *Rock My Religion* is dated 1983 to 1984 (fig.1—51), Rhea Anastas has suggested that Dan Graham actually began working on it in 1980 or 1981.[3] After its first screening at the exhibition 'Dan Graham Pavilions' at Kunsthalle Bern in 1983, Graham reworked the video for 'Flypunkter/Vanishing Points' at Moderna Museet in Stockholm one year later.[4] The various versions of the script offer insights into the editorial process that led to the work as it exists today. The earliest version currently available, however, is not a script, but the digital file of a Memorex cassette recording titled *My Religion: Extract from a Work Tape: Ann Lee*, released as a 7-minute and 8-second soundwork by *Audio Arts Magazine* in 1982.[5] In 1983, a subsequent version of the script was published in the exhibition catalogue for 'Scenes and Conventions in Architecture by Artists' at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, under the title 'Rock Religion'.[6] A third version was published as 'Rock My Religion' in *TERMINAL ZONE*, the magazine project edited by artist Fareed Armaly from 1987 to 1988.[7] The fourth version of the script, also titled 'Rock My Religion', differs significantly from the actual voice-over of the video, and was published in Graham's volume *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects 1965—1990*, in 1993.[8]

The shifting emphasis of the script suggests the project's changeable, unstable nature. In the years following its completion, however, Graham sought to stabilise its reception.

*Rock My Religion*, he wrote in 1988, aimed to 'restore historical memory' by reconstructing an 'actual, although hidden past' that was mostly eradicated but still 'briefly available'.[9] To do so it was necessary to challenge, firstly, the 'dominant ideology of newness'; secondly, the Baudrillardian notion of 'history as simulation'; and thirdly, the 'historicist idea' that 'everything we know' about the past is 'dependent upon the present'.

Brian Wallis's 1993 essay 'Dan Graham's History Lessons' popularised Graham's position. Since then, curators such as Philippe Vergne have tended to take Graham's reading at its word, approaching the work as an illustration of his intentions. By taking 'rock music and entertainment both as tools and subjects', *Rock My Religion*, Vergne has written, functions as a 'history lesson crystallising qualities specific to Graham's aesthetic programme'.[10]

Recent thematic exhibitions such as 'Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll Since 1967' at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (2007—08) and 'See This Sound: Promises in Sound and Vision' at Lentos Kunstmuseum in Linz (2009—10) have confirmed the conception of *Rock My Religion* as a rock-history lesson in video-essay form.[11] Arguably, the recent retrospective exhibition 'Dan Graham: Beyond' at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis served to institutionalise this reading.[12]

In their book *Black Sound White Cube* (2010), Dieter Lesage and Ina Wudtke challenged this tendency, concluding that *Rock My Religion* is

> *often integrated into exhibitions with the intention of informing an audience about the history of rock music. However, obvious obligatory historical references to black culture in general (the dancing and trance in black 'sanctified' churches) and black sound in particular (rhythm and blues) are almost completely missing from this ambitious attempt to 'contextualise' one's 'own' (rock) culture and background. Given that, it is far from certain whether the 'lesson' approach is the right curatorial way of presenting the video.*[13]

Their response echoed the first substantial critical response to *Rock My Religion* in the 1980s. In 'From Gadget Video to Agit Video: Some Notes on Four Recent Video Works' (1985), Benjamin Buchloh articulated his unease with the video's exclusions:

> *Thus it is astonishing that Graham should omit from his construction of the panorama of religious and musical consumption any reference whatsoever to the fact that this history cannot possibly be written without considering the contribution of the black working class and its musicians or reflecting on its cultural contribution in the context of its role as the traditionally exploited and oppressed proletarian class of American society.*[14]

*Rock My Religion*, then, did not seek to restore 'historical memory'. It emphasised specific moments in white working-class histories while excluding those of the black working class.

Separated from the authority of Graham's reading, it becomes possible to understand *Rock My Religion* as a video-essay that works with historical images and archival sounds in ways that are not historical, but rather ahistorical and transhistorical; not academic or theoretical so much as associative and speculative. Hal Foster discerned *Rock My Religion*'s desire to thwart academic expectations when he pointed towards the 'hint of the vengeful

nerd as well as a touch of the provocative adolescent' contained within the 'quirky versions of cultural history pioneered by Graham'.[15]

*Rock My Religion* directed its provocation, highly valued within punk culture, towards art culture. In 1984, it brought with it a powerful sense of artistic grievance that targeted critics of contemporary art. Today, after Graham's video has been canonised by younger art historians and critics, that sense of revenge remains palpable. Its vengefulness stemmed from the belief that the rock culture that mattered to artists in the 1970s and 80s had been ignored by art critics unschooled in such culture, indifferent to its impact and convinced of its irrelevance. In this sense, *Rock My Religion* operated, and continues to operate, as an object lesson that demonstrates how artists can rewrite the history of the present according to their own enthusiasms.

What Buchloch failed to consider was that *Rock My Religion*'s omissions of African American music could repel and attract in equal measure. For every artist discomfited by its inexcusable exclusions, another artist, perhaps even the same artist, might discern a refusal to give ground on one's convictions. Within *Rock My Religion* could be discerned a method for elevating one's obsessions to the dimensions of mythology. The subjective intensity of *Rock My Religion* appeals to artists whose preoccupations have nothing whatsoever to do with rock culture. Its appeal lies in its autodidacticism, its amateurism and its do-it-yourself perseverance. Each of these qualities encourages artists, especially the fraction of artists who write, to make works about what matters to them, using material collected over years.

Even as its exclusions disqualify it as reliable history, *Rock My Religion* can be understood in other ways. As a synthetic ethnography on tribes, sects, fans and anti-families. As a series of speculations on shared states of sensation. On dance as a method for ecstatic belonging. On the necessity of forgetting as the route to immortality. As an amateur anthropology of the founding of America.

*Rock My Religion* often feels like a white dream of America divested of African presence, with the exception of an appearance by Jimi Hendrix, a single reference to Chuck Berry's 'Johnny B. Goode' (1958), a reference to Jerry Lee Lewis's 'Great Balls of Fire' (1957) that omits its songwriter Otis Blackwell, Little Eva singing 'The Loco-Motion' (1962) and the presence of one unidentified slave spiritual about the day of Jubilee. And yet, *Rock My Religion* is not so much a wish fulfilment of a whitened America as a new mythology of origin fashioned from the images and sounds of working-class religious rituals. Given the political climate of Christian Republicanism in the 1980s, its preoccupation with the fundamentalist theologies of white America was perceptive.

To summon the memory of the Shakers at the precise moment when evangelicalism resurged on radio and television allows one to pose a question. Had *Rock My Religion* found a way to match the rhetoric of conservative family values with the anti-family principles of American celibate communists? Situating rock culture within the wider context of the political theology of America drew attention to rock music's capacities of identification and projection. The close-up shot of glistening black ants crawling over the face and torso of a toy model of Christ in David Wojnarowicz's film *A Fire in My Belly* (1986—87) offered one response to Pentecostal demonology. Graham's position, by contrast, was harder to read. Rather than a critique of organised religion, *Rock My Religion* invites viewers into the ecstatic dimension of becoming born-again. It seeks to invoke the power that brings those congregations into existence.

This invocatory capacity is specific to the video-essay. Bennett Simpson has suggested that *Rock My Religion* is 'essentially a textual critical work that Graham's video and audio montage serves to illustrate'.[16] On first viewing, the role of audio and video does indeed appear to illustrate the 'textual' and 'critical' work of the essays on rock culture produced by Graham from 1980 to 1984. Graham and Cypis do read scripts that extend ideas initially formulated in published essays. Their voices address the viewer with a guileless didacticism, and the images often illustrate what the voices say. Indeed, Graham favours Victorian illustrations as a source of historical imagery. The texts, or to be more precise the 'text-overs' generated by the edit suite, do make words visible within generic parameters.[17]

Repeated viewings and listenings, however, begin to reveal a performative dimension that exceeds illustration. What distinguishes the video-essay from other forms of video art is its ability to perform the states it seeks to articulate. Because the video-essay inhabits the same medium as its subject, it can enact its speculations in ways that a textual essay cannot. Since it uses the same sounds, images and voices that it speculates about, it is capable of sharing their powers of seduction. This capacity of exemplification is the promise of the genre. Each video-essay has to discover its own methods of actualisation; the task facing the video-essayist is to invent forms capable of animating arguments.

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On first viewing *Rock My Religion*, what strikes the viewer is the poor quality of the images and the blurred sound. The horizontal hold of the image continually gives way, the picture is always collapsing. At moments of silence, the ghost-voice of Patti Smith can be heard, leaking between channels. These slippages indicate



the attrition suffered by the work they make you protective of it. Each fault is not so much a flaw as a scar that attests to its difficult existence. This sense of infirmity in the image brings a corresponding sense of imbalance in the sound. On first listening to *Rock My Religion*, what impresses is the insistent insecurity expressed in the voice-overs of Cypis and Graham. What imprints itself is the imperfection that articulates the position and the stance of New York's post-punk culture, which *Rock My Religion* emerged from and participated in.

Cypis's and Graham's reading voices are monotonous, depressive, excitable, serious, determined, thoughtful, introspective, amateurish, persistent. Neither is in control of itself, nor its environment. At three different moments, the voices can be heard to stumble over words. Twice, bumps are audible — the microphone has picked up the movement of the body, or perhaps someone has leaned too close to the microphone and has managed to hit it. The levels at which the voices are recorded continually fluctuate; no attempt is made to match the tone of speaking voices from one take to another. All of these factors produce a shifting unsteadiness, and build a portrait of making do with what one has. The viewer becomes attuned to the provisional nature of each assertion, instead of assuming it to be an accomplished fact that must be deconstructed.

The reading voices are often supplanted by the voices of rock stars: Eddie Cochran; Jerry Lee Lewis; Patti Smith; Robby Krieger, Ray Manzarek and Jim Morrison of The Doors, each of whom takes over responsibility for narration. The New Jersey-accented nasal voice of Patti Smith recorded on cassette tape, recalling a visitation by the ghost of Jimi Hendrix arguing with a radio deejay — declaring Radio Ethiopia to be 'an alternative to your alternative' — and riffing on Rimbaud at St Mark's Church. The intimacy of Jim Morrison reciting a childhood recollection,

slurring his words, haranguing his audience from a stage in Miami. The bootlegged voice of Jerry Lee Lewis arguing with Sam Phillips. The cavernous echo of Eddie Cochran bidding farewell to a Buddy Holly ascended to teen heaven. Each voice is distinguished by the conditions of its recording. The muffled pause of the cassette recorder; the sound of something being pounded; the crude edits; the fluctuating volume levels; the room tone; the proximity of the microphone; the expressive dimension of guitar distortion, of shouts, screams, hollers, yells, whispers, sighs, dead silences.

On first reading *Rock My Religion*, you realise that the screen has become the support for a scriptovisuality. It demands doubled vision and twin hearing. The capitalised font, its size and the number of characters in each line are fixed, as are the direction and speed of the textual flow. However, the text's and screen's colours are variable. Within the parameters set by the video editing suite, each move away from white font on black screen draws attention to the combined action of reading and looking at reading, while listening to one or more voices and or one or more songs. The challenge of *Rock My Religion* is to watch, listen and read the screen with two kinds of twin attention.

### The Gods of Hardcore

*Rock My Religion* begins in the crowd. Graham's video camera documents Black Flag onstage from his position below the stage; the perspective is the partial view of the fan in the mosh pit with other fans. The camera loses sight of the band, and its ability to frame the movement of the group is obscured by the movement of backs and heads.[18]

Holding his camera at head height, Graham follows the glare of the yellow stage light as it illuminates the exposed torso of Black Flag's singer Henry Rollins. Rollins untangles himself from his microphone lead and arches his back (fig.1). He drops his neck forward, level with his waist, feeling the load of Greg Ginn's dragging guitar riffs. Ginn drops and lifts his head, bearing the weight of distortion. A white teenager with a shaved head crouches, swinging his arms. Another rears out of the pit and beats the air with his clenched fists until it looks as if he were pounding a drum on Rollins's flexed chest (fig.5). The footage is frequently illegible. Such quality suggests a portrait of Graham in 1983, when he shot Black Flag at one of the California group's first gigs in New York. It is a portrait of Graham as a fan, a participant and an observer of a new teenage ritual.

Black Flag's grievous dirge has been muted. The hiss of tape seems to suggest that their music is composed of frequencies outside the threshold of hearing. The lack of sound also makes the group appear slower than normal, as if the footage had been deliberately decelerated.[19] It draws attention to the crowd that stands watching these gods of American hardcore. That muting of the sound magnifies the expressive intensity of the performance was evident to rock critics such as Paul Williams, whose magazine *Crawdaddy!* had influenced Graham's writings in the 1960s, on The Kinks, The Seeds and Vanilla Fudge. On his first encounter with Black Flag in San Francisco in the early 1980s, Williams was struck by the way in which Rollins leaned forward to make eye contact with the crowd. As he did so, the singer moved his lips, making a sound that the writer transcribed as 'muh muh muh muh muh'. Rollins, he wrote, was 'mimicking them, communicating, but also in a strange way very giving, not holding himself back'.[20] Instead of speaking to the crowd, Rollins was miming their action of speaking to him. The singer exhibited the communication that passed between performer and audience. Youth's sense of itself as an embattled subcultural class was being played back to itself. In Graham's video, fleeting images of Rollins flexing his back, running from the dark into

the spotlight, banging his head with both fists, become grimacing mimes that exaggerate teenage rage into allegories of a modern day pilgrim's toil in hardcore America. Of equal importance was the nocturnal ritual captured by Graham's camera. The camera captured the new dance in which it found itself. It watched the hardcore punks as they slam each other like dodgem cars. Williams observed the way in which youth 'assault each other in a rough but impersonal, non-hostile ... way, careening into their neighbours or sending others off with furious shoves...'[21] The result, he concluded, was an 'atmosphere of danger for the crowd as a whole, since people may come flying into you at any time wherever you stand on the sidelines. This reduces the distance between performers and audience.'

Slamming was hardcore punk's version of what Pere Ubu identified in the title of their 1978 album *The Modern Dance*. In 1983, Graham filmed Washington DC hardcore band Minor Threat at their first New York gig, at CBGB, in an eponymously titled video. Singer Ian MacKaye can be seen pacing the floor, berating his audience, voice inaudible. Minor Threat, like Black Flag, were idolised for their principled position within punk culture. In the dark, what could be seen was similar: swinging arms, thrusting necks, shaved heads, faces clenched like fists, the exhilaration of self-inflicted violence.

Graham integrated three scenes from *Minor Threat* into *Rock My Religion*. What attracted Graham to hardcore punk was what Williams had discerned: the promise to 'reduce the distance between performers and audience'.[22] This promise could be visualised in moments of obscurity and confusion, when the camera's ability to frame experience was compromised.

The footage of Black Flag must have been shot after Rollins joined the band in 1982. In 1984, he grew his hair down his shoulders.



In 1982, however, his skull was shaved like a goon gone AWOL, so the short hair dates the gig to 1983. The need to embark on this guesswork stems from Graham's decision to omit in *Rock My Religion* the name, date and venue from the image of the performance, which is then separated from its sound. The information that could locate the group in history has been subtracted so that Black Flag's presence in the video, like that of Minor Threat and Sonic Youth, is rendered anonymous. Without a name, these three bands float in an indefinite present tense.

How important was hardcore punk? Where did it belong? What did it indicate about this generation of youth? By withholding information, *Rock My Religion* also forestalls questions of value and judgement. Once those assumptions are suspended, what emerges is a mode of attention: the viewer is invited into a decontextualised world characterised by gestures and expressions that assume a significance that is compelling because it is unspecified. *Rock My Religion* invites the viewer to read different kinds of significances into the performances of Black Flag, the Patti Smith Group, Minor Threat and Sonic Youth, and, by connecting them to archival images and historical sounds, these groups begin to play roles in a larger drama of transhistorical implications. The viewer becomes used to seeing performance in an archetypal dimension. Actually, each image and each sound begins to take on this kind of significance. As a result, *Rock My Religion* invites a reading that is as spiritual as the religious practices that preoccupy it. The performative capacity of the video-essay becomes animated in a metaphorical dimension that can be understood as religious, animistic or mythological. In this dimension sounds gain the power to possess bodies, and images have the capacity to entrance.

To understand the transhistorical role that hardcore punk plays within *Rock My Religion*, it is necessary to see how it reconnected

its fans to the fundamental purpose of rock 'n' roll. Hardcore was a method for transforming noise into ecstasy. Talking to Anne Hilde Neset in 2009, Graham stated that 'I always thought, particularly because I was listening to hardcore, that rock 'n' roll comes very much out of using noise and the destructiveness of noise and sound, making it into something ecstatic, where you can get in touch with God.'[23] By the 'destructiveness of noise and sound' Graham meant the machine noise of the factory. In the mime of hardcore, the agonies of industrialisation can be heard, as well as the means for transducing the rhythms of its machines. In interviews conducted with Tony Oursler between 1997 and 2001 and with Eric de Bruyn in 1997, Graham insists that rock 'n' roll did not emerge in the 1950s, nor from the agrarian blues of twentieth-century America, but in the Industrial Revolution in Manchester, England, in the 1730s.[24] Industrialisation had produced a new breed of peasants called 'workers', whose lives were dominated by what Friedrich Engels called the 'social murder' of disease, exhaustion, work and poverty.[25] New rituals were needed to ameliorate the spiritual injuries inflicted by the discipline of the factory. This was rock's reason for being: to function as what Throbbing Gristle has called 'industrial music for industrial people'.[26] This was, of course, not a historical argument as much as an anachronistic assertion that answered a need within the present. It felt right for the era. When Throbbing Gristle founded their record label in 1980, they named it Industrial Records, reflecting a similar desire; and this is echoed by the words of their singer Genesis P. Orridge, who declared that the time had come to 'drag electrically amplified music' away from its presumed origins within 'slave-era agrarian blues', towards an 'admission that the Industrial Revolution had taken place' in order to confront rock with the 'ugly, raw, difficult' nature of its true mechanical origins.[27]



There was a heretical dimension to this anti-historical rejection of the founding role of the agrarian blues. It signalled a desire to correct histories of rock music formulated in influential readings such as Greil Marcus's *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music* (1975).[28] Once this new myth of the past was in place, the present could be inhabited differently.

Why was it so important to relocate the origin of rock within the making of the proletariat? Why was Graham identifying punk with the Industrial Revolution just as the idea of a post-industrial society was gaining heightened appreciation throughout post-punk culture? In fact, this was not a new history of rock so much as hardcore's reimagining of the birth of America. The logic of Graham's argument was that hardcore punk functioned as a modern-day blues for white youth, and this, in turn, made those suburban youths into contemporary slaves, the descendants of those 'very oppressed peasants who were forced to suffer incredible personal and spiritual losses in the city'.[29]

## The Trailer

*Rock My Religion*'s 2-minute and 33-second opening sequence functions like a trailer, by introducing contemporary and historical visual and musical figures that will be crucial to the whole work. The first sonic presence in the video is Black Flag's guitar feedback. The second is that of the unknown Elder who sings his song of work. His voice attests to a life of labour and the recording conveys the gravitas of the historical document. The third is Sonic Youth's 'Shakin' Hell'. The song's rapidly strummed guitar chords generate a frictionless, forward motion. Alternate tunings capture the attention, as the voice of Kim Gordon draws the listener into an ahistorical drama. They are joined by scenes of 'early industrial age mills' situated on the 'outskirts of Manchester', which indicate the world from which the Shakers emerged, and by the archival illustration of a young

woman in profile wearing a bonnet (fig.4) that appears as Graham starts to narrate the biography of the Shakers' founder. The video encourages the viewer to believe that the young woman is Ann Lee. In fact, the drawing does not depict her; rather, *Rock My Religion* uses the drawing to envision Ann Lee as a young woman. The illustration, titled *Sisters in Every-Day Costume*, actually depicts two anonymous female Shakers facing each other in profile, but Graham has only filmed the young woman on the left side. The image was drawn by the artist Benson John Lossing, and was first published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in July 1857. Lossing's illustrations also appear in historian Edward Deming Andrews's *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society* (1953); all of Graham's visual references of the Shakers are extracted from this book.[30] The image titled *Ring Dance, Niskayuna* (fig.3), which appears both in the 'trailer' and as the final image in *Rock My Religion*, provides the key image of Shaker worship. Graham reworks these Victorian illustrations by moving his camera within the limits of the image and editing details from different illustrations into continuous sequences. Within *Rock My Religion*, these cropped pictures exert a power described by Raymond Pettibon as the 'surprisingly big littleness of the excerpt'.[31]

The opening images build a picture of Ann Lee as a case study in the condition of women in the making of the English working class. Paintings of silhouetted rooflines and foundry chimneys billowing black smoke (fig.6) as well as illustrations of factory workers stooping over machines are arranged into a sequence at a tempo too fast to grasp on initial viewing. Subsequent viewings reveal a giant weaving shed fitted with rows of power looms driven by transmission belts, a female spindle cleaner concentrating on the threads of a giant loom (fig.7), a female worker looking on at two male workers crouching in a dark furnace and a peasant family forced out of its home and carrying bags (fig.8).



Another illustration is identifiable as an excerpt from a black-and-white reproduction of Hubert von Herkomer's monumental painting *On Strike* (1891). Graham has focused on the upper section, filming the scowling worker and his weakened wife as she clings to his shoulder (fig.9), a darkened doorway behind them. What persists is the Victorian imagery of proletarian despair.[32] The visual sense of anguish in *On Strike* is scored by 'Shakin' Hell' throughout the opening trailer. But the discrepancy between the contemporary song and the historical image is not just a question of creative mismatch. In *Rock My Religion*, songs do more than comment upon images of the past or connect themselves to images of the present. Rather, *Rock My Religion* enacts the performative implications of separating music from image. By setting 'Shakin' Hell' apart from the image of the band performing it, the song is liberated to roam outside its date. The recording escapes its body in order to connect to different bodies, different times and different media. It gains the capacity to intern itself inside bodies and to haunt depopulated settlements.

In this opening sequence, images from the industrial past are being drawn into the harrowing demands made by the song. As it plays out its fixations, 'Shakin' Hell' begins to take on the force of a transhistorical drama. Gordon's guttural screams become a script that assigns roles. The Shakers start to appear as performers interpreting her instructions. The slam dancers in the Black Flag gig also begin to move according to the commands of the song.

In her essay 'American Prayers' (1985), Gordon argues that hardcore punk revived an American 'tradition of horror' that she traces back to Edgar Allan Poe's 'antibourgeois, anti-family stories of incest'.[33] Gordon connects Black Flag's expression of 'modern apocalyptic doom' to a similar preference for 'horror

and incestuous smothering' that she detects in works by artists such as Raymond Pettibon, Tony Oursler and Mike Kelley. Gordon's account describes the emotional impact of 'Shakin' Hell' as well as of Black Flag. 'Shakin' Hell' does not describe or dramatise what the Shakers did on Sunday nights.[34] Nonetheless, repeated viewings of *Rock My Religion* create associations between the song and the religious group that did not pre-exist the video. Graham invents a role for 'Shakin' Hell' in relationship to the rituals of the Shakers that is emotional and at the same time ahistorical. The song creates a connection to the images of the past that cannot be proven but instead is asserted and affirmed.

### It's Her Factory

The appearance of the Patti Smith Group at 2:33 shifts the oppressiveness of labour into the near present of the 1970s. The poor-quality recording shows the group performing at an outdoor concert. Smith holds her thin arms in front of her, walking forward in time to the beat. She sings 'Piss Factory', the B-side of 'Hey Joe', her debut single, recorded in June 1974. *Rock My Religion* returns to this scene three times. What seems of interest to Graham on this first occasion are the opening sentences of the song, in which Smith judges herself and her co-workers at the toy factory where she worked as a teenager with pitiless clarity. *Rock My Religion* draws attention to these words by transcribing them in a capitalised yellow font that scrolls upwards on the screen (fig.10). Reading is complicated by images of Smith performing behind the text and the simultaneous but not synchronous bootleg recording of the song.

Smith's pungent account of work on the assembly line at the Dennis Mitchel Toy Factory in Pitman, South Jersey, in the summer of 1964 becomes a modern case study of low-paid female work. When Smith sings, 'You do your piece work and you do it slow', she is ventriloquising the words of the factory foreman that warned her teenage self to fall into line. He is telling her to slow down her rate of productivity; the young Patti Smith must learn to adjust her pace to match that of other female workers.

Factory work forces its workers to adopt its repetitive rhythms. The rhythms of the assembly line enforce themselves upon the psyche as much as the body: bored by repeating the same gestures hour after hour, female workers fall into daydreaming. As Herbert Marcuse wrote, 'The machine process in the technological universe breaks down the innermost privacy of freedom and joins sexuality and labour in one unconscious rhythmic automatism'.[35] Marcuse envisioned a world inhabited by subjects psychically enslaved by their desires, their unconscious wishes programmed on an industrial scale. These unconscious desires could not be changed by moral appeal or critical dialogue. To reprogram the unconscious, one would have to invent methods capable of entering into the 'one unconscious rhythmic automatism' and hacking its mechanisms. In its surging beat and insistent words, 'Piss Factory' articulates Smith's liberation from those rhythms. In the context of *Rock My Religion*, this argument takes shape by means of a preoccupation with the relationship between the rhythms of work and the beat of rock. For Graham, hardcore punk provided one method of remembering the injuries inflicted on the spirit by industrial rhythms and transducing them at the same time.

After some images of Shaker settlements, the Patti Smith Group comes back. This time, the gig is frozen into sixteen frames. Each frame focuses on an expression or a gesture. Smith is dressed in the white shirt and black tie familiar from Robert Mapplethorpe's cover photograph for her first album, *Horses* (1975). She is holding her microphone, arching her neck as she leans in (fig.13). The soundtrack is Smith's recitation of her 7-minute and 46-second prose poem titled 'Histories of the

Universe', recorded at the St Mark's Poetry Project New Year Extravaganza.[36] Graham has edited two excerpts of this to construct one sequence:

> *Um, yeah, alright, the histories of the universe lie ... in the sleeping sex of a woman. Now, back in Egypt, the Egyptian Book of the Dead was written, because they got these like, women, that were, like, you know, that were before the time after 1852. So like ... they got these women and they put them in these, like, tomb shapes, like mummy shapes, only they didn't mummyise them, what they'd do is they made this mixture up, of opium and salad oil and henna and they put it all over them ... you know, they took ... first, they'd knock 'em out with a sledgehammer, then they'd lay 'em in there, then they'd wipe them all over with this opiate henna oil ... maybe throw a little merc in, anything they could get in there.*

Graham doesn't include the following sentences:

> *...and she'd be saying ... she'd be laid out and then she'd like start feeling all this stuff getting in her pores and like er deeper in her pores and deeper in her pores into her veins and you know how like the filaments are inside a light bulb when you turn it on and the next thing you know her fingers are moving Egyptian style ... very rigid very hieroglyphic...*

And instead jumps to:

> *...anyway she'd do this and the scribes would be standing around ... with their papyrus or papyrus or err er errm peanut butter bag wrappers ... No, forget that one ... sitting around with their their scrolls and anyway she'd start babbling.*



'Histories of the Universe' could be understood, according to Graham, as a proposal for a 'new rock language' called 'Babelogue' by Smith that was 'neither male nor female'. This automatic speech drew upon the traditions of glossolalia practised by the 'Egyptian priestesses' and the 'religious revivalists talking in tongues'. But when one listens to the entire recording, it becomes clear that a 'new rock language' that was 'neither male nor female' describes the project of *Rock My Religion* better than it does Smith's own thinking. Distinguishing what she says in 'Histories of the Universe' from Graham's interpretation provides a more complex understanding of how his ideas on the relationship between rock music and industrialisation differed from hers.

In fact, Patti Smith was preoccupied with female speech rather than with speech that was 'neither male nor female'. In 'Histories of the Universe' she takes pains to explain her method for speaking in tongues and automatic writing. These are methods that have worked for her, in the past. She is recommending them specifically to girls who want to be artists. She wants girls to learn a discipline. If they practise, as she did, they will learn how to artificially induce a state of possession through trance. They will become mediums for divine speech.

On 15 May 1871, Arthur Rimbaud wrote a letter to Paul Demeny that declared:

> *When the infinite servitude of woman shall have ended, when she will be able to live by and for herself; then, man — hitherto abominable — having given her her freedom, she too will be a poet. Woman will discover the unknown. Will her world be different from ours? She will discover strange, unfathomable things, repulsive, delicious.*[37]

'Babelogue' was Smith's name for a woman's culture that would be 'strange and unfathomable, repulsive and delicious', to which Smith was already contributing; a method for the 'new music, new sensations, new horrors, new spurts' that she wanted to inspire.[38] She approached the medium of rock music as a means to revive the tradition of possession. The sense of expectation that Smith brought to rock as a visionary language was exorbitant.

It is striking how seriously Graham takes Smith's proposals, given the divergence between her ideas and his. In some way, *Rock My Religion* can be seen as a series of methods for protecting Smith's high seriousness from ridicule, and for building speculations from her songs, performances and interviews. Perhaps the reason for this is that Smith's poetry, writings and songs proved that rock music could be reinvented as a visionary language. Given that Graham situated hardcore punk within the context of post-industrial society, it is possible also to understand Smith's exalted vision of rock from the perspective of industrialisation formulated by the film-maker Humphrey Jennings around this time. In his posthumously published book *Pandaemonium 1660—1886: The Coming of the Machine as Seen by Contemporary Observers* (1985), Jennings argues that poetry, like labour, rhythm and sexuality, had been 'violently and fundamentally altered' by the 'accumulation of capital, the freedom of trade, the invention of machines, the philosophy of materialism, the discoveries of science'.[39] By 1750, the 'classic line of poetry' had been enclosed and industrialised, and Jennings excavated quotations from texts produced from 1680 to 1880 in order to reconstruct each phase of the manufacture of poetry. 'In what sense', Jennings asked plaintively, 'have the means of Vision kept pace with these alterations?'[40] Smith's visionary language provided one answer to this question — a question that for Jennings was 'mankind's greatest problem'. *Pandaemonium* operates like an 'unrolling film': each of its



quotations functions as an image in which the 'situation of humanity' becomes 'clear' for the 'flash time of the photographer or the lightning', each possessing an 'illuminatory' quality that condenses a 'whole world'.[41]

*Rock My Religion* might be understood as one version of this 'unrolling film', a grand narrative of industrialisation retold through the dancing bodies of Quakers, the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (Shakers), the born-again of the Great Religious Awakening, the Ghost Dancers, rockers, hippies, slam dancers and straight-edgers — each of which produced means of vision through rituals of dance. But the epic narrative of *Rock My Religion* was not told chronologically. Graham approached historical moments anachronistically, informed by Smith's style of thinking. To suggest that the Shakers had founded rock 'n' roll in 1774 in New Lebanon, in rural New York state, was indeed laughable. And yet *Rock My Religion* managed to compel audiences to suspend critical judgment and enter into its invented mythology of origin.

Smith's poetic mode of thought was visionary in a specifically heretical sense. She invented a rock language capable of enacting symbolic refusals with heretical implications, continually testing Christian faith. When Graham applauded Smith for being the first singer 'to make explicit the truth that rock is a religion',[42] this did not mean she was the first to set religious themes to rock, as George Harrison had with 'My Sweet Lord' in 1970. The distance between Harrison's song and Smith's 'Gloria: In Excelsis Deo' (1975) indicates the precise nature of Smith's achievement, evident from the recurring words in 'Gloria'. At 53:04, in the final minutes of *Rock My Religion*, the Patti Smith Group's performance is finally allowed to play right through to its righteous conclusion. Dressed in baggy white shirt and black tie, right hand above her hip, Smith leans into her microphone

and drags out the words: 'I said that Jeeeesus dieeyyaaaad for somebody's seeeyiiiiiiinnnnns...' She pauses to savour the moment, smiling to herself: '...but not miiiine' (fig.50).

In these lyrics, she rejects the debt Christians incurred when Jesus died for their sins, refusing the transaction that all Christians are obliged to enter. The words had initially appeared as the first sentence of her poem 'Oath', from 1970. Its concluding sentence was just as impertinent as its opening:

> *So Christ*
> *I'm giving you the good-bye*
> *firing you tonight.*[43]

Smith discussed the origin of her heterodox impulse in 'Radio Ethiopia (the tongue of love)', an essay written in 1976 to accompany the release of the album *Radio Ethiopia*. The essay recalls her youthful encounter with the Old Testament parable of the Tower of Babel. As she read, her heart 'ached' for the architect who wept when God destroyed his life's work. The young Smith identified with the architect: 'the artist in me was already aroused' by God's decision to rob humanity of 'the universal tongue because we sought to create beyond the landscape...' Before the architect stood the figure of 'Satan', whom she realised was the 'first absolute artist — the first true nigger'. Satan had been punished for being 'the first to have a vision of existence beyond what was imposed on him'. He 'fell to disgrace not for being evil, but for exhibiting the anxious passionate recklessness of the artist'. By identifying Satan as the 'first absolute artist' and as the 'first true nigger,' Smith drew upon an inflammatory vocabulary in which the figure of the 'nigger', like that of the 'mutant' and the artist, occupied the highest point in a sacrilegious value system.



Smith's urge to profane emerges most powerfully in the song 'Ain't It Strange', from *Radio Ethiopia*. In the middle section of the song, Smith lowers her voice and garbles her words. Her speech becomes a guttural taunt directed at an Old Testament God. Brazenly she speaks her challenge: 'turn, God, make a move'. The performance of this satanic provocation is what Graham chooses for the end sequence of *Rock My Religion*. Smith recalls the events, on the night of 26 January 1977, at a concert in Tampa, Florida:

> *I was doing my most intense number, 'Ain't It Strange', a song where I directly challenge God to speak to me in some way. It's after a part where I spin like a dervish and I say 'Hand of God I feel the finger, Hand of God I start to whirl, Hand of God I don't get dizzy. Hand of God I do not fall now.' But I fell ... I did feel the finger of God push me right over...*[45]

She explains the fall as a divine response to her satanic defiance:

> *I feel it was His way of saying 'You keep battering against my door and I'm gonna open that door and you'll fall in...' Did I want a communication with God so intimate that I'd be dead, off the earth?*[46]

The fact of her fall produced a profound performative irony that proved that God was listening, retroactively validating the heresy of her songs. The irony of performing 'Ain't It Strange' with its 'do not fall now' declaration and simultaneously suffering the accident signals a difference between what the voice of Graham does not say and what the text-over writes. At 53:48, there is a three-second silence as the lyrics 'Hand of God feel the finger' slowly scroll over an image of the Shakers performing the Ring Dance (fig.51). Graham begins to quietly narrate the accident and the agony of recovery. His voice-over

continues into the closing credits, indicating that *Rock My Religion* has not concluded its speculations.

However, at 54:32, a recording of Smith gravely reciting the lyrics of 'Easter' (1975) can be heard: 'I am the salt, the bitter laugh, I am the gas in a womb of light...' Placed after the account of her fall and her return to performance in a neck brace, the excerpt of 'Easter' attains a new significance: it has earned the right to be listened to with respect. And when 'Gloria' comes roaring back in the final moments of the video, it is as if the montage itself were participating in the resurrection of Smith.

The care that *Rock My Religion* bestows upon 'Easter' exemplifies the work's essayistic approach to the pop song. As a video-essay, *Rock My Religion* is obliged to invent methods for actualising the capacities of sound and image. It does this by liberating the song from its supporting role: the pop song does not play a secondary role to the image, nor does it function as a document of a historical event. In this sense, there is no such thing as 'soundtrack' in *Rock My Religion*. Instead, the pop song appears as a historical presence within the speculative present of the video. Songs function as entities and events according to a logic of veneration, with the musical dimension enshrining the verbal dimension and the guitar notes validating the lyrics. Songs speculate in *Rock My Religion*; they assert, they think. Songs are edited to emphasise a specific excerpt that continues, contradicts or complicates an assertion started by the voice-over or the text-over. A sequence within a song pushes a specific line of thinking forward. It is montage that reveals the song's operative power of declaration, rendering it present. The paradox of *Rock My Religion* is that for a pop song to perform as a gesture, it has to be carefully enclosed in a context of veneration and fear. Montage creates the condition of respect around each section of music regardless of its source (an advertisement, a music video, a video cassette of a feature film, a video of an illegally filmed concert).



Only 'Johnny B. Goode', Mark Dinning's 'Teen Angel' (1959), 'Piss Factory' and 'Ain't It Strange' are transcribed and credited. These are the exceptions, as the rule is not to identify.[47] Besides, *Rock My Religion* does not distinguish between songs, sermons, advertisements or bootlegs. It treats all its appropriations as propositions of faith rather than found objects. Repeating an existing song or image is not the 'deconstructive device' of Barbara Kruger, the 'implicit critique' she identified in 'taking' a picture whose value was 'safely ensconced' within the 'proven marketability' of a media image. Such an act, she wrote, could be subsumed by the

> *power granted its original, thus serving to further elevate cliché. This might prove interesting in the use of repetition as a deconstructive device, but this elevation of cliché might merely shift the ornamental to the religious. And as an adoration the work can read as another buzz in the image repertoire of image culture or as simply a kitschy divinity.*[48]

*Rock My Religion*'s appropriation strategy could be accurately described as one of elevating cliché to the level of the religious. What Kruger did not foresee was that its adoration could produce archetypes powerful enough to suspend the power of kitsch while maintaining an aura of divinity. This is the role played by the figure of Johnny in the songs 'Johnny B. Goode' and 'Land' (1975).

### The Turbine

In *Rock My Religion*, the ability of the song to convincingly connect itself to an image does not hinge only upon its content; it depends upon the way Graham edits on the beat, using the rhythm of the pop or rock song as a dynamic element to launch into an

image and vice versa. *Rock My Religion* repeatedly draws attention to the rhythmic continuity of song and image.

When Patti Smith sings 'You do your piece work and you do it slow', from 'Piss Factory', she stresses the long 'o' in the final word. Graham truncates the sentence before the vowel sound ends and cuts to a rotating water turbine. By calling attention to the round shape of the vowel, he underlines the visual echo of the circular motion of the turbine. Water turbines such as the one pictured produced the energy that powered the mills of the Industrial Revolution. In the repeated shots of the turbine, it is as if Graham were accelerating its movement until it catches up to the speed of montage. This invites the thought that the editing suite is the post-industrial equivalent of the turbine, that it is the motor of post-industrial society.

Locating the turbine within the historical setting of a Shaker settlement places the group inside the visible movement of history. Graham's camera walks around the depopulated Shaker village, across the grey exteriors of the houses, looking at their walls. It proceeds through the houses' interiors and inspects their windows. Throughout, massed guitars can be heard. The camera gazes at details from Masaccio's *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (fig.11) and looks at Adam, as he hides his face in his hands, and Eve, who covers her breasts with her left hand, her face anguished. The guitars continue to play underneath Johanna Cypis's narration of Ann Lee's critique of 'Adam's sin in the garden'. As Graham quotes God's prophecy of woman's labour and man's toil, white capitalised text on orange explains how Ann Lee experienced a trance which revealed to her that 'she, a female, was Christ's Second Coming' (fig.12).

Meanwhile, the sound of the guitars suggests the instruments have shed their individual identities. The riff of the electric



guitar has merged into indistinct harmonies that swarm around the same note. The power chords have undergone 'halation', the photographic term for the spreading of light beyond its proper boundary in a developed image. Graham has found a contemporary music that renders the 'homeless spirits' of the Shakers audible. By bringing this music together in these scenes, he has staged an encounter between two experiments: Glenn Branca's reinvention of the rock guitar and the Shakers' reinvention of the family.

The music is the first minute and 45 seconds of 'The Ascension' — one of four Branca compositions integrated into *Rock My Religion*. None of them behave like pop songs; but neither, as noted earlier, do they function like soundtracks. The second is used to construct a relationship between the past and present of Shakers in the US. From 6:34 to 8:19, the journey, the landing, interiors and exteriors of Shaker compounds in the US — distinct from the interiors of Shaker buildings seen a few minutes earlier — are animated by the massed electric guitars of 'The Spectacular Commodity' (1981). The Shakers' journey across the Atlantic Ocean is visualised by three illustrations recorded from the pages of an unidentified book (fig.14). The camera tracks left to a colour illustration that acts as a visual reference for the wilderness of America (fig.15).[49] The tracking shot is repeated across the scene of an empty road, behind which a rural setting stretches. This visual repetition suggests the film has moved from historical illustration to present-day New Lebanon, the primary Shaker settlement. The camera approaches the white houses of an empty Shaker settlement (fig.16). It tracks from left to right and right to left in a series of mismatched movements.

At 6:40, Graham announces the Shakers' departure for America in '1774'. At the sound of 'four', a guitar begins its descent from the height of an attack towards a chorused note that subsides in

a resonant silence. As the downstrokes accelerate, it becomes difficult to work out how many guitars are playing. They aggregate into a hornet-hive rhythm, clustering aggressively around a single note played by one of the four guitars in Branca's ensemble. Immediately after, the camera travels through the interiors of empty Shaker residences (fig.17). It inspects walls, doors, beams, benches, staircases, chairs. The present-day scenes are contrasted with four of Benson John Lossing's illustrations of the Shakers, all connected into one sequence linked by framing details as the camera moves across them.

The third Branca sequence occurs from 21:24 to 22:05, during two elaborately edited sequences of Elvis in performance. His overly familiar music ('Good Rockin' Tonight', 1954) is replaced by passages of sustained gamelan that saturate the archive. The guitars are gone, replaced by the acoustic phenomena generated from overtones. The effect of this metallic susurration is to exalt Elvis. The outstretched hands and shining eyes of fans take on the impact of devotion (fig.32). When 'Good Rockin' Tonight' returns, the change from the sacrosanct to the profane is experienced as a fall from the aerial weightlessness of Branca's music to the rhythmic invitation implied in the backbeat of Elvis's group.

The fourth Branca composition is excerpted from an earlier video by Graham and Ernst Mitzka, titled *Westkunst (Modern Period): Dan Graham Segment* (1980). *Westkunst* is a 7-minute and 10-second work that analyses the post-War development of suburbia. Within *Rock My Religion*, the scene from *Westkunst* demonstrates the typical suburban location of the white teenager. Its placement in *Rock My Religion*, from 33:22 to 35:38, imbues it with the peculiarly self-contained dimension of a suburban ideal. This sense of contemporary pastoral is created by Branca's 'Theme for a Drive Through Suburbia' (1980—82). There are no distinctive guitars to be heard in this scene; instead,



there are looped sequences of tintinnabulation, rolling cycles of bells and chimes that throw off glints and sparkles. Guitars have become a new form of gamelan, they suspend time. Suburbia is envisioned as an idyll of tract-house façades, brightened by the afternoon sun (fig.38). The camera must be fixed to the outside of the car in order to capture the slow-motion travelling shot of lawns and house fronts.

The idealised suburb and the devout aura bestowed upon Elvis take on the form of mirages when recalled by the auditory memory. When the memory of the Shakers is played back, however, what returns is a peculiar form of cultural dissonance. The historical associations that viewers bring to the images of the Shakers no longer behave historically. Rather, they emerge from a present that can't be told clearly from the past.

In Branca's ensembles, each guitar was strung with two pairs of three strings, tuned an octave apart, to play a chorused or unison note. The four guitars he used in these recordings were tuned according to baritone, alto, tenor and soprano, like a traditional chorus. When they combined with bass and drums, the ensemble produced dissonances, consonances and overtones that generated auditory hallucinations of acoustic phenomena. Branca had learnt about alternate tunings from performing in the band of composer Rhys Chatham, and Sonic Youth's guitarists Lee Ranaldo and Thurston Moore developed tunings learnt from performing in Branca's ensembles.[50] This lineage fed into *Rock My Religion* through Sonic Youth's songs, which Graham cast as presences of horror and possession.

Branca's collaboration with Graham began in 1977 and extended into 1983. In March 1983, Graham and Branca, together with musicians Axel Gross and Margaret DeWys, collaborated on *Performance and Stage-Set Utilizing Two-Way Mirror and Video*

*Time Delay*, during Graham's exhibition at Kunsthalle Bern. The sound of this 45-minute performance, filmed by artist Judith Barry, is, at times, similar to the music used for the Elvis sequence. The introductory text of the video explains that it incorporates 'two views of the performance. The first is from the rear of the space facing the mirror; the other view is from the camera behind the mirror.' What can be seen is the musicians isolated from each other, focusing on their instruments; whatever eye contact they made with each other was not detected by the video camera. DeWys is seen at her keyboard, in profile; Gross looks down, studying his guitar.[51] A community of sound, then, that did not translate into a community of bodies.

**Mother Ann Lee Leads the Shakers to the New Land**

When the white text on orange announces that Ann Lee experienced a trance which 'revealed to her that she, a female, was Christ's Second Coming', it reasserts the spiritual authority of Mother Ann Lee. It is this revelation that Johanna Cypis quotes when she states that Lee interpreted heterosexual marriage as a sin. Armed with this conviction, Lee elaborated a radical diagnosis of industrial capitalism in the Biblical language available to uneducated women of the time.[52] *Rock My Religion* never questions the delusion implied by her revelation. Instead, it takes her speech at its word, building a context of value in which each statement provides evidence of its own truth. It never thinks of questioning Ann Lee; its faith in her faith works to persuade viewers of the contemporary significance of the Shakers, a group of celibate American communists who invented a way of living that would allow them to protect themselves from the social murder committed by capitalism.

*Rock My Religion* moves from the documentary present of the Shaker residence to drawings of their domestic life within those interiors. It moves from walls, doors, benches, staircases and



chairs to the details of daily life depicted in illustrations taken from Edward Deming Andrews's *The People Called Shakers*. The image *Singing Meeting*, from a sketch by Joseph Becker first published in *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* in 1885, is followed by a detail from *Brethren's Retiring Room* from the same source, that Graham has inverted so that the right side of the image is now on the left. For the third image, titled *Sister's Shop* and drawn by Lossing, the camera focuses on a detail on the left side and slowly zooms out. For the fourth, titled *Dining Room, North Family, Niskayuna* (fig.18) and drawn by Becker, the camera slowly pans across the scene in detail.

Graham's explanation of the design principles of the Shaker community was informed by a close reading of Dolores Hayden's *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism 1790—1975* (1976). According to Hayden, the Shakers described themselves as a 'living building' that articulated 'questions of order, sharing and visibility'.[53] Their book of 'Millennial Laws' systematised every aspect of their daily lives, structured according to a 'spatial organisation' of segregated domestic space maintained by a hierarchy of Elders and Eldresses. Graham visited Amerika Haus in Munich to 'see books on the Shakers which the German middle-class lovers of Shaker decoration would buy'.[54] These design fans made a 'connection between Shaker furniture and Minimal art'.

On Sundays, the Shakers worshipped by dancing in circles that developed into pantomimes of temptation and fits. Graham wanted to 'offset' the contemporary perception of the Shakers by emphasising that they were 'very much more involved with a sexual kind of utopia ... a kind of utopia based on having men and women live together but not have sex'.[55] *Rock My Religion* desublimates the middle-class fascination with Shaker decoration by connecting the images of Shaker interiors

calculated to appeal with images of Minor Threat and Sonic Youth gigs designed to repel: it records illustrations of the Shakers' bodies and animates them by the distorted live recording of 'Shakin' Hell'; it moves from the morning light of the Shaker residence to the barely legible darkness of the mosh pit.

The spatial order of a Shaker residence gives way to the cavernous depths of the Minor Threat gig. The distortion of the latter is interrupted by four beats of silence in which an unknown drummer silently yells as he pounds out a rhythm. The obscurity surrounding the drummer is dispelled by the light thrown onto tools hanging on hooks fixed to the slanted wooden planks of the Shaker walls. The muted image of Ian MacKaye — pacing the floor, dressed in a black T-shirt, yelling into his microphone — is crowded by the threats of 'Shakin' Hell', which continues as the white text on vibrant orange describes how 'a fit of shaking passed over the group' (fig.19). Kim Gordon appears for the first time at 10:32, shouting into her microphone. Her white arms are visible in the darkness, her elbows pointing downwards as she moves her shoulders in time to the pounding drum (fig.20). For the first time, 'Shakin' Hell' is reconnected with its own image. In doing so, it invokes the visual memory of the other images that appeared as it played: factory illustrations, drawings of Shakers, muted images of Black Flag. It recalls them in the altered form of auditory memories. Each visual memory conjures its auditory dimension: the rhythms of a Manchester factory, the pounding of shoes in a Shaker church in New Lebanon, the grinding guitars and yells of a Black Flag gig.

The music of 'Shakin' Hell' plays also throughout the pan across the central figures of a drawing titled *The Gift of Love, Evening Meeting*, by A. Boyd Houghton, published in *The London Graphic* in 1870. The medium shot of *The Whirling Gift*, a line drawing by an unknown artist from David R. Lamson's *Two Years' Experience*



*Among the Shakers* (1848), is followed by the dramatic jump cut to a woman lying on the floor, a detail of the drawing (fig.21). When Gordon reappears, her shoulders hunch and sink in time to the beat. She growls and snarls into the microphone. Her bass guitar bangs against the lower half of her silver dress. Graham's camera shakes. Gordon's performance is interrupted by white text: 'singing begun after a violent jerking of head from side to side'. As the text scrolls, whoops can be heard. These yells announce the presence of the religious revivalism that plays an important role in *Rock My Religion*.

'Shakin' Hell' dramatises the Shakers' demonology of desire as the first episode in *Rock My Religion*'s speculative account of 'the making of Americans', to borrow Gertrude Stein's phrase. Graham concentrates on white Americans born in the flames of Christian fundamentalism; the Puritan sermon, the Salem witch trials and the Second Great Awakening are envisioned as moments in a political discourse that understands itself in the language of witchcraft and demons.

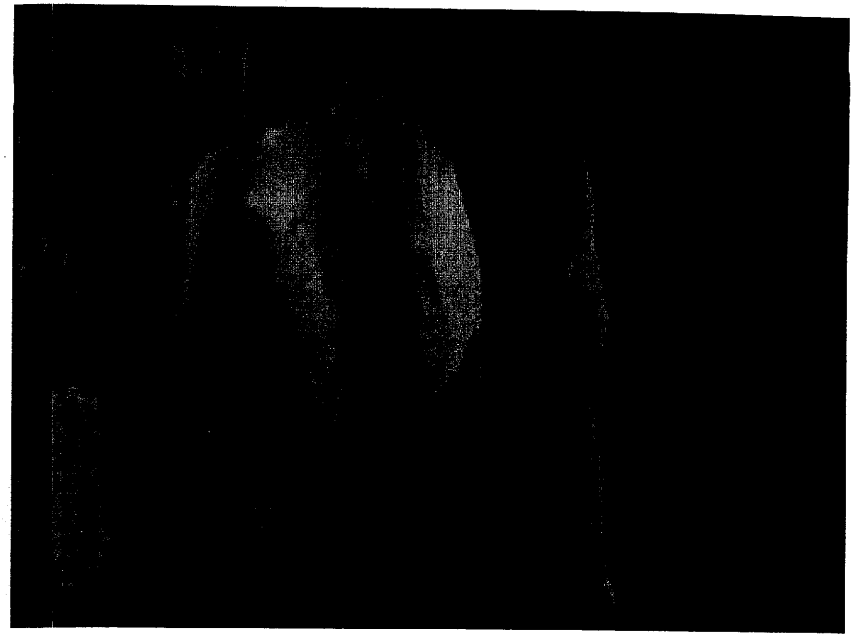
**The Puritans**

A detail from 'Pilgrims Going to Church' (1867) by George Henry Boughton announces the start of the section of *Rock My Religion* titled 'The Puritans', at 11:29. Here Graham identifies a struggle between two economic, political and religious tendencies: the working-class collectivism of the Shakers and the middle-class individualism of the Puritans. White text on bright orange announces that 'men are held ... over the pit of hell' (fig.22). Graham has extracted the quotation from *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741), the foundational Puritan sermon written by the theologian Jonathan Edwards. Not only does the sermon survive its transition from page to screen; the estrangement imposed by the analogue medium serves to affirm its impact.

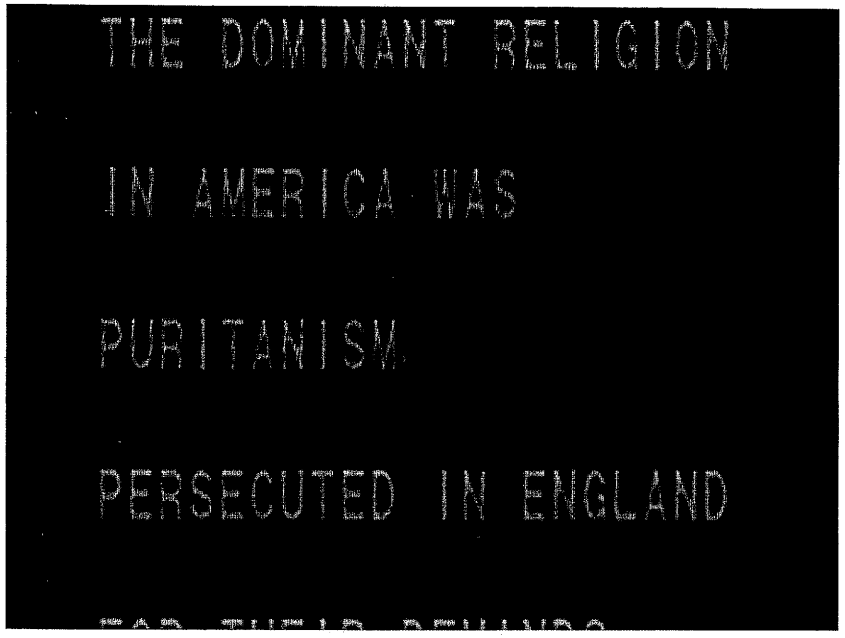
Accompanying the text is a bass guitar that rumbles in front of a crashing hi-hat and goading, trebly, guitars. It belongs to The Fall's 'A Figure Walks' (1979) — rockabilly rendered macabre by the needling voice of vocalist Mark E. Smith, declaiming that 'a shadow walks behind you'. As the song continues its warning, the camera starts to move across a powerful illustration. The horizontal hold breaks up as it focuses upon the anxious face of a Puritan girl looking upward. It tracks towards girls kneeling, pointing their fingers at an unidentified event out of frame (fig.23). Other girls stand and look anxiously. The camera travels past stern-faced men sitting at a table towards a man standing behind a girl whose hands are clasped in prayer. The camera shakes as it pauses on this detail. At the left-hand corner of the image it is just about possible to see the corner of the orange title of a book. This sequence might have been inspired by *Live at the Witch Trials*, The Fall's first album, released in 1979. Graham also filmed an illustration drawn by artist Gordon Pyle for Act 3 of *Giles Cory, Yeoman*, Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman's 1893 play on the Salem witch trials.[56] Pyle's image, titled 'There is a flock of yellow birds above her head', visualises the trials of 1692 and 1693, with a Victorian emphasis upon encumbered girlhood. This scene was the remnant of a longer section whose text can be read in the script published in Graham's *Rock My Religion: Writings and Projects 1965—1990*.[57] Although Pyle's image shows cowed femininity, in Graham interpretation the witch trials were a revolt of female youth against their elders. (Graham later abandoned the idea that these accusations prefigured twentieth-century youth rebellion.)

The historical phenomenon of revivalism gained a new relevance when evangelism resurfaced in the years of 1980 to 1984. And yet *Rock My Religion* does not overtly criticise nineteenth-century evangelism or its resurgence in the early 1980s. Its absence of critique provokes questions that the video itself does not answer.





1—51. Dan Graham,
*Rock My Religion*, 1983—84,
single-channel video tape, black and white
and colour, stereo sound,
55min 27sec, stills
Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery,
London


THE DOMINANT RELIGION
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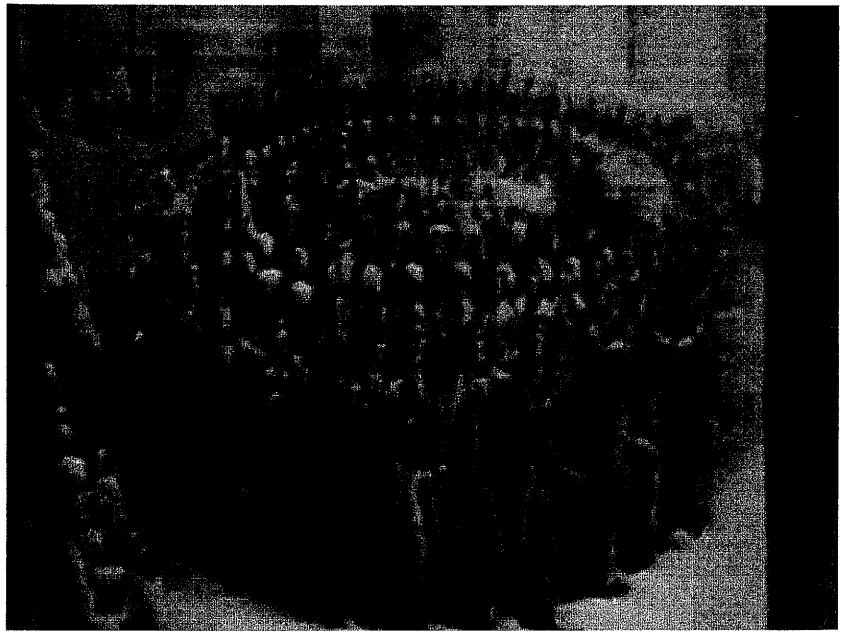

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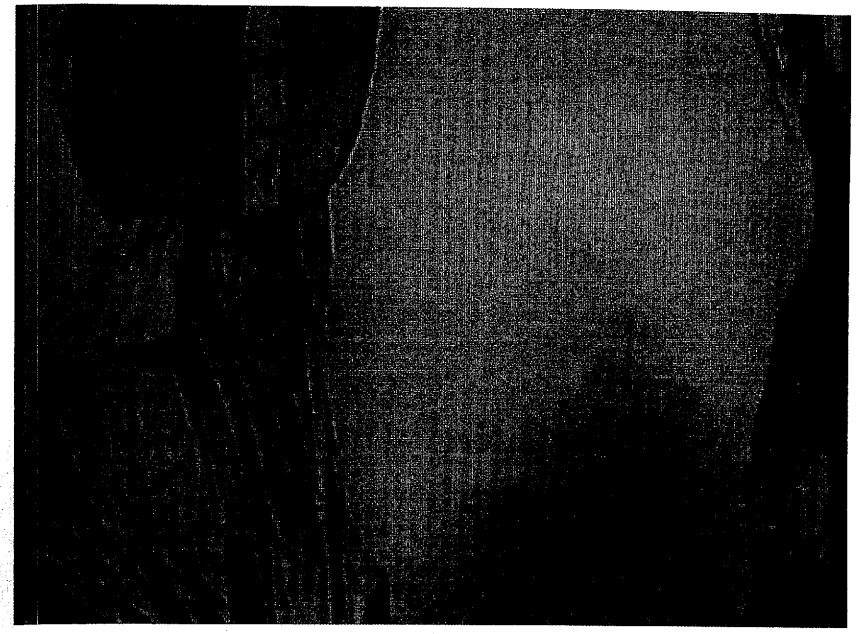

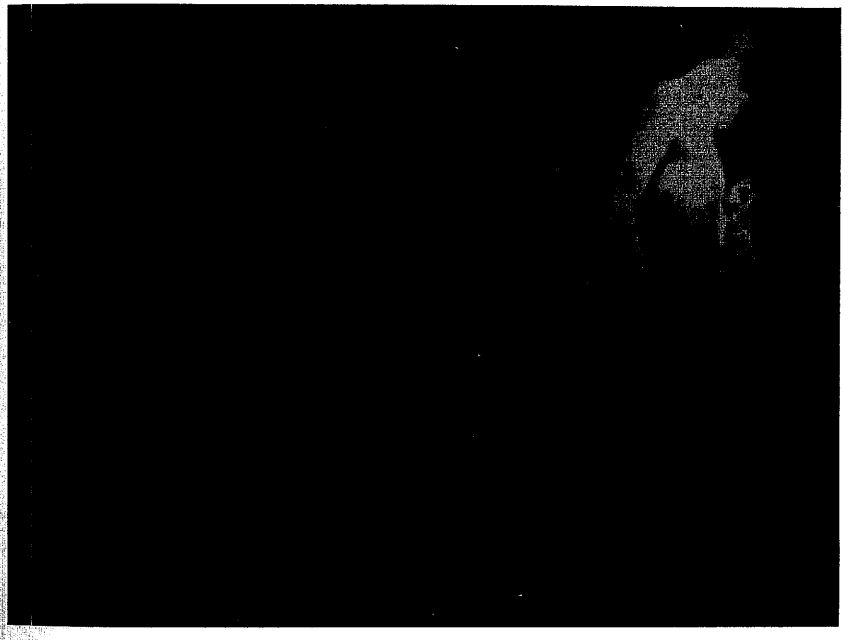

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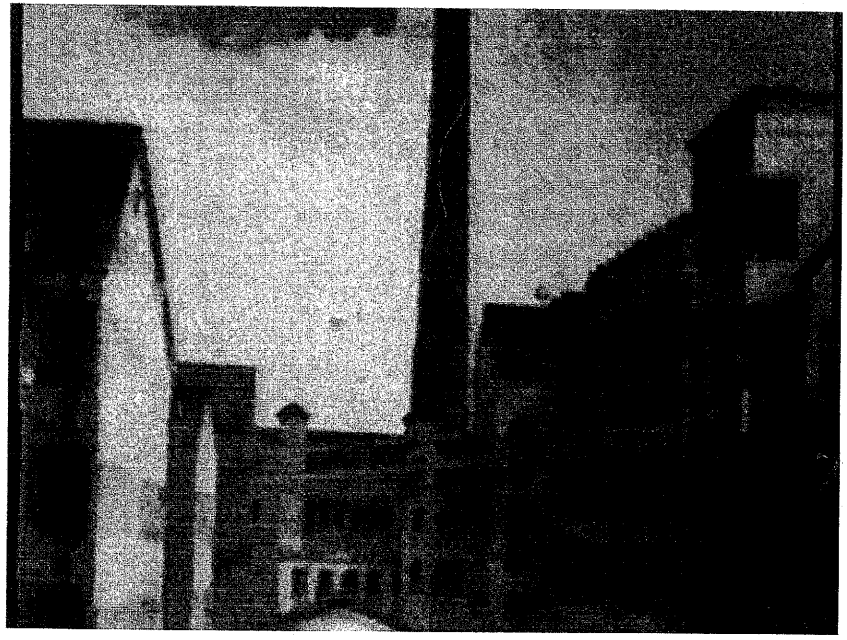

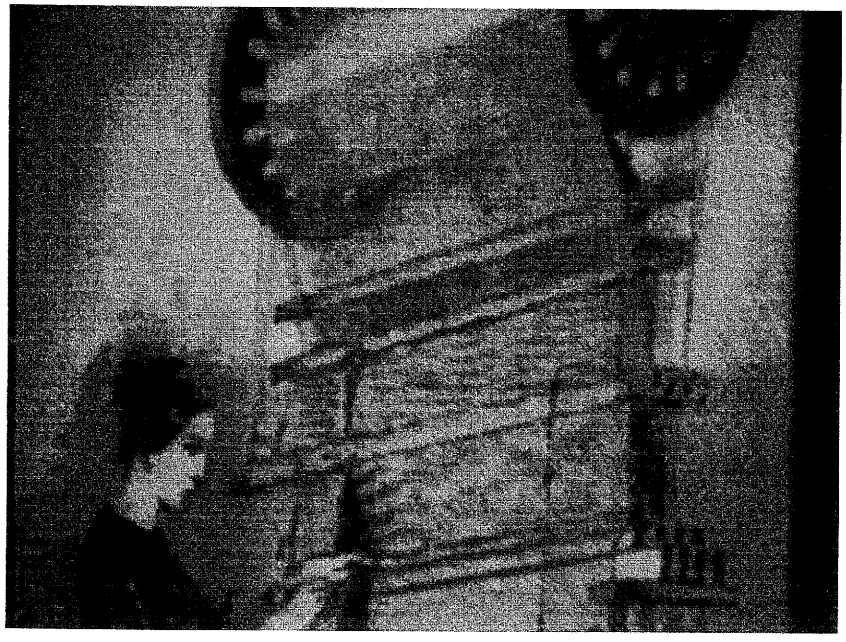

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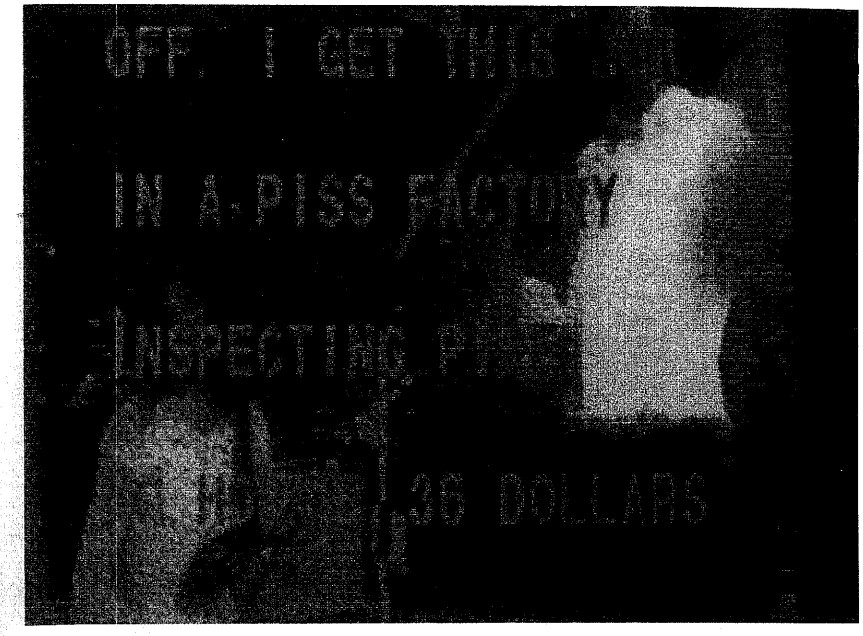
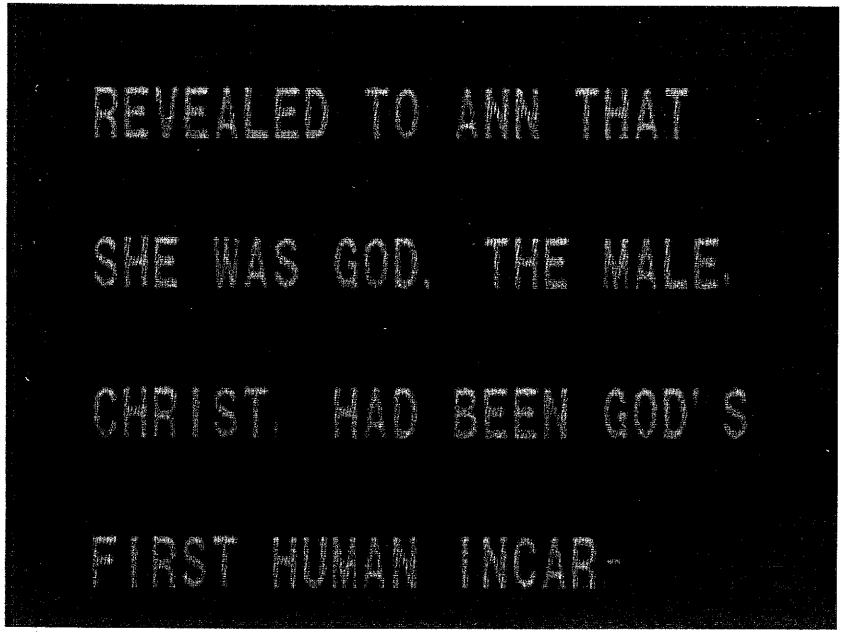
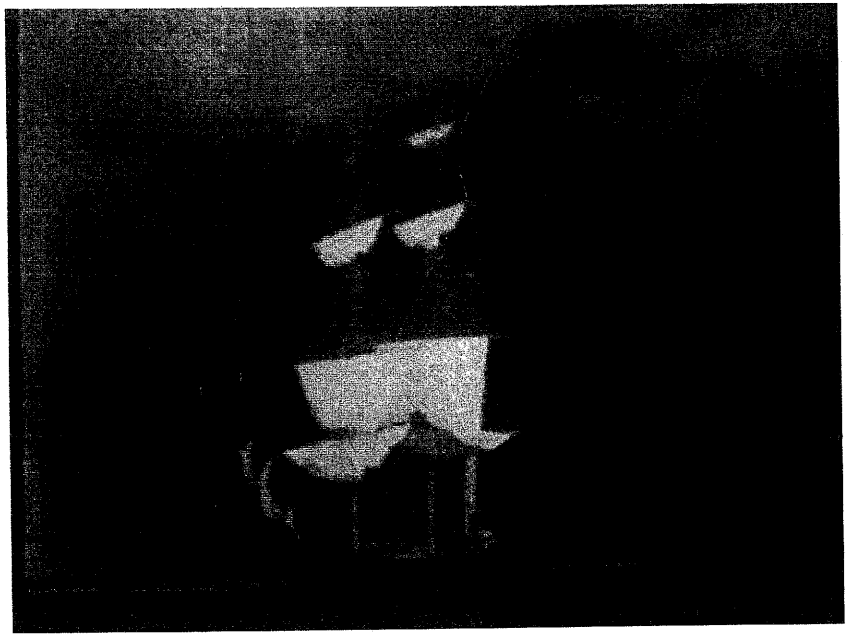

OFF. I GET THIS
IN A PISS FACTORY
INSPECTING PI
36 DOLLARS

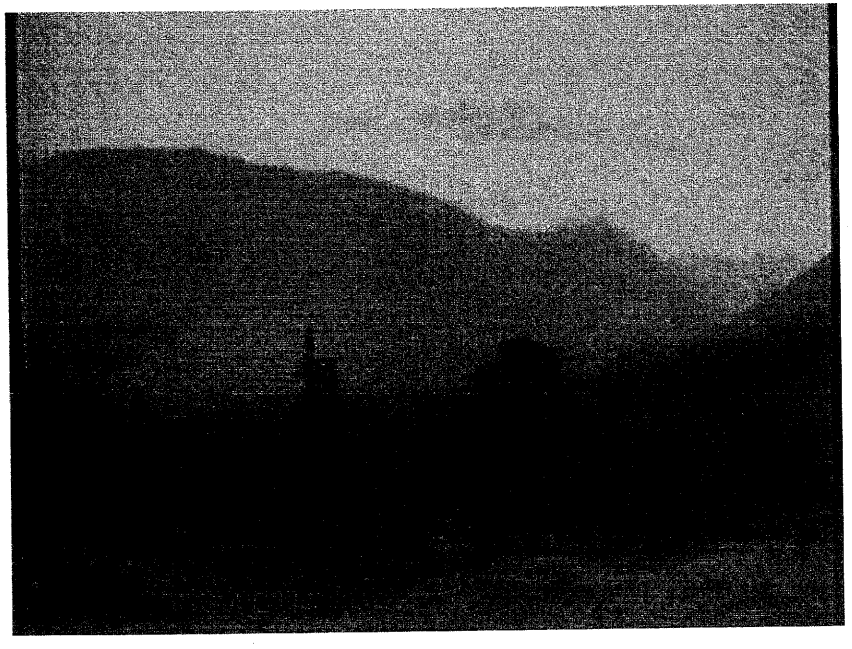

REVEALED TO ANN THAT
SHE WAS GOD. THE MALE
CHRIST HAD BEEN GOD'S
FIRST HUMAN INCAR-

11.
12.


WOMEN GET AWAY FROM
THEIR LONG SERVITUDE
TO MEN.
GOING T
THE MEN

13.





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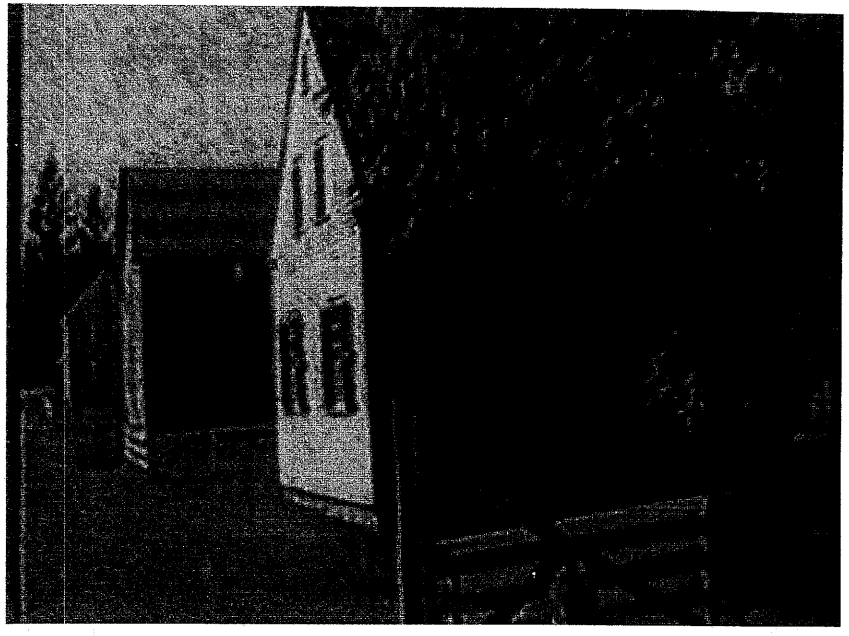

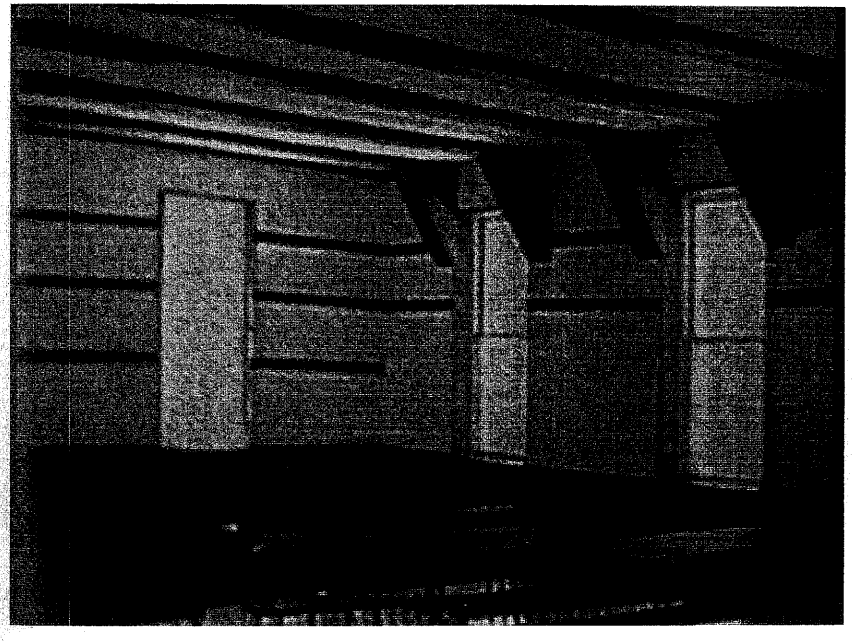

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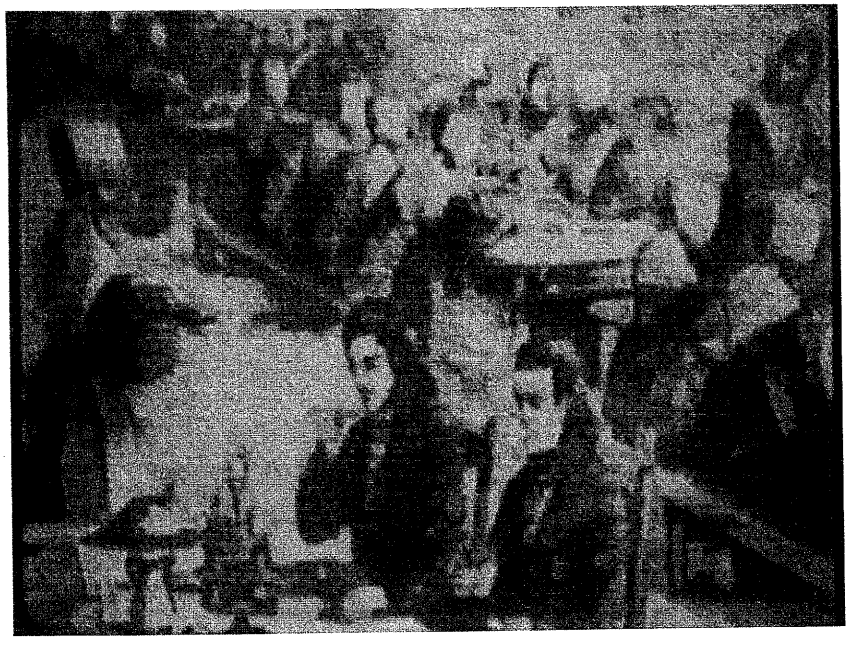

SOME REMOVED THEIR

OUTER CLOTHES. A FIT

OF SHAKING PASSED OVER

THE GROUP. SOME

SHAKERS BOWED DOWN

18.
19.

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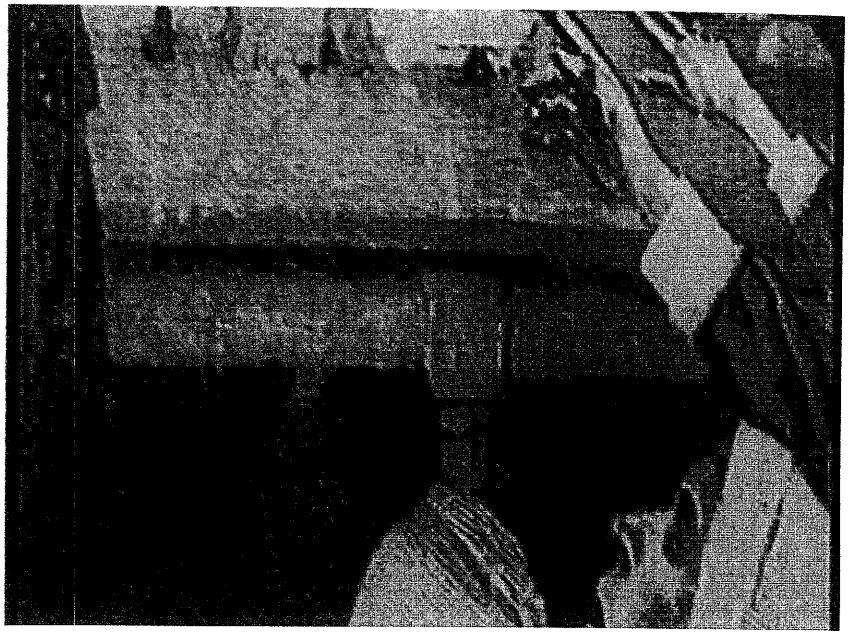
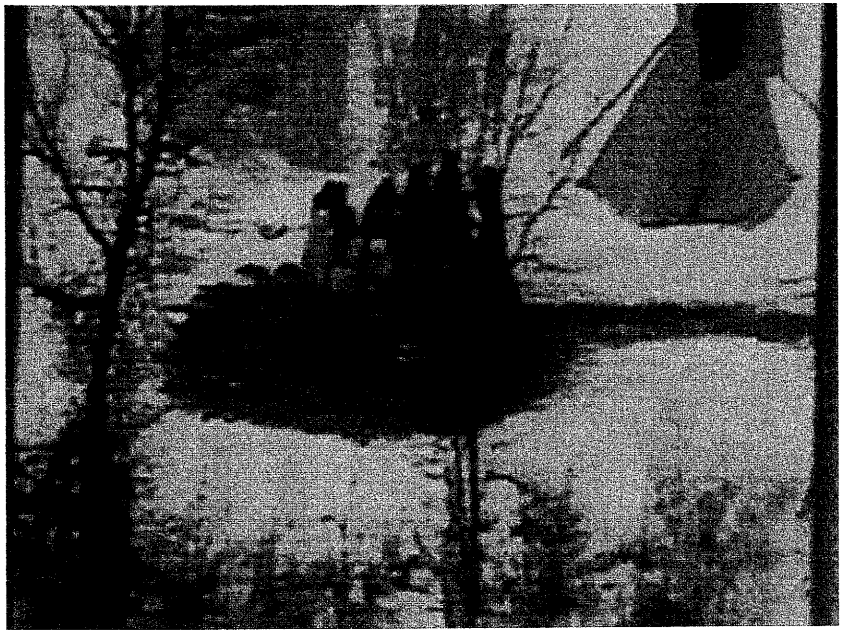
21.

"MEN ARE HELD... OVER
THE PIT OF HELL: THEY
HAVE DESERVED THE
FIERY PIT AND ARE







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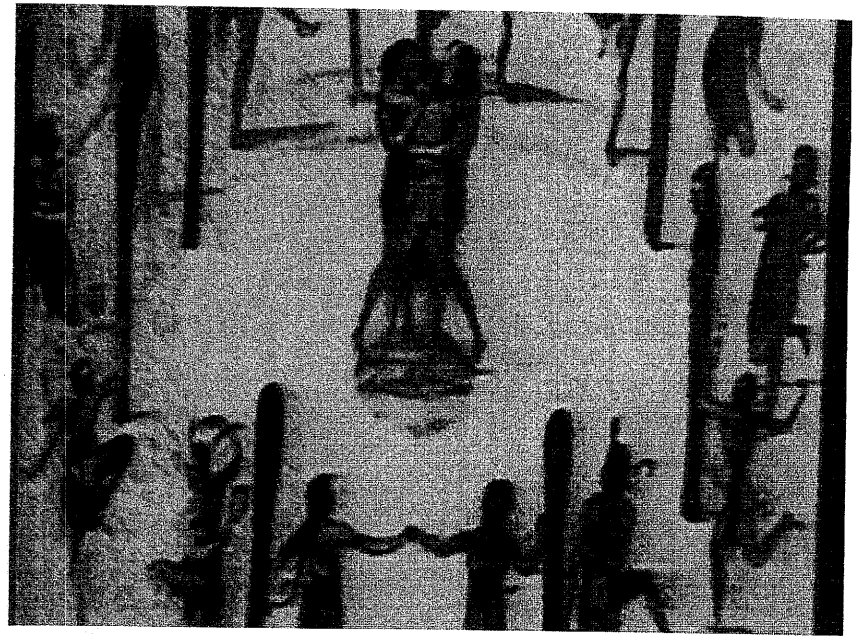

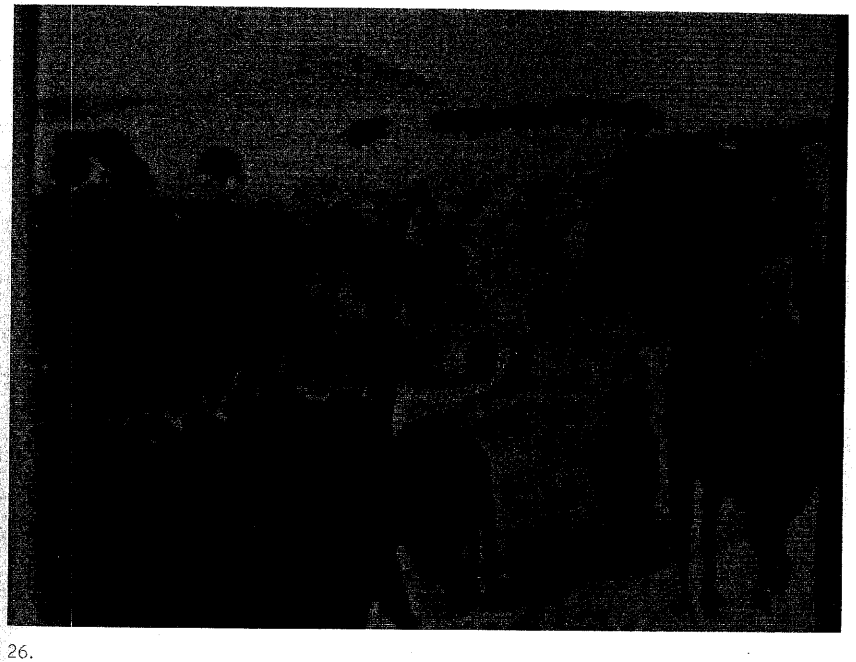

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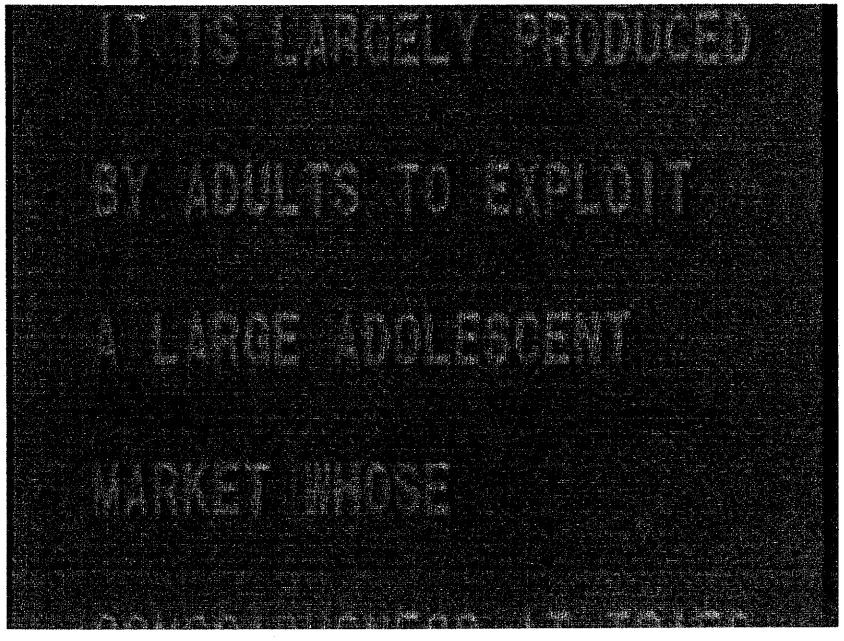
CASSETTES
UPSTAIRS


IT IS LARGELY PRODUCED
BY ADULTS TO EXPLOIT
A LARGE ADOLESCENT
MARKET WHOSE

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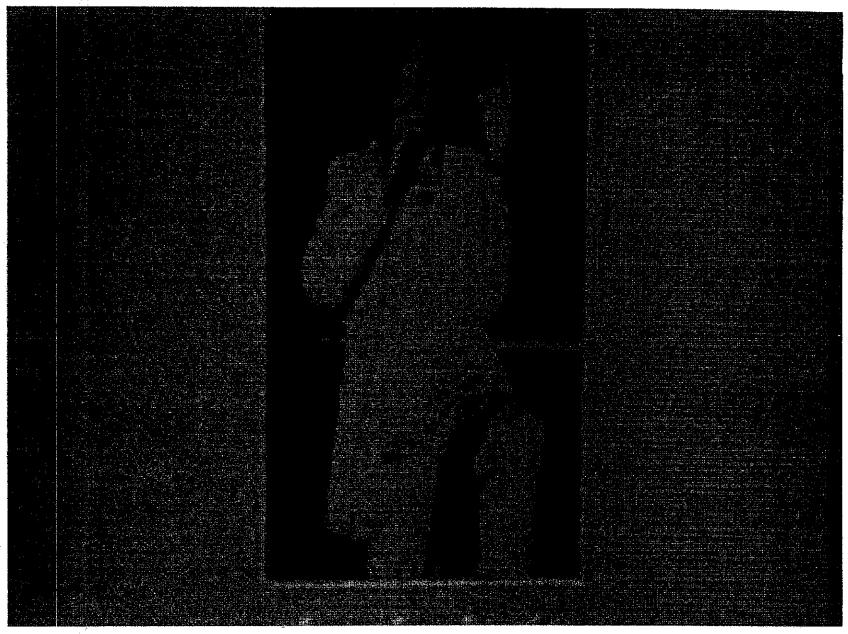

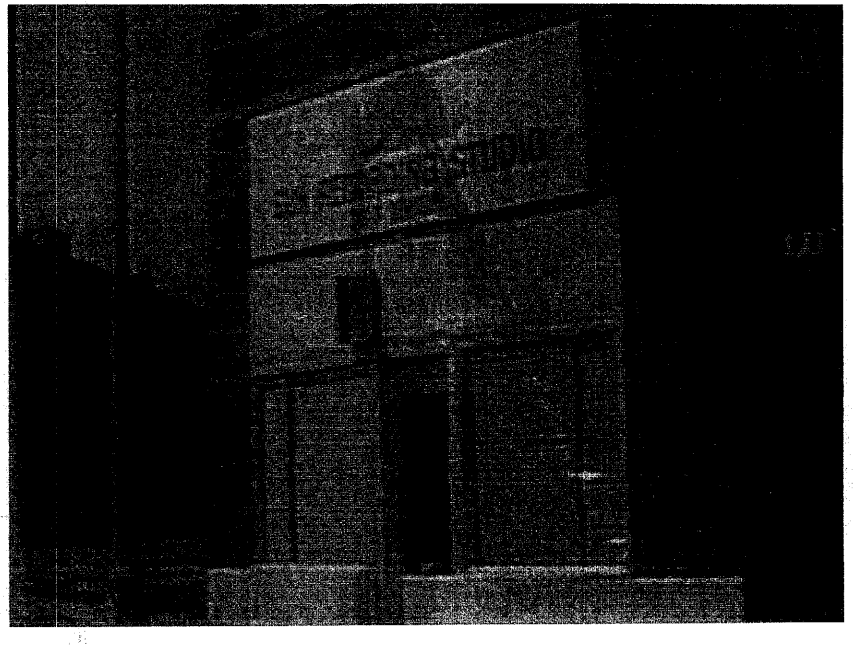

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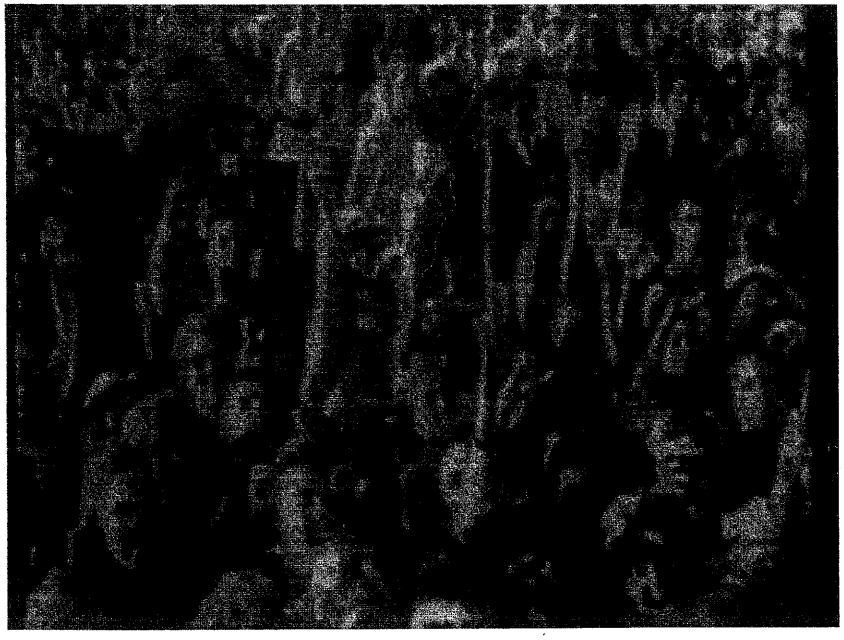

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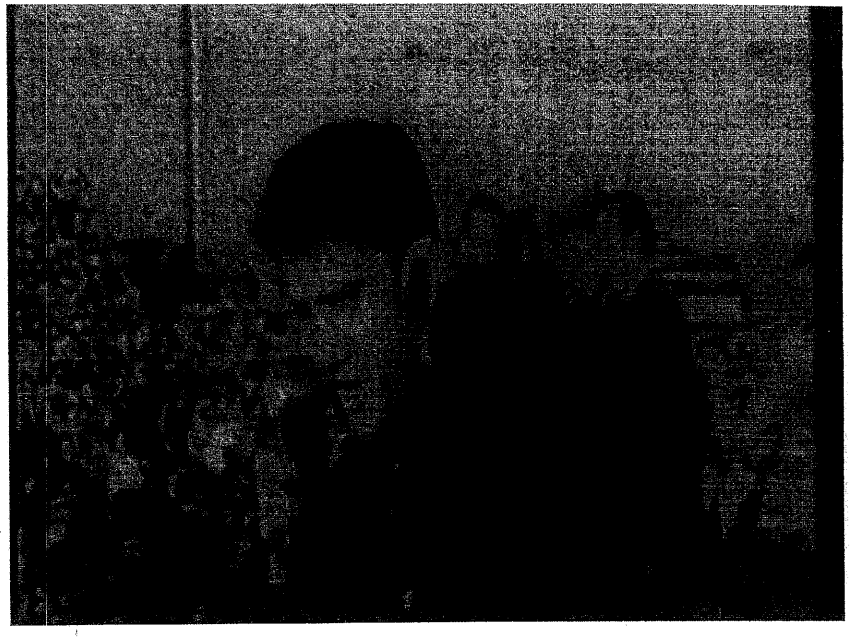

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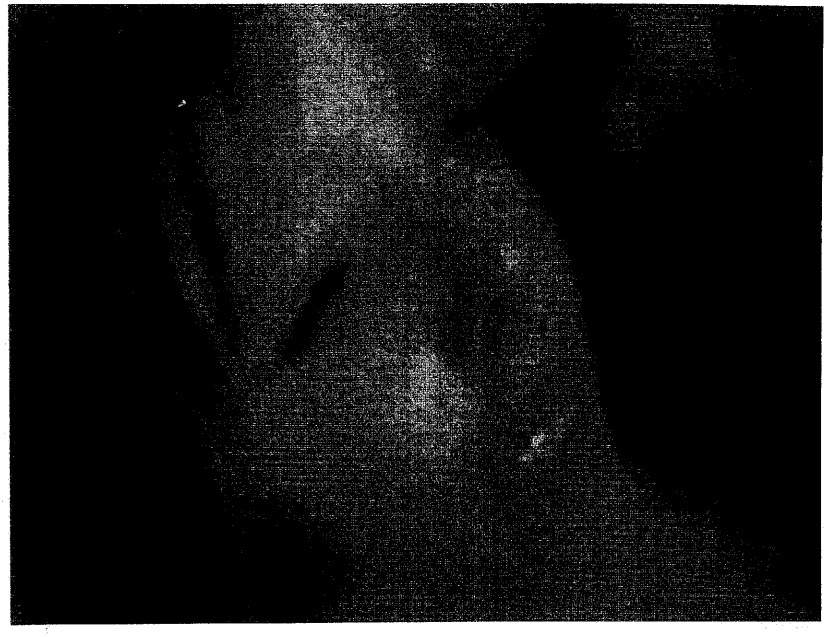

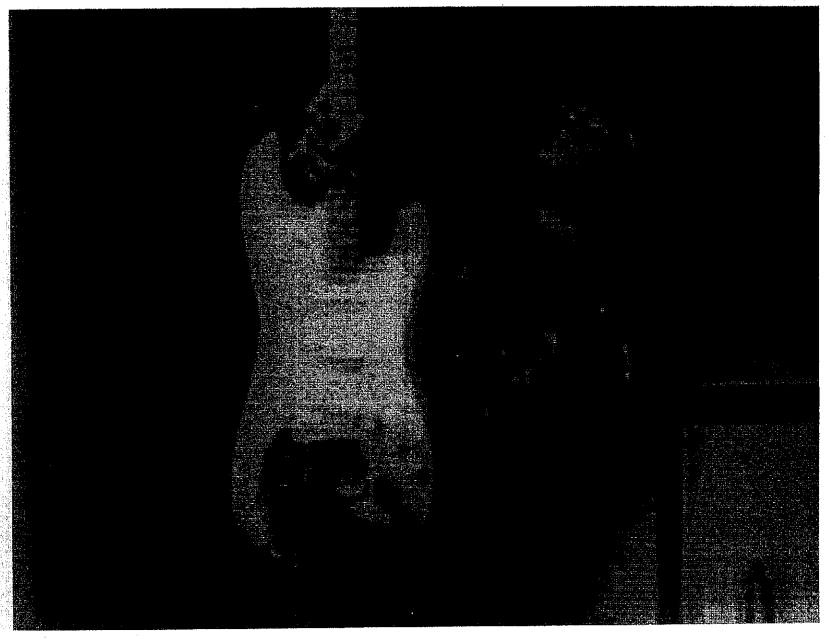

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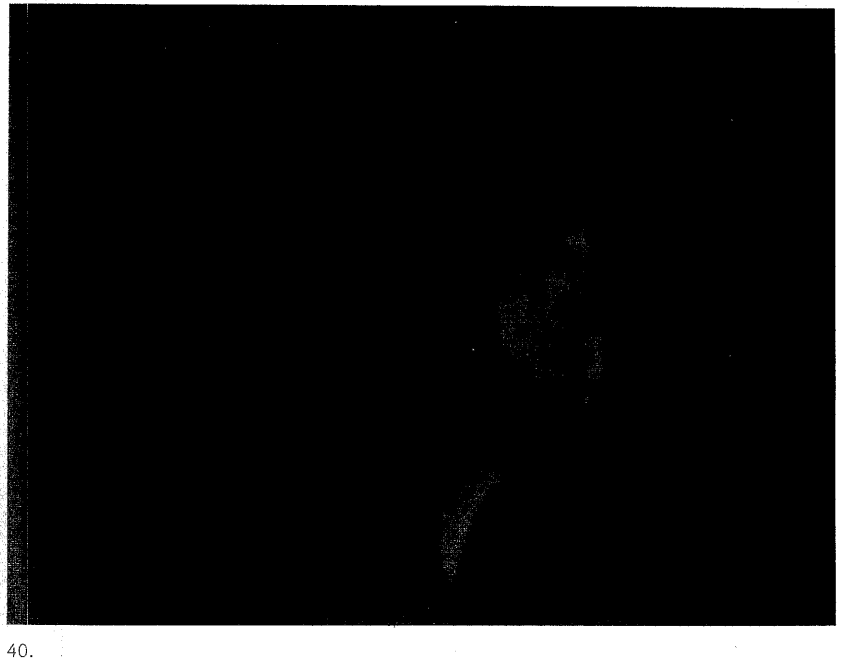

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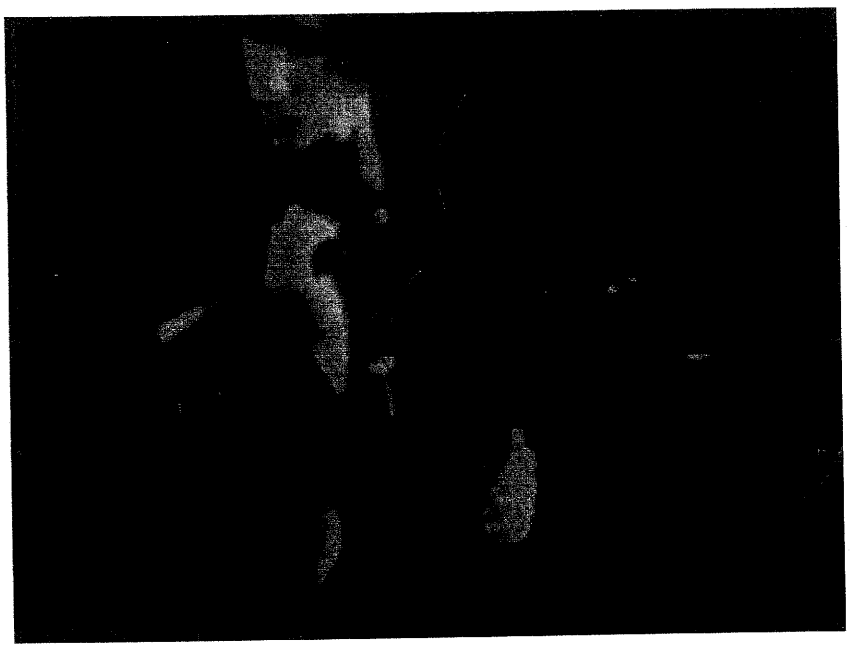

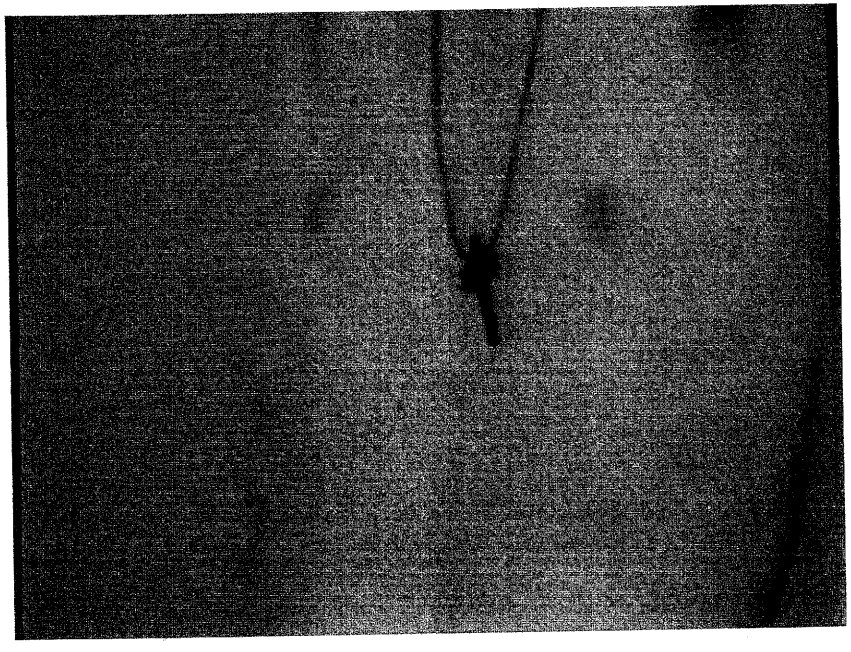

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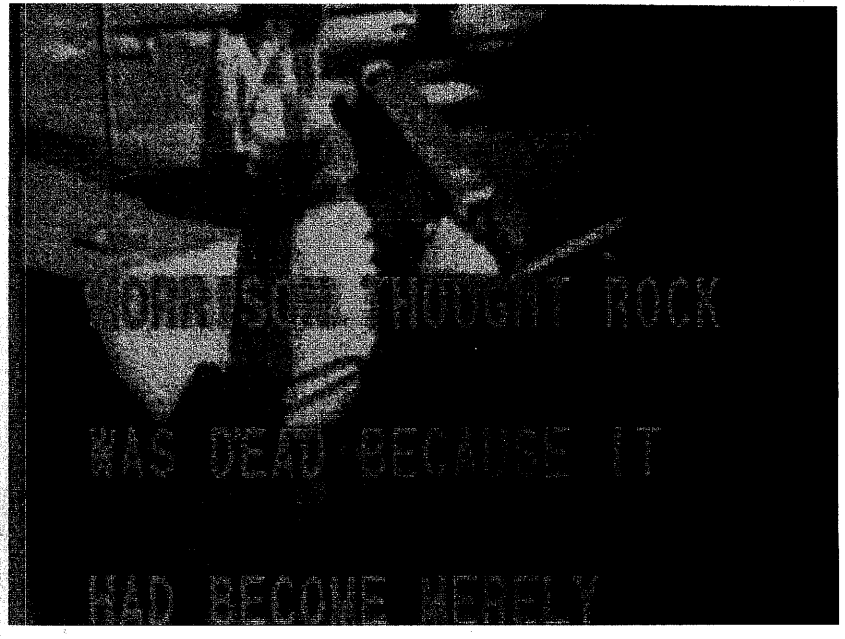


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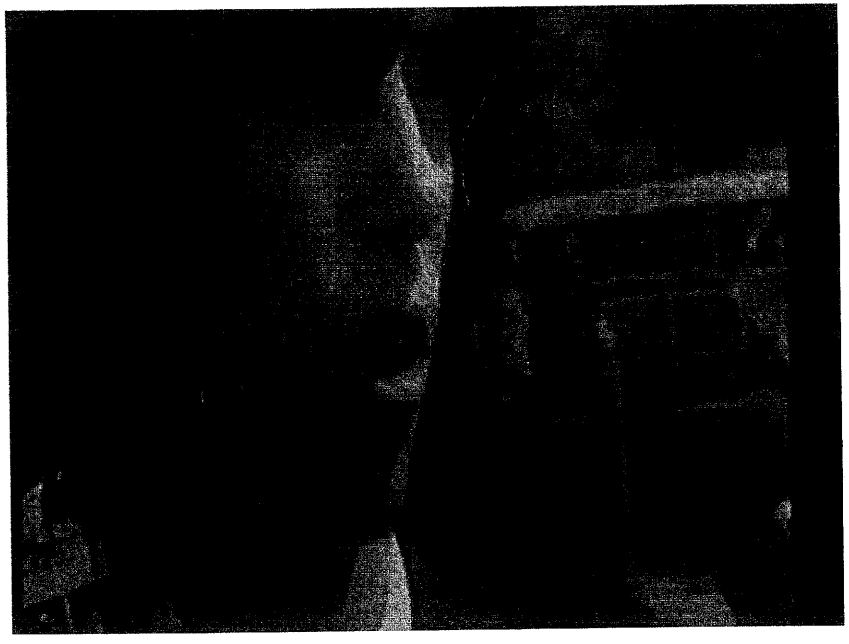

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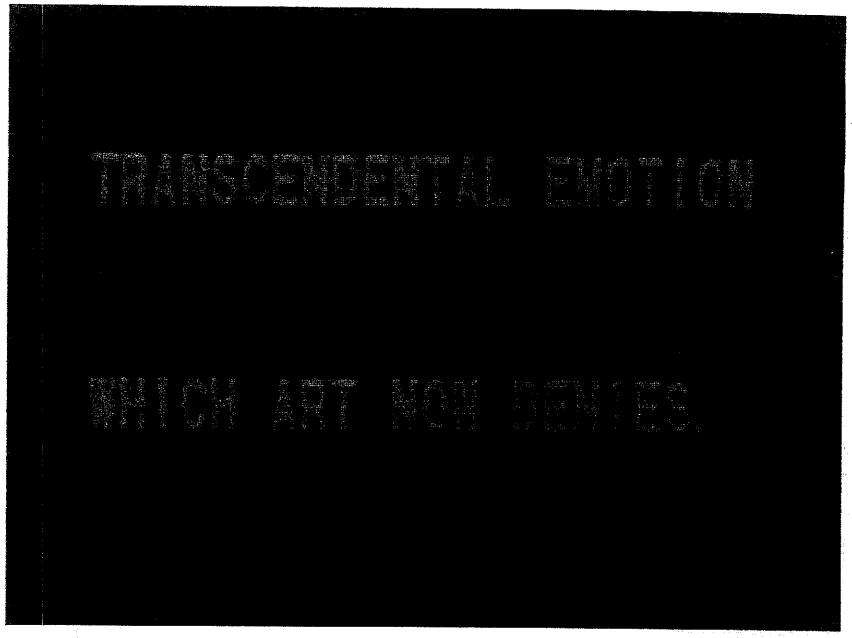


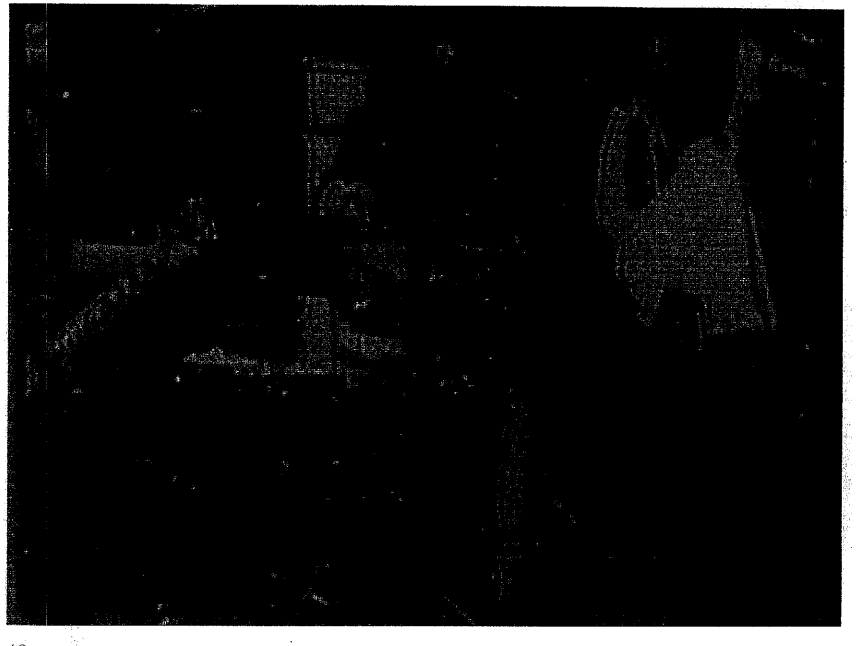

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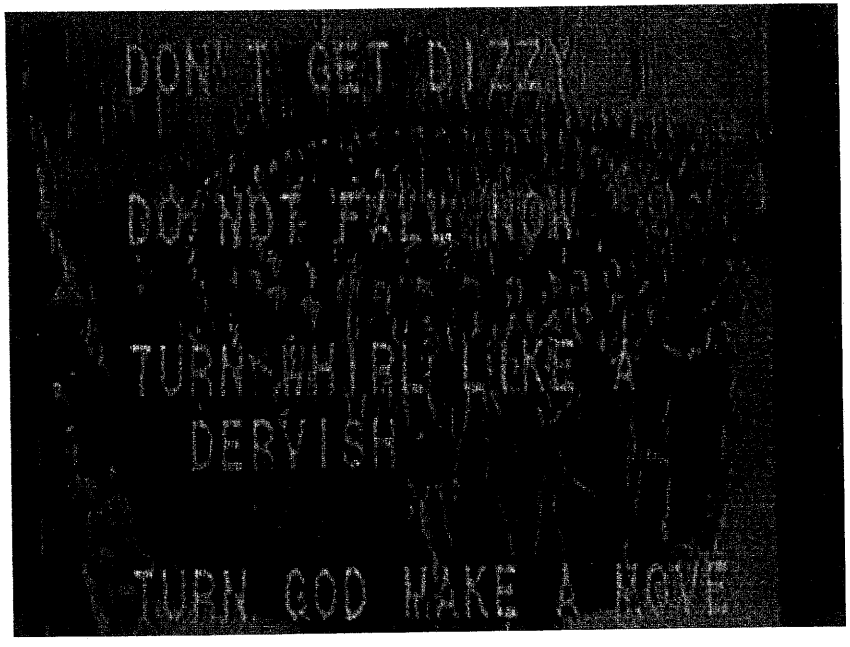


51.

*Rock My Religion* attempts to involve the viewer in the captivating power of the evangelical speech act. As Lia Trinka-Browner has written, religion always resists criticality, and *Rock My Religion* builds upon this resistance by generating a 'subliminal force field' that protects religion and rock 'from any blows'.[58] By situating Pentecostal sounds and images within a montage that shields those sounds from critique, it forestalls disapproval and stages a reckoning with its drama. If evangelism deployed the performative power of images and sounds in its radio and television broadcasts, *Rock My Religion* used the performative capacity of the video-essay to inhabit the emotional drama of 1980s Christian fundamentalism in ways that exceeded illustration or critique.

At 13:56, the religious congregation appears as if born again. In an unidentified barn, the evangelical preacher sings his sermon, accompanying himself with an amplified guitar. An old woman, with a heavy, careworn face, in a blue dress, turns on the spot. A younger woman is draped over her shoulders. Her eyes are closed, her head thrown back. The couple turn clockwise three times, supporting each other against collapsing (fig.24). These images first appear at 6:00, when Graham interprets Patti Smith's call for a 'new rock language, neither male nor female: Babelogue'. On the beat of the word 'Babelogue', a Native American chant bursts into the video and continues through three scenes of circle dances. The similarity between each dance emerges through the differences between each dance. The reappearance of these images at 13:56 recalls the images to which they were connected at 6:00. When the older and the younger women turn clockwise three times, again, they summon the memory of the Native American man spinning alone in the snow that came first, and of the hardcore youth slamming into each other in the dark that came after.

Other images of the congregation appear: an old woman who flicks her hands as she jumps on the spot. An elderly man who stares at his lighter flame. A woman who flings her hands to her shoulders. The groans of the congregation are mixed at the same level as the live recording of Sonic Youth's 'Brother James', released in 1983 on the album *Confusion Is Sex* — guitars swarming through the moans of the born-again as the preacher starts his sermon. The distorted recording of the live performance mixes with the twang of the preacher's song. 'Brother James' intrudes into the faithful, as an aural presence fighting to dominate their bodies.

*Rock My Religion* shared post-punk culture's desire to record the enthusiasm of born-again Christianity. For example, as the British punk band Cabaret Voltaire toured the US in November 1979, they tuned into broadcasts of preachers galvanised by the religiosity of Ronald Reagan. The itchy-clipped funk of their 'Sluggin' Fer Jesus Parts 1—3' (1981—83) was built around the sermons of televangelist William Eugene Scott. The band was attracted to the way his unrestrained imagery rallied listeners to pledge money: 'No gifts tonight; I want sacrifice. I'm fighting battles for freedom as the last true voice for religious freedom on television.' In addition, David Byrne and Brian Eno recorded the exuberant voices of broadcast evangelism into three songs for their album *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1981). Byrne observed that the delivery of testifying preachers was 'real ecstatic' due to the fact that 'what they're saying is so conservative and moralistic'.[59] Eno pointed to the fact that the most radiogenic of voices came from 'spiritual or religious sources. It is one of the only obvious places on radio where people are passionate.'[60]

In his study of the Christian right-wing preacher Martin Luther Thomas, Theodor Adorno wrote that the 'dynamics of unrestrained rhetoric are perceived as an image of the dynamics of real events'.[61] As evangelical speech recognised no authority other than itself, it insisted upon amplifying its rhetoric. The apocalyptic images generated during this amplification became the means for understanding the 'dynamics of real events'. The unfolding drama of this rhetoric made sense; indeed, it was the only speech capable of making sense of the senseless events of daily life.

If *Rock My Religion* locates the transition from sacred to secular music in the replacement of the church organ by the guitar and piano, Eno and Byrne placed this shift within the ecstatic context of the Negro church. The script of *Rock My Religion* published in *TERMINAL ZONE* revealed that Graham had emphasised the meeting between the forms of 'African choral chant' and 'Scotch-Irish square dancing', and the social encounter between 'backwoods white settlers' and 'enslaved blacks' during early nineteenth-century revivals.[62] However, the final version of *Rock My Religion* deleted this passage. Did that editorial decision produce an absent presence that continues to haunt it?

❋ ❋ ❋

'What is it, Father, that makes me spin around?' asks Patti Smith in 'Ghost Dance' (1978), speaking from the perspective of a Sioux Indian. The section on the Ghost Dance in *Rock My Religion*, starting at 15:34, provides one answer to Smith's question. This section does not mention Wovoka, the 'half-breed' prophet that exhorted Sioux Indians to a dance that would bring on an apocalypse, when the ancestors would return and whites would be nothing more than a bad dream. Within *Rock My Religion*, the Ghost Dance plays a visual, sonic, gestural and historical role, summoning the sonic memory of its placement within the context of Babelogue. This auditory memory brings with it a visual memory: the image of a Native American man spinning

by himself in the snow, the camera framing his face and turning clockwise with him as he shouts. The memory of this image recalls its placement within the montage of circle dances, of bodies rotating around different axes, in distinct places, in specific times.

Both memories meet within a staged re-enactment of the Ghost Dance that has the look of a television broadcast recorded onto video. A slow zoom establishes the scene of Native American men dressed in costume, chanting and turning in a closed circle in a clearing in the snow (fig.25). This dramatisation is contrasted with an illustration of men dancing around stakes (fig.26) and with images of buffalo (fig.27). The camera moves from the face to moccasins that step on the snow in a circular movement. As the bodies rotate, the horizon tilts in opposing directions, counterclockwise and clockwise.

Dancing for two days and nights was supposed to induce a sleep during which the 'terrible clarity of the Last Days' would be revealed. For the Plains Indians, apocalypse had already arrived in the form of the whites; Wovoka offered the compensation of a second apocalypse in which 'white people' were 'only a bad dream'. Graham explains this eschatology. The point is not to prove Wovoka's false prophecy wrong, but to draw connections between rotation, revelation and revolution.

### Rock and the Commodity Form

At 16:46, a close-up of a still photograph of Patti Smith at her most androgynous stares at the viewer with determination. At 16:49, Johanna Cypis quotes Smith: 'My belief in rock 'n' roll gave me a kind of strength that other religions couldn't come close to.' In 1971, Smith and Sam Shepherd wrote the play *Cowboy Mouth*, in which one character states, 'The rock 'n' roll star in his highest state of grace will be the new saviour.'



After Cypis says 'come close to', in comes the song 'Johnny B. Goode', and a dissolve into a second close-up of a haunted, hunted female face. As 'Johnny B. Goode' starts, you suddenly realise that the Johnny of this song is the same Johnny of Patti Smith's 'Land', and the music is the reverse of formulaic: it is a formula taking shape, with the first appearance of an archetypal figure who will stride through the popular landscape of rock. It is as if the audience were present at the birth of a myth.

At 16:55 the camera positions itself in the aisle of an unidentifi record store (fig.28). It studies the behaviour of young white men and women as they stand in front of record bins, studying the alphabetically arranged albums. It zooms in on a young couple making their way through the aisle, rifling through vinyl albums. White text on faded purple background argues that 'rock is the first musical form to be totally commercial and consumer-exploitative', while we hear Chuck Berry singin 'Go Johnny go!' Berry is then replaced by The Byrds, singing 'So You Want to Be a Rock 'n' Roll Star' (1967), a song that exemplif Graham's argument about the nature of rock 'n' roll. For Grahar 'Johnny B. Goode' and 'So You Want to Be a Rock 'n' Roll Star' reveal self-awareness: 'Ambiguously built into rock is a self-consciousness by the music and by the teenagers that it is a commercialised form.'

Of all the available types of re-enactment, Roy Lichtenstein's strategy of equivocation has been the most productive for Graham. Lichtenstein's work, he argues, 'equivocates' by 'mimicking' the clichés of commercial vernacular and, at the same time, allowing the work to generate an 'anchorage' withi 'high' art. In 'Artist as Producer' (1978—88), Graham's final essay on rock culture, the potential of equivocation gives way to the awareness of entrapment.[63] This shift into a register of 'acerbic defeatism' recalls the principled fatalism of Theodor

Adorno and Max Horkheimer, but in an inverted manner. (Just as Graham deploys the Marcusean concept of desublimation only to reverse its meaning, here too Frankfurt School language is deployed in order to be inverted.) The argument, as laid out in the text-over (fig.29), is that it is rock 'n' roll's engagement with consumerism rather than its resistance to it that gives it the power to 'discern the nature of its compromised position'. On the one hand, rock music discerns the compromised position of the teenager in its capacity to compromise its listener. On the other, the teenager recognises the compromised position of rock and thereby his or her own compromised position in relation to commodity culture.

Graham concludes 'Artist as Producer' by stating that 'ambiguously built into rock music was the teenager's awareness that it was a commercialised form'.[64] From this perspective, rock music is a self-reflexive form that is aware that its audience is conscious of its entertainment nature. At this point, there is no discernible difference to be drawn between the rock music that forms the consciousness of the teenager and the figure of the teenager educated as a total consumer by rock music. In fact, they are coupled together to the extent that rock music is to be understood, like the cinematic apparatus he analysed in his essay 'Cinema' (1981), as a 'perceptual machine'[65] capable of implanting 'artificial memory directly' into the unconscious of the viewer, as if it were his or her 'own real memory'.[66]

As Graham points out in an earlier essay, 'Punk as Propaganda' (1979), the perceptual machines of television programmes like *Happy Days* (1974—84) broke history into a 'confusion' of 'half-accurately, half-nostalgically depicted decades of the 1930s, 40s, 50s and 60s'.[67] The common confusion of history and memory characteristic of our time is further mixed up by television's 'personal nostalgia', in which present-day middle-class problems



are confused with characters that might 'possibly' be our 'fami forebears'. This strategy is readapted by the Ramones and Blon in a manner that Graham describes as 'neoclassical': they adop early 1960s rock imagery that 'comments' upon the late 70s. In this way, the Allan Arkush film *Rock 'n' Roll High School* (1979), featuring the music of the Ramones, among others, witl its dramatisation of the mid-1970s version of the early 60s tee mythology of the early 50s high school, excels in its ability to implant artificial memories.

At 17:47 Jerry Lee Lewis can be seen, right hand clasped aroun a microphone, left hand raised high, second finger erect — a gesture of instruction and defiance, inset within a blue fram (fig.30). The image dissolves into another version of the same gesture, this time surrounded by black: 'C'mon over baby, whol lotta shakin' goin' on.' The black-and-white archival footage of Lewis surrounded by eager white teenagers, clapping and shaking their hair to the beat of the piano, comes from Lewis's live 1964 appearance in Manchester, England, filmed by Grana Television for the programme *Don't Knock the Rock*.[68] Energise by the teenagers, Lewis ups the ante: he takes his jacket off and plays the piano with his right white winkle-picker; then he lifts up the mic stand, climbs onto the piano, lifts his left hand's second finger imperiously, holds the mic downward with his right hand, lifts his left arm behind his head and thrusts his hip, miming penetration in an exalted manner. With these images, *Rock My Religion* makes visible rock's anth pological function. Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis and the rest are useful insofar as they help Graham propose a mythology of the American teenager.

At 18:04, Graham's voice-over declares the dawn of the 1950s a the era in which a 'new class emerges. A generation whose tas is not to produce but to consume. This is the teenager.' The sect

that follows, on the making of the white American teenager, works as a video-essay in its own right. Through sequences extracted from films, documentaries and television programmes, as well as music videos, advertisements and songs, the dream life of the teenager is narrated, from its birth in consumption to its 'philosophy of fun'; from its exaltation of the present, sanctioned by the presence of the atomic bomb, to its sexuality; from its use of communication to its educational formation and its theology of a teen heaven populated by teen angels. The teenager emerges through a process of manumission in which freedom from production is granted in order to carry out the task of consumption. This is not a historical reading of the 1950s; rather, it is an identification of the figure of the teenager in post-War US society as the promise of a new class. This political fantasy emerged throughout the 1950s and 60s in the sociology of youth culture, continued in the relation between hippie culture and the sociology of youth culture in the early 1970s, and endured into the feedback cycles between punk and theories of subculture in the late 1970s and 80s.

*Rock My Religion*'s section on the teenager elaborates ideas rehearsed by Graham in the essays 'Artist as Producer' and 'McLaren's Children' (1981—82).[69] In Graham's account, for Malcolm McLaren rock culture could provide a medium in which new political situations could be enacted on condition of divorcing youth from their seniors. In contrast to this enthusiastic projection, Graham characterises teenagers as a class that is 'exploited and given a false consciousness of freedom'.[70] The fatalistic sense of dialectical entrapment is exaggerated into the mythic image of the teenager as a robot 'with clearly delimited functions', ordained by a dominant order that develops a non-human consciousness that is capable of a more advanced critique of the society that is created for them.



Graham understood McLaren's fantasy as an analysis of youth a the leaders of a culture — a culture based on mass unemployme and leisure consumption. McLaren, according to him, was only interested in the points of maximum disturbance in the youth a class. The title of the essay alludes to *Hitler's Children: The Sto of the Baader-Meinhof Terrorist Gang*, the unforgiving biography of the Red Army Faction by journalist Jillian Becker in 1977. One wonders what form a video-essay on McLaren might have taken. Graham characterises McLaren as an artist who perceiv 'rock culture's fashion codes' as a series of 'anthropologically inspired media art operations'. This is a definition that also fitted Graham at the time.

From 1977 until 1981, Graham was fascinated by McLaren. (The 'Artist as Producer' is organised around an undated interview with him.) McLaren seemed to epitomise for Graham the capacity for complicity, consciousness and cynicis that he prized in rock. Indeed, Patti Smith's self-conscious mythopoesis of rock was at odds with the self-conscious critique of the post-punk vanguard that resonated with Grahar Her heresies made sense in terms of a devotion to, rather than a deconstruction of, rock. She aimed to renew rock as poetic language, not to demystify it as an ideological apparatus. In contrast, Graham's sympathy for the punk, post-punk and No Wave disenchantments can be understood in relation to his turn towards the re-materialisation of architecture in the late 1970s. According to Jeff Wall, in his 1982 essay 'Dan Graham's Kammerspiel', Graham did not simply discover the work of architects like Aldo Rossi and Robert Venturi in the late 1970s; he recognised that the 'semiotic and historical approach' to the built environment that had been central to his Conceptual art practice had now 'entered directly' into architectural practice, at least 'partially through the influence of Pop'.[71] The advent of punk and post-punk prompted a similar recognition.

His long-standing 'semiotic and historical approach' to music criticism had now 'entered directly' into musical practice through the influence of punk.[72] Accordingly, Graham consistently championed punk bands that performed what he understood to be a self-conscious awareness of their position as rock bands. He praised Blondie for their 'doubly ironic glamour', or celebrated the Ramones for their 'second ironic interpretation' that puts the initial reading 'in perspective or in quotes'.[73] This dialectical strategy is carried through into the formal approach of his writing, which, Wall argued, existed in a permanent state of category-shift, addressing various subjects and, at the same time, articulating formulations that emerged from contemporaneous aspects of his artistic practice.

The simultaneous movements of cultural analysis and aesthetic formulation begin to explain why the concepts Graham employed when writing about art reappeared in his writings on rock music. Post-punk theorised the music industry as what Louis Althusser called an 'Ideological State Apparatus', which questioned the grounds upon which music might be made, preoccupied itself with alternative economies and challenged the sexism of rock and the virtuosity of the guitar solo.[74] All these discontents with rock, in its popular incarnation, came together in the critical term 'rockism'. To be rockist was to perform rock with the assurance of the sexist and the certitude of the racist. Post-punk made music that questioned the forms of music; its preoccupations rehearsed Graham's own.

*Rock My Religion* studiously avoids any mention of bands Graham liked to write about, such as X-Ray Spex, Blondie, Bow Wow Wow and Devo, in favour of others like Minor Threat, Black Flag, The Clash and the Patti Smith Group, each of whom epitomised the critical rockist desire to renew the form and the function of rock. Therefore, far from illustrating his writing, as might seem



to be the case, *Rock My Religion* replaces his long-standing concern with dialectical irony with a distinct although related speculation on ecstatic bodies and urban ritual.

Despite his professed admiration for the rock criticism of the 1960s, Graham's essays on rock always maintained a distance from it. They scrutinise criticism as a literary genre rather than participating in it. They go to great lengths to ensure they could never be confused with rock journalism. *Rock My Religion* extends this distance from rock criticism into an ethnographic principle of external observation. It constructs its seriousness through the vocabulary of typology. Such a move lends an anthropological tone to his mode of address. It talks of the figures of the teenager, the hippie and the rock star as mass subjects who behave as archetypes or clichés. In *Rock My Religion*, these are always ideal types: functional, generalised, essentialised, mythopoetic, belonging to the cultural imaginary. It is as if Graham had never met a teenager or a hippie and had never attended an actual rock concert, but nonetheless finds himself obliged to explain their existence to others in his position. Perhaps it is this distance that allows him to account for rock in its anthropological totality at the level of text and voice, even as image and song express an extreme attention to detail.

### The Great Day of His Wrath

*Rock My Religion* does not name Otis Blackwell, the African American songwriter whose 'Great Balls of Fire' was so blasphemous as to unnerve its performer Jerry Lee Lewis. One glimpses a sense of rock 'n' roll as an arena in which sin and repentance are passionate beliefs. In his hesitations it becomes possible to hear, if not to comprehend, the weight of the idea of sin. *Rock My Religion* creates a context for a respectful attention to Lewis's beliefs. At 19:05 there is an abrupt cut from

'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On' (1957) to a white capitalised text on purple background which specifies 1957 as the date of the bootlegged recording of Lewis and discusses the heretical implications of 'Great Balls of Fire'.[75] The song plays as the text scrolls. The picture quality is at its worst, as the tracking is faulty. This sequence illustrates one page extracted from the footnotes to *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music*, in which Greil Marcus interprets Lewis's understanding in 1957 of 'Great Balls of Fire'. Marcus's text is returned to an audio recording, as read by Graham with the crackle and hiss of *Rock My Religion*. And instead of transcribing the audio into text, Graham films an already existing transcription of Lewis's dialogue with Sam Phillips. Marcus writes:

> *...working for that next hit, Phillips ran into mysteries in the music not even he could have expected.* [...] *Sitting in Phillips's studio, reading over the lead sheet for 'Great Balls of Love', the meaning of the image must have hit him. 'Great Balls of Fire', that was a Pentecostal image, that meant Judgement Day — and now Sam Phillips wanted Jerry Lee Lewis to turn that image into a smutty joke, to defile it. Jerry Lee rebelled.*[76]

Lewis begins by recognising the evangelical language of religious awakening, which calls on the faithful to renounce all worldly pleasure. He is then confronted with the recognition that this demand is made in the profane language of 'worldly music'. The contradiction of an eschatological warning rendered as a scatological joke reveals the common ground shared by intimate enemies. Both rock and Protestantism can be seen as fundamentalisms, fighting over the same terrain.

The horizontal hold at the top of the screen gives way. Lewis talks about Jesus Christ's exorcism of the Devil ('can I cast this Devil out') and, as he talks, an image of Phillips's Sun Recording Stud building briefly appears (fig.31). It establishes the location of the recording, implicitly suggesting that this is when the Devil was cast out, in this building — vinyl is the Devil's work Lewis declares, 'It ain't what you believe, it's what's written in the Bible.' He thumps a surface twice to emphasise his point. In the beat after the word 'Bible', at 21:24, the gaseous, luminescent radiation music of Branca fills the air, creating, all at once, an ascendant ambiance. This teeming atmosphere o radiated particles reorientates a series of black-and-white shot of a crowd of white teenage girls reacting to an unseen presence Their hands are pressed against their cheeks; they are trying to contain emotions that have exceeded them, and that emerge through mouths gaping, choking, swaying. A girl clutches her head, her face collapsing in tears. The music creates the sense of an unseen event.

From 21:30 to 22:08, Elvis appears onstage. The music stretches the scene beyond its 38 seconds. In the first shot, Elvis, dressed in black-and-white winkle-pickers, steps backward, bouncing on his heels. The small square of stage is surrounded to the left by bodies, hands outstretched. A white statue of a dog sits behin him. In the second (mid-)shot, Elvis, turning right, bounces on his heels, keeping beat, and lifts his left hand to his ear. In the third (overhead) shot, the frame is filled with the crowd of fans (fig.32). For the fourth, a close-up of girls reaching towards Elv their arms stretched out. The fifth is a mid-shot of the crowd, hands in the air, waving at Elvis. The sixth is a medium close-u of Elvis, right hand clutching his Shure Unidyne microphone, left hand over left ear with index finger pressing down his tragus (fig.33); he takes his finger away, as if giving up on the effort to hear himself sing, and turns away from the camera. The seventh shot frames a crowded dance floor at waist-height. White dancing legs, dark dresses billowing in a circle, revealin

legs and tiered, ruffled chiffon, twisting, as shoes take some steps, then turn. In the eighth shot, a girl in a white dress faces a mirror, spins until she faces a boy, lifts the sides of her dress, rears her head, steps back and takes two steps forward. In the ninth shot, white legs in a white dress take a step forward and turn, dress rising to reveal white thighs. In the tenth, Elvis, laughing, turns his head away and steps back, left hand holding his microphone. Then the fourth, sixth and fifth shots are repeated.

By reducing ten shots to three, the documentary sequence is concentrated into a gesture of adoration. And by subtracting and replacing the sound of Elvis with the acoustic phenomena, the weight of history is lifted from the archive; it becomes possible to see Elvis as an electric soul loved by nature. The aerial gaseous music breaks off to leave two long seconds of crackling silence. In this silence, Elvis, in mid-shot, holds the microphone on its stand, tilting it towards him, lifting his head back. In mid-close-up, Elvis tilts his head back and turns right. An overdubbed recording that does not synchronise with his voice begins: 'W-e-e-e-ll, I heard the news, there's good rockin' tonight'. As he stretches the first word, history begins again.

To make Elvis's and Lewis's promises of teen sex understandable, *Rock My Religion* has to render the prohibition against sex audible, visible and comprehensible. Branca's music suspends the accumulated historical knowledge that viewers bring to the reaction shots of American teenage girls and Elvis's phallic pantomime. Its aerial, saturated frequencies bestow a devotional quality upon the encounter, allowing the 1980s viewer to review the images of the 1950s from an optic of unearthly, disembodied ascension. It allows a desexualised, disembodied perspective on a primal scene of sexual invitation. The crowd receives Elvis's mime as an invitation, a demonstration, a threat and a promise.



The scene plays in opposition to the voice-over. Graham asserts that by 'desublimating repression of the body, rock sexualises the Shaker dance and the religious revivalist meeting. Rock turns the values of traditional American religion upside down. To rock 'n' roll means to have sex ... Now.' For Graham, desublimation releases the body from repression. According to Marcuse, however, the opposite is the case: the sexualisation of the body implies repression. For Graham, by sexualising the body, rock creates the liberty of 'now', an intensity shared in looks, sustained in dances, touches, kisses, laughter, shouting, attitude posing. In these precious moments of teenage lust, industrial society 'extends liberty' so as to 'intensify domination'. Happiness is a trap of freedom. The 'joys' which 'society grants promote social cohesion and enjoyment'. By satisfying the 'innermost drives of its citizens' at the level of the 'interests of society', the libido, the death drive, the psyche itself is industrialised following the rhythms of capitalist production. If rock's joy ensures conformity, then the self-admitted repression of the Shakers becomes indispensable; it keeps alive an anti-libertarian (or unhappy) opposition to a dominant society. Marcuse's concept of desublimation attacks rock culture insofar as it aims to undermine the value of happiness, oppose the desire for gratification and insist on discontent. In this sense, desublimation contains a latent dimension of punk, post-punk, No Wave, Industrial and hip hop.

*Rock My Religion* oscillates between the enraptured sublimation of Branca's post-rock acoustic phenomena and the desublimated libido of Elvis, Little Eva and Jan and Dean. Branca's music is a disembodied radiance re-embodied by a hormonal teen voice singing, 'Well, now, I think you've got the knack.' When Little Eva sings 'The Loco-Motion', her adolescent voice, compressed into a trebly, tinny wall of sound, violently desublimates the gaseous harmonies of Branca. Inciting scenes of a couple kissing

in the darkness and a sequence of dancing shoes; close-ups of white stilettoed toes twisting on the dark floor, white socks stamping rhythmically... The montage of dancing feet celebrates the epidemic dance craze in which rhythm and the body are what Fred and Judy Vermorel define as the 'key locus' of all expression.[77]

Such gleeful incitement to dance is interrupted by the tremulous unison-note of Branca's 'Theme for a Drive Through Suburbia'. From 22:44 to 22:46, the song creates an unexpected brightness that promises to sustain itself in perpetuity. A lower-case text on orange background reads: 'Fun, fun, fun. Maybe it won't last but what do we care my baby and I just want a good time.' The text reappears at 23:58, this time held in a crackly silence, as if daring the viewer to reread it. Within the crackle, the faint, ghosted voice of Patti Smith can be heard, reciting 'Histories of the Universe'.

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*Rock My Religion* includes a number of scenes that attract attention because of their brevity and their autonomy. Their brevity means that they register at a near subliminal level, as if they had passed beneath the notice of the voice-over or the song. They attain an independence from voice or music, existing as enigmatic presences within the video. One of these scenes occurs from 23:57 to 23:58. A woman, wearing a sleeveless dress, seated at a diner table, looks at her cigarette. She taps her ash and turns to smile at a bare-chested man seated opposite her. Another occurs from 44:50 to 44:51, and shows the white torso of a male, with a small black crucifix suspended between his nipples — a precise conjunction of Christianity and coquettishness (fig.45).



Throughout the video, advertisements are separated from their pack-shot selling points and represented as corporate arcadias. A white family in sunlit slow motion. White, smiling girls, tossing their tousled hair, baring their teeth, pulling rope. Teenagers in striped T-shirts, rolling head over heels down a blinding white beach. The utopia of beach life is rudely interrupted by the trill of the school bell, and teen heaven replaced by teen apocalypse. The ordered rows of American school children lined behind each other in desks is countered by the downward plunge of a woman watched by two friends, and by a ringing power chord taken from 'Rock 'n' Roll High School' (1979), the Ramones' musical hymn to juvenile delinquency.

The shot of the woman is not explained until youths steer a boat towards the camera and an orange explosion expands into a firestorm that destroys a house. Then it becomes clear: she is detonating dynamite. Smoke fills the screen, and the television glitches as if it had been destroyed by the explosion. While the Ramones continue singing, students celebrate as their school explodes in a giant yellow fireball. They raise their arms and dance in formation. The explosion, the falling embers, the joyou reaction are repeated three times, in what seems like an homage to Dara Birnbaum's *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978—79). The third time the explosion fills the screen in silence, as the blinding yellow light consumes the frame, smoke curling and embers falling. The pop vision of imminent doom articulated by Barry McGuire's 'Eve of Destruction' (1965) is edited so that it insists rather than asks the listener to '...feel th fears I'm feelin' today'. When McGuire rasps that 'if the button is pushed, there's no runnin' away', Graham talks right through his jeremiad. In the teenage imagination, Graham insists, 'death is a way of avoiding growing up'. This assertion is recorde with a different microphone from the next assertion, that 'the myth of James Dean is archetypal'. (Throughout *Rock My Religion*

the room tone and type of microphone on which Cypis's and Graham's voice-overs are recorded shift from one sentence to the next. A collage of takes registered at different times and moods, in more than one studio.)

What François Truffaut calls the 'eternal adolescent love of trials and tests'[78] is dramatised in the exchange of gazes between Jim Stark, played by James Dean, and Buzz Gundersen, played by Corey Allen, as they race their cars towards the cliff in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955; fig.34). Squealing trumpets and trombones emulate the plunge of Buzz's car. Graham replaces its final impact with the majesty of a mushroom cloud filmed from above in a saturated blue sky (fig.35). The effect is to elevate the drama of masculine competition to apocalyptic proportions.

Dean, like Hendrix, personifies the archetype and the cliché of teenage death. Extending the Christian theology of the teenage imagination, Graham declares Patti Smith to be the 'Mary Magdalene to all the fallen rock idols'. Smith recalled that recording 'Elegie' at Electric Lady Studios on 18 September 1975, six years after Hendrix's death, the Patti Smith Group gathered to listen to Allen Lanier of Blue Öyster Cult playing a guitar solo when 'all of a sudden we all got hit by some kind of strange sensation'. The intimacy of the narration, with her New Jersey accent, starting at around 29:10, rerecorded onto cassette, diverts awareness from the structure of the sequence, dedicated to Jimi Hendrix, from 27:58 to 29:50 — a sequence of reaction shots that foreground the fact that the viewer watches women watching male rock stars. Of the 29 shots that compose this sequence, one reaction shot of a blonde girl looking right (fig.36), nodding her head, smiling to herself, is repeated six times. A girl with a floppy hat, looking right, is repeated four times. Of Hendrix's performance, one shot in which he is crouching on the floor and



describes a full circle with his white Fender Stratocaster is repeated four times (fig.37). The effect of these repeated shot-reverse-shots is to construct feedback loops of adulation between fan and performer. The repetitions are heliotropic gestures; the female fans turn their faces towards the light of Hendrix, who is elevated into the position of an idol.

*Rock My Religion* begins by studying hardcore teenagers slamming at Black Flag and Minor Threat. By its midway point it captures teenage girls fascinated by Elvis, entranced by Hendrix. These fans embody the passion of 'fandemonium'; they possess the capacity to be taken over by star lust, to be overwhelmed by idol worship, to act out 'consumerist deliriums'.

According to Judy and Fred Vermorel, the 1950s is the era of the 'emergence of the Girl as principal motive and motivator of fanhood'.[79] Crucially, the Girl has 'no particular gender'; what defines the Girl is the capacity to be 'excitable, vulnerable, a tremulous public body'. From the perspective of fandemonium, the white teenage boys at Minor Threat and Black Flag gigs are Girls, just as much as the Hendrix and Elvis fans are. The Vermorels' exaltation of the fan as an excitable body is indebted to *The Stars* (1957), Edgar Morin's pioneering anthropology of stardom. Morin analyses fandemonium as a condition of 'affective participation' that emerges from a 'complex of projections and identifications' excited by every 'spectacle'.[80] According to him, 'our psychic participation' is at its most intense when 'we are purely spectators, that is, physically passive'. In this state, we 'live the spectacle in an almost mystical fashion' by 'mentally integrating ourselves with the characters and the action (projection)' and 'mentally integrating them with ourselves (identification)'. To live the spectacle in an almost mystical fashion: this is one definition of fandemonium.

## In the Court of the Lizard King

At 32:13, Jim Morrison fills the frame. The date is 7 September 1968. The location is the Roundhouse, in Chalk Farm, North London. The footage comes from *The Doors Are Open*, a documentary from that same year on The Doors, directed by Jo Duerden-Smith and broadcast by Granada Television. In the footage, Morrison's head rolls, sweat streaks his cheeks, lips adjusts themselves to the microphone, right hand at his right ear. Serpentine guitar lines insinuate their way through his recital. His voice is slightly out of synch with its image: 'The snake was pale gold, glazed and shrunken, we were afraid to touch it.' Drummer John Densmore bends over his kit, playing fills and rolls. Graham talks over the black-and-white scene of The Doors performing 'Wake Up!' from 'The Celebration of the Lizard' (1968) song cycle. His voice suggests that rock performances provide a 'hypnotic ritualistic trance basis for the mass audience' that evokes the memory of the Shakers, 'deliberate seeking out of the Devil in order to purify themselves and ensure a communion with God'.

As he talks, the performance cuts to faces of fans leaning against the cordon, filmed in colour from below the crash barrier. Folded waves of blonde hair, white Afros and a tangle of white arms appear in adulation from 32:31 to 32:34. Morrison reappears in close-up, his face filling the screen at frame right. He shakes his head, stretching out the word 'now', and the band speeds up into his command to 'run to the mirror in the bathroom, look, she's coming in here, I can't live through each slow century of her moving'. On the word 'moving', his voice slows; the organ drags the tempo; the mood congeals. Morrison's voice crumples into a witch-like persona, that watches itself: 'I let my cheek slide down the cool smooth tile.'

At 33:02 Black Flag reappear, as if summoned from the year 1983 by the malign power of The Doors, eked out one word at a time.



The band is obscured by silhouetted heads that emerge from the darkness, a darkness that eventually obscures the entire frame. Rollins, his torso turned blue by spotlight, sinks to his knees, tilts his head, grasps his microphone — his profile subsumed by the presence of two fans onstage, one Mohican-haired and assuming a simian posture. As Morrison stretches the words 'the cool smooth tile' and Ray Manzarek's organ emits malevolence, Patti Smith appears for three seconds. She breathes heavily at her microphone, as if conscripted from the past to appear at the court of the Lizard King. In its first appearance at 4:45 this scene was paused into a series of fifteen frames designed to illustrate the 'Histories of the Universe' sequence. In its final appearance at 50:54, the shot becomes one moment in a performance played to its finale. The date is 17 April 1976, in the evening, and the Patti Smith Group are performing 'Gloria' on *Saturday Night Live*.

At 35:46, a loud silence announces a new intertitle: 'The Hippies'. This chapter edits scenes from unspecified outdoor rock festivals, alternating between studying medium shots of dancing bodies and looking at close-ups of smiling faces, mostly female, as they turn to face the camera (fig.39). Sky Saxon, lead singer of The Seeds, recites 'Introduction', the monologue from their 1967 album *Future*. Over a delicate guitar evoking the innocence of sunflowers, Saxon, in his prominent Salt Lake City accent, envisions an infantile idyll: 'Somewhere ... the children are out there playing ... so happy in their flower garden...' A keyboard bass refrain, spongy and succulent, appears: 'And just like a painted doll ... this could fall ... the future's yours...' Graham says over Sky Saxon's Edenic vision: 'Love as sentimental romanticism must be replaced with a more open universal form.' The camera follows a large soap bubble floating over head after head of brown hair (fig.40). The crowd's babble, swelling strings, cushioned keyboards, trilling recorders are brutally disrupted at 36:40 by the thrashing guitars and uproarious yells of Minor

Threat. This intrusion will continue to 36:59. In the shocking darkness of their CBGB gig, young white teenagers hurl themselves at each other in slow motion (fig.41). An intrusion like this underlines the impatience with the ethos of the hippie. It suggests the hippie imaginary is narrated from the perspective of a hostile present. 'Hippies dream of a world before or after cities', asserts Graham. His explication of the rural spirit of the hippies is affirmed by Neil Young, as he recounts the rural pleasure of looking 'at the sky without the smog' in 'Here We Are in the Years' (1968). Going back to nature allows hippies to attempt to reinvent the family along tribal lines. A bearded father, his baby secured in a papoose, walks by stroking the child's head.

At 44:23, Morrison returns. He takes his microphone off its stand and moves towards the right, looking back as he goes (fig.44). From 45:58 to 46:26 he sits at the edge of a stage, cross-legged, left arm draped over his knee, looking bored. A giant camera wings itself into position in front of him (fig.46). From its perspective, Morrison can be seen patiently folding his microphone lead; finally he stands up and replaces the microphone in its stand. Then Ray Manzarek's voice concludes, assuming Morrison's perspective

> *What did you come here for? You didn't come to hear music, you didn't come to hear a good rock 'n' roll band play some songs, you came for something you've never seen before, something greater and bigger than you've ever experienced. What can I do, man? How about this? How about if I show you my ... How about if I let you see it? Isn't that what you want? How about this?*

From 47:29 to 48:34, Morrison lambastes the audience, calling them a 'bunch of fucking idiots'. Morrison taunts them. 'How long you gonna let them push you around? You love it. You're all a bunch of slaves. Bunch of slaves. Whatyougonnado aboutit? Whatyougonnadoaboutit? Whatyougonnado aboutit? What are you gonna do?'

If in the Elvis and Hendrix sequences *Rock My Religion* watched the ways audiences watch their idols, The Doors' Miami concert dramatises what happens when an audience reacts to a rock star as he attempts to force them into freedom from spectatorship. Morrison's reluctance to entertain, according to John Miller, led him to shift the 'onus of performing' from the rock star back 'onto the audience'.[81] He intended to throw his audience back on itself. By redefining fan and performer as complicit creatures trapped by the feedback between myth and adulation, Morrison hoped to leave his audience with no choice but to 'contend with the nature of its repression'.[82] From his position within rock culture, he performed his critique of the medium in ways that must have appealed to Graham.

In 'The Lords: Notes on Vision' (1969), Morrison insisted that the 'cleavage of men into actor and spectators is the central fact of our time'.[83] He mourned the fact that we 'have been metamorphosised from a mad body dancing on hillsides to a pair of eyes staring in the dark'. This lament drew upon a pulp Marcuseanism, vulgar Situationism and the militant Artaudianism of the Living Theatre. By staging the clichés of the Oedipus complex within the 12-minute psychodrama of 'The End', The Doors prescribed a critical language for interpreting their songs. Graham's Freudian interpretation of their Miami gig took up the psychosexual ideas already enacted in their music so as to draw out the defining paradoxes of 1960s rock culture.

Throughout the footage of Morrison folding his microphone lead, green capitalised text continuously scrolls. It begins with

'Morrison thought rock was dead because it had become merely spectacle', and continues to scroll at a minimum of two and a maximum of four words per line (fig.47). It takes 49 lines to conclude.

Morrison's vituperative attack continues throughout Graham's study of Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, where Morrison's grave stands. His hectoring contrasts with the serious faces of fans paying their respects. The camera watches them as they stand, their coughs intruding into the opening lyrics of 'The End', breaking its solemn mood. The camera inspects the yellow flowers planted on the grave, the empty beer bottle, the inscription on the ugly bust of Morrison flanked by cheap flowerpots. Graham argues that Smith's demiurgic renewal of rock achieved what Morrison could not do: 'Patti Smith took Morrison's negative trip and attempted to make it — and rock — into a positive social good.'

**The Necessity of Violence**

From 39:51 to 41:20, the Patti Smith Group sings 'Land'. The scene that illustrated 'Piss Factory' at 2:33 reappears, the long shots in colour alternating with close-ups in black and white. She raises an arm (fig.42); she walks on the spot, keeping time to the building beat. She quietens the band and sings: 'Here's a little place, it's a place called space, it's across the tracks, and the name of that place is...' The last word of her sentence is completed by Black Flag's grind and the retching vocals of Henry Rollins (fig.43). This match cut from Smith's voice to Black Flag's doom simultaneously carries *Rock My Religion* from the light of the open-air concert to the intermittent visibility of the gig. The transition recalls passages from daylight to darkness and from exterior to interior that recur throughout the work. In moving from one type of spectatorship to another, it uses one performance to interrupt another. The viewer gradually becomes aware of the video's ability to frame his or her position, and grasps its cyclical, anti-chronological movement.

The camera picks out Rollins and zooms in on his crouching torso. Beside him, guitarist Greg Ginn bangs his head in time, and bassist Dale Nixon flails. It is as if the group were shouldering the burden of being hardcore. Very gently, the volume lowers. Above Rollins's expectorations floats Morrison's confidently articulated voice, never rising above conversational intimacy. As 'Dawn's Highway/Newborn Awakening' (1969—70/78) mixes with the barbaric despond of Black Flag live, a skinhead crouches at the far side of the stage. He stares at the crowd, enjoying the distance that enables him to calculate his participation.

At 50:15, Patti Smith is being interviewed: 'I think its real important that us as Americans recognise the fact that we have a lot of violence inherent in us, you know, it's like part of our culture; it's part of our art, you know, the 1950s, the great artists, like [Jackson] Pollock and [Willem] de Kooning, and we should work now, now that wars are over to not be ashamed to put violence in our art; I have a lot of violence in my art' (fig.48). Even as she speaks, there is yelling that sounds as if it were coming from a drunken bum (it is actually audio from a Minor Threat gig being mixed into the interview).

At 50:34, Graham's voice-over, louder than usual, intrudes upon Smith while she is speaking. As if too impatient to listen and already knowing what she will say, Graham produces an interpretation of what she is saying before she has finished saying it. When Smith smiles and says 'you won't ever see me beating up nobody', Graham asserts that 'she rejects the simplicities...' Before he can finish saying 'of the false utopia of the 1960s', he too is interrupted by the shouts of Minor Threat fans at 50:38.

He didn't have patience for Smith, but now hardcore has run out of patience with the narrative constructed by *Rock My Religion* and attempts to crowd out both. With no lights and no stage, Graham films bodies looming into the camera, slamming each other, dark silhouettes in an illegible club. He stumbles over his script, 'in favour as a reality of an ambiguity of violence in the 1970s. She also accepts that rock and violence must coexist. This is the first manifestation of punk rock.'

At 52:09 'Ain't It Strange' begins to play. Smith sings 'I'll never end transcend transcend' as the yellow text on black summarises and elaborates one speculative proposition from *Rock My Religion*:

> *In the 1970s the religion of the 50s teenager and the 60s 'counterculture' is adopted by pop artists who propose the end of the religion of 'art for art's sake'. Patti Smith took this one step further: she saw rock as an art form which could come to replace poetry, painting and sculpture. If art is only a business, as* [Andy] *Warhol suggests, then music expresses a more communal, transcendental emotion which art now denies* (fig.49).

Instead of lamenting the death of art, decrying art as business or looking to forms that might resurrect art, Smith, according to Graham, was preoccupied with the task of creating rock as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that 'would come to encompass poetry, sculpture, painting — as well as its own form of revolutionary politics'. His championing of Smith was tactical. Her Wagnerian ambitions for rock as a total artwork allowed Graham to declare neo-popism passé. The project was to enlist Smith in order to widen the space in art for the symbiotic practices of rock. The final published script for *Rock My Religion* offers an alternative to the film text: 'If art was only business then rock expressed that transcendental, religious yearning for communal, non-market feeling that official art denied. For a time during the 1970s, rock culture became the religion of the avant-garde art world.'[84]



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What was at stake in this hyperbolic assertion? What did it make thinkable? What did it license, what did it occlude and what did it target? And to which rock culture, which religion, which avant-garde art world was Graham alluding? Hailing rock as the religion of art hinted at a secret tendency within avant-garde art, a devotional strain running throughout recent artistic practice. In turn, this implied a rewriting of the understanding of what constituted advanced art. It suggested that a historical understanding of art that showed no enthusiasm for the artistic preoccupation with the stances, positions and attitudes of rock culture could not, in turn, expect to be taken seriously by those artists. It declared a faith in the value of rock culture for art culture in the face of art history's indifference towards rock. What was important to grasp about avant-garde art, Graham insisted, was the seriousness that it bestowed upon rock. Without an awareness of the sustenance that artists had drawn from rock, without a realisation of the elevated role that rock culture had played within artistic thinking, it would not be possible to understand what had made art avant-garde in the 1970s and 80s.

*Rock My Religion* suspended the hierarchies that rock cultures and art worlds continually tried to resurrect — it melted them into shared states of intensity, attitudes, gestures, performances, parties, scenes and cliques. By doing so, it rewrote art history as rock history.

1
The timings noted throughout this book refer to a copy of the work viewable on Vimeo at the following address http://vimeo.com/8796242 (last accessed on 22/03/2012). These timings are different from the timings of the version Graham now exhibits, and which is available from Electronic Arts Intermix, which is itself different from the version included in the collection of the Whitney Museur of American Art. Dan Graham does not have an 'official' version of *Rock My Religion* — his practice, as acknowledged by his studio, in many ways defies notions of singular discrete art objects. Email to the editors, 1 May 2012.

2
See Arthur Rimbaud, 'À Paul Demeny', 15 May 1871, available at http://abardel.free.fr/tout_rimbaud/lettres_1871.htm#lettre_demeny_15_mai_187: (last accessed on 22 March 2012).

3
See Rhea Anastas, 'Chronology of Works and Writings 1965—2000', in Marianne Brouwer (ed.), *Dan Graham: Works 1965—2000* (exh. cat.), Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2001, p.209.

4
'Dan Graham: Pavilions' took place from 12 March to 17 April 1983; 'Flypunkter/ Vanishing Points' from 14 April to 27 May 1984.

5
Dan Graham, 'My Religion: Extract from a Work Tape: Ann Lee, in Live to Air — Artists Sound Works' (1982), *Audio Arts Magazine*, vol.5, no.3 and 4 (3 x C-82), 1982. This recording may have provided the basis for the script published as 'My Religion' in *Museumjournaal*, vol.27, no.7, 1982.

6
'Rock Religion' was published in *Scenes and Conventions in Architecture by Artists* (exh. cat.), London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1983, pp.80—81. According to Rhea Anastas, it was first published in North America as 'Rock Religion' in *Just Another Asshole*, no.6, 1983. 'Rock Religion' is republished in M. Brouwer (ed.), *Dan Graham: Works 1965—2000, op. cit.*, pp.210—11.

7
D. Graham, 'Rock My Religion', *TERMINAL ZONE*, issue 1, 1987—88.

8
D. Graham, 'Rock My Religion', *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects 1965—1990* (ed. D. Graham and Brian Wallis), Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993, pp.80—96.

9
Quoted by B. Wallis, 'Dan Graham's History Lessons', in *ibid.*, p.viii.

10
Philippe Vergne, 'Don't Trust Anybody', in Bennett Simpson and Chrissie Iles (ed.), *Dan Graham: Beyond* (exh. cat.), Los Angeles, Cambridge, MA and London: The

Museum of Contemporary Art and The MIT Press, 2009, p.146. Simpson writes: 'Underlying this dense weave of subject matter, images, sounds and words is an attempt, Graham said, "to restore historical memory".' B. Simpson, 'A Minor Threat: Dan Graham and Music', in *ibid.*, p.47.

11
'Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll since 1967' took place from 29 September 2007 to 6 January 2008; 'See This Sound: Promises in Sound and Vision' from 28 August 2009 to 10 January 2010.

12
'Dan Graham: Beyond', The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 15 February—25 May 2009. It then travelled to the Whitney Museum of American Art (25 June—11 October 2009) and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (31 October 2009—31 January 2010).

13
Dieter Lesage and Ina Wudtke, *Black Sound White Cube*, Vienna: Locker, 2010, p.64.

14
Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'From Gadget Video to Agit Video: Some Notes on Four Recent Video Works', *Art Journal*, vol.45, no.3, Fall 1985, p.220. Buchloh writes that the 'idiosyncratic and eclectic compilation of the material in Graham's subjective history of the relationship between rock and roll and religion is highly original and it would be foolish to judge the results by the standard of academic historical research in the field of the history of religion or that of mass-cultural practices of delirious consumption. Yet even if one grants the tape all the individual rights to select at will and compile at random from the complex history of that inter relationship in artistic bricolage manner, it also provokes a response to the subjectivity of that choice and the construction of the history resulting from it.'

15
Hal Foster, 'Dan Graham, Whitney Museum of Modern Art, New York', *Artforum*, vol.48, no.2, October 2009, p.226.

16
B. Simpson, 'A Minor Threat', *op. cit.*, p.48.

17
It is likely that Graham used the Sony Series V editing suite popular with artists in the early to mid-1980s for typing text and for converting images into backgrounds.

18
Tony Oursler has said: 'There was really not enough light for the camera, it was just disastrous. But I would always see Dan, this guy crouching around with this small camera and all these people jumping around him.' See T. Oursler in Markus Müller, 'Dan Graham: Collaborations, in Other Words, Not Alone', in M. Brouwer (ed.), *Dan Graham: Works 1965—2000*, *op. cit.*, p.36.

19
Bennett Simpson states that *Rock My Religion* opens with 'a slow-motion view of Black Flag singer Henry Rollins writhing before a crowd'. B. Simpson, 'A Minor Threat', *op. cit.*, p.47. In fact, the image has not been slowed down. It is Black Flag themselves who have slowed down their tempo in order to introduce a new mood into their performance, and counter the generalised expectation that they always played fast.

20
Paul Williams, 'Dissolve/Reveal', in Clinton Heylin (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Rock Writing*, New York: Viking Penguin, 1992, p.261.

21
*Ibid.*

22
*Ibid.*

23
Anne Hilde Neset, 'All Shook Up', *The Wire*, no.304, June 2009, pp.32—33.

24
In a video interview conducted by Tony Oursler, Graham insists: 'Yeah, I think all music comes from industrialisation, in other words, industrialisation, erm, beginning in Manchester, England...' See T. Oursler, *Synaesthesia: Dan Graham* (1997—2001). 'I made the connection to the Industrial Revolution because I think rock 'n' roll in America began with the Industrial Revolution.' D. Graham quoted in A.H. Neset, 'All Shook Up', *op. cit.*, pp.32—33. See also Eric de Bruyn, 'Sound Is Material', *Grey Room*, vol.17, Fall 2004, pp.113—14.

25
See Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006, especially the chapter 'Results', available at http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/condition-working-class/ch07.htm (last accessed on 22 March 2012).

26
According to Simon Ford, the company slogan of 'Industrial Music for Industrial People' was suggested by artist Monte Cazazza. See S. Ford, *Wreckers of Civilisation: The Story of COUM Transmission & Throbbing Gristle*, London: Faber & Faber, 2001, p.7. In his interview with Tony Oursler, Genesis P. Orridge elaborated on this motif. See T. Oursler, *Synaesthesia: Genesis P. Orridge* (1997—2001).

27
Genesis P. Orridge credited Peter 'Sleazy' Christopherson of Throbbing Gristle for the name Industrial Records. Quoted in S. Ford, *Wreckers of Civilisation*, *op. cit.*, p.7.

28
See Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975; reprinted by Plume in 1997.

29
D. Graham quoted in E. de Bruyn, 'Sound is Material', *op. cit.*, p.114.

30
See Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society*, New York: Dover, 1953.

31
Raymond Pettibon quoted in *Air Guitar: Art Reconsidering Rock Music* (exh. cat.), Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes Gallery, 2002, p.58.

32
As Lee M. Edwards noted, 'only the *Illustrated London News* observed the internal drama of *On Strike* in its review of the really strong study of a working man halting between two views of life — his duty to his comrades and his duty to his family. Of the former motive we only see the trace in the sullen obstinacy of the man's face as he leans against the doorpost of his lodgings. His wife, with a baby in her arms, followed by an elder child, is urging the breadwinner to think of their hapless lot.' L.M. Edwards, 'Herkomer & the Modern Life Subject', in Stephen Poole (ed.), *A Passion for Work: Sir Hubert von Herkomer 1849—1914* (exh. cat.), Watford: Watford Museum, 1982, pp.43—44. See also 'The Royal Academy: Third Notice', *Illustrated London News*, 16 May 1891.

33
Kim Gordon, 'American Prayers', *Artforum*, vol.23, no.8, April 1985, p.75.

34
According to Sonic Youth biographer David Browne, Graham commissioned Gordon, who lived with Thurston Moore one floor below Graham at 84 Eldridge Street near the Bowery, to write the song for *Rock My Religion*. The lyrics of 'Shakin' Hell' refer to the way 'advertising men are in control of the way women look'; 'Take off your dress and shake off your flesh' is about male control. See David Browne, *Goodbye 20th Century: Sonic Youth and The Rise of the Alternative Nation*, London: Piatkus Books, 2008, pp.97—98.

35
Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: The Ideology of Industrial Society* (1964), London: Sphere Books, 1968, p.37.

36
Patti Smith, 'Histories of the Universe', recorded at St Mark's Church, New York, 1 January 1975, available at http://www.ubu.com/sound/smith.html (last accessed on 22 March 2012).

37
A. Rimbaud, *Illuminations and Other Prose Poems* (trans. Louise Varèse), New York: New Directions, 1946, 1957, p.xxxiii.

38
P. Smith, 'Histories of the Universe', *op.cit.*

39
Humphrey Jennings, *Pandaemonium 1660—1886: The Coming of the Machine as Seen by Contemporary Observers* (ed. Mary Lou Jennings and Charles Madge), London: Papermac, 1995, p.xxxviii.



40
*Ibid.*

41
*Ibid.*

42
D. Graham, 'Rock Religion', in M. Brouwer (ed.), *Dan Graham: Works 1965—2000*, *op. cit.*, p.211.

43
P. Smith, 'Oath', *Early Work 1970—1979*, New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994, p.7.

44
P. Smith, 'Radio Ethiopia (the tongue of love)', 1976. The essay was printed in low case, accompanying the CD reissue of *Radio Ethiopia*.

45
Quoted in C. Heylin, *From The Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post Punk World*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993, p.198. See also Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997, pp.364—66.

46
C. Heylin, *From The Velvets to the Voidoids*, *op. cit.*, p.198.

47
The following songs are included but not credited: The Beatles' 'Tomorrow Never Knows' (1966); Black Flag's 'Nothing Left Inside' (1984); Glenn Branca's 'The Spectacular Commodity', 'The Ascension' (both 1981) and 'Theme for a Drive through Suburbia' (1980—82); The Byrds' 'So You Want to Be a Rock 'n' Roll Star'(1967); The Clash's 'All the Young Punks (New Boots and Contracts)' and 'Tommy Gun' (both 1978); Eddie Cochran's 'Teenage Heaven' (1960); The Doors' 'Wake Up!' (1970), 'Blue Sunday' (1970) and 'The End (1967); Elvis's 'Good Rockin' Tonight' (1954); The Fall's 'A Figure Walks' (1979); Buddy Holly's 'Oh Boy' (1957); Jan and Dean's 'Surf City' (1963); Jerry Lee Lewis's 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On' (1957) and 'Great Balls of Fire' (1957); Little Eva's 'The Loco-Motion' (1962); Barry McGuire's 'Eve of Destruction' (1965); Jim Morrison's 'Dawn's Highway/ Newborn Awakening' (1969—70/78); the Ramones' 'Rock 'n' Roll High School' (1979); Merrilee Rush's 'Angel of the Morning' (1968); Patti Smith's 'Histories of the Universe' (1975), 'Land' (1975), 'Gloria: In Excelsis Deo' (1975), 'We Three' (1978), 'Elegie' (1975), 'Kimberly' (1975) and 'Easter' (1975); Sonic Youth's 'Shakin Hell' and 'Brother James' (both 1983), and Neil Young's 'Here We Are in the Years' (1968).

48
Barbara Kruger, '"Taking" Pictures: Photo-Texts By Barbara Kruger', *Screen*, vol.23, no.2, July—August 1982, p.90; reprinted in David Evans (ed.), *Appropriation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel, and The MIT Press, 2009, p.106.

49
The painting is *Hunter Mountain, Twilight* (1866) by Sanford Robinson Gifford. In the foreground what was once a forest is now an expanse of tree stumps. This was Hunter Mountain that Gifford painted a few years after the end of the Civil War. In the years following the Civil War, Hunter Mountain (north of New York on the Hudson river) was overrun with small farms, strip-cut logging to create pastures for cattle and is one of the first documented large-scale ecological destructions in the US. The wilderness that had come to symbolise America is filled with disquiet and signs of destruction crowd this apparently serene scene.

50
Lee Ranaldo played on 'The Ascension' and toured Europe with Branca's ensemble in 1981. Through Graham, Ranaldo and Moore met with Gerhard Richter and Isa Genzken in Cologne, played at Martin Kippenberger's club in Berlin and performed at Einsturzende Neubauten's debut concert. Both Ranaldo and Moore performed on *Symphony No.1 (Tonal Plexus)* (1981), *Symphony No.2 (The Peak of the Sacred)* (1982), *Indeterminate Activity of Resultant Masses* (1982) and *Symphony No.3 (Gloria)* (1983). The alternate tunings at the opening of 'Shakin' Hell' integrate Branca's method into song form.

51
In 1979, Ericka Beckman filmed *135 Grand Street, New York, 1979*. This is the only visual document of The Static, a band that consisted of Branca, guitarist Barbara Ess and drummer Christine Hahn, performing an early version of 'The Spectacular Commodity'. In 1979, Graham performed *Performance/Audience/Mirror* at Riverside Studios in London. He invited The Static to play a concert afterwards, which can be heard at http://ubumexico.centro.org.mx/sound/graham_dan/Branca-Glenn_The-Static.mp3 (last accessed on 22 March 2012). In 1978, Graham produced The Static's only single. In 1977, the first gig of Theoretical Girls, the band formed by bassist Jeffrey Lohn with Branca and Margaret de Wys, was at the alternative space Franklin Furnace as a guest of Graham's. The name 'Theoretical Girls' originated in a conversation between Graham and Jeff Wall.

52
Ann Lee's conviction is not unique. Several women proclaimed to be messiahs in the second half of the eighteenth century. See Philip Hoare, *England's Last Eden: Adventures in a Victorian Utopia*, London, New York, Toronto and Sydney: Harper Perennial, 2006.

53
Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism 1790—1975*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1976, p.5.

54
Unpublished interview notes for A.H. Neset, 'All Shook Up', *op. cit.*

55
*Ibid.*

56
Gordon Pyle's illustrations for *Giles Cory, Yeoman* (1893) were originally published in *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*, vol.76.



57
D. Graham, 'Rock My Religion', *op. cit.*, p.94.

58
Lia Trinka-Browner, 'Letter to Dan', in *Pep Talk 3: Dan Graham*, 2010, p.32.

59
'Help Me Somebody' sampled Reverend Paul Morton as he broadcast from New Orleans in June 1980. 'The Jezebel Spirit' featured evangelist and faith healer Kathryn Kuhlman. See David Breskin, 'Talking Heads', *Musician*, 4 October 1981, available at http://clients.fdtdesign.com/mlitbog/archive_press.php?id=5 (last accessed on 22 March 2012).

60
Scott Isler, 'Going, Going, Ghana!', *Trouser Press*, no.61, May 1981, available at http://www.talking-heads.nl/index.php/david-byrne-bio/david-byrne-archive/136-going-going-ghana (last accessed on 22 March 2012).

61
Theodor W. Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p.80.

62
D. Graham, 'Rock My Religion', *TERMINAL ZONE*, *op. cit.*

63
See D. Graham, 'Artist as Producer' (1978—88), *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings* by Dan Graham on His Art (ed. Alexander Alberro), Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999; reprinted in *Rock/Music Writings*, New York: Primary Information, 2009, pp.205—219.

64
*Ibid.*, p.1.

65
D. Graham, 'Cinema' (1981), *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects 1965—1990*, *op. cit.*, p.169.

66
D. Graham, 'Theater, Cinema, Power' (1983), *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects 1965—1990*, *op. cit.*, p.182.

67
D. Graham, 'Punk as Propaganda' (1979), *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects 1965—1990*, *op. cit.*, p.99; reprinted in *Rock/Music Writings*, *op. cit.*, pp.63—89.

68
Outside of *Rock My Religion*, due to over-familiarity, it is nearly impossible to listen to Jerry Lee Lewis's 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On' with any attention; inside *Rock My Religion*, it becomes a sonorous gesture with a capacity to affect bodies. The term 'rock 'n' roll' itself, rendered nauseating through overuse, emerges as a coded sexual invitation.

69
D. Graham, 'McLaren's Children' (1981—82), *Rock My Religion: Writings and Projects 1965—1990*, *op. cit.*; reprinted in *Rock/Music Writings*, *op. cit.*, pp.165—89.

70
*Ibid.*, p.169.

71
See Jeff Wall, 'Dan Graham's Kammerspiel Part II' (1982), *REALLIFE Magazine*, no.15, 1985; reprinted in Miriam Katzeff, Thomas Lawson and Susan Morgan (ed.), *REALLIFE Magazine: Selected Writings and Projects 1979—1994*, New York: Primary Information, 2006, p.204.

72
*Ibid.*

73
D. Graham, 'New Wave Rock and the Feminine' (1980—84), *Rock/Music Writings*, *op. cit.*, p.127.

74
See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)' (1970), *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (trans. Ben Brewster), London: Monthly Review Press, 1971, available at http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm (last accessed on 22 March 2012).

75
The frames showing the 1957 date do not appear in the EAI version of the video-essay.

76
G. Marcus, *Mystery Train*, *op. cit.*, p.263.

77
See Judy and Fred Vermorel, *Fandemonium*, London, New York and Sydney: Omnibus Press, 1989.

78
François Truffaut quoted in James Monaco, *The New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, p.26.

79
J. and F. Vermorel, *Fandemonium*, *op. cit.*, p.25.

80
Edgar Morin, *The Stars* (1957, trans. Richard Howard), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p.119.

81
John Miller, 'Now Even the Pigs're Groovin'', in M. Brouwer (ed.), *Dan Graham: Works 1965—2000*, *op. cit.*, p.368.



82
*Ibid.*

83
Jim Morrison, *The Lords. The New Creatures: The Original Published Poetry of Jim Morrison*, London, New York and Sydney: Omnibus Press, 1985, p.9. Morrison's attack on spectatorship and his lament for participation were inspired by the Living Theatre performances he had just attended.

84
D. Graham, 'Rock My Religion', in M. Brouwer (ed.), *Dan Graham: Works 1965—2000*, *op. cit.*, p.94.

Dan Graham's *Rock My Religion* (1983–84) is a video essay populated by punk and rock performers (Patti Smith, Jim Morrison, Black Flag and Glenn Branca) and historical figures (including Ann Lee, founder of the Shakers). This coming together of several narrative voice-overs, of singing and shouting, of jarring sounds and text overlaid onto shaky, gritty images, proposes a revision of art history through the lens of rock music and an ambitious thesis on the origins of America.

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