

# INTRODUCTION: *¿OTRO PUNK ES POSIBLE?* HETEROGENOUS HEMISPHERE, CONTESTED TERRITORIES

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*¡Púdrete pituco, reconchatumadre!*

—*Sociedad de Mierda*

The notion of *ch'ixi* [ ... ] corresponds to the Aymara idea of something that is and is not. [ ... ] A grey that is *ch'ixi* is white and is not white at the same time; it's white and it's also black, its opposite.

—Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui

The whole point of punk is not doing what you're told to do.

—Virginie Despentes

It wasn't only about the music and music wasn't only about music.

—Mark Fisher

## Radically Heterogenous Punk

We begin this book citing four disparate sources above—a mid-1980s Peruvian punk band, a Bolivian indigenous activist, a French fiction writer, and a British intellectual dead from suicide—after two years of planning, encounters, drafts, and spicy chat sessions. We want to signal from the outset that our strength lies in the *purposely heterogenous* set of texts, images, and ideas contained here and the *contrarily positioned* actors involved in their production.

To start, we argue punk is a category with simultaneously analytical, experiential, and relational properties, as will become clear in the divergent contributions this book contains. It's analytical because punk can be used as a conceptual starting point to tackle much broader issues (society, history, power, race, gender, etc.). It's experiential because as a subcultural phenomenon—marked as such since the 1970s even when the roots of the word prove to be older than “the Americas” (more on that below)—punk informs individual and collective self-definitions all over the world. It's relational because punk, through analysis and experience, is never simply one definable thing. Punk is many things caught up in relation to many other things: local context, historical moment, other forms of artistic expression, haircuts and tattoos, sets of political values, and so on.

Were we to explore a punk Américas through only one or two modalities—let’s say a book of scholarly essays with a few visuals—it would be a willful misrepresentation addressed to only one kind of reader. It would also be pretty boring. Instead, we sought from the outset to engage multiple forms of punk representation: written and visual essays; short commentary on primary texts, transcriptions, *testimonios*, and *crónicas*; visual documentation; sit-down interviews; record and film reviews; snippets of fanzines and flyers; and excerpts of poetry and novels. In lieu of a contrived conclusion, we end with a manifesto, giving the final word to a punk we encountered spontaneously in Mexico City during the book’s making.<sup>1</sup>

We present this intentionally wild eclecticism in contents because our core conceptual claim is that *heterogeneity*, an analytic with its own American history that we explore below, best encapsulates the Contested Territories this book asks the reader to traverse. We suggest there is a radical heterogeneity already embedded in the book’s cover image. First, we use a fanzine cover as a book cover to indicate our constant back and forth: between “official” and “popular” culture (culture and subculture if you prefer); between academe as an elitist site of social critique and the street as a site of critical social consciousness; between saying things “properly” and saying things however the fuck you want.

Second, the image speaks to a desire to open punk up to a series of critical frameworks and utter contradictions. The image is the handiwork of Pedro Tóxico, guitarist of the mid-1980s Peruvian band Sociedad de Mierda (Society of Shit), whose most well-known song is “Púdrete Pituco” (Rot, You White Peruvian). Taken from the cover of a 1985 fanzine, titled *Kólera* (“Anger”), the surface features belie deeper contradictions of race and class that fractured Lima’s early punk scene, revealing multiple tensions and impossible dialogues that haunt Peruvian society (see Rodríguez-Ulloa, Chapter 9 in this volume; Quijano, Chapter 5 in this volume). Tóxico recalls cutting out this image of some prototypical punks from a used German-language magazine he found in one of Lima’s dump sites of globally recycled goods. Perhaps they are early 1980s German punks, perhaps British, perhaps Swiss, he had no idea because he can’t read German. But they reminded him of certain Whitish and wealthier punks in the early Lima scene, socially distant from the cholo punks his band spoke to. The sardonic interventions with blue pen into the image—“Is there punk in Lima?”; “This ain’t London”—became a visual echo to Sociedad de Mierda’s bitter sonic message in their cholo punk “hit” song:

You say there’s no future	Dices que no hay futuro
But yours is totally secured	Pero el tuyo sí que está bien seguro
You’re White, just like your father	Eres blanquito, igual que tu padre

Rot, you White motherfucker!	¡Púdrete pituco, reconchatumadre!
	(1986)

Looking to inhabit some of these multilayered contradictions the book explores, we intentionally sought out contributors to represent an uncommon mix: academics and journalists; poets and activists; cholas, chicanas, Latinx, and boricuas; Afro-Punks, straightedgers, and Native Alaskans; Argentines, Mexicans, and Colombians; a Canadian who lives in DC but does fieldwork in Brazil and a Brazilian punk currently residing in Canada; musicians, feminists, photographers, zinesters, vegan tattoo artists, hair stylists, writers, and queers; a punkademic from Spain studying in Philly and a punk from the Basque Country professing in Bogotá; gringos from the North with affect pointing South; immigrants from the South surviving the North. Most are living; one is dead. All are American or currently living through las Américas. We operate from distinct geopolitical sites and recognize these divergent social realities as the facts of our existences.

Some readers might see this as chaos and search in vain for a social scientific “systematicity” we never promised to produce. We are not after one kind of reader but readers of all kinds. Flipping through the pages to find what you want and discarding the rest is highly encouraged. We chose not to sacrifice the realities of heterogeneity to the academic deities that demand firm definitions, delimited variables, total theoretical coherence, a single thread, and so on. Call it a reader, a choose-your-Américas story, or a meta-comment on the musical anarchy punk sometimes desires and the social disorder punk helps visualize. Below, we suggest it is a ch’ixi punk collage and argue that if one wants to engage for real—rather than solely in theoretical terms—with the profoundly differing but still connected experiences that compose punk life across these Contested Territories of the Americas, one has to start from this premise of radical heterogeneity in content, form, and contributor.

Aside from *Rockin’ las Américas* (Pacini Hernandez 2004)—a scholarly book that pioneered a transnational approach to rock music throughout the hemisphere—we can think of few precedents for this book. There is an emerging trend to rethink punk from broader global angles as in the recent works of Kevin Dunn (2016), Vivien Goldman (2019), and Russ Bestley et al. (2019). We still perceive an overemphasis on punk as music, relative to the many other expressive forms it takes. One cannot *write* about the sounds of punk without *looking* in depth at the sights of punk as a distinct visual culture—hence this book is loaded with imagery. Similarly, since there has never been one way *to write* or *to speak* about punk, we went out of our way to include a multiplicity of voices, genres, and idioms in the book’s making.

Clearly, we are not suggesting languages are treated equal here or anywhere. One of our aims is precisely to introduce punk worlds from the Spanish, Portuguese, and indigenous regions of the Americas to an Anglophone audience. This is why we produced a largely English language text while retaining select moments in Spanish, Portuguese, and (a bit of) Mapuche—typically in more expressive passages (poetry, lyrics, manifesto)—and why we rely centrally on an analytical term from Aymara. Given the hemispheric scope, some readers might rightly desire a more extensively multilingual volume in lieu of translations into the “gringo’s tongue.” This is not an idea we are against. Yet, in addition to presenting practical problems with publisher and length, it is worth noting that such a book would assume a multilingual reader and perhaps implicitly privilege the kind of “cosmopolitan” subject often imagined from within academia. This leaves monolinguals aside and skirts around the fact that all European languages are colonial in the Americas context—Spanish and Portuguese are the most historical among them. To broaden this politics of language without claiming to have produced a fully decolonial text, we plan for a Spanish edition to follow.

To be clear, we start with a distinct awareness that there is a long and prolific history of books and films about punk in the Anglophone world, so many no one could possibly do an exhaustive review. These range from the academic and journalistic to the visual and testimonial, though rarely do these different genres mix together in one compilation as they do here. Such accounts stretch back to the late 1970s when the term “punk” morphed from a street (and prison) insult into an explosive subcultural style, musical movement, DIY way of life, and, well, just another rock’n’roll swindle (see Hebdige 1979; Laing 1985; Marcus 1989; McNeil and McCain 2006; Savage 2002; Holmstrom and Hurd 2012).

To be critical, virtually all of these more or less canonical accounts operate under the same basic premise. That before the global media explosion surrounding the Sex Pistols in 1977 solidified its British component, punk originated as an “American” phenomenon, much like the British socio-musicologist Simon Frith (1981) once argued rock’n’roll itself is about the “American” experience even if his compatriots proved expert in transforming it into a global phenomenon. In all these accounts, “American” means “from the United States” and sends implicit messages to the Anglophone world. There is an underlying assumption that a US punk has “more to talk about” with a British punk than, say, a Mexican or Puerto Rican or Cuban punk all of whom are closer geographic neighbors. This is because of the racialized and geopolitical logics that feed into language hierarchies. It is also often regardless of what language(s) this or that punk is actually speaking, singing, or writing or which American territories this or that punk moves in and through.

This imperial US and Anglocentric notion of “American” also often implies masculine and White, particularly since “crazy White boy” stories prevail in the semi-canonized punk accounts. By the 1970s the rock music that garnered global media attention had become an overwhelmingly Whited space. This was partly through a relegation of rock’s rhythm and blues roots to the past and partly by keeping musical contributions from Black and brown artists into strictly segregated genres (R&B, soul, disco, funk, salsa, etc.), as Hamilton (2016) argues. It’s also because punk, like rock, routinely embraces anti-Black stances, a problem that thankfully at least some early US punk rock writers were critical of (see Bangs 1988) and that Afro-punks reveal through direct experience (see Spooner 2003; Spooner and Greene, Chapter 12 in this volume).

That certain kinds of punk became interwoven with the explicit White supremacy of nativist nationalists and neo-Nazi skinheads is only the most obvious thing to point out, hence the film *American History X*. US punk’s antiblackness was already present in John Holmstrom’s and Legs McNeil’s now sacralized *PUNK* magazine, launched in New York City in early 1976, when they decided it would be cool to position punks as direct antagonists of disco, a musical form known for its danceability, club life, and multiracial dimensions. They did so by appropriating rock’s long-standing claim toward musical “authenticity,” which is too often a masquerade for expressing racial, class, and gendered anxieties about other bodies and bodily movements. On the editorial page of the first issue of *PUNK*, they announced the death of disco, sold T-shirts to that effect, and clarified its subhumanness:

Kill Yourself. Jump off a Fuckin’ Cliff. Drive nails into your head. Become a robot and join the staff at Disneyland. OD. Anything. Just don’t listen to that discoshit. I’ve seen that canned crap take real live people and turn them into dogs!

(Holmstrom and Hurd 2012: 14)

Lest one think this kind of reasoning is entirely gone, or specific to US racial conflict, go visit a few social media spaces where Peruvian punks congregate online, posting rock memes ad nauseum about their revulsion toward reggaeton using similar logics. “Reggaeton is for *idiotas*” and so on and so forth. Punk has long cultivated an authenticity complex that casts out posers, fakes, and traitors in order to claim its own transcendent “realness.” Too often it does so without admitting that punks can’t escape social prejudice or global contradictions any more easily than anyone else.

In some accounts of punk—say Sara Marcus’s (2010) book on riot grrrl or Duncombe and Tremblay’s (2011) book on punk and race—there are interventions

into the social contradictions infused into the story of punk in the United States and the United Kingdom. There's no absence of accounts of punk in Latin America, for example, Shane Greene's (2016) book on the political history of the punk scene in Lima, Merarit Viera's (2015) book on feminism and punk in Tijuana, or Pat Pietrafesa and Tomás Makaji's (2014) documentary series "Desacato a la Autoridad" about punk in Buenos Aires. But many of these are framed in national or localized urban terms rather than a broader hemispheric and global dialogue. Our principal aim then is to attempt to engage with this radical heterogeneity and simultaneous interconnectedness of the Americas through a series of critical punk lenses. In doing so, we aim to introduce the reader to many core dilemmas that define the history of the hemisphere: a coloniality of the long durée; a twentieth century geopolitics full of conflict and liberation struggles intensifying into the twenty-first; a "War on Drugs" as old as punk subculture itself; socialist experiments, militant defeats, imperial intervention, and state repression; complex linguistic, migratory, gendered, and artistic dialogues and their silences; the individual dreams and nightmares of specific punk personalities; and more.

We also want to instigate resistance toward perspectives that retain narrow claims of punk's authenticity or perhaps rework it in other terms. In this latter sense, we aren't nearly as anxious as some of the "punkademics" (see Furness 2012) that see a need to fret over whether punk and academia represent such polar opposites that any attempt to combine them produces crippling dilemmas. There's the risk of trusting any particular punk's proclaimed anarchic resistance to hierarchy too much. There's also the risk of underestimating how a heterogenous punkness might be just what is needed to question the aristocratic and moralizing logics of academia, an institution that prides itself on restricting voices and voicings that it considers "not good enough" for scholarly publication (shout-out to those with "rejected" manuscripts!). In this instance, we got this group of misfits together on the very premise that in the act of misfitting within the space of this book, we might rehearse some of the plural American and radically heterogenous realities from which we hail.

### **America the Heterogenous, First Thoughts as Ch'ixi Punks**

There's a multitude of potential framings for a book with such a large repertoire of analytics, experiences, and relational statements about punk. As the volume proceeds, these range from Third Worldist poetry and critical race perspectives to intersectional gender analysis and anarchist collages. Rather than try to define all these perspectives in glossary fashion in the short space of an introduction, we let them unfold in the context of the different contributions. As editors, we started with a more basic framing

question explicit in the book's title: What are these plural Américas and how might we conceptualize them through a set of punk lenses?

We might first see the Americas as a complex series of hierarchically ordered nation-state projects. Were the 1 billion plus Americans across the continent to truly reckon with these territories—an entirely colonized space where even the idea of a "western hemisphere" is the product of a Eurocentric remapping of the world—we should pause to ask what indigenous terms might point toward potential decolonization. One concrete proposal is to reject all versions of America (the singular, the plural, the Anglo, the Latin) and rename the entire thing Abiyala. This proposal is born out of indigenous dialogues between Guna and Aymara leaders, and is adopted by the K'iche' Maya intellectual Emil Keme (2018), who appropriates from a famous speech by the Oglala Lakota activist, orator, and actor, Russell Means. Or as Keme proclaims in his transhemispheric indigenous proposal: "For Abiyala to live, the Americas must die." Notice immediately the back and forth between speaking and writing, orality and literary culture. This is a double reality this book also seeks to enact within but also beyond the world of indigenous cultures.

The nation-state structure imposed onto the native land of the Americas is centuries in the making and is thoroughly dominated by a Eurocentric form of reasoning. Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (2000) began calling this underlying state of affairs the "coloniality of power" in the late 1980s. As he argued with Immanuel Wallerstein, the invention of "America" (as a hemispheric territory, not a single country) proved central in the coloniality of the modern world condition—because of its supposed futurity and promises of freedom and because these futures and freedoms have always been radically constrained by the racialized forms of labor and geopolitical structures that dictate winner and loser nations, superior and inferior peoples, backward and forward cultures (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992).

Rita Segato (2013), an Argentine anthropologist with ample experience in Brazil and Mexico, engages Quijano's command of world history by asking what role gender and sex play in this coloniality of the modern condition. She suggests that while patriarchy is much older than the Americas as the birthplace of global capitalism, and widely cross-cultural, there is a crucial contrast in its "low intensity" forms, notable in certain indigenous spheres, and the "high intensity" it develops under coloniality. Her point is that the modern tendency to biologize inequality that Quijano sees in the logics of race—justifying as "natural" an historical outcome of unequal peoples, nations, and regions—also has severe consequences in terms of a modern rigidification of gender/sex differences. Another supposed biology dictates which kinds of humans belong in

the public versus private spheres, political versus domestic spaces, sexually active versus sexually passive roles. Perhaps bell hooks (1982) would agree. Her analysis of how patriarchal logics consistently confound who stands in for the whole of Black liberation, as Black men routinely display desires to gain access to spaces of White patriarchal control by leaving Black women behind, suggests there has always been a connection between systems of racial, labor, and gender-based oppression—intensified through the coloniality of American experience.

In citing these broadly construed theoretical conversations, three things strike us as crucial to state upfront about our framework of a punk Américas. First, we refuse to set the United States apart. The fact that it historically appropriated the term “America” as a singular reference to itself is important to note but hardly novel criticism. The United States’ long-standing discourse about its global exceptionalism is something we simply reject. Amid the open resurgence of White supremacist ideology, the popularity of fascist figures in contemporary US politics, and levels of riotous protest not seen since the 1960s—at the time of this writing, there is burning and occupation of police precincts and tumbling of Confederate and Columbus monuments, and the phrase “Black Lives Matter” circulates everywhere—this seems important to recognize. There has never been anything exceptional, much less exceptionally democratic, about the United States. It has no “Shining Cities.” No dreams have been delivered. The discourse on US exceptionalism is merely a euphemism for its transparent intent to dominate the region and the world for the past two centuries, an imperialism rooted in the Eurocentric logics of coloniality that brought America (the hemisphere) to the “center” of a “new world” in the first place. With the advance of the twenty-first century and the emergence of other globally powerful rivals (China and Russia in particular), even US dominance is no longer a given moving into the future.

Second, at various historical moments, political actors from equally symbolic sites in the hemisphere have presented their own claims to a singularized America, if also from a position directly opposed to US imperialism. José Martí’s (1891) famous articulation of a “Nuestra América” at the close of the nineteenth century—an Our America where a Spanish-speaking subject of history claims center stage—is perhaps the most well known. More than just a counter to the US Anglocentric discourse, it was a marker of an important world historical shift, the fading of Spain’s global importance and the emergence of the United States’ all-encompassing aggression that defined the entire next century.

Third, the fact that there are crucial differences in size, positioning, and an extraordinary inequality of wealth distribution within Latin American and Caribbean nations, as well as some still formally colonial territories (e.g., Puerto Rico), is important

but also somewhat self-evident. The “Caribbean” has the history of coloniality embedded in the term given its indigenous origins. “Latin America” is a racialized linguistic construct that emerged out of the mid part of the nineteenth century, when both regional elites and French colonizers of Mexico imagined themselves distinct from an Anglo-Saxon enemy to the North (Gobat 2013). Yet, the very idea of a “Latin” root, also the source for “Latino” as identity marker for those of Latin American heritage in the United States, effectively excluded the various Afro-diasporic, indigenous, and other “non-Latin” peoples and histories caught up in America’s coloniality.<sup>2</sup>

One crucial aspect embedded in the concept of coloniality, as Segato (2013) indicates, is a reality of social heterogeneity or, as it were, the existence of multiple realities.<sup>3</sup> Anibal Quijano (1989) traces a more political economic history of the notion of heterogeneity back to José Carlos Mariátegui’s proposal for an anti-dogmatic Marxism and dreams for an autochthonous socialism that would be “ni calco ni copia” (neither mold nor copy of Europe). Quijano has in mind divergent modes of production and less-hierarchical forms of sociality that persist despite the global pervasiveness of coloniality and capital. Because they persist, they cannot be simply reduced in evolutionary Marxist fashion to “pre-capitalist” or “primitive communist” formations. Neocolonial capitalist extraction is the dominant paradigm, but it is incapable of ever teleologically replacing these other modes of being and doing; instead, capital is constantly forced to articulate with them through spaces of contradiction. For example, the *cultura popular* embedded in informal street markets full of recycled goods, or the urban cholo identity crafted through the figure of the *ambulante* street seller, represents this ongoing persistence of socioeconomic worlds that exist beyond (while articulated to) the alienating logics of extraction, exploitation, and profit. Here, we see direct corollaries in how punks routinely define a DIY commitment to amateurism, anti-virtuosity, and noncommercial forms of cultural production as a means to resist—*from within*—those same alienating logics embedded in the culture industry’s routine practices of commodity homogenization, monopoly of creative control, and bottom-line profit motives. Here too, the reader might revisit this in light of our zine cover acting as book cover, that iconic European punk image struck through and repurposed by a Peruvian street punk, nicknamed Tóxico.

Analyzing across five centuries, from the defining events of the Spanish conquest to modern-day Andean literature, Cornejo Polar (2013) argues heterogeneity also pervades the discursive domain. He has in mind a series of complex articulations between the literary world and oral traditions, and all this contrast is presumed to imply urbanity versus rurality, education versus illiteracy, the European colonizer versus the indigenous resistor,

a bourgeois self versus a communal spirit, and so on. He requests we see these apparently dueling polarities as part of an ongoing heterogenous dialogue, one full of constant expressive tension rather than a “modernizing” process where one cultural mode fully displaces another. Here too there are multiple parallels with American punk life and the techniques of punk expression we compiled here. Think, for example, of the importance we place on the spoken, spontaneous, and shouted word—as opposed to the relative flatness of written text—via interviews, transcript, *testimonios*, manifestos, and *crónicas*. Think also of the tension between more essayistic prose; its elaborative, revised, and citation-driven qualities; and the emphasis on direct experience, uninhibited, and even crude expression as communicated via spoken, poetic, and emotive voicings. Notice too the images that capture a punk body language that words can never fully articulate; the tensions between written discourse and visual aesthetics also form part of our expressive dialogues.

And everything else that sits somewhere in between.

It is this awkward in-between quality of the book, a reflection of a heterogenous punk Américas we seek to rehearse, that aligns us with a proposal offered by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010). A Bolivian feminist, also an indigenous and anarchist activist, so far as we know she doesn't identify as a punk. Yet, we see her core theoretical principle, the Aymara concept of *ch'ixi*, as distinctly punk-like. *Ch'ixi* is the notion that a juxtaposition of opposites does not necessarily portend a final resolution into a third “hybrid” thing-in-itself. Nor is it simply a projection of absolute opposition. Instead, what appear as color opposites from one vantage point can effectively produce a different color from another vantage point and more fundamentally a *different way of looking*. The perspective of the viewer is the key.

Rivera Cusicanqui is suggesting we actually embrace rather than falsely resolve our already apparent contradictions. We might better spend our time looking for the heterogenous images our contradictions produce and stop feeling apologetically less-than or more-than depending on how we fit into the racist, sexist, and colonial ideologies of the nation-states imposed on us. Thinking of ourselves as America's contradictory *ch'ixi* punks, we want to be active anti-purists and disloyal to perfected dialectics. We want images that move beyond the dominant Black versus White logics that rule the US racial imaginary. We also seek something other than the happy hybridity supposedly delivered through *mestizaje*, which in its more nationalistic and masculinized versions have long been projected as the defining characteristic of Latin America and the Caribbean. Part of this work might involve identifying more dissident, less stable, and more messy *mestizajes*, as in the work of Marisol de la Cadena (2000) or the heterogenous production practices that Anibal Quijano (1989) sees as a potential path to disrupt global capital's coloniality. Both proposals share in a juxtapositional dynamic—same but also different, this but also

that—that is embedded in the Aymara notion of the *ch'ixi*. Ultimately, our *ch'ixi* punk practices extend beyond issues of race, as we reject any kind of purity put before us in order to embrace our more contaminating parts.

We also notice that Rivera Cusicanqui's *ch'ixi* praxis is akin to the logics implicit in collage, which aesthetically suggest not just acceptance but a distinct pleasure in life's contradictions, particularly when communicated through drastic contrasts. It's neither controversial to say nor likely an accident that collage aesthetics have long been at the heart of punk visuality. So, we work with the presumption that this book is nothing if not a collage. Deep contradictions, mindboggling contrasts, radical differences: these are what the Americas are. Rather than purport to resolve them toward some full theoretical synthesis or final historical end, or produce a singular happy hybrid figure in the process, our aim is to express the juxtapositions: generate multiple perspectives, develop contrasting imagery, present multiple ways of looking, and relish the difference in vantage points.

Rivera Cusicanqui's personal and political investments in indigenous language and knowledge also inspired us to dig deeper into punk's curiously deep etymology. This key word is not so much American as it is native to these ravaged lands now called las Américas. It is quite likely a derivative from the term “punkw” in the Lenape language (see Robinson 2018), spoken by those also named the Delaware peoples by colonial history, indigenous to the Northeastern United States, and eventually forced west to Oklahoma and north to Ontario. In Lenape, punkw means “ashes” (see Lenape Talking Dictionary 2020). Punk is so rooted in the various Native *and later* American landscapes we explore here that it predates the colonial name of the territories themselves.

Given this, and much more, we confess to a collective interest in making up an incredibly dense pretext to tell you there really is something especially punk about the Americas, something punk about trying to make life and death in las Américas slightly less miserable amid the contradictions. Or perhaps we've decided to give that misery, and the multitudinous responses to it, the name punk. Why? Because the Americas were forged out of the ashes of a global history in which Europe's civilizational project was just a gigantic excuse to rape, pillage, steal, enslave, and trick millions into submission all across the continent. The Americas persist as both this very symbolic and distinctly real set of charred remains after centuries of fire. They continue to burn, quite literally, as we write this. This book asks you to start digging through the ashes of America and destroy any expectations of what a “book about punk” is supposed to be. We suggest you view the book as a series of “Contested Territories”—a heuristic we explain below—in which a series of punk Américas are revealed without a claim to have resolved anything.

### On *King Kong* and Not Being Someone Else's Punk

At various stages in the making of this book, certain actors in positions of publishing authority (other potential publishers; certain manuscript reviewers) questioned whether there is method to our madness, a coherent “through-line” to hold this heterogeneity together. It was suggested more than once that we might be producing a “not marketable” product because of the book’s chaotically nonconventional contents. We decided we don’t care. And thank Intellect for agreeing that this Américas punk collage is something the world might want anyway. We were attempting not just to maintain certain creative controls but, ultimately, also to be the punks we want to be rather than the punks someone else wanted to make of us.

In this regard, we take direct inspiration from Virginie Despentes (2006), the anarcho-feminist who was a prostitute and pornographer before she became a well-known French novelist. Before all of that, she was a teenage punk who was raped while hitchhiking to shows, as she recounts in fierce autobiographical detail. A short-term etymology makes it immediately clear that petty street crime, prostitution, prison rape, and other harsh realities of the abject and lumpenproletariat experience are also at the heart of punk’s many meanings. Well after its indigenous origins, but long before the term was appropriated by rock writers in the early 1970s, punk was street slang, at times with distinctly Black inflections in the United States (see Nyong’o 2005). In this register, to be a punk is to figure out how to survive despite precarious circumstances, while to become someone’s punk is to be on the receiving end of their abuse of power.

To this story of the word, we remind Anglo readers that all over Latin America, there are numerous slang phrases that refer to the same idea behind “getting punked.” Judith Rodríguez (Chapter 10 in this volume) says the punk struggle is also a Puerto Rican struggle of finding oneself in a perpetual state of *estar jodidx* (being fucked). Decades ago, Octavio Paz (1994), revisiting the colonial story of la Malinche, explained how the entire nation of Mexico is premised on a sense of collective betrayal, a deeply internalized form of gendered colonial violence that is simultaneously political, psychic, and sexual. Mexicans are *hijos de la chingada* (the sons of raped women). And yet, in Mexican Spanish, anything *chingón* is something worth paying attention to. The entire regions of Latin America and the Caribbean have been getting punked by the United States, Europe, and their own criollo elites for centuries. Eduardo Galeano’s text, *The Open Veins of Latin America* (1997), is still one of the most important testaments to this reality, however marked his thought is by dependency-era concepts. At the same time, the idealism of the Cuban Revolution, Salvador Allende’s Chile, the Zapatistas, and so

much more still make Latin America the space of worldly political hope (see, e.g., Martín Crudo and Shane Greene, Chapter 7 in this volume).

The critical questions are: How does one make the critical passage from feeling fucked over to fucking the system? How does one go from feeling *chingado* to death to becoming a ch’ixi punk that creates something *muy chingón*? How does one go from being someone else’s punk to becoming the punk one wants to be?

In addition to reminding us that punks have long imagined themselves as part of the abject, the violated, and the leftover sectors of modern society, Despentes interests us for this singular reason: Despite her own trauma she refuses to portray herself as simply victim. Instead, she ratchets up her own desires for creativity, provocation, and revenge through word and image and deed. Most notable in this context is her unique reading of Director Peter Jackson’s 2005 version of that great American fantasy story, *King Kong*. While things on Kong’s island are never perfectly calm, given the complex creatures that inhabit it, the island is free of the disgustingly reductive gender dichotomies, and accompanying grotesque inequalities, we the inheritors of this thing touted as “civilization” find ourselves so thoroughly savaged by. Resting at such a large distance from the City, the island was relatively free of such things until the self-appointed representative of all things civilized arrived—and we’ll just go ahead and call him the White Man Speaking English Who Believes the City Is Also the Center of the World.

He arrived with an unparalleled desire to lock Kong up in the great cage of history and take him back to the City without asking it for a single opinion. “It” since, as Despentes perceptively notices, Kong has no genitalia to condemn it to the gendered statuses we routinely assume are “biologically” derived from what’s between our legs. All this happened while the peripatetic blonde woman might easily have used her time on the island far from the City to develop her implied alliance with Kong, rather than fall prey to the patriarchal saviorism that “rescues” her from this powerful but genderless primate holding her so softly in its tremendously large grasp. We can’t help but wonder how many punks—indeed how many humans—might feel more at home on Kong’s island than they do in the many American cities where the historical prison of “civilization” has been built.

Punk, in short, has always been about more than its lumpenesque street scenarios and a reference to the realities of sexualized violence. It represents a potential, if not always realized, alliance between those that the “civilized man” has historically maligned as savage, primitive, bestial, woman, queer, macho beta, not-man-enough, a little too dandy, and more. This ostensible weakness is punk’s actual strength in numbers if and when said alliances become real rather than merely etymological or marshalled primarily to serve

some sort of academic theory game. This too brings us back to the crucial question of how we become the punks we want to be rather than the punks someone else wants to make of us. How do we—or can we—form a ch'ixi punk world within the strictures of America, its coloniality, its essential role in constructing global capital?

Mark Fisher was a British intellectual perhaps most well-known for the concept of capitalist realism, that rather depressing idea that nothing short of a total earth-shattering apocalypse will bring the current global order to a halt given the collective inability to imagine equally ambitious alternatives to it (much less enact them). He was also the mind behind the K-punk blog in the early 2000s, ironically offering a tremendous sense of hope that DIY digital alternatives to mainstream monopoly media continue to exist even, maybe especially, in an age defined by cyber technologies and quick digital transfers. His decision to kill himself in 2017 was widely interpreted as not just the outcome of his own struggle with personal demons but also some sort of internalized symptom of the collective darkness we are all inhabiting amid the rise of neofascism, widespread social unrest with no clear direction, imminent ecological collapse, no straightforward path out of a global capitalist order that benefits only the tiniest portion of humankind, and, on top of it all, a global pandemic that furthers our already existing “social distance.”

There is reason in hopelessness even when the global spread of resistance movements also clearly indicates there is a mass desire for real transformation. Again, we sit awkwardly in-between. Punks, we respectfully submit, know a thing or two about depression and other anguished emotive states: despair, anger, *rabia*, frustration, melancholy, *berrinches*, and more. That most basic opposition between hope and despair, as refracted through deeply individual lives and not just collective experiences, is also something punk struggles to articulate. Here too there are juxtapositions we find fascinating to reveal without pretending we can resolve.

This unstable alternation between positive and negative, a back and forth from one extreme to the next, has followed America doggedly since its earliest invention, and only seems to intensify into the future. America and Europe's discursive “new world” that it was derived from have long been metaphors for the future itself, always haunted by the radical uncertainty of how to resolve its past. Thomas Moore's sixteenth-century coinage of the term “utopia” in direct reference to the “new world” is a crucial early marker. Octavia Butler's (2000) sci-fi prophecy of a dystopian twenty-first century now feels like our present full of Trumps, Bolsonaros, and other monsters likely to follow. Butler's vision of America in decadent descent is far scarier than the many zombie narratives inhabiting popular culture because it is so much closer to reality—and because, in science fiction fashion, her only real hope for our future lies on distant planets still over four light years away.

So, when Fisher says music isn't only about music, we understand this in a double sense, at the level of content and concept. Content wise, we've made great effort to assure we don't produce another account of punk with an overemphasis on its musical dimensions to the exclusion of its multiple other expressive forms: its visuality, its literary engagements, its spokenness, its self-publishing (zines, documentaries, flyers in particular). At a conceptual level, we believe punk is an epochal, antisocial experience of shock brought about by the global conflicts of coloniality and the emancipatory demands of the twentieth century, intensifying further into the twenty-first, a seeking of escape from the disheartening trap of global capitalist realism. Neither totally positive nor totally negative, nor fully hopeful nor completely despairing, punk is this state of mind and also that one. Another in-between.

The music referenced here—like the writing and the imagery—is not incidental just like what often happens in film. It is all part of a broader global articulation in which America the heterogenous plays a pivotal role. These ch'ixi punk sights, sounds, and words represent the constant cultural tension that accompanies, explains, and makes performative large-scale transformations, the many worlds through which social identity, body, gender, sound, image, and word propose one or more utopias while anxiously anticipating one or more dystopian scenarios.

It's from this same perspective, amid the painful exhaustion of previous orders and the struggles to find a better one, that punk has long proposed the notion of no future and various strategies of rejection toward the horizon, sometimes directly political and sometimes not, sometimes explicitly collective and sometimes individually internalized. Basically, there is no punk if there is no rejection of the existing global order, America's crucial place in it, and its future reproduction. For that same reason, there is no punk without the critical dissidences behind all the expressions of social identity, economic reality, body, gender, sight, word, and sound found here. All are demanding something different and better while nonetheless fearing the worst might be yet to come.

This rebellious character, cultivated amid subcultures formed on the margins of a social and global order in crisis, is the principal symptom diagnosed from the heterogenous perspectives included in this volume. It places in question, through image, sound, and poetry, the spatial conflicts born out of the imposition of nation-states on indigenous peoples in the Americas, something explored concretely in the cases of *mapunkys* in Patagonia and punks in Alaska. But the book also explores the expansionist and imperial character of the United States in relation to Latin America and the Caribbean, in addition to an explosion of subcultural phenomena and subjects in other subaltern spaces forgotten by criollo nationalist projects. Finally, we examine multiple

contemporary reactions, from urban social conflict and its soundtrack to individual melancholy and the condition of Blackness, from the cholo migrant to feminisms and queer life. All these heterogenous manifestations present themselves against an order that breeds angry rejection, profound dissatisfaction, and cries for something else.

What newer worlds, or older ones, might emerge we do not know. Yet, we will state a simple faith in one idea: *otro punk es posible*.

### **Note on Organization and Contents**

From the outset, we sought contributions for two basic categories of content: essays and paraphernalia. The former offer expanded introspection on a particular problem, place, or trajectory from distinct analytical and visual perspectives. The essays do not all conform to the same conventions. The essayists don't all come from the same country. They don't approach an essay with the same references in mind. They don't represent the same kind of academic training or expectations about "who you should be in dialogue with" as most disciplines typically do. Nonuniformity and a mix of perspectives is what we are after.

The items we indicate as paraphernalia are typically shorter and even more heterogenous in form, everything from interview segments and fiction excerpts to firsthand testimony and fanzine reproductions. We clearly want the book to be exceedingly visual and noticeably literary, and engage the spoken word, a testament to the imaging effects, writerly experiments, and ongoing conversations that have long accompanied punk on its journeys and yet are much less contemplated in light of a frequent emphasis on its musical dimensions. The resulting product is therefore a mix of original productions and source materials, many translated for an Anglo audience for the first time.

Our understanding of a hemispheric perspective follows the argument that a "transnational" approach proves more critical than a "comparative" one, particularly given the colonial racialized assumptions built into the nation-state form and for that matter the Cold War logics of "area studies" (see Seigel 2005). The Americas are made up of a dizzying array of intensely localized, globalized, and nation-state-specific experiences—with attendant contradictions at all levels. Since there is no singular nor fool-proof method that will resolve such contradictions we seek to explore through various means. Certain pieces in the book focus on particular urban contexts; others focus on colonial, regional, and gendered logics that have global dimensions but are explored in specific country cases; others still pursue travel, diaspora, and border crossing as central to their stories. In short, our methods and the units of analysis they presume are as different as the texts and images they explore and the disciplinary, biographical, and artistic backgrounds from which the contributors hail.

In order to begin writing this introduction and give structure to the book's contents, the editors engaged in an experiment of mental mapping (see below). We first constructed a map of the various sites our contributors mention and listed key words we felt emerged from reading the contents. Of the multiple terms we generated, the term "Contested Territory" seemed especially evocative in terms of how to begin organizing the contents. Whatever else punk and las Américas are, when put into conversation, they are clearly symptoms of a deeper problem centuries in the making—spaces in radical dispute. By Contested Territories we mean spaces that are figurative and real, material and symbolic, sonic and visual, psychic and corporeal, subcultural and transcultural, individual and collective. Thus, Contested Territories became the primary heuristic device to group and represent these experiences of radical heterogeneity through a punk Américas. To help orient the reader, each Contested Territory opens with an editorial statement on how the different pieces in that section might be read together and what the logic was in grouping them together.

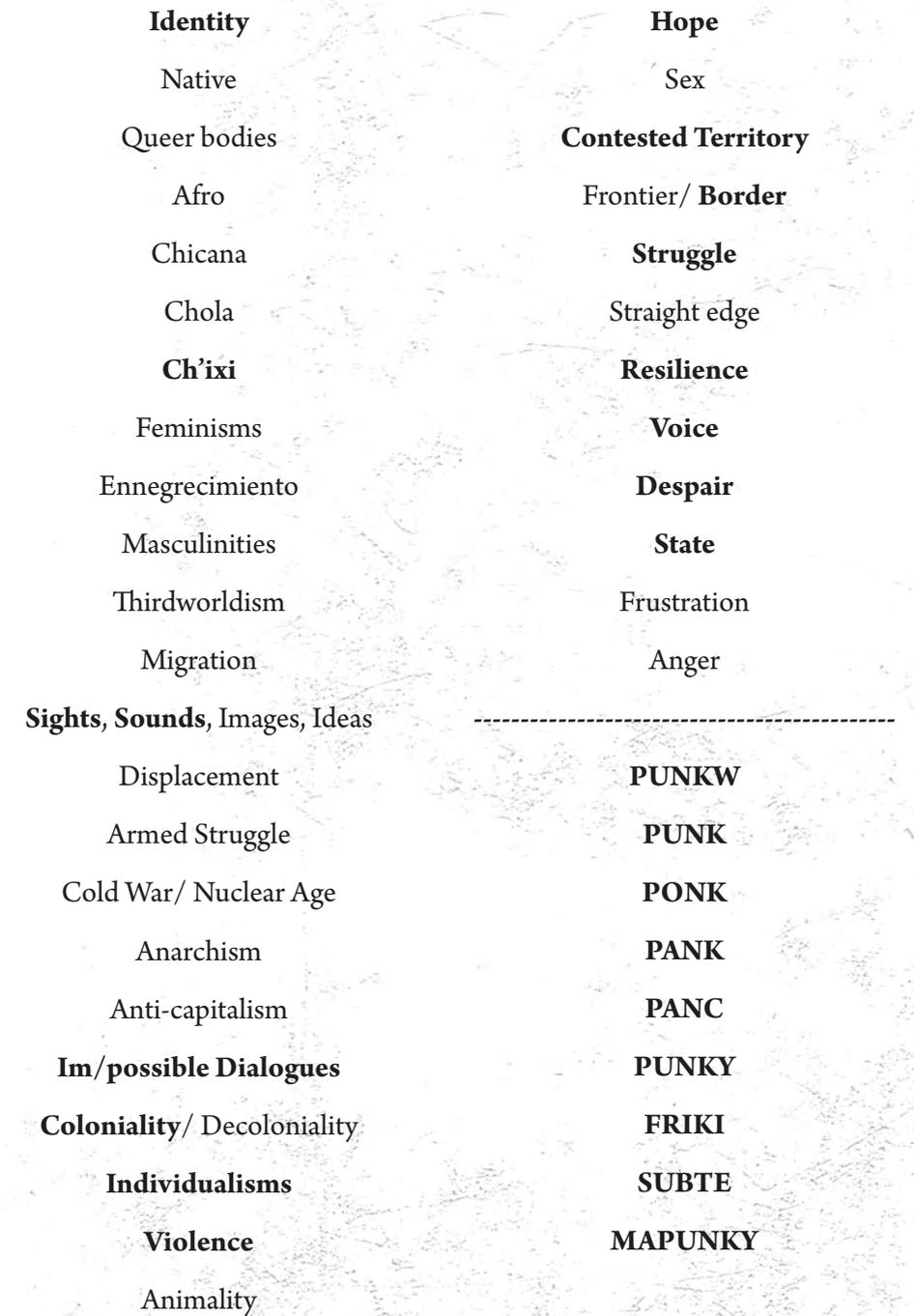
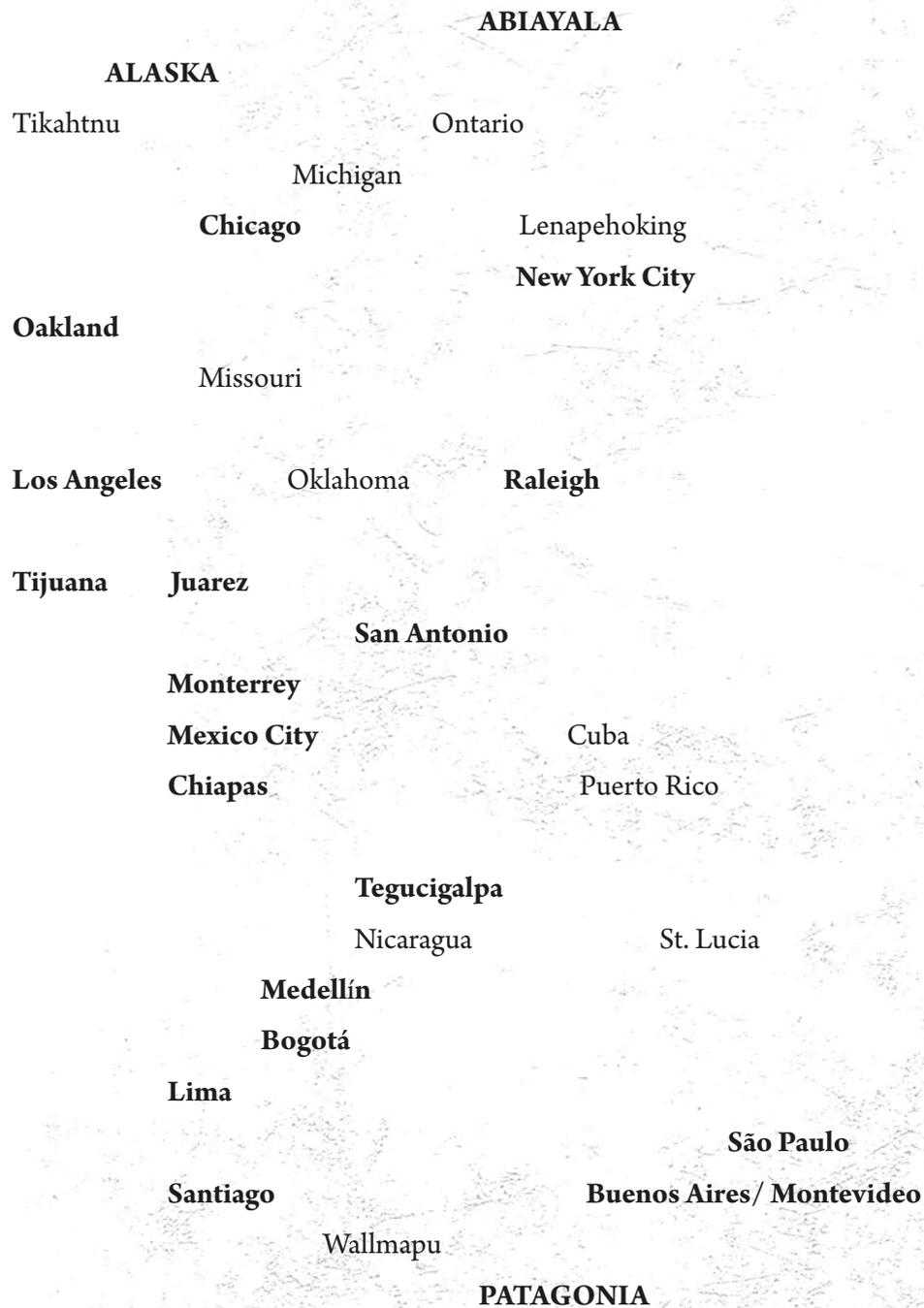


Figure 0.1: Mental map: Sites and territories mentioned, keywords.

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