

Never Mind The Authentic:  
You Wanted the Spectacle/You've Got The Spectacle  
(And Nothing Else Matters?)

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines criteria of valuation in regard to popular music. Rock press coverage of particular events within the domain of popular music in 1996 were examined in regard to criteria of valuation (specifically the Sex Pistols reunion and tour, the original lineup/Kabuki makeup reunion and tour of KISS, and the release of a new album and the headlining of the Lollapalooza tour by Metallica). It was seen that there were not only the expected authentic versus inauthentic considerations in regard to criteria of valuation, but a second sensibility that could be termed a "postmodern" one. Furthermore, this thesis shows a complexity in regard to the ways in which rock writers evaluate particular popular music events beyond both the criteria of valuation of authenticity and what may be referred to as a postmodern sensibility. In this thesis, the receptions of rock writers (working within the rock press) of these three events of 1996 have been examined in order illuminate how criteria of valuation were espoused.

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## Research Problematic

Rock music is taken seriously by its performers, its producers, and its consumers (fans and rock writers). And then again, it isn't. Steve Jones writes of the "...odd position of popular music in culture."

On the one hand, it is taken very seriously - musicians are rated highly for sincerity, feeling, and authenticity. On the other hand, it is also valued for fun, enjoyment. The ideology of popular music forever totters between these two poles. (Jones, 1992: pg 192)

In examining how questions of authenticity are played out by the "rock press" in regard to particular events in 1996 (the 1996 incarnations of the Sex Pistols, KISS and Metallica), we might find that (in part) there is indeed a "tottering" between these two "poles". Is rock about sincerity and seriousness, or is it about fun? Can one only enjoy "authentic" rock (i.e., rock that meets the "criteria of authenticity", whatever these may be) or can one take some pleasure in the inauthentic? Must it be a choice between one or the other, or is something more complex going on? Is the notion of authenticity actually dead? Has it been replaced with (or displaced by) a new set of criteria of valuation?

The first of these events, the Sex Pistols 1996 reunion and tour, provides a wonderful case study. Having been canonized by both the rock press (and more generally, rock criticism) and by scholars of cultural studies as representing an important historical moment in rock (in a word, PUNK), the band's reunion seems at first to be somewhat, well, *wrong*. In short, at a particular moment in history, they were considered authentic (and also, importantly, postmodern). And then happily (in terms of myth making), they

stopped (or died).<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately for some, the band was, in Rotten's words, "fat, forty and back". An interesting twist to the then forthcoming calls of "sellout" was the band's appropriation of this criticism: the band said straight out that they were doing it in a large part for the money!<sup>2</sup> However, this only somewhat disarmed the critics, as though it is not enough to simply acknowledge the criticism to diffuse it. In the case of the Sex Pistols reunion, the critics have utilized the criteria of valuation of both authenticity and of a more postmodern sensibility in discussing this reunion.

The 1996 incarnation of KISS was a different story. Although their 1996 reunion and tour was by all accounts (including those of the band) for the money, KISS has always fought to be taken seriously (i.e., as authentic). As they have been almost entirely dismissed by the rock writers over the years, the rock writers don't seem to hold the band up to the same standards of authenticity that the Sex Pistols are held up to: that is, KISS has not been traditionally lauded as authentic. The writers did seem to be give the band authentically inauthentic status, however, and did not judge their motivations as critically/cynically as they do for bands that have been seen historically as authentic. For a band that has always seemingly been about spectacle to put on a series of spectacles seemed to be acceptable. Thus, a fan is allowed to enjoy the KISS reunion tour as either an authentic representation of a historically inauthentic band, or, relatedly, as simply an ironic (in a retro, kitschy kind of way) good time.

As the Sex Pistols are to punk, so is Metallica to that marvelous archetype of the 1980's, heavy metal. This is to say that like the Sex Pistols but

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<sup>1</sup> One is reminded of Neil Young's lyric marked for Johnny Rotten, lead singer of the Sex Pistols, in the song "Into the Black," "...it's better to burn out, than to fade away...."

<sup>2</sup>Of course, this in no way contradicts the original version or philosophy of the band, as the band has a consistent history of taking the money and running: or in the words of Johnny Rotten, "daylight robbery".

unlike KISS, there was a moment in history at which Metallica was considered authentic. The first of the two Metallica related events of 1996, the release of their first album in five years, *Load*, is the focus of my analysis. The main criticism aimed at this album (and at the band) was that it seemed to be aimed at the newly segmented/recently constructed "alternative" audience. In short, the band's musical aesthetic had indeed changed, and change can be read as a bad thing in terms of authenticity.<sup>3</sup> The response from the rock writers was divided between calls of "sellout" in regard to a perception that Metallica had "softened" and changed with an eye to the alternative market, and a second response that viewed the changes as signs of a maturing, refined, stripped-down sound. Fueling the fire for both of these interpretations was another aesthetic change made by the band: the replacement of their heavy metal manes of long flowing hair with short sheared "alterna-cuts". The new post-Nirvana alternative sound coupled with the visual sell-out sign of cutting their hair to styles that fit too easily with the more recent alternative look was simply too much change for many to accept. A secondary aspect of the 1996 incarnation of Metallica was their headlining of the alternative Lollapalooza tour. If Metallica had indeed sold out and gone alternative, then they would seem to have belonged in such an event. However, many rock writers suddenly gave their "Heavy Metal Gods" title back to them and accused the Lollapalooza tour of selling out to mainstream interests.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, two of these three events (the 1996 incarnations of the Sex Pistols and Metallica) could be seen to have been troubling for rock writers in that the new versions were in conflict with the historical career path of the

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<sup>3</sup>An example of this would be Bob Dylan plugging in the 1960's and being booed by the folk crowd.

<sup>4</sup>By 1991, Metallica's particular brand of heavy metal (i.e., thrash) had become mainstream.



bands, or rather there was too sudden a change in trajectory in regard to their respective career paths. Furthermore, the incarnations of all three bands seemed to beg questions in regard to authenticity in relation to their historical career paths.

**In this project, I want to examine how particular criteria of valuation were expounded upon by the rock press in regard to the 1996 incarnations of the Sex Pistols, KISS, and Metallica. The question is not only as to whether or not a given formation/product is seen as authentic or not, but also to whether authenticity is at issue at all in the rock press' coverage of these events. Also at issue, then, is the question as to which alternative criteria of valuation are employed.**

### Literature Review

It is necessary to situate the discussion of authenticity and valuation within the arena/articulation of "rock": that is, a discussion of the definitions and boundaries of what constitutes "rock", or in Lawrence Grossberg's term, the "rock formation"(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 132), is in order. Grossberg's term points to the "fact" that rock is not isolatable or definable, and what "truly" exists is a complex web of relations. Grossberg writes that

Cultural studies has to locate rock culture in its articulations to and within the contexts of postwar popular culture. In this sense, one might speak of a "rock formation," which is as much a formation of television, film, advertising, comics, etc. It is this rock formation which in fact has colonized significant spaces within the daily life of contemporary society. It's identity and power cannot be separated from people's relations to popular culture.(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 132)

Thus, one must think of the rock formation as emerging at a particular moment in time and under certain circumstances. Indeed, Simon Frith has written that "rock" itself is past history:

I am now quite sure that the rock era is over. People will go on playing and enjoying rock music, of course (though the label is increasingly vague), but the music business is no longer organized around rock, around the selling of a particular sort of musical event to young people. The rock era - born around 1956 with Elvis Presley, peaking around 1967 with *Sgt. Pepper*, dying around 1976 with the Sex Pistols - turned out to be a by-way in the development of twentieth-century popular music, rather than, as we thought at the time, any kind of mass-cultural revolution. Rock was a last romantic attempt to preserve ways of music-making - performer as artist, performance as 'community' - that had been made obsolete by technology and capital.(Frith, 1988: pg 1)

Whether or not rock is dead, both rock writers and fans continue to understand and evaluate popular music and events through the lens of rock (that is, as if they *were* rock). Thus, Frith's pronouncement notwithstanding, in trying to understand the valuation of popular music and its histories in 1996, it is helpful to understand how rock has been valued historically (and that this valuation itself has a history).

This is not to say that rock is one-dimensional and monolithic. It is also important to note the complexity of rock.

Rock and roll is never as homogenous as its name suggests, nor as diverse as its fans would like to believe. It exists as a set of strategic responses to a particular historical context; it cannot be treated merely as a set of musical messages, for its power and identity as rock and roll depend upon a complex set of differences that cut across generations, genders, time, and space.(Grossberg, 1992(b): pg 172)

Despite the complexities of rock, there is an insistence on the setting of boundaries by not only performers and rock critics, but by the fans themselves. There seem to be two apparently opposing views on this subject: simply stated that either anything can be rock, or not everything can be rock

(as rock is defined as difference from non-rock). In regard to the former, Grossberg has written that

There are, for all practical purposes, no musical limits on what can or cannot be rock. Of course, particular fans may have their own sense of constraints on its musical possibilities, but there will always be other fans with different boundaries. What sounds like rock to some will not to others. There is nothing that cannot become a rock song or, perhaps more accurately, there is no sound that cannot become a part of rock. Its musical limits are defined, for particular audiences at particular times and places, by the alliances constructed between selected sounds, images, practices and fans.(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 131)

This is a romantic, inclusive idea of what rock can be. This conception of the boundlessness of rock sees rock less as a genre within popular music than a potential revolutionary force within popular music. Rock, then, is a potentially boundary-busting force that purports to be able to save us from insipid non-rock.

More convincing, I believe, is the notion that not everything can be rock. Rock is most often defined in part by what it is not, or by differentiation. In regard to rock's politics, for example, Grossberg notes that rock became political not from within itself but by being attacked from outside the rock formation (Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 147). The important point is that, by differentiation, rock sets up both the music and its consumers as *others*, or outsiders, while positioning non-rock and those who do not consume rock as others. This inclusion/exclusion is a (the?) central feature of any boundary construction. As Will Straw writes, popular music is

marked to a much greater extent by its importance within processes of social differentiation and interaction. The drawing and enforcing of boundaries between musical forms, the marking of racial, class-based and gender differences, and the maintenance of lines of communication between dispersed cultural communities are all

central to the elaboration of musical meaning and value.(Straw, 1991: pg 372)

As I will discuss below, rock (which is "authentic") is most often differentiated from non-rock or pop (the "inauthentic").

Thus, an important part of the definition or setting of the boundaries of rock is the consumption by its fans: rock is that which rock fans listen to. It is, in part, the fans who insist on boundaries of what is and is not rock and roll. What purpose does this scheme serve? Grossberg offers a hypothesis.

By encapsulating rock and roll and defining it as essentially different from whatever is not included, the apparatus also "encapsulates" the nominal group. Marking itself as different and placing the fan within its spaces, the fan takes up a position of being different from those who don't "understand" the music and who cannot make the appropriate distinctions.(Grossberg, 1992(b): pg 162)

The key point that I want to take from Grossberg in regard to the above quotation is that of *difference* in defining or setting the boundaries of what is rock (or a rock fan). As Simon Frith writes, "...an undifferentiated audience *can't* be a rock audience"(Frith, 1981(a): pg 153). Although Frith's comment seems a little strong and dated in light of the mainstreaming of rock, rock has been historically connected to difference. According to Grossberg, the power of rock and roll lies in its ability to bring together and celebrate the production of difference and fun. It marks its fans as *others*, as outsiders, even while they continue to live within the dominant cultural structures of meaning.(Grossberg, 1992(b): pg 169)

Thus, as discussed above, rock works for fans by both defining themselves as inclusive others (rock fans) and constructing excluded others (non-rock fans).

It would be useful to differentiate "rock" from "pop". Unfortunately, these terms are often used interchangeably (especially in Britain/by British writers). For many rock fans, however, there are "clear" differences. Often these differences are attributed to conditions of production. This view

assumes that corporations produce inherently co-opted music (sometimes referred to by rock fans as mere "pop") while "people" (usually working-class or black youths, but occasionally alienated middle-class kids) produce authentic rock and roll. (Grossberg, 1992(b): pg 155)

Thus, part of the distinction of non-rock (or pop) from rock is linked or attributed to the corruption of music by the music industry and the conditions of production under which the music is made. As Simon Frith has noted,

we retain a sense that the music industry is a bad thing - bad for music, bad for us.... What such arguments assume (and they're part of the common sense of every rock fan) is that there is some essential human activity, music making, which has been colonized by commerce.... In the language of rock criticism, what's at issue here is the *truth* of music. (Frith, 1987: pg 50)

It is this notion of *truth* that is central to understanding valuation within rock: simply stated, there is a romantic assumption that there is or can be something as elusive as "truth".

This points to important non-production differences between rock and non-rock or pop. Though it is beyond the scope of the present project to attempt an ideological analysis of rock and/or authenticity, a neutral, world-view conception of ideology characterizes the common-sense surrounding rock and authenticity.

Rock's special place was enabled by its articulation to an ideology of "authenticity." Rock appropriated an older middle-class obsession with "authenticity" as a way of responding to the absence of its own authentic past (and future). But rock's authenticity was defined not by any claim to historical origins or ideological purity but by the very conditions which enabled its particular forms of aural, visual and behavioral excess. It was defined by rock's ability to articulate the historical condition to the experience of postwar youth. Only by

making youth belong somewhere could it speak to both the identity and the difference of its audience.(Grossberg, 1992(a): pgs 205-6)

Authenticity in rock, like authenticity in any art form, purports to speak to "truth", "honesty", and the "real". Performers strive for authenticity, associating themselves with historically established authentic phenomena in the hope that some of the patina might adhere to their own work. Frith explains that music

is a medium in which the expression of emotion is so direct (performers talk straight at us) that powerful conventions of "subjective realism," truth-to-feeling, have developed. Rock musicians drew on both blues and folk devices to establish their "authenticity," and these devices were important for pop musicians too - they lurk behind their realist claims.(Frith, 1981(a): pg 160)

Thus, rock appropriated the established idea of authenticity from forms that could make a claim to authenticity. One of the most direct sources that rock can be seen to have drawn from in terms of authenticity is, according to Frith, folk music. "Rock ideologues...claimed their music as folk in order to distinguish it from the rest of pop..."(Frith, 1981(b): pg 160). This strategy worked to associate rock with the truth that folk music claimed to speak to.

Linking the two more directly, Frith writes of a transition from folk to rock.

In the original New York folk scene, folk songs were a form of political propaganda - their aim was to invoke solidarity, to draw listeners into organizations; by the mid-sixties, folk singers were more concerned to express their individual discontent with events than to organize political responses. The criteria of sincerity began to shift from raw signs to marks of artifice; the resulting separation of artist and audience was confirmed by the development of folk-rock. Performers moved from the clubs to the studios; their records began to mean more than their appearances. This did not undercut rock's folk claims. For rock fans, Bob Dylan was a more 'authentic' singer after he went electric than before.(Frith, 1981(b): pg 163)

Frith writes that the authenticity of folk songs had traditionally been judged in two (equally weighted) ways: by the songs' musical value, and according to their class consciousness (Frith, 1981(b): pg 163). However, as folk shifted to folk-rock and (eventually rock), this

position eventually (was) rejected by singers like Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs. As they turned to rock 'n' roll, they denied that they 'represented' anyone but themselves. But the emphasis on truth remained - truth-to-self.(Frith, 1981(b): pg 163)

This was the notion of authenticity appropriated from folk: truth to experience rather than to class or organization. With the notion of authenticity working for it, rock could now claim to be something more than mere pop.

The authentic claims to mean something: that is, it claims to *matter*. It matters because it has something *more*; an excess. According to Grossberg, The ideology of authenticity legitimated the fact that rock mattered by providing the measure of its difference from other cultural forms - rock differed absolutely from mere entertainment - and grounding that difference in rock's claim to have an excess.(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 206)

Revisiting the defining of rock by differentiation (that is, by what it is not), this excess (an excess of virtue signaling authenticity) can be marked in a number of ways: "inauthentic vs. authentic; center vs. margin; mainstream vs. underground; commercial vs. independent; coopted vs. resistant; pop vs. rock"(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 206).

So what of the inauthentic? Does inauthentic rock merely lack an excess of virtue? The phenomenon of the formerly authentic rock form's condemnation to the realm of the inauthentic must also be addressed. "Rock constantly articulates its own authentic center, which is always on the way to becoming inauthentic"(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 208). Thus, the inauthentic may simply be old authentic rock. Combining the idea that authentic rock may

have a limited shelf life with the corrupting force of the music industry, Grossberg differentiates inauthentic and authentic rock.

"Inauthentic rock" is "establishment culture," rock that is dominated by economic interest, rock that has lost its political edge, bubblegum music, etc. "Authentic rock" depends on its ability to articulate private but common desires, feelings and experiences into a shared public language.(Grossberg, 1992(a): pgs 206 - 7)

Interesting in light of the present project is Grossberg's comment that the inauthentic is "...dismissed, not merely as bad or inferior rock, but as mere entertainment, as not really rock at all"(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 207). Can we then say that "mere entertainment" is not a valuable thing? Is "mere entertainment" not enough sometimes? As I will discuss below, mere entertainment *can* be valued, albeit at a different "level"(i.e., by different criteria of valuation).

Who are the keepers of this "ideology of authenticity"? According to Sarah Thornton, scholars of youth and music culture are among the most tenacious holders of the idea that authentic culture is somehow outside media and commerce (Thornton, 1994: pg 176). One must add the profession of "rock writer" (which is the generic term that is used throughout this thesis that includes rock critics, rock journalists and popular music academics) to this short list.

Rock critics have always defined art in terms of subjective expression. Music, according to the reviewing principles developed by *Rolling Stone*, for example, is meant to be honest: critics value a performance if they can hear it as the authentic expression of feeling, and the more clearer and more intense the feeling, the better.(Frith, 1981(a): pg 161)

Thus, rock writers, like rock musicians, have appropriated notions of truth and authenticity as criteria of valuation of rock. Importantly, rock writers



tend to begin as fans of the music themselves, and as Steve Jones writes, this is their door to the hierarchical world of journalism:

Most popular music critics begin as fans whose delight and fascination in the music has led them to toss their hats into the critical arena, and the novelty fades quickly. Music criticism is at the bottom of the journalistic totem pole in many ways....(Jones, 1993: pg 81)

Frith sees the rock writer as a sort of gatekeeper (reviewing or discussing only those records, concerts, etc., that are "worthy", to the exclusion of bands that are unworthy of such review or commentary, be it positive or negative) or opinion leader (evaluating these events as being worthy or unworthy of consumption).

Hence the importance of the professional rock fans - the rock writers. Music papers, indeed, are important even for those people who don't buy them - their readers act as the opinion leaders, the rock interpreters, the ideological gatekeepers for everyone else.(Frith, 1981: pg 165)

Of course, privileging the rock writer and the rock press does a disservice to the consumers (what of audience agency?).<sup>5</sup>

Rock writers promote particular criteria of authenticity, and in return, these criteria can work to legitimate the opinions of the critics; the language of authenticity encodes a certain kind of elitism into the heart of popular music: the fans, or musicians or critics who speak with the authority of 'authenticity' on their side justify their tastes, relegating the unauthentic to the realm of a poor, undesired and evil relative.(Bennett et al., 1993: pg 172)

The medium through which rock writers can both legitimize and be legitimized by criteria of authenticity is the rock press.

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<sup>5</sup>Although this project also ultimately works to privilege the writers and the rock press in the making of meaning, I do not wish to dismiss or ignore other questions of reception and mediation. It is beyond the scope of the present project to examine the role of the audience, but, as I discuss in the conclusions, this does not mean that future work on this should/could not be done.

Most rock writers work within the "rock press". The rock press grew out of the "underground press" of the 1960s, the origins of which can be traced back to the *LA Free Press*, the *Berkeley Barb*, and the *Village Voice*. In regard to the British rock press, Frith writes that within these publications, rock

was imbued with an ideology that was at marked variance with previous notions of pop: rock was valued for its political stance, its aggression, its sexuality, its relationship to cultural struggle. The music that was most despised and mistrusted by the underground press was precisely the commercial, successful, teenage pop that had been essential to the development of the British music press.(Frith, 1981(a): pg 168)

In short, rock was imbued with an ideology within which criteria of authenticity played an important role. Furthermore, "...underground papers were important as the source of what became the dominant ideology of rock"(Frith, 1981a: pg 169). If we subscribe to Frith's views, it was the rock writers and the underground/rock press that were the main promoters of the "ideology of rock". That is, a complex interconnected relationship developed between the notion of rock authenticity, the rock writers, and the rock press. The notion/ideology of authenticity benefited from its use by the rock writers (within the rock press) which in turn confirmed the authority of rock writers and the rock press within which these writers worked.

Specifically, Frith writes that the most important of the new music papers was *Rolling Stone* (Frith, 1981(a): pg 169). Rock papers like *Rolling Stone*, according to Frith, confirmed taste and offered a sense of a hip community (Frith, 1981(a): pg 175). Indeed, as late as 1981, Frith wrote that The ideology of 1960s rock is still articulated in *Rolling Stone*. Its reviewers still consider whether this artist, this piece of music, has the right sense of rock communion; artistic excellence for *Rolling Stone*

still lies in the authentic expression of the old myth.(Frith, 1981(b): pg 164)

Although *Rolling Stone* today may not have the same power and influence it once did, it may be seen as an important source of rock criticism for fans of rock to base their choices.

For the purposes of this thesis, the term "rock press" will be used to refer to North American magazines and papers that are primarily concerned with rock/pop music as well as those publications that devote a regular special section on music of this type. Thus, some examples included will be *Rolling Stone, Spin, Details, Entertainment Weekly, Guitar World, Musician, Request, Alternative Press, Magnet, The Mirror, The Hour, The Georgia Straight, Exclaim!, and Discorder.*

This thesis examines criteria of valuation as espoused by rock writers within the rock press in 1996. Thus far, the criteria of authenticity as a framework for valuation has been discussed. There are, of course, further criteria for the valuation of the work of rock/popular music performers. Sarah Thornton, in her essay "Strategies for reconstructing the popular past," provides a valuable inventory of various types of criteria of valuation of pop cultural events in regard to the historiography of discotheques.

When it comes to assigning historical importance to a pop cultural event, four criteria tend to be employed: sales figures, biographical interest, critical acclaim or amount of media coverage. These criteria, in turn, support four strategies of bringing historical order to the popular past: listing, personalizing, canonizing and mediating.(Thornton, 1990: pg 87)

The first of these criteria for assigning historical importance (valuation) to a pop cultural event, sales figures, and the associated strategy of bringing social order to the popular past of listing seems to be separate from, if not opposed to, the criteria of authenticity. Indeed, "mass appeal" can be seen as a sign of

inauthenticity or "selling out". The third of these criteria of assigning value to a pop cultural event, critical acclaim, and its associated strategy of canonizing, does seem to speak to authenticity: both of the given event and of the rock writers. The fourth of these criteria of assigning value to a pop cultural event, the amount of media coverage, like that of assigning value based on sales figures, can be seen as suspicious in regard to criteria of authenticity. In short, success and/or popularity (as measured by sales figures or by the amount of media coverage) seems to clash with ideals of the authentic.

The second of these criteria of assigning value to a pop cultural event, biographical interest, and the associated strategy of personalizing, is the most apropos within the context of this study. This strategy revolves around the history of an individual or group (i.e., their historical career path or trajectory). Evaluating a given event based on the history of the individuals or groups involved with that event can speak to criteria of authenticity, as well as to other concerns. The history of an individual or group that lies behind a given pop culture event is much more complex than the sales figures, critical acclaim, or media coverage of an event.<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, the criteria of valuation of a given pop cultural event is not limited to concerns of authenticity. Furthermore, the rock press is not one dimensional in its valuation of popular music events. That is, although there are concerns to the serious business of authenticity (i.e.; "responsible journalism"), there are other concerns in the assigning of value.

Music media, especially the music press, are in an odd position. There is a vague notion of responsible journalism in the music press, as it relates to fairness in reporting. However, when it comes to journalistic

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<sup>6</sup>As Thornton notes, "The above description of four prevalent modes of containing the past is reductive...and hardly exhaustive...."(Thornton, 1990: pg 89).

style, the music defies categorization. Some magazines pride themselves on good reporting. Others are proud of their irreverence, wit and sarcasm.(Jones, 1993: pg 86)

Importantly, irreverence, wit and sarcasm are not exclusive to the criteria of valuation of authenticity. These tones or writing styles suggest a wider range of aesthetic sensibilities.

While debates over authenticity still exist, there is a second major sensibility in regard to valuation that might be seen as a postmodern, ironic appreciation of events. This must be addressed in a second (but importantly, not truly separate) body of literature, once again based largely on work by Lawrence Grossberg.

In short, many of the rock writers seem to be indifferent to the difference (or distinction) between authentic and inauthentic musical forms or events. Grossberg describes what he calls a "postmodern sensibility", in which the

relationship between rock and the ideology of authenticity depended on a particular sensibility which negotiated the relation between optimism and cynicism.(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 209)

Although it is beyond the scope of this project to go into greater depth in regard to postmodernism, Grossberg provides a helpful positioning of postmodernity for this project:

Postmodernity is a story about the historical collapse of specific relations within everyday life, about the "fact" that certain differences no longer matter. It is not that everything has been reduced to a single plane, but that the articulations between the planes are beginning to disintegrate. Each plane becomes increasingly indifferent to the others - affective organizations, ideologies, libidinal economies. That indifference is not a matter of some metaphysical reality but of one of the ways in which people live in historical reality. This collapse of difference is real in that it has specific effects, but it is not their only reality, nor the totality of their lives.(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 221)

An examination of the history of rock and its valuation reveals a shift from concerns with authenticity to concerns with the artificial. "One of the most important aspects of the post-punk dissolution of rock certainties was the replacement of authenticity by artifice as the central concern in critical discourse"(Frith, 1988: pg 4). Frith provides a condensed history.

In the 1960s, for example, when the rock/pop distinction was first established, *authenticity* was the key critical term - the question was whether there should be politically or emotionally authentic commercial music. The debate was stalled by punk, which was so overdeterminedly authentic in rock terms that it threw the very concept into confusion.

By the end of the 1970s the most interesting critical debates revolved, instead, around *artifice*.(Frith, 1988: pg 192 - 193)

Thus, the shift away from authenticity can be seen as historical. Furthermore, it should be noted that this was not a new direction but rather an extension of older concerns with authenticity: that is, the post-punk concerns were not separate from but rather an inseparable extension of authenticity. As Frith notes, "...authenticity must be defined against artifice; the terms only make sense in opposition to each other"(Frith, 1988: pg 98). Artifice did not suddenly emerge to subsume concerns to authenticity, but rather had always posed internal problems to rock authenticity.

The eye has always been suspect in rock culture; after all, visually, rock often borders on the inauthentic. Visual style as conceived in rock culture is usually the stage for an outrageous and self-conscious inauthenticity (which can be made consistent with its authenticity through its celebration of excessive difference). It was here - in its visual presentation - that rock often most explicitly manifested both an ironic resistance to the dominant culture and its sympathies with the business of entertainment.(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 208)

One aspect of postmodern formations that critics and analysts of postmodernism have identified is cynicism and irony. One becomes cynical

with such ideas as "authenticity", the "real" (and must present them in quotes), and the objective appreciation of art, and must defend against the perceived investments in such things with the protective shield of irony.

The cynicism which had been lived with an attitude of desperation is increasingly inflected through an overwhelming sense of irony. What had appeared as the failure of a specific historical ideology now signals the impossibility of any ideology, or of any articulation between affect and ideology. (Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 209)

If one cannot believe (or have faith) in such things (i.e., "authenticity" and the "real"), considerations to the authentic ring hollow.

An interesting product or phenomenon that falls under the umbrella of the postmodern sensibility and irony is the notion of "authentic inauthenticity". Importantly, this does not replace authenticity, but rather coexists with it. As alluded to above in regard to finding value in "mere entertainment", authentic inauthenticity holds that there can be something which can be seen as quite authentic in its inauthenticity. According to Grossberg, authentic inauthenticity

is in-different to difference. It does not deny differences; it merely assumes that since there are no grounds for distinguishing between the relative claims of alternatives, one cannot read beyond the fact of investment. To appropriate, enjoy or invest in a particular style, image or set of images no longer necessarily implies any faith that such investments make a significant (even affective) difference. Instead we celebrate the affective ambiguity of images, images which are well developed in their shallowness, fascinating in their emptiness.... (Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 225)

Thus, one can find value in an event that under the criteria of valuation of authenticity would have been seen as unworthy. Authentic inauthenticity allows the reclamation of that which had previously been considered cultural trash. It allows not only the investment in the shallow and the superficial,

but also the celebration of these products. In this scenario or sensibility, all that "matters" is the fleeting participation. The product is ultimately disposable and must be constantly replaced.

In the end, only the affective commitment, however temporary or superficial, matters. Authentic inauthenticity, as a popular sensibility, is a specific logic which cannot locate differences outside the fact of its own temporary investment. If every identity is equally fake, a pose taken, then authentic inauthenticity celebrates the possibilities of poses without denying that that is all they are.(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 226)

Authentic inauthenticity not only implies a different set of concerns to that of the authentic versus inauthentic dyad, but also suggests (within this domain) that questions of authenticity are extraneous.

Authentic inauthenticity, then, undermines the very possibility of a privileged marginality which can separate itself from and measure itself (favorably) against an apparently homogeneous mainstream. It marks the collapse, or at least the irrelevance, of the difference between the authentic and the inauthentic. It signals the absence of alternative spaces: we are all in the same space, already coopted.(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 227)

Irony, of course, is by no means a new phenomenon. However, perhaps a shift can be seen in terms of the use of irony. Ironic gestures that were once taken as signs of seriousness - "a kind of self-reflexivity about the relationship between image and reality" - have become "an almost requisite but still clichéd gesture"(Grossberg, 1987: pg 31). It is as though one can no longer simply aspire to be authentic: that this authenticity must at the very least be reframed or positioned as an ironic/self-conscious authenticity. Related to this latter notion of irony, Grossberg describes a sub-category of authentic inauthenticity that he labels "ironic authenticity".

Ironic inauthenticity celebrates its own investment in the image precisely because it is self-consciously taken as an image, no more and no less. In the end, crocodile tears are as good as real ones, perhaps



even better because they require no anchor in the real in order to be effective.(Grossberg, 1992(a): pg 228)

In some respect, we have returned to the second "pole" discussed above: fun (as opposed to the "rock as serious" pole). In short, the rock writers seem to be saying that, once again, rock is fun (in a postmodern ironic kind of way, but fun nonetheless). As Grossberg writes, "Rock and roll responds by offering "fun" as a strategy, but not as something capable of transcending that reality"(Grossberg, 1992(b): pg 170). In the end, authenticity is incorporated back into rock while remaining under the postmodern umbrella.

finding fun in the postmodern enables rock and roll to celebrate the artificial and the ironic. Rock and roll substitutes style for authenticity (making the latter into another style)....(Grossberg, 1992(b): pg 172)

The "postmodern condition" does not only confuse or complicate the world of the artist, but also that of the rock writer.

Here, just as much as in academic discourse, 'postmodernism' really describes the condition of the critics not that of the world they watch. When there is no good reason left why a Keith Richard record should be any more or less culturally valuable than a Cliff Richard record, Kate Bush's music any more or less profound than Bananarama's, the Beastie Boys any more or less socially redemptive than Run DMC, then what is under threat is critical authority....(Frith, 1988: pg 5)

Thus, rock criticism is also affected by the postmodern condition. How must a rock writer respond to the problematic return of bands that have been historically considered authentic such as the Sex Pistols (authentic punk), KISS (as authentically inauthentic), and Metallica (authentic thrash/heavy metal)?

## Methodology

Unquestionably hard rock's twin themes in 1996 centered around "reunions" and "returns".(Andrews, 1996: pg 46)

In what other twelve month period could anyone ever imagined the reformations of legendary bands like Kiss...the Sex Pistols...new discs from long-absent superstars like Metallica....(Andrews, 1996: pg 44)

This project examines coverage within the rock press of three particular events of 1996 from which concerns could be heard in regard to authenticity: that is, specifically, the Sex Pistols reunion tour (and live album), the reunion of the original Kabuki makeup covered lineup of KISS, and the release of (former "Heavy Metal Gods") Metallica's first album in five years (and their subsequent headlining of the Lollapalooza tour).

In this thesis, my object of inquiry is rock criticism and its employment of criteria of valuation. How do the rock press and rock writers value popular music? Two different but related discourses within which this valuation takes place are the focus of this analysis. The rock press coverage of each of the three incarnations of bands in 1996 discussed above is examined in regard to both discussions of the "authentic" and what I am grouping together as a "postmodern sensibility" (characterized by an indifference to difference and irony; i.e., authentic inauthenticity and ironic authenticity). It is important to note that these are not the exclusive means of determining the value of rock, nor is each of the three cases only addressed by either a discourse on authenticity or one of a postmodern sensibility (that is, it is not an either/or situation), nor are these two sub-categories of criteria of valuation mutually exclusive. A secondary goal of this analysis is to present regularities

within/between different sub-genres of the rock press, and between rock writers.

As discussed above, in this thesis the term "rock press" refers to North American magazines and papers that are primarily concerned with rock/pop music as well as those publications that devote a regular special section on music of this type. For the purposes of this thesis, then, the corpus that is referred to as the rock press consists of all 1996 issues of *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Musician*, *The Mirror*, *The Hour*, *The Georgia Straight*, and *Discorder*. All references to the Sex Pistols, KISS and Metallica were examined in regard to the criteria of valuation of authenticity, those reflecting a postmodern sensibility, and other valuations (including uncritical valuations). Furthermore, selected articles from *Details*, *Magnet*, *Guitar World*, *Exclaim!*, *Hit Parader*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *Forbes* and *Guitar Legends* were examined in regard to their valuation of the 1996 incarnations of the Sex Pistols, KISS, and Metallica.

Chapter two examines how the Sex Pistols reunion (with original bassist Glen Matlock), their subsequent tour, and the release of a live album (*Filthy Lucre Live*) were received by the rock press in terms of criteria of valuation. Is a discussion of such events that hinges on notions of authenticity appropriate? Are these events discussed with regard to what could be termed a "postmodern sensibility"(authentic inauthenticity or ironic authenticity)? A brief history of the band is provided, the choice of this particular band is explained (in terms of how the detour from their historical career path could be seen as problematic), the coverage by rock writers within the rock press is examined in regard to criteria of valuation, and preliminary conclusions are offered.

Chapter three examines the reception of the historically disrespected KISS and their Kabuki makeup, original-lineup reunion tour. KISS is an example of a band for whom discussions of the authentic seem to miss the point, and to which Grossberg's authentic inauthenticity seems apropos. Interestingly, there are other considerations as to criteria of value for KISS, as *Forbes* magazine's admiration of KISS' business sense would suggest (LaFranco, 1996: pg 156). A brief history of the band is provided, the choice of this particular band is explained, the coverage by rock writers within the rock press is examined in regard to criteria of valuation, and preliminary conclusions are offered.

Chapter four examines the North American rock press' reception of the latest Metallica album, *Load*, and the band's subsequent headlining of the Lollapalooza tour. As discussed above, some rock writers viewed Metallica's "new sound" as refinement and maturity, while others lead the cries of "sellout". In regard to Metallica, the criteria of valuation pertaining to authenticity were most often employed, and the more postmodern concerns or appreciations simply were not used. A brief history of the band is provided, the choice of this particular band is explained (in terms of how the detour from their historical career path could be seen as problematic), the coverage by rock writers within the rock press is examined in regard to criteria of valuation, and preliminary conclusions are offered.

Chapter five offers conclusions to that while considerations of authenticity don't seem to be as central as they perhaps once were, this is not to say that it is no longer at issue (or that the postmodern sensibility has replaced considerations of authenticity). If anything, this thesis attempts to show a more complex situation. Furthermore, one must point to the fact that

only three events of 1996 were addressed, and that ultimately this work cannot be viewed as representative of the whole.

In short, what is at issue is exactly how criteria of valuation are discussed within the rock press. Is authenticity deemed important? If not, why not? Does Grossberg's "postmodern sensibility" replace (or rather, displace) considerations of authenticity? Are these events seen as authentically inauthentic? Is this the "end of authenticity"? What about alternative criteria of valuation?

## Chapter Two:

### The Sex Pistols

As the new generation, the Sex Pistols were a finely tuned mixture of the authentic and the constructed. The members of the group embodied an attitude into which McLaren fed a new set of references: late-sixties radical politics, sexual fetish material, pop history and the burgeoning discipline of youth sociology. (Savage, 1991: pg 163)

Although the Sex Pistols are the most noted/canonized of the genre, they were not the first "punk" band. Some of the bands that can be seen as precursors to the Sex Pistols brand of punk rock are the Velvet Underground (in their aesthetic primitivism, they sounded as if anyone could do "it"), the MC5 (in their attitude, intensity and speed), Iggy Pop, and the New York Dolls (attitude plus fashion plus camp/glam).

More directly preceding British/Sex Pistols punk was the American, or more specifically New York (or even more specifically CBGB's), punk scene. Journalist/rock writer Jon Savage writes in his book, *England's Dreaming* (considered by many to be the definitive history of punk), that punk was in New York by March of 1975 (Savage, 1991: pg 90). Bands as diverse as the Ramones, Talking Heads, Television, Blondie, and one fronted by poet/rock writer Patti Smith made up the (aesthetically tenuously linked) scene. What connected these groups together was a philosophy or work ethic known as DIY: Do It Yourself. In this scenario, both the sped-up, stripped-down bubble-gum Beach Boys-esque music of the Ramones and the college graduate quirky/jerky Talking Heads were considered punk, despite aesthetic musical differences, because these young punks or outsiders were "doing it" on their own. Many of these bands had released albums by the end of 1975, and the

Ramones influential first album (to which many British punks learned to play their instruments) was released in April of 1976.

History (and McLaren himself) often positions Malcom McLaren, the Sex Pistols manager, as the creator/author/architect of the band. This is not entirely the case. Steve Jones and Paul Cook, the band's eventual guitarist and drummer, respectively, were already together and playing in a fledgling band called "The Strand" (a Roxy Music song) in 1973. The Sex Pistols' original bassist, Glen Matlock, joined The Strand during the summer of 1974. Notably, the band accumulated its equipment in the manner to which they were accustomed to acquiring things as petty criminals: they stole it. A partial drum kit was liberated from the BBC studios. A PA system was stolen from a van. A reggae group were victimized to the tune of two speaker columns and an amplifier. The band's Fender bass was removed from another van. A strobe tuner was stolen from a Roxy Music concert. Two guitars were stolen from Rod Stewart's mansion, and the boys stole *all* the microphones from a David Bowie concert (Savage, 1991: pg 75).

After having dumped a fourth member, the stripped down Strand was looking for a lead singer; and it is at *this* point that Malcolm McLaren becomes involved with the band. McLaren had been keeping busy with his clothing/fetish shop, SEX, as well as with a stint as the manager of the New York Dolls European tour. McLaren took a strong position in guiding the band's future and began looking for a singer for "his" band through which he could espouse his political ideals. He found his protégé in young John Lydon, who on first meeting was sporting short spiked green hair and a customized "I Hate" Pink Floyd t-shirt. McLaren renamed "his" band the "Sex Pistols."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>The name of the band has been read as "SEX's Pistols", referring to McLaren's shop (SEX) and his exploitation of the band in regard to selling bondage trousers.

The short history of the Sex Pistols reads like a shopping list of scandal and controversy (which was all reported dutifully in/by the British rock press): at an early show, Lydon, now called "Johnny Rotten", ripped the clothes off an employee of McLaren's SEX shop who had jumped onto the stage; (soon after) a fight broke out at one of the shows; within the span of a few months, the Sex Pistols had become banned from most clubs; EMI records signed the band only to quickly drop them in response to unforeseen pressures in regard to production (such as workers going on strike and refusing to sleeve the "Anarchy in the UK" single); the band kicked out their original bass player (and main melody writer), Glen Matlock, and replaced him with the musically challenged/inept #1 fan of the band, Sid Vicious; six days after signing a contract with A&M records in front of Buckingham Palace and subsequently trashing the A&M building in celebration, the Sex Pistols were dumped again (75,000 £ richer for "...one week's drunken activity"(Savage, 1991: pg 320)); Johnny Rotten was attacked and knifed; the denial of the band's visa applications by the U.S. due to (petty) criminal records; the floundering Sex Pistols tour (nine dates) of the American South in January of 1978; the band's final show and break-up in San Francisco; the death of Sid Vicious' girlfriend, Nancy Spungeon (perhaps at the hands of Viscious himself); and finally, the overdose and death of Vicious from drugs supplied by his mother, Anne Beverley.

There are three events that are worthy of expanded discussion. The first, the infamous Grundy/*Today* show scandal, was a pivotal moment for the band (indeed, Savage writes that this scandal "made" the Sex Pistols (Savage, 1991: pg 288)). A last minute replacement for Queen, The Sex Pistols appeared on the *Today* show with host Bill Grundy just after being signed to EMI. Grundy did not want to interview the band, and his disposition towards



them was not improved by the band reading along with him as he read the autocue. With four of the band's "punkier" fans behind them, the Sex Pistols were goaded into being outrageous by Grundy. Not understanding that the broadcast was going out live, the band obliged with infantile/punk behavior, climaxing with Steve Jones calling Grundy a "fucking rotter".

The particularly intense media coverage of the event included a report of a man kicking in his television after viewing the program. Punk was vilified.

The Grundy scandal made the Sex Pistols, but it also killed them. They were now frozen in time, leaders of a movement which had been wrested out of their control. It also froze Punk itself....(Savage, 1991: pg 288)

It was at this moment that the DIY version of punk (by way of the Ramones and the Sex Pistols) became defined as one particular aesthetic both in terms of musical style and fashion. Even the punk scene in London was, before Grundy, a more eclectic mix.

This was a milieu of some complexity reduced within twenty seconds of the Grundy interview to white, male Rock. A Rock movement of considerable energy, hostility and an unsettling politics, but Rock nonetheless.(Savage, 1991: pg 278)

The second event worthy of expanded discussion is the release and context of the release of the "God Save The Queen" single. Finally settled in at Virgin Records, the Sex Pistols third record company, this was to be the band's first release. Once again, plant workers refused to manufacture the single. Once this problem was overcome, Virgin had to deal with the reluctance and/or refusal of the media to run ads for the single. Television stations refused to broadcast the ads, radio banned the single, and many stores would not sell it. Only the music press promoted it, with all four British weeklies bestowing "single of the week" status upon it. "Despite a surprising and

unprecedented attempt across the media, music and retail industries to prevent its appearance, 'God Save The Queen' sold 150,000 copies in five days..."(Savage, 1991: pg 349). Moreover, there seems to have been a conspiracy to keep the single out of the #1 slot on the charts.

Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee provided a golden opportunity for the band to both make a statement and attract publicity. In regard to making a political statement, Savage writes that

'God Save The Queen' was the only serious anti-Jubilee protest, the only rallying call for those who didn't agree with the Jubilee because they didn't like the Queen, either because John Lydon, they were Irish, or, much more to the point, because they resented being steamrollered by such sickening hype, by a view of England which had not the remotest bearing on their everyday experience.(Savage, 1991: pg 352)

The dual purpose of the event was most typified by the protest/promotional stunt on the Thames river, whereupon the band set up a floating concert playing on a boat as it moved up and down the river. The police bust of the party and the subsequent media coverage confirmed the event.

The final event worthy of mention is that of the release of the band's album, *Never Mind The Bollocks: Here's The Sex Pistols*. As Savage notes, "...by the time it came out, it was almost an afterthought, a 'greatest hits' collection. The Sex Pistols were embalmed..."(Savage, 1991: pg 412). Despite resistance and controversy due to the title, and further problems due to the banning of the ads for the release, the album went straight into the charts at an unequivocal #1.<sup>8</sup>

Importantly, punk itself was a historical phenomenon. According to Grossberg

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<sup>8</sup>The album is still considered an all-time classic, receiving the maximum rating in the *Rolling Stone Album Guide* of five stars. As Mark Coleman writes in his review, *Never Mind The Bollocks* "...still cuts deep into the heart of rock & roll - and still draws blood"(Coleman, 1992(b): pg 267).

Punk emerged at, and responded to, a particular moment in the history of rock and roll. It is, after all, not coincidental that in 1976, the first of the baby boomers were turning thirty. Punk attacked rock and roll for having grown old and fat, for having lost that which puts it in touch with its audience and outside of the hegemonic reality. It attacked rock and roll in the guise of megagroups and arena rock, hippies and baby boomers who had clearly become part of that which was supposed to be outside of rock and roll. (Grossberg, 1986: pg 61)

Punk was pivotal and important in terms of the history of popular music.

"Punk was, after all a watershed of some sort, at least in the sense that everything that has come after it - and there has been a real explosion of musics and styles - must be read as "post-punk"" (Grossberg, 1986: pg 57).

Many writers point to punk as a turning point in both rock and popular music in that it was an intervention into what many viewed as a stagnant musical genre.

Punk was more than a historical moment: punk was what it *did*.

Grossberg describes how punk worked.

What is punk? (Listen to the first albums by the Sex Pistols, The Clash, or the Ramones.) The music is loud, fast, simple and abrasive. But punk is what it did and how it worked. First, it challenged the control of the so-called "major" record companies which have, since the sixties, dominated the economics of rock and roll. It was not, however, anti-capitalist; for the most part, it substituted small capitalists for big ones and, if Malcom McLaren (manager of the Sex Pistols) is taken as an example, it used capitalist practices to beat the system (e.g., the Sex Pistols were paid by a number of record companies without ever releasing a record). This is not a criticism: there is nothing wrong with using rock and roll as a form of economic work and mobility. Second, it returned the single to the center of the production of rock and roll, making it easier for new groups to record and release music. Thus it empowered the raw sounds of such records. Third, it rejected the criteria of aesthetic and technical expertise which had dominated and often defined the musical practice of rock and roll in the seventies,

Fourth, it rejected the star system which had become so pervasive and had fractured the relation between musician and fan. And finally, it consciously sought the minimal musical conditions of rock and roll. To many, it sounds like anarchic noise.(Grossberg, 1986: pg 58)

Punk also allowed work such as the present project to come into being: Frith writes that, academically, punk "...made discussion of rock and roll much more credible..." and that "If punk did nothing else it empowered cultural commentators..."(Frith, 1986: pg 76).

The Sex Pistols history and their inherent (inseparable) association with punk has made their reunion and tour potentially problematic in terms of the criteria of valuation of authenticity. Punk might be seen as having been "hyper-authentic", or "self-consciously authentic", (in part) in that it rejected what it saw as inauthentic arena-rock acts and offered something that was more "real". According to *Rolling Stone's* Alec Foege,

The original idea was to eschew the inflated sense of importance engendered by pompous arena-rock acts like Yes and Led Zeppelin.(Foege, 1995/1996: pg 30)

Discussing performance, Green Day's Mike Dirnt gets to the point; "There's nothing punk rock about hockey arenas and coliseums and shit..."(Foege, 1995/1996: pg 30). In short, success or the appearance or aesthetic of success and or professionalism are taken as signs of inauthenticity within the punk genre/domain. The Sex Pistols' 1996 return as seasoned professionals (to the very arenas that they had mocked their contemporaries for playing) makes covering such a reunion problematic for rock writers. The Sex Pistols history and their career path would seem to disallow and/or suppress such a reunion, and the existence of such a reunion (for financial motives) thus poses problems to the coverage of the reunion by rock writers. If a rock writer works within the criteria of valuation of authenticity, a seemingly

inauthentic return of a historically considered authentic band can be seen as problematic in that there seemed to be a conflict in terms of the band's historical career path and trajectory.<sup>9</sup>

The second of Sarah Thornton's aforementioned criteria of assigning historical importance to an event, biographical interest, would seem to be applicable. In this case, evaluations of a given event are contingent upon that event's relation to the group's history. Thus, the criteria of assigning historical importance to an event of biographical interest speaks (in part) to concerns of the authentic in terms of staying true to one's history or career path.

The main problem for the rock writers in evaluating the (arguably) inauthentic 1996 reunion and tour of the Sex Pistols, then, was that they were considered to be authentic at a particular moment in their history. Daibhid James wrote in an *Exclaim!* article entitled "Never Mind The Sex Pistols, Here's Steve Jones" that the band "...are a genuinely important group, the greatest punk band in history, and they have a mystique. In other words, they matter"(James, 1996: pg 13). Interestingly (in light of this project), Gene Simmons of KISS was quoted in *Musician* in 1996 as saying that "...for all the glory of punk, you only had the Pistols and the Clash and the rest you could give a shit about"(Resnicoff, 1996: pg 28). In the cover story of the August 1996 issue of *Alternative Press*, John Pecorelli wrote of the historical importance/authenticity of the band in his article "Hide Your Grandmothers, It's The Sex Pistols."

Never mind that this is a band that existed only two years yet dramatically altered the industry, the sound and the scope of rock and

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<sup>9</sup>Notably, other criteria of valuation employed for such an event would be less problematic, in that (in the case of a more postmodern reception) one might be indifferent to the sudden unexpected detour of the career path and evaluate the event without an eye to the band's history.

roll. They did it with a startling new noise, with combative theatrics, and most of all with words, forcing taboo after taboo down the throats of a docile and unsuspecting English public. They did it despite being banned from the radio, banished from performing in most English counties, and having the top spot in the country's published record charts left blank when one of their songs occupied it. They did it despite two major labels signing and unceremoniously dumping them immediately, despite record plant workers going on strike, refusing to press the vinyl and sleeves. Most amazingly, the Pistols did it releasing only one LP, 1977's *Never Mind The Bollocks, Here's The Sex Pistols*, after 20 years still the definitive punk-rock album.(Pecorelli, 1996: pg 57)

The Sex Pistols can be seen as "darlings" of the rock writers (both critics and academics). As Alan di Perna wrote in *Guitar World* in his article "Sexual Healing,"

The Sex Pistols even got respect, although most of it came after they broke up. *Never Mind The Bollocks* routinely appears on critics "Ten Best Rock Albums" lists. Their angry, guitar-driven sound is essential to our idea of what rock is. The band's place in rock history is as substantial as the Beatles', the Rolling Stones', or David Bowie's.(di Perna, 1996: pg 47)

Pecorelli wrote of scholarly canonization of the Sex Pistols and the secondary cultural industry they inadvertently created.

The topic of hundreds of scholarly papers in everything from *Time* magazine to *Art Forum*, the Pistols have been linked with intellectual movements from Surrealism to Situationism. Word-for-word deconstructions of Rotten's lyrics have been published, and Greil Marcus' 500 page tome, *Lipstick Traces*, explored in multi-syllabic detail the relationship between the Pistols and the Frankfurt School.(Pecorelli, 1996: pg 60)

Tom Sinclair, in an article in *Entertainment Weekly* entitled "Bring In da Punk" wrote

Although the Pistols have come to occupy an almost mythic niche in rock history, the truth is they never saw much money the first go-around. (If they'd figured out how to convert the reams of rock criticism written about them into hard currency, they probably wouldn't be on the road now.)(Sinclair, T., 1996: pg 59)

The Sex Pistols are valued as authentic in their influence on important/valued bands that followed them: that is, they have been valued as authentic in that they have been historically influential. J.D. Considine wrote in a *Baltimore Sun* article titled "Rotten to the core" that the Pistols did not kill off rock and roll but reinvigorated it. And not just punk rockers either; metalheads from Motley Crüe to Metallica listed the Sex Pistols among their influences.(Considine, 1996(b))

Shawn Conner wrote in the *Georgia Straight* that although it may have taken the band twenty years "...the Pistols have won by attrition"(Conner, 1996: pg 59). Conner noted that although the Sex Pistols really had no impact on the charts or the bands on the top of the charts in 1976-77, they have impacted on the music of today, citing Alice in Chains, Garbage, Soundgarden and Bush as bands that have been influenced by the band.

Of course, it could also be argued that if it weren't for the New York Dolls and the Stooges there would be no Sex Pistols, but it was Johnny and company who upset the U.K. status quo to such a degree that the world press stood up and took notice - not to mention the thousands of people who might never otherwise have picked up a guitar.(Conner, 1996: pg 59)

In this case the historical value of the band was gauged by the influence that the band has had on the (valued) artists of the present (or more specifically, of 1996).

Interestingly, only one article was found that did not value the Sex Pistols as an important band in the history of rock. The tone of Dave Thompson's *Alternative Press* article entitled "Anarchy In The 401K,"

insinuates that the band is unworthy of praise; that they are ultimately irrelevant, unworthy of their place in history, and that their reunion is pointless and insignificant.

The fact is, the Pistols' own day in the sun was so long ago that in comparative terms, their reformation is no more startling, or indeed relevant, than a Bill Haley revival in 1975 (and yes indeed, there was one).(Thompson, 1996: pg 62)

Thompson concluded: "Never mind, it's bollocks. The Swindle itself wasn't conceived until after the fact, after the split, and after a couple of other movie projects had gone down the drain"(Thompson, 1996: pg 62). Thus, although rare, there are rock writers that do not value the Sex Pistols as historically important or as either worthy of adoration or canonization.

Quite separate from the historical value of the Sex Pistols was the valuation by the rock writers of the Sex Pistols reunion tour. This reunion had been rumored about for some time. In an article entitled "Dead On Arrival?: Taking the pulse of the Nineties punk revival" in *Guitar World*, David Grad discussed the imminent Sex Pistols reunion.

Oh, and if you're still wondering whether punk is dead, muse over the implications of the rumored upcoming Sex Pistols reunion tour and ask yourself if those guys wouldn't have tripped over their bondage pants in hysterics 20 years ago at the mere suggestion that they would be touring American stadiums as middle-aged men, singing "Anarchy in the U.K." to frat boys.(Grad, 1996: pg 60)

The band made their announcement at a press conference at the famed 100 Club in London on May 18, 1996. This affirmation of the Sex Pistols reunion and tour was received by the rock press in different fashions (reflecting not only the criteria of valuation of authenticity and a postmodern sensibility, but in other ways as well). John Pecorelli wrote of the different ways in which the Sex Pistols reunion and tour had been received in the



aforementioned "Hide Your Grandmothers, It's The Sex Pistols" article in *Alternative Press*.

Surprise isn't the only sentiment greeting the Pistols' reunion, either - a fair amount of dismay exists, as well. They've "sold out" say some (forget that the band always embraced crass materialism, saying "the more the merrier" to talk show host Bill Grundy in the late 70's, shortly before calling him a "fucking rotter" on live, prime-time British TV). Others feel that they just shouldn't be allowed to sully their own legend the way Elvis and the Beatles did. There is an almost pathologically social need to keep the Pistols frozen in time like James Dean or Brian Jones - or Sid Vicious, for that matter - as icons of eternal, rebellious youth. Perhaps the heaviest irony of them all is that the original icon breakers, who carried the nothing-is-sacred credo to its visceral extreme, have become all too sacred themselves. (Pecorelli, 1996: pg 58 - 59)

Displaying the complexity of the reception of the Sex Pistols reunion and tour (and that it was not simply a matter of authentic or postmodern receptions), it can be seen that this event was received both positively and negatively within various criteria of valuation. *Hit Parader's* "The Year in Hard Rock" retrospective of 1996 valued the band's reunion positively as #3 on its Top Five list of "Most necessary reunions" (*Hit Parader*, Jan. 1997: pg 42 -43). Ira Robbins wrote a more matter-of-fact valuation of the band's reunion in *Rolling Stone*.

Complaints that the Pistols have sold out their principles are, of course, as wrongheaded as the idea that the group had any in the first place.

The lyrics are unambiguous: "We're pretty vacant...and we don't care!" The great rock & roll swindle continues. (Robbins, 1996: pg 82)

David Sinclair reported in *Rolling Stone* that the reunion "...was greeted in the British press as the least welcome rock & roll comeback of all time, a crass betrayal of the original do-or-die punk philosophy" (Sinclair, D., 1996: pg 30).

Daibhid James wrote in *Exclaim!* of a more universal concern.

I believe Nostradamus, prophesizing the apocalypse, said: "And verily, rock dinosaurs will stalk the earth, demanding large sums of money to play the hits." Thus the summer of '96.... Clearly it's time to stock up on canned goods.(James, 1996: pg 13)

Mark Simpson wrote in a *Details* article titled "Still Rotten After All These Years" and subtitled "Cash from Chaos. Never trust a hippie. And T-shirts for twenty dollars" that the Sex Pistols

self-detonated at the apogee of the most glorious and perfect rock parabola ever, just two years after their launch and at the height of their fame. And now they have decided to come back and spoil it all.(Simpson, 1996: pg 262)

Some writers utilized the criteria of valuation of authenticity and employed a sarcastic, ironic tone (as discussed below, irony and sarcasm are not exclusive to a postmodern sensibility). As there was more than one reunion in 1996, the *Alternative Press* saw fit to produce the "AP's Guide To The Reunions"(*Alternative Press*, Aug. 1996: pg 62 - 63). In regard to the Sex Pistols reunion, the magazine reported "Overall satisfaction" at 80%, "Audience Interest" as four of five stars, "Just Like Good Old Days" as five out of five stars, and "Band Sincerity" at a mere two stars of five. More telling were the fine-print notes: "Reunion is worthy of respect", "Appeal limited to old men and people who write band names on leather jackets in typewriter correction fluid", and "Reunion means time away from equally reprehensive solo career(s)"(*Alternative Press*, Aug. 1996: pg 62 - 63).

Perhaps the main concerns of those writers who were critical of the reunion and the intentions of the band were considerations of financial remuneration. In terms of the rock press coverage, the issue of the money spoke to the concerns of sellout or the inauthentic, and was most often written in a sarcastic tone. Mark Simpson wrote in his *Details* article that

Yes, the passage of time and the rising cost of swimming pool maintenance has healed their differences and brought them together again for the Filthy Lucre Tour and live album....(Simpson, 1996: 262)

The prime concern/criticism of the Sex Pistols reunion tour was that rather than for some higher purpose (whatever this might have been), the band seems to have reunited solely for the money. Put more simply in *Rolling Stone* by Nilou Panahpour, "The reason? Cash"(Panahpour, 1996: pg 17).

Furthermore, perhaps to disarm this criticism, the band has far from denied this. Dave Thompson wrote of "...the Pistols' insistence that they only regrouped for the money and don't give a toss what anyone thinks"(Thompson, 1996: pg 62). This did not truly disarm the rock writers, however, as most of the reunion announcements discussed (critically) the alleged sole purpose of the band. Mark Simpson wrote in *Details* that

The band who once told us "Don't know what I want but I know how to get it" has now decided that what they want is our money.(Simpson, 1996: 262)

Alan di Perna wrote in *Guitar World's* August 1996 "special punk issue" that The Sex Pistols don't want your love. They want your money. Your hero worship doesn't interest them. Nor does your contempt. They don't care if *Never Mind The Bollocks* changed your whole life, or if you're grateful to them radically altering the course of rock and roll with one big, loud, disruptive belch. And they certainly don't give a toss whether their current actions violate some notion of second-generation punk political correctness. No, they've come back for your cash, the one thing they got precious little of the first time 'round.(di Perna, 1996: pg 44)

J.D. Considine wrote in his *Baltimore Sun* article that

The Sex Pistols are back, not to prove they were a great band, but to annoy people - and to make money. It worked in the 70's; it'll work again. You'll pay.

Now, however, those who applauded that gesture are beginning to feel, well, cheated. It's bad enough that the Sex Pistols have gone the

way of all fleshy, aging rock stars (Hello, KISS! Nice to see ya, Eagles!) and hit the reunion trail; making matters worse is the fact that Rotten and company have nothing to gain from this tour but money.  
(Considine, 1996(a))

Panahpour noted with typical *Rolling Stone* cynical, sarcastic tone<sup>10</sup> that "Now that the Sex Pistols and the Eagles have something in common, there's an overriding sense of community in the world of music"(Panahpour, 1996: pg 17).<sup>11</sup> The hypocritical element of the Sex Pistols reuniting as rock dinosaurs was not lost on an unnamed writer at *Guitar World*:

While the Sex Pistols vowed never to reform, it seems that for the right price, even their gun is for hire. "They used to spit at bands like the ROLLING STONES for being too old," a source close to the band reported. "But with the money they're being offered today, it's hard for them to refuse to come back."(*Guitar World*, April 1996: pg 19)

The tone of this announcement, curiously, is that regrouping for money is somehow OK if it's for *alot* of money.

Importantly, criticizing a band for regrouping solely for the money can be seen to show considerations to the criteria of valuation of authenticity, as it might be seen to point to the inauthentic. The romantic idea that the music should come first (as opposed to considerations to financial remuneration) can be seen to reflect the criteria of valuation of authenticity.<sup>12</sup> Also, though a sense that the Sex Pistols regrouping solely for the money can be seen as ironic (in that this, on the surface, seems so anti-punk), this cannot necessarily be seen as a postmodern sensibility, as the writers do not seem to be indifferent to the difference.

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<sup>10</sup>It must be noted that sarcasm or a sarcastic tone, often displayed in *Rolling Stone*, is not exclusive to either the criteria of valuation of authenticity or a postmodern sensibility.

<sup>11</sup>These comparisons with the Eagles and KISS were stinging attacks (as the Sex Pistols mission, in part, was to destroy such bands).

<sup>12</sup>This, of course, does not mean that criticizing the band's reunion solely for the money is exclusive to the criteria of valuation of authenticity or that such a criticism necessarily reflects concerns to authenticity.

Other rock writers pointed out the importance of the cash for the reunion, but also offered that the reunion was about more than the money. Matt Hendrickson reported in *Rolling Stone* of the motivation for the reunion: "Obviously, money and a sense of unfinished business," says a source close to the band...(Hendrickson, 1996(a): pg 32). This was ultimately the position of the band: that although the money was a large part of the motivation, the reunion offered the chance to put, as Lydon stated at the reunion press conference, "a fucking full-stop on it." That is, as the Sex Pistols finished in a self-consuming ball of flames the first go-round, the reunion gave them a chance to finish properly.

Tom Sinclair wrote in *Entertainment Weekly* in his article "Bring In da Punk" that the band *deserved* a second chance at cash.

It's no secret that many people view this comeback - dubbed the Filthy Lucre Tour - as a betrayal, a cynical attempt by the band to cash in on their notoriety. Which, of course, it is. As Kiss...know, staging a middle aged comeback tour may not be what becomes a legend most, but it'll do wonders for your bank balance. Although the Pistols have come to occupy an almost mythic niche in rock history, the truth is they never saw much money the first go-around.(Sinclair, T., 1996: pg 60 - 61)

Although this could be seen to reflect, somewhat, a postmodern sensibility (in that although Sinclair admits that the reunion is a sellout, he seems to be indifferent to the difference), this also seems to show that this reception of the reunion is more complex than simply authenticity versus a postmodern sensibility. Sinclair may be indifferent to the return being solely for the money, but he does view the Sex Pistols as worthy of a second chance at compensation (perhaps displaying a valuation of the band as authentic or otherwise worthy).

Many of the comments on the Sex Pistols reunion that might be said to reflect a postmodern sensibility seem to have had an underlying message of

"lighten up". In his aforementioned *Entertainment Weekly* article, Tom Sinclair wrote that

Those who persist in viewing the comeback as heresy need to lighten up. Perhaps Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong (of all people) best summed up the contradictions of the Pistols' second coming when he retooled the lyrics to "Anarchy in the U.K." in an interview: I am the anti-Christ/Please buy our merchandise." Now *that's* punk.(Sinclair, T., 1996: pg 61)

Sinclair seems to acknowledge that the reunion is indeed a sellout and inauthentic, but is indifferent to this. Furthermore, he seems to value this positively. This "lighten-ing up" is reflected in an interview with Lydon by Alan di Perna in *Guitar World* on reforming the Sex Pistols.

**Rotten:** It seems to fit in quite well with what I have in mind for myself.

**GW:** Which is?

**Rotten:** Not to be so damned serious about things. To not treat things so preciously. I think that was a real problem for a long time: I treated the Pistols as something sacrosanct and holy, like a religious icon.(di Perna; 1996: pg 58)

Indifference to difference is not caring about the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic (or believing that this difference doesn't matter). This allows one to enjoy the superficial, both despite it's superficiality and because of it. Although this seems to be beyond the concerns of authenticity (i.e., that it is "post-authenticity"), it is important to note that it is difficult to distinguish between this position and an appreciation of pop (i.e., what might be called "pre-authenticity"). Thus the adoption of a postmodern sensibility can appear as both progressive and regressive. Regardless, what matters (to many fans and rock writers) is that a given event can be enjoyed on the level of amusement or fun.

An excerpt of an interview in *Discorder* demonstrates this fun as had by a rock writer. Written by Vancouver local underground celebrity Nardwuar the Human Serviette for the Student Radio Society of the University of British Columbia's monthly paper, the article, entitled "Nardwuar Vs. The Sex Pistols," was an opportunity for the writer to interview someone of whom he is a knowledgeable fan. The tone of the article was that of playful tongue-in-cheek sarcastic fan worship. There was a definite respect for both the band and the subject of the interview, Paul Cook, but he did push it to the point that one might think that this could have been a joke to him. The article can be seen as having shown concerns to both the authentic (fan worship) and to postmodern fun (in the sarcasm, irony and ribbing). More concerned with the history of the band, and more specifically Paul Cook, than with the tour, the interview could have been done without the tour. The most biting comment in terms of authenticity was the following cordless microphone question. The interview began with the following exchange.

**Nardwuar** Who are you?

Paul Cook What do you mean, who I am?

**Who are you? You're Paul Cook!**

That's right. I'm Paul Cook.

**Paul Cook of The Sex Pistols!**

That's right.

**Now, Paul, how's your head?**

How's my head?

**Weren't you hit by a bottle at the Roskilde Festival?**

No, I was hit by a can — in the chest, actually.

**Did it hurt you very much?**

Naaaa. No, 'cause I'm tough. I just carry on, you know.

**What about people throwing stuff. Was that because Johnny was singing with a cordless mic, and people weren't used to the cordless mic? What do you think about Johnny singing with a cordless mic?**

I don't think anything about it.

**Hey, Paul. Congratulations. The Sex Pistols' *Never Mind The Bollocks* 8-track version of your record sells for one hundred dollars!**

The what?

**The 8-track version of your record. The Sex Pistols' 8-track. Were you aware that an 8-track cartridge was created for the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind The Bollocks*?**

I didn't even know there was an 8-track cartridge. I thought they'd all gone out. I thought they were all redundant by the time *Never Mind The Bollocks* came out. (Serviette, 1996: pg 16)

Thus, although the knowledge that Nardwuar displayed of the band points to a valuation of authenticity, Cook was teased throughout the interview with a sarcastic, ironic tone that signals, perhaps, an indifference to difference and the ability to have fun.<sup>13</sup> Thus, we can see that a single rock writer within a particular article can employ, at the very least, both the criteria of valuation of authenticity and a postmodern sensibility.

The positive valuation of entertainment and spectacle might be seen to signal or reflect a postmodern sensibility. In its indifference to difference in regard to the inauthenticity of spectacle, a postmodern sensibility allows one to be simply entertained without concerns to authenticity. Jon Savage wrote in an article in *Spin* of the authentic spectacle that was the 1996 version of the Sex Pistols. "This is what this spectacle is about: the rewriting of history and unfinished business" (Savage, 1996: pg 72). Furthermore, Savage writes that the return of the Sex Pistols as spectacle performs a service to the fans. "In becoming entertainment, which is all they could do now, the Sex Pistols have laid to rest their, and our, burden. What a relief" (Savage, 1996: pg 72).

Importantly, the acceptance of the Sex Pistols as spectacle despite their inauthenticity may be seen as historically specific. Steve Newton wrote in the

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<sup>13</sup>Again, one must remember that a sarcastic tone is not exclusive to either the criteria of valuation of authenticity or to a postmodern sensibility.



*Georgia Straight* in an article on the newfound popularity of punk that "Just five years ago, the announcement of a Sex Pistols reunion tour would have been scoffed at, but in '96 it sounds like a hell of an idea"(Newton, 1996(d): pg 59). This seems to speak to the timing of such reunions: that for a formerly authentic band to make an inauthentic comeback, the historical context is important. One might also ask if the stance taken by the band (a sarcastic "fat, forty and back" daylight robbery one), in which they show not merely an indifference to difference but in which they embrace their inauthenticity, helps direct the reception by the band.<sup>14</sup>

The bottom line for *Rolling Stone*, as reported in their special "Year In Rock" issue, was that despite the inauthenticities, the reunion was valuable in that it was amusing.

Yes, the Filthy Lucre Tour was way too cohesive and play-by-numbers; yes, Rotten, at 40 years old, often showed his age; yes, the edge was gone, and the shows were straight out of Las Vegas. But at the end of the day, we were amused, though in a pretty vacant way.(Dunn et al., 1996/1997: pg 64)

There were two specific reviewable products offered by the Sex Pistols to the rock writers in 1996. A live recording of their second show at Finsbury Park, U.K., titled "Filthy Lucre Live" was commercially unsuccessful. Chris Yurkiw of the Montréal based weekly the *Mirror* gave the disc five out of ten and wrote, in regard to the disc, that "...there's just no point"(Yurkiw, 1996(a): pg 18). This negative valuation might be read as reflecting concerns of authenticity, in that it judged the band's releasing the disc as pointless and (perhaps) inauthentic.

Charles M. Young reviewed "Filthy Lucre Live" for *Musician*. His review was more favourable, writing that the Sex Pistols "...sound as

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<sup>14</sup>Of course, the type of authenticity that the Sex Pistols had could be seen as a postmodern one, and perhaps one should not be surprised by a postmodern reception to a postmodern band.

devastating as they ever did"(Young, 1996: pg 88). Of course, his account, like that of superfan Nardwuar, was affected by his longtime admiration of the band.

I can't be snide about this reprise of *Never Mind The Bollocks* for two reasons: (1) Unlike Iggy Pop, the dangerous punk rocker and shoe salesman, they haven't sold any of their songs to Nike for jingles: and (1) they meant too much to me twenty years ago.(Young, 1996: pg 88)

Thus, Young not only found value in the CD, but pointed to an authenticity in the lack of commercial sellout.<sup>15</sup>

Ira Robbins gave a backhanded valuation to the Sex Pistols live disc in *Rolling Stone* by noting that "No longer reckless juvenile delinquents, today's all-pro Pistols are simply a top-notch tribute band..."(Robbins, 1996: pg 80). The charm and importance of the 1976 version of the Sex Pistols for many was that they were amateurs and juvenile delinquents (i.e., punk!). To call them competent professionals can, thus, be read as a negative valuation by the criteria of valuation of authenticity (in that they have strayed from the band's original career path as incompetents).

The second reviewable product provided by the Sex Pistols to rock writers in 1996 was, of course, their live concerts. The twenty years of skill acquisition was not lost on Mark Simpson in the aforementioned *Details* article "Still Rotten After All These Years." "The rolling attack of this guitar noise is enough to spike your hair without gel - but it's *professional*"(Simpson, 1996: pg 262). As professionalism can be seen to take the edge off of punk, Simpson noted "This is punk lite"(Simpson, 1996: pg 262). Simpson, like Robbins above, seemed to be working within the criteria of valuation of authenticity, as he judged the band's performances as having

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<sup>15</sup>Young, evidently, had not heard Lydon's "Rotten" voice on his cover of the song "Route 66" for Mountain Dew.

been somewhat untrue to their historical selves (and thus, inauthentic to their past).

David Sinclair of *Rolling Stone* thought the quality of the live show lived up to the authenticity or historical importance of the Sex Pistols of the 1970s.

Still, you had to hand the Pistols high marks for trying, and it was by no means the embarrassment that many had feared. No future, it's true - but they did adequate justice to an illustrious past.(Sinclair, D., 1996: pg 31)

Rather than judge the live show of the Sex Pistols by the criteria of valuation pertaining to authenticity, Jon Savage wrote of what a good time he had at the show in *Spin*. His fun began at the outset, as the band launched their show by rushing through a paper tabloid backdrop to commence the set. "We start laughing: This is going to be fun"(Savage, 1996: pg 72). Savage pointed out how the postmodern Sex Pistols of 1970s differed from the 1996 reunion tour. "I can't stop laughing - this is what I always wanted to do in 1977 but never could"(Savage, 1996: pg 72). The difference is somewhat historical: The 1970s version of the Sex Pistols was postmodern authentic and serious, whereas the 1996 version was postmodern fun.

The changes are most evident in Lydon. His former defensive posture has been replaced by the sharp self-mockery and campy gestures of a vaudevillian. As he chatters his way through "Submission," he delivers a line that shows what he wants out of the occasion: "and the crowd went wild."(Savage, 1996: pg 72)

If punk is viewed as both authentic and postmodern (in its indifference to difference or to its inauthenticity), then the reunion of the Sex Pistols, in its inauthenticity and their indifference to this difference, can be viewed as punk. The notion that the reunion itself was punk was shared by many

writers. The *Georgia Straight*, in its what's-hot-in-town-this-week section, reported that

They didn't dig up Sid Vicious, but they are fat, 40, and they want your money. What could be more punk than the Sex Pistols reuniting for no other reason than to cynically cash in on their now ancient notoriety!(*Georgia Straight*, Aug. 29 - Sept. 5, 1996: pg 71)

A common reasoning for the viewing of the reunion tour as punk was that it agitated so many people. John Pecorelli wrote in *Alternative Press* that "Frankly, given all the people it's traumatizing, this tour may be the "punkest" thing the Pistols have done yet"(Pecorelli, 1996: pg 60).

A further rationale for the labeling of the reunion itself as punk was the fact that it clashed with the myth of the Sex Pistols. Shawn Conner quoted Paul Cook in the *Georgia Straight* in his article titled "Pistols Return to Rewrite History" as having said "...that's what I like about getting back together: it annoys all those people who've got their ideals set about what the Pistols were all about"(Conner, 1996: pg 59). Savage wrote in the aforementioned *Spin* article that

In reforming, the group - and John Lydon in particular - are dancing on the grave of punk ideals; the songs are still relevant; this is just sad nostalgia, the true rock 'n' roll swindle, cash from chaos; it's their myth, they can do what they want from it.(Savage, 1996: pg 72)

Finally, J.D. Considine wrote in the *Baltimore Sun* that "Against that kind of cultural backdrop, it's hard to imagine a gesture more completely punk than the Sex Pistols unapologetic return"(Considine, 1996(b)). This viewing of the reunion by these rock writers as punk seems to speak to a postmodern sensibility. However, one can see that these writers were not indifferent to the difference, and seemed to be positioning the inauthentic (the reunion of the Sex Pistols) as authentic postmodernity, or authentically punk.

Returning to the importance of the historical context of the reunion, Steven Stolder wrote in a *Request* article titled "God Save The Sex Pistols" that the *timing* of the reunion of the Sex Pistols was punk.

Some punk true believers have denounced the notion of a full-scale revival, but here's one vote in favor. This is the time (it's been 20 years since their farewell show in San Francisco on January 14, 1976) to make a consequential statement. Now that punk is solidly entrenched and feeling a bit too good about its own seditious self, what better time to bring a cynical, bloated, calamitous road show out under the Sex Pistols' banner? Corporate sponsorships are welcome! Set ticket prices as high as possible! The more like Elvis' last tour the better!(Stolder, 1996: pg 14)

To conclude, it must be noted that the 1970's version of the Sex Pistols was considered postmodern and authentic (these are not exclusive concepts). It was during the twenty years between the origins of the band and the reunion of 1996 that they became the canonized, authentic heroes of punk that changed the direction of rock, so that rock that emerged after punk must be read as post-punk. In short, it was during these twenty years that rock reclaimed the band as a part of its history: the Sex Pistols became a rock band. The rock version of the Sex Pistols kept their authenticity but lost their postmodernity (or rather, the concerns of the postmodern were subsumed by their authenticity). In 1996, those who saw the band in terms of rock's criteria of valuation of authenticity saw the reunion as inauthentic and deplorable. Those rock writers who viewed the band as a historically postmodern phenomenon saw no contradiction in a reunion. Some rock writers that viewed the reunion as inauthentic by the criteria of valuation of authenticity were ultimately indifferent to the difference between authentic and inauthentic and found value in the spectacle. Finally, some rock writers

found the inauthenticity of the reunion to be authentically punk  
(authentically inauthentic?).

## Chapter Three:

### KISS

Cartoon characters or crankin' metal band? In its mid-'70s heyday, Kiss was a bit of both. This costumed New York quartet utilized image and packaging with a shrewdness that belies the lunk-headed crudeness of its musical attack. Kiss turned the campy, low-budget excesses of glitter rock into a high-tech (for the '70s) circus of horrors, right down to the fire-breathing and tongue-rolling sideshow antics. And while the music could be almost unlistenable raw...the group also managed to concoct some undeniably catchy teen-rebellion anthems.(Coleman, 1992(a): pg 163)

Of the twenty-three records listed under the KISS entry of the *Rolling Stone Album Guide*, the highest rated received only 3 1/2 stars of five (the 1988 greatest hits compilation *Smashes, Thrashes & Hits*) (Coleman, 1992(a): pg 163). With KISS, it would seem, one cannot appreciate the full impact or value of the band based on musical merit alone. That is, one must look at the total package that is KISS before evaluating them as relevant, irrelevant or otherwise.

Originally from New York, KISS emerged in the early 1970s with (at best) mediocre songs, but with an impressive stage show. Visually, the band merged the heavy metal aesthetic (leather, spikes, big hair) with Kabuki theatre makeup and comic book superhero characterizations. The band built a strong fan base (dubbed the KISS Army), and continually improved their live show. KISS had their own comic book, were featured in a film entitled "KISS Meets the Phantom of the Park," and appeared on lunch-box type items. They were a comic strip come to life, and they had a mystique about them (never appearing in public without their makeup on). KISS was all about the total

package. Furthermore, Paul Stanley (Starchild), Gene Simmons (The Demon), Ace Frehley (Spaceman), and Peter Criss (The Cat) *were* their characters. Of the four characters/band members, the most mystery surrounded Simmons: was that really a cow's tongue sewn on? Did he spit real goat's blood? KISS were once picketed by Christian fundamentalists who suspected that "KISS" was an acronym was Knights in Satan's Service

The original lineup of the band began to fall apart in 1980, when Peter Criss was kicked out of the band. Two and a half years later, guitarist Ace Frehley left to pursue a solo career. The remaining core of the band (Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons), along with others, have recorded and toured ever since (but took the makeup off in 1983).

Regardless of how one views their music or their ability to put on a show, KISS' popularity is undeniable.

The band has sold over 75 million albums worldwide, and is four releases shy of eclipsing the Beatles' record 29 gold albums. Kiss had an ice cream and a toothpaste named after them; love guns and wastebaskets molded in their image.(Smith, 1996: pg 48)

Furthermore, the KISS Army's faith in the band is impressive. "The Kiss imprint created a fan base second in loyalty only to that of the Beatles"(Resnicoff, 1996: pg 26).

KISS music, which R.J. Smith describes as "...metal squeezed into a pop jacket, Rolling Stones blues riffs, Zeppelin screaming, and Detroit-band feedback made gregarious..."(Smith, 1996: pg 48), is secondary in the valuation of the band.

Possibly the band should have more to show for their 22 years in the studio than an invaluable greatest-hits album, but they accomplished something far more world-historic outside the studio: They changed the nature of stardom.(Smith, 1996: pg 52)



In short, the band showed that a band could be immensely popular despite its music, not because of it.<sup>16</sup>

Notably, KISS has not enjoyed the same level of success that they enjoyed in the 1970s since the removal of the excess (i.e., the makeup and theatrics). By the late 1980s, the band was drawing far smaller crowds. As Steve Newton recounts in the Vancouver based *Georgia Straight*, a March 1988 concert "...drew fewer than 5,000 fans to the Pacific Coliseum, and many of those were there to hear then-hot openers Anthrax"(Newton, 1996(b): pg 59). This might imply that the band had little to offer other than spectacle, and that the music does not stand on its own merit. Indeed, the reunion was greeted by Newton as if KISS had no other options:

After an on-again, off-again flirtation with the idea of trying to make it on musical merit alone, Kiss has returned to the cartoonish flashpots and fleshpaint of its '70s heyday - to the evident satisfaction of the groups many fans.(Newton, 1996(b): pg 59)

The historical valuation of KISS as having been worthy of value on its own terms was articulated by Smith.

Most of all, Kiss recast what it meant to rock. A Kiss fan clarified this to me by distinguishing between his favorite group and the best group. Kiss became a lot of people's favorites not because Paul was the best singer, but because everything - the costumes, the cherry bombs ringing in your ear, the Kiss model-Chevy van - the whole damned package rocked.(Smith, 1996: pg 52)

Thus, as mentioned above, KISS was a total package. When the band shed the makeup and theatrics and tried to make it on musical merit alone, they were not as successful. KISS' 1996 response to this situation was to "re-package" themselves for the fans (and for financial considerations).

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<sup>16</sup>Of course, KISS weren't the first to be able to say this about themselves, but it could be argued that they took it to a new extreme.

One might suspect that the 1996 reunion and tour of KISS' original lineup, like that of the Sex Pistols, would be problematic for the rock writers. However, KISS have not historically been seen as authentic in the traditional sense. Thus, for many rock writers, a 1996 KISS reunion was not a betrayal of an authentic past, but merely a continuation or reprisal of a spectacular and inauthentic past (and unproblematic). Another means by which the reunion could have been problematic for the rock writers would be if there was a betrayal of their career path or history. This was not the case, however, as the band went to extraordinary lengths to not only recreate the original shows but to improve them (from working with personal trainers to fine tuning the rocket launching system on Ace Frehley's famed Gibson Les Paul guitar). Indeed, on the level that KISS *were* historically considered authentic, that is, as authentic spectacle, the 1996 reunion was true to their former glories (i.e., they were authentically KISS). It would seem, then, that the 1996 reunion and tour was only problematic for those who saw KISS as just as inauthentic and unworthy of praise in 1996 as they have for the past twenty years.

KISS' triumphant return now seems not as a spontaneous reunion, but as a long term orchestrated plan. Perhaps the first sign of a reunion based on the 1970s version of KISS was the self-produced tribute album to themselves, *kiss my ass: classic kiss regrooved*, on which (then) current artists covered *only* the KISS songs of the makeup years. This 1994 album featured Lenny Kravitz with Stevie Wonder, Garth Brooks, Anthrax, Gin Blossoms, Toad the Wet Sprocket, Dinosaur Jr., The Lemonheads, The Mighty Mighty Bosstones, and Yoshiki with the American Symphony Orchestra. It might be seen that KISS was associating themselves with valued artists of the day, positioning themselves as influences to them. Curiously, the liner notes to the album

lists others that are "missing in action", implying a kinship with these bands as well:

Stone Temple Pilots, Ozzy Osbourne, Soundgarden, Alice In Chain, Skid Row, Smashing Pumpkins, Thurston/Group, Megadeth, Melvins, Snow, Pantera, Bel Biv Devoe, Gilby Clarke/Matt Sorum, Cypress Hill, Ugly Kid Joe, Soda Stereo, Nirvana, Nikki Sixx, Babes In Toyland, Public Enemy, Run DMC, Ministry, Mozart, Galactic Cowboys, Nine Inch Nails, Tony Toni Tone, Die Toten Hozen, Tears for Fears, Mozart (sic) and all the rest of our friends (liner notes to *kiss my ass*, 1994)

Also within the liner notes of *kiss my ass* was an advertisement for the next stage of the cash-in: a self-produced book commemorating the band's twentieth anniversary entitled *KISSTORY*. As is customary for the band itself, the book is not hailed in regard to quality of content, but rather, size. "440 pages!" "8 pounds per book!" The "limited/numbered 1st edition personally signed by Kiss" sold for \$149.95, and was sold direct via either a Beverly Hills address or by a 1-800 number.

The next stage of the comeback was a (self-produced) series of KISS conventions. One to two thousand fans attended each of these conventions, which featured the sale of KISS merchandise, the trading of collectibles, performances from KISS tribute bands, and finally some live, unplugged (requested) songs from KISS itself. These pricey (\$100 admission) conventions set the stage for the next pivotal moment in evolution of the comeback (de-evolution?) reunion tour: a performance on MTV Unplugged.

It was at the 1995 MTV Unplugged that the first signs of an original lineup KISS reunion appeared: former members Ace Frehley and Peter Criss made "surprise" cameos. Reviews of the resulting "KISS: Unplugged" album provide an idea of how eager the public was for such a reunion. Mitch Joel of Montréal's *Hour* gave the CD four and-a-half of five stars, and used the opportunity to tell the reader of how much "KISS rules" and how much the

reunion was anticipated (Joel, 1996(b): pg 16). Within the context of a "Macho Rock" chart, Daina Darzin wrote in *Request* of the album:

BAND Kiss, ALBUM Unplugged, OVERALL STATEMENT We may be old, but we can still get babes, so fans continue to worship us, thank you very much, MOST PROMINENT SONIC ATTRIBUTE Better when plugged in, LYRICAL PROOF OF MANLINESS "When the bitch bends over, I forget my name," PROBABLE FUTURE None, but they're millionaires, so what do they care? PERSONAL NOTE Trivia question: who has more rugs, Gene Simmons, William Shatner, or Burt Reynolds? MOST LOVABLE QUALITY Beloved seminal influence of a generation, like it or not, OVERALL RATING: C+(Darzin, 1996: pg 15)

Their reunion imminent, KISS appeared on the 1996 Grammy Awards (with Tupac Shakur) in full makeup. A subsequent press conference (again, in full makeup) confirmed that the original lineup would again wear the original costumes and makeup, sing the original songs, and recreate the original shows of the 1970s.

It was the extent to which the KISS reunion and tour was planned that was seen as problematic for rock writers. The reunion did not seem to be spontaneous or about the music or the shows themselves (the art), and rather seemed to be solely for the financial security of the aging band members (business or industry). This planning made the 1996 KISS reunion and tour different than the 1996 incarnations of the Sex Pistols and Metallica, in that, as discussed above, KISS had not betrayed their historically authentic career path, but rather were seen to be too in control and coldly doing it for the money.<sup>17</sup> The association with industry in the art versus industry dichotomy could be seen as inauthentic, or at least as problematic.

The tour, which turned out to be the most successful North American tour of 1996 (showing that, at the very least, the fans embraced the reunion),

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<sup>17</sup>As discussed below, control over one's art can also be valued positively (as authentic and by other criteria of valuation).

was of course received or positioned differently by different rock writers. The *Alternative Press*, in its "AP's Guide To The Reunions," noted "Overall Satisfaction" of the reunion as about 78%, "Audience Interest" as five on a scale of five, a category identified as "Just like good old days" as a three of five, and "Band sincerity" as one of five (*Alternative Press*, Aug., 1996: pg 62 - 63). Furthermore, this guide notes "Genocide of audience is recommended," "One or more band members appear winded in the middle of performance," and that the "Band's creditors/investment firms are sincere" (*Alternative Press*, Aug., 1996: pg 62 - 63). This reception of the KISS reunion by *Alternative Press* seems to position the reunion as inauthentic in rating band sincerity so low and pointing to the suspicious (in terms of authenticity) business interests of the band.

KISS was a prominent force in *Hit Parader's* special "The Year in Hard Rock" issue's Top Five lists. KISS ranked #2 in the top five Bands list, #1 in the top five Live Acts list, #2 in the top five Overhyped list, #5 in the top five Loudest Bands list, and #1 in the top five Most Necessary Reunions list (*Hit Parader*, Jan., 1997: pg 42 - 43). The 1996 reunion and tour of KISS were thus positively received by *Hit Parader* in 1996, and considerations of authenticity and of a postmodern sensibility would not seem to apply to their generally positive valuation of the band. Conversely, Matt Hendrickson of *Rolling Stone* saw the reunion of KISS as something analogous to the first sign of the apocalypse: "Good god, next thing you know, the SEX PISTOLS will get back together" (Hendrickson, 1996(b): pg 30).

Some rock writers received the KISS reunion as authentic in its blatant inauthenticity. Jancee Dunn et al. wrote in *Rolling Stone's* "Year In Rock" issue that it was KISS that were the champions of the 1996 concert season.

After the Eagle's record-setting \$80 million 1994 summer tour, every band that has ever felt the sting of the cutout bin seemed to sit up and take notice. Hence the summer's schedule, which was dominated by such sorely missed faces as Styx; Foghat; Emerson, Lake and Palmer; Peter Frampton; Foreigner; Boston; Kansas; REO Speedwagon; and, of course, the Sex Pistols. But these were all just sideshows compared with KISS, whose first full-makeup reunion tour in 17 years, launched in June, became the mother of all '96 concert events - reunion or otherwise. Why Kiss? Because, after the Beatles, Kiss have the most gold records. Because they promised the tattered remnants of the Kiss Army more blood spitting, fire breathing and drum-set levitating than anyone else did. Because in a culture besotted by '70s kitsch, Kiss have become more than a treasured artifact; they're the real deal. And the over-30 crowd wasn't the only one holding up its lighters. For younger fans who were weaned on grunge, "I want to rock & roll all night and party every day" was a welcome change from "I hate myself and want to die."(Dunn et al., 1996/1997: pg 64)

Thus, in this valuation, KISS became the most authentic of the reunited bands because rather than offer an authentic experience which could only come up short, KISS went off in the opposite direction: they took the inauthentic as far as it could go (in the form of spectacle).

A further way in which KISS has been evaluated as authentic is in the influence the band has had on other performers that are valued positively (that is, as authentic or credible). Indeed, Matt Resnicoff wrote in *Musician* that the 1970s incarnation of KISS was "...a movement that shaped the consciousness of most contemporary rock musicians"(Resnicoff, 1996: pg 26). In an article that could be described as "KISS worship", Resnicoff noted that Nile Rodgers formed Chic because of KISS, that Pearl Jam "...copped Frehley's magnificently sculptured solos...", and that KISS "...once blew Black Sabbath off the stage"(Resnicoff, 1996: pg 26). Resnicoff concluded that KISS has earned their credibility (and perhaps, authenticity) by association.

Credibility, like all commodities, is a measure of perceived value. Has it come to pass, then, that their formative influence on most credible contemporary bands has made Kiss a credible act the second time around?(Resnicoff, 1996: pg 31)

Of course, as for the Sex Pistols, the money being made by the reunion was often discussed by rock writers in 1996. Furthermore, the financial motivations for the reunion tour were most often seen in a negative light. In the case of KISS, it was the enormity of this bounty that was often discussed. The cover blurb on the Aug. 16, 1996 issue of *Entertainment Weekly* conveyed the magnitude of the money that was being made: "On the road with KISS: Behind the groupies, smoke bombs, and monstrous money of this summer's biggest tour"(*Entertainment Weekly*, Aug. 16, 1996: cover). The announcement of the reunion in *Guitar World*, titled "Alive... Again: Kiss reloads its love gun for a summer reunion tour," also mentioned money: "...there's no doubt that the next few months will bring the kind of exposure, ticket sales, fan adoration and money Kiss reveled in during their Seventies heyday..."(*Guitar World*, Aug. 96: pg 21). These two statements did not necessarily point to the reunion as inauthentic due to money; however, for money to have been mentioned prominently seems to signal concerns or awareness of the making of money as a primary goal of the tour, which can be viewed or valued negatively as inauthentic.

The merchandising of the band, which could be seen as inauthentic, was also mentioned by a few writers. The artificially enthusiastic (!) announcement of the KISS concert in Montréal in the *Mirror* stated "You wanted a reunion and you got it! The richest, most merchandised band in the land - Kiss!!!"(*Mirror*, Aug. 1 - 8, 1996)! Notably, it was not the quality of the music or of at least the show of KISS that was mentioned, but rather that the

band is rich and heavily merchandised. Even the obsequious *Hit Parader* took a swipe at KISS' merchandising.

Despite their straight-laced claims that they're not doing their reunion tour for the money, Kiss seem delighted by the fact that they're breaking all existing merchandising records during their North American road jaunt. (*Hit Parader*, Jan. 1997: pg 21)

Resnicoff, in the aforementioned KISS-worshipping article in *Musician*, also discussed the unfavorable business side of the band. The tone of his article changes briefly when, in this interview with the band's Gene Simmons, Resnicoff asked about "Kiss Inc.." (Resnicoff, 1996: pg 79) After responding with the fact that all bands truly have "Inc." after their name, Simmons responded to the interviewer's questions in regard to membership in the band and whether the other two members (Bruce Kulick and Eric Singer) are really members or employees, and also to whether Ace Frehley and Peter Criss are employed in the same way. Simmons said that each had a slice of the proverbial pie, a "proprietary interest" (Resnicoff, 1996: pg 79).

Pete Harper, in a *Hit Parader* article titled "Kiss: Cool Customers," was critical of the monetary motivations of KISS in regard to their reunion.

No matter what they may say, this tour ain't about art, buster, it's about raking in the almighty dollar, and when it comes to high finance banking, Kiss have once again proven to be rock and roll's master manipulators. (Harper, 1997: pg 32)

This criticism seems to fall short of judging the reunion solely for the money negatively. In this case, the criteria of valuation employed is similar to that of authenticity. Furthermore, this is not a postmodern sensibility, as Harper does not seem indifferent to the difference.

Robert LaFranco's valuation of KISS in his *Forbes* article entitled "Retread Rock" provided interesting alternative criteria of valuation in that it did not reflect the criteria of valuation of authenticity or a postmodern



sensibility. This issue of *Forbes*, the yearly "Top 40 Entertainers" issue, featured KISS on the cover with the cover blurb "Retread Rock '96: Four middle-aged guys decide it's time to save for retirement."<sup>18</sup> In short, KISS were valued by *Forbes* (#29 of top forty entertainers of the year, grossing approximately \$27 million in 1996) and LaFranco for their business sense and financial success: the very things that makes them suspicious in regard to other criteria of valuation. As LaFranco recounted, "The band learned a lot about business in the long, dry period"(LaFranco, 1996: pg 160). When LaFranco wrote that "Kiss is cashing in on the nostalgia that people ... feel as their own youth fades into middle age"(LaFranco, 1996: pg 156), he was not disgusted by the cash-in, but rather seemed impressed with the band's ability to satisfy a market demand.

It's more noise than music, but fans don't care. By the time the tour ends in December 1997, Kiss will have sold about \$100 million worth of tickets, another \$30 million worth of merchandise and perhaps \$30 million more in CDs, books and videotapes. That's enough to put the band at number 29 on the FORBES Top 40 this year.(LaFranco, 1996: pg 156)

As discussed above, a criteria of valuation that seems to apply to KISS is that of seeing the band as in control of their careers. This control can also be valued positively in terms of authenticity: that is, authenticity as the appearance of control over the product or art. Dick Hebdige writes that for some artists

the important issues for the artist have less to do with staying "honest" and "authentic" and refusing to "sell out" than with grabbing and retaining control of the product at every stage and in all its forms. (quoted in Jones, 1992: pg 6)

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<sup>18</sup>Of course, *Forbes* cannot be considered as falling within the domain of the rock press, and LaFranco is not a rock writer.

Steve Jones writes that "Hebdige is less concerned with what is and is not authentic than with *who* is responsible for the creative activity"(Jones, 1992: pg 6). KISS, then, can be seen as authentic in that they exercise extraordinary control over their "product." In regard to the aforementioned KISS conventions, LaFranco wrote that "Finally the founders, Simmons and Stanley, decided to take control themselves and started a comeback based on the band's original image"(LaFranco, 1996: pg 160). For LaFranco, this taking of control was therefore valued positively, if not as authentic. LaFranco also valued the spectacle that is a KISS show, if only in terms of value for money. "If the old rockers know anything, its how to put on a show"(LaFranco, 1996: pg 158).

Spectacle can be read as suspicious in terms of authenticity. Even Gene Simmons has in the past depreciated spectacle. Steve Newton discussed a 1992 interview in the *Georgia Straight* in which Simmons was quoted as denying the possibility or probability of a makeup reunion.

"Every day of the year there are bankers holding up cheques in front of our faces, saying 'Put the makeup back on and you can keep this big cheque.' And even though it's appealing, we don't really want to do that because it'll become like a Las Vegas show."(Newton, 1996(b): pg 59)

Thus, at a particular moment in the career path or history of KISS, even Gene Simmons thought the idea of an original lineup, full makeup spectacle was unappealing (and inauthentic).

There is a market for the spectacle, however. LaFranco wrote that "...aging fans seem to miss the bangs and the whistles..."(LaFranco, 1996: pg 158). Today, Simmons sees spectacle as democratic

"It's great to have beatnik art and it should exist in the coffeehouse circuit, but the people want John Philip Sousa, stuff with beating

drums and big trumpets, and they wanna march!"(Resnicoff, 1996: pg 31)

Simmons positioned the need for spectacle as (historically) post grunge. "It was interesting to see everybody want to commit suicide. I now declare it over - let's rock"(Resnicoff, 1996: pg 79). It would seem, then, that (as for the Sex Pistols) there was an appropriate moment in history when such a reunion was both desirable and appropriate.

In 1996, Simmons offered no apologies for the spectacle. In an interview in *Musician*, Matt Resnicoff asked Simmons about the spectacle.

**Why summon all this spectacle when you could just reunite the four original members and do roughly the same business?**

I guess 'cause we can. We wanna bring spectacle back.(Resnicoff, 1996: pg 79)

In this case, Resnicoff spoke of spectacle as bad or suspicious, but not necessarily as inauthentic. Furthermore, this valuation did not reflect a postmodern sensibility in that Resnicoff was not indifferent to the difference. Simmons explained that spectacle can be valued positively.

"Well, when you go to a football game and people scream their heads off and a scribe sits down and describes what it means, he's not going to have much to write, but you can't discount the *spectacle*. If an event, act, or band means absolutely nothing, that doesn't mean it's not valid, because meaningless noise is one of the great reasons for being alive. Sounds good, feels good. Maybe that's as far as we should get."(Resnicoff, 1996: pg 28)

It might be seen, then, that Simmons (self-serving) comments in 1996 reflected a postmodern sensibility in regard to spectacle.

If the music of KISS does not stand alone, then the spectacle was necessary for the success of the reunion tour. In 1996, it may be more important than ever: "This time out they have to blow more shit up, be bigger, grander, louder and stupider than ever"(Smith, 1996: pg 48). Indeed,

the spectacle that is a KISS show is serious business. As David Browne noted in *Entertainment Weekly* in an article titled "Sex, Drudgery, and Rock & Roll: My life of hell, humiliation, and groupie herding on the road with KISS", "The concert - rock spectacle at its most entertaining - is formatted within an inch of its codpieced life"(Browne, 1996(a): pg 25). This rigidity of format could be read negatively as inauthentic, even if we are dealing with spectacle. Of course, this implies "authentic spectacle" (or perhaps authentic inauthenticity).

What of the aforementioned value for the dollar? In his interview with Resnicoff, Simmons speaks to the current state of live performances by big bands. "The vibe is that it's not credible to give people their money's worth"(Resnicoff, 1996: pg 79). Paul Stanley is quoted in *Rolling Stone* on the same subject.

"I came to the realization that America is thirsty for entertainment, and I have brought them rock & roll Gatorade. There are millions of people who want more than what they've been getting, and I want to make sure that they don't leave the table until they're full"(Dunn et al., 1996/1997: pg 45)

This hailing or positive valuation of spectacle points to fun despite inauthenticity, or indifference to difference. Ultimately (for some writers, musicians and fans), what matters is a good time and value for the dollar. Once again, it is a matter of viewing spectacle as potentially authentic.

Another means of evaluating the reunion tour of KISS positively, then, is by viewing it as authentically inauthentic. This appreciation acknowledges the inauthentic status of the band by the criteria of valuation of authenticity, but it awards the band authentic status in its very inauthenticity. This positioning can be seen as being within a postmodern sensibility in that

it is indifferent to the difference: that is, it values the inauthentic as worthy despite its inauthenticity. R.J. Smith wrote in *Spin* that

if the summer of '96 is a new iron age, it's not a new age of irony. Kiss have been apart for so long that they can't possibly occupy the same niche in the pop consciousness. What was once contemptible comes back collectible. The kind of people who'd call you a fag for liking Kiss in high school are going to be shouting it out the loudest for them this time around. Kiss split up as the biggest, richest joke band in the history of the universe, disparaged by hipsters and rock critics coast to coast as showbiz.(Smith, 1996: pg 46)

Smith perfectly captured KISS' shift from the inauthentic to the authentically inauthentic. "They went out as cheese, and they come back as well...*fromage*, anyway"(Smith, 1996: pg 46). This KISS Army becomes the "Kitsch Army"(Smith, 1996: pg 46).

This sensibility was captured in a concert review of the KISS reunion tour by David Wild in *Rolling Stone*.

By many objective musical standards, Kiss are shit, but as their enduring appeal suggests, they are indeed good - occasionally even great - shit.(Wild, 1996(a): pg 31)

To expand this thought, but noting that authenticity can be earned over time, regardless of the quality of the original product, Wild noted "Sure Kiss suck, but give them a little credit - they've sucked for more than 20 years"(Wild, 1996(a): pg 31).

There were few reviews of KISS concerts in the rock press in 1996.<sup>19</sup> Only a fun, playful positive review would seem to have been warranted, as a negative review would seem to miss the point. Sean Palmerston provided a fine example of what a KISS concert review (perhaps) should be in *Exclaim!*:

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<sup>19</sup>However, perhaps this shouldn't be surprising, as one might see no point in reviewing the band's concerts (as they are merely recreations of events from which everyone knows what to expect).

"It was a middle-class suburban white trash teenager's dream come true, and I wouldn't have missed it for the world"(Palmerston, 1996: pg 30).

There were few reviews of the 1996 KISS CD release *You Wanted The Best, You Got The Best!!* Essentially a re-release of live tracks from the 1970s, it was largely ignored by the rock press. Chris Yurkiw of Montréal's *Mirror* took the opportunity to discuss how he felt about the band and their reunion

Kiss has always been about being 13 years old, but what happens when a fan's age has flipped numerals by the time the original members reunite? Well, first you realize that playing air guitar is like riding a bicycle, and then you think "Plus ça change...," 'cause Kiss are back to pumping out product at a pace to match their '74 - '77 heyday. After the recent self-produced tribute album, \$200 coffee-table book, \$100-ticket convention tour and MTV Unplugged album, this CD is recycled tracks from *Alive*, *Alive II*, and *Unearthed Alive*. Who Cares? Unless you're really into getting Ace Frehley and Peter Criss back on their financial feet, don't even bother.(Yurkiw, 1996(b): pg 16)

Barely a review, Yurkiw gave *You Wanted The Best, You Got The Best!!* a 13 out of 31.

Many writers pitted the Sex Pistols and KISS reunions against each other. Having been contemporaries in their respective heydays, and particularly as the Sex Pistols had set themselves up to destroy such bands as KISS, their concurrent reunions begged for a head-to-head comparison. David Wild, in a *Rolling Stone* article entitled "Tours: From Sex Pistols to Kiss, the Summer of ...'76?," equated the two

1996 looks to be the pretty vacant summer when we lose our remaining punk innocence and confront the fact that maybe there wasn't all that much difference between the Sex Pistols and Kiss after all.(Wild, 1996(b): pg 52)

This valuation of the two bands shows an indifference to the difference between the Sex Pistols and KISS, and what could be termed a postmodern

sensibility. Bob Mould, formerly of Hüsker Dü and Sugar, responded to Dave Thompson's question in *Alternative Press*.

**What is the cosmic significance of the fact that the Sex Pistols reunited just as the Ramones broke up? And what do you think about punk reunions?**

There might be more cosmic significance in that Kiss seemed to appear at the exact same time. Therein lies the irony. I presume that the Sex Pistols were out to destroy everything that Kiss were about; both of them were able to reunite - but Kiss triumphed - if you look at the box office figures. The more things change, the more they stay the same. It didn't really change all that much at the end of the day, and part of it might be that the Pistols became part of the system this time around.(Thompson, 1997: pg 34)

Once again, the bands are seen at the same level: that ultimately, there is no difference between them. The Sex Pistols historical authenticity ultimately was meaningless, as was KISS' inauthenticity.

More often than not, KISS was declared the winner in the war with the Sex Pistols that the rock press constructed. As Wild noted in *Rolling Stone*, "After all, here Kiss are kicking box-office ass when former press darlings the Sex Pistols are selling out only artistically"(Wild, 1996(a): pg 31). Eric Weisbard, in a *Spin* article entitled "'96: The Year In Music," also declared KISS the winner.

Reuniting the same year the Sex Pistols did (and the Ramones "retired"...), Kiss didn't just win the ticket competition - they probably got more respect. Kiss, the Pistols, and the Ramones: All three understood that rock 'n' roll could survive its suburbanization only by becoming a willing cartoon. All three knew to dress up and put on a show. All three owed the New York Dolls bigtime. (...) The Sex Pistols were on a mission, and though in England they returned as national heroes, in America they come off as ersatz, trying too hard - everything Brits accuse Americans of.

Whereas Kiss, always punk fellow travellers (Sex Pistols=Love Gun), wrote just enough obvious anthems to get them into venues where Ace Frehley could shoot fireworks out of his guitar, Gene Simmons spit out the blood of his groupies, and hockey bubbas pound each other's backs in ecstatic appreciation. Blood and circuses, pure and simple. Yet if time renders harsh sounds palatable, it also has a way of making crass schemes the only ones worth believing in, and who could deny that Kiss had the Pistols and the Ramones beat for crassness?(Weisbard, 1997: pg 40)

Chris Yurkiw, in his review of the Sex Pistols' "Filthy Lucre Live" in Montréal's *Mirror*, also seems to posit KISS as the victors.

As went 1977 so goes 1996: never mind Love Gun, here's the Sex Pistols. Of course, it's a lot easier for a cock-rock act like Kiss to hop on the reunion trail than a cocky John Lydon & Co. Kiss, so they say, is meaningless, but the Sex Pistols were utterly significant because once upon a time they turned rock on its hardened head. The irony is that the Kiss get-together is actually more meaningful than that of the Pistols, if only because it pleases fans. No one who understood the Sex Pistols *wants* a reunion.(Yurkiw, 1996(a):pg 18)

In this instance, KISS wins because the Sex Pistols were (in the past, at least) authentic: that is, the bands are judged by different standards (i.e., by their different histories/career paths). Yurkiw viewed the 1996 version of the Sex Pistols as inauthentic by the criteria of valuation of authenticity in their straying from their authentic past. KISS, on the other hand, did not have to live with the burden of formerly having been authentic, and had only to please the fans to be worthy. Furthermore, KISS could be seen to have been "authentically KISS" in 1996.

As the concerts of both the Sex Pistols and KISS were only two days apart in Vancouver, *Georgia Straight* reporter Steve Newton had the opportunity to review the concerts of both bands in the same article. In "The Revenge of the Wrinkled Rock Gods," Newton compared the lead singers'



physiques, referring to the Sex Pistols' Lydon as "the pudgy punk" with the "flabby butt," while praising KISS' Paul Stanley as "impressively buffed"(Newton, 1996(a): pg 63). Once again, KISS won. In regard to the Sex Pistols' performance, Newton noted that "...something was missing. Where was the venom? Where was the rottenness? Where, indeed, was the punk?"(Newton, 1996(a): pg 63). The KISS concert, on the other hand, "...was all big, bright, loud fun..."(Newton, 1996(a): pg 63). Once again, we see the bands were judged by different standards or criteria of valuation. The Sex Pistols must act authentically punk to be valuable; that is, the band must be true to their (and punk's) historical past, and must not be seen as having deviated from their career path. KISS, however, must only entertain to be worthy of praise, as their historical selves were entertainers (that is, they were true to their historical selves). It would seem, then, that KISS will always win in this situation (KISS versus the Sex Pistols in regard to truth to their historical selves), as it is much easier for KISS to reenact their past than for the Sex Pistols to do the same.

Phil Sheridan, in his *Magnet* article titled "Never Mind the Sex Pistols, Here's Kiss," declared KISS the winner and derided the Sex Pistols in the process.

Look at any official history of rock 'n' roll - and there are dozens of such books, all penned by chimp-spanking losers who spent their teens smoking hash and trying to figure out whose head the lunatic was in - and it will say the same thing: KISS was nothing more than a footnote, a sight gag played on gullible, 12-year-old boys, a novelty act. The Pistols, meanwhile, saved rock 'n' roll from precisely the same overwrought, bloated, corporate garbage that KISS personified. With their attitude and their defiance, the Pistols revolutionized rock and launched punk, the new wave and the whole DIY concept.

Bullshit. Steaming heaping piles of it.(Sheridan, 1996)

The historical authenticity and credibility of the Sex Pistols (and rock writers) was called into question. Sheridan then set up an outstanding historical-role reversal.

They were cartoon characters. Frauds. Showmen rather than musicians. Stupid, lowbrow and phonier than hell. They were playing a stupid prank on the rest of the world and they got paid for it. (Just to be clear, this is the Sex Pistols we're talking about.)(Sheridan, 1996)

The Sex Pistols were posited as worthless, and all who viewed them otherwise were disparaged. The destruction of the Sex Pistols authenticity continued.

Let's make it simple. If the Sex Pistols meant anything at all, if they even had a shred of credibility, they wouldn't be making a mad cash-grab tour...in 1996, two decades after the fact.(Sheridan, 1996)

If the Sex Pistols were authentic, which according to Sheridan was not the case, then their reunion would have made them inauthentic. In both scenarios, Sheridan saw the band as unworthy in comparison to KISS.

And now, 20 years later? The Pistols are proving their irrelevance by taking the stage again. KISS never claimed to have any relevance. All those guys wanted to do was rock out, party and get laid. That they were so homely they needed pancake makeup just makes them that much cooler.(Sheridan, 1996)

Again, the bands were held up to different standards: the Sex Pistols were inauthentic because of their authenticity (or rather that they were being judged as inauthentic for betraying the authentic past), while KISS was judged to be authentic by their very inauthenticity (they had authentic inauthenticity). The overall tone of Sheridan's article was that of sarcastic fun: he got to ridicule the rock writers for having posited the Sex Pistols as the critics' darlings they had become while justifying his love of a historically disparaged band. Sheridan turned the criteria of valuation of authenticity on its head: KISS was fun, fun is authentic (or valuable), therefore KISS was

authentic. The Sex Pistols weren't fun, and thus were inauthentic. This should not be confused with a postmodern sensibility; Sheridan was not indifferent to difference, but rather reversed the values of the authentic and the inauthentic. His positing of KISS as authentically inauthentic can, however, be seen to reflect a postmodern sensibility. The importance of this article is that it shows that the criteria of valuation of authenticity and of a postmodern sensibility are not truly separate and/or mutually exclusive: rather, they are interdependent, and their relationship is complex.

To conclude, KISS were judged by different criteria of valuation or standards than either the Sex Pistols or Metallica by rock writers in 1996, as they have not historically been considered authentic. If the very act of reuniting and touring twenty years after one's heyday primarily for the cash is inauthentic, how does this apply to a band that wasn't considered authentic in the first place? Importantly, the 1996 incarnation of KISS could be seen as authentically KISS: that is, they were true to their historical selves. Furthermore, in the case of KISS, other criteria of valuation came to bear. KISS were valued positively within the corpus of this project in three main ways: as spectacle and fun (perhaps reflecting a postmodern sensibility), as authentically inauthentic (which could also be seen to reflect a postmodern sensibility), and as business geniuses (financial success in the business world). Of course all three of these appreciations are linked to the criteria of valuation of authenticity and are exactly the concerns that would signal inauthenticity. However, all three show an indifference to the difference between the authentic and the inauthentic (although an appreciation of KISS' business acumen does not necessarily reflect a postmodern sensibility). A postmodern sensibility permits the appreciation of things such as spectacle, and works to bring "inauthentic" bands such as KISS to the same level as "authentic" bands

such as the Sex Pistols (at which point the authentic bands may be blown away by a superior live show).

Finally, although the band's reunion was valued negatively under the criteria of valuation of authenticity, these criticisms seemed to miss the point. It's KISS: what did you expect?

## Chapter Four:

### Metallica

(H)eadlining hard rock's resurgence in 1996 was Metallica who not only topped the charts throughout the summer with **Load**, their first album in four years, but also lured millions of rock hounds to the previously alternative world of Lollapalooza. By cramming almost 90 minutes of music onto their latest disc, and promising another new effort by mid-'97, there's no doubt that Metallica have returned in a BIG way! While **Load** has yet to show the sales "legs" enjoyed by the Metallimen's previous effort, their legendary self-titled "black" album, the disc's chart-topping status served to once again prove that the reports of heavy metal's untimely death had been greatly exaggerated.(Andrews, 1996: pg 46)

Metallica, unlike the Sex Pistols and KISS, did not reunite in 1996. The band did make a comeback of sorts, however, as they released their first album in five years, *Load*, and headlined the Lollapalooza tour. As Rob Andrews noted in the above quotation in the obsequious *Hit Parader* magazine, this return was indeed an event. *Hit Parader's* "The Year in Hard Rock" issue's Top Five lists positioned Metallica as the #2 Band, the #5 Live Act, the #2 Loudest Band, as having the #3 Video ("Until It Sleeps"), and as having the #1 Album of 1996 (*Hit Parader*, 1996: pg 42 - 43).

The 1996 return of Metallica differed from the returns of both the Sex Pistols and KISS in that they had only been absent in terms of recording (or releasing records) and had continued to tour throughout the five years in which they hadn't released an album. The two problematic aspects of the 1996 incarnation of Metallica for some fans and rock writers were their new aesthetics (in both their sound and appearance) and their headlining of the

1996 Lollapalooza tour (a tour that has traditionally been seen as featuring "alternative" bands). In both cases, the band appeared to have strayed from their historical selves or their career path; that is, the changes in the band were seen as being untrue to their past (and were often judged negatively by both rock writers and fans). Metallica did not betray its past by reuniting, but rather by changing its aesthetics (and as a result, perhaps, the genre to which they belong). Abandoning one's genre for another can be seen both positively (in terms of growth or maturity) and negatively (as "sellout", as inauthentic, and/or as untrue to the genre or to a historical past).

*Guitar World* released a special issue in 1996 of their *Guitar Legends* magazine series which documented the history of Metallica as it has been covered by *Guitar World*. In the magazine's editorial entitled "Metal Misfits," Jeff Colchamiro wrote that

Metallica have never really fit in with or conformed to popular music trends. In the Eighties, they came out of nowhere - dominating the underground heavy metal scene and selling records without the support of radio or MTV. As the Nineties rolled around, just as they were starting to gain some mainstream popularity, grunge and alternative music changed everything. (...)

Now, at a time when most Eighties metal bands have either called it quits or have been reduced to playing clubs, Metallica has two albums on *Billboard's* Top 200, and three more on the Top Pop Catalog Albums chart. (Colchamiro, 1996: pg 6)

Metallica's first single was their song "Hit The Lights" on a compilation titled *Metal Massacre* in 1982. In early 1983, the lineup of James Hetfield (vocals and guitar), Lars Ulrich (drums) and Dave Mustaine (lead guitar) was joined by Cliff Burton (bass). Later that same year, Mustaine (now of the band Megadeth), was ousted and replaced with Exodus' Kirk Hammett, and the band's first record, *Kill 'Em All*, was recorded. Metallica toured North

America and Europe in 1984, and signed with Elektra Records, who released *Ride The Lightning*. By 1985, the band was headlining tours, and they played Castle Donnington's "Monsters of Rock" Festival (for 70,000 people) as well as Bill Graham's "Day on the Green" Festival in Oakland, California (for 80,000 people). Metallica's third album in four years, *Master of Puppets*, was released in 1986, a year that also saw the band open for Ozzy Osbourne on tour. It was during a 1986 tour of Europe that the band's original bassist, Cliff Burton, died in a bus crash. His replacement, Jason Newsted, joined the band in time for tours of Japan and Canada. Metallica released the *\$5.98 EP*, a collection of punk and hardcore covers, in 1987, as well as their first home video, *Cliff 'Em All*. In 1988, the band's fourth full-length record, *...and Justice For All*, was released, and the band's first video ("One") was shot. Their breakthrough single, "One" was performed on the Grammys in 1989. In 1991, Metallica released the self titled *Metallica* (or as it is commonly known, "The Black Album").<sup>20</sup> The band toured on and off from the release of this album until the recording and release of their 1996 album, *Load*.

Like the Sex Pistols, Metallica were at one time considered to be representative of their genre. As Gene Simmons of KISS clarified for Matt Resnicoff in *Musician*, "...however anybody talked about death metal and thrash, there's only Metallica when you think about it"(Resnicoff, 1996: pg 28). Just as he positioned the Sex Pistols as representing punk, Simmons sees the metal/thrash genre as being best exemplified by Metallica.

In the mid-eighties, Metallica were as alternative as today they are mainstream. In short, their roots are authentic. "Indeed," as Dan Snierson wrote in *Entertainment Weekly*, "the Bay Area band's do-it yourself indie

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<sup>20</sup>This brief history was adapted from an article in *Guitar Legends* by K.J. Doughton (Doughton, 1996: pg 37).

roots are undeniable"(Snierson, 1996: pg 37). This signals a reception or valuation of authenticity. Vinny Cecolini called Metallica the "Kings of Metal" in *Hit Parader's* "The Year in Hard Rock" issue(Cecolini, 1997: pg 22-23). In his *Guitar Legends* article "Garage Days Revisited," K.J. Doughton wrote about the early music of Metallica on *Kill 'Em All*. "Some called the music thrash, while others preferred the term "power metal." Whatever the label, Metallica's unique hybrid of sounds created a whole new genre"(Doughton, 1996: pg 104). The band's historic valuation as authentic or as worthy of value is supported by J.D. Considine's review of Metallica's recorded history previous to *Load* in the *Rolling Stone Album Guide*. Of the six releases listed (including the *\$5.98 EP*), the lowest score on a scale of five is three and a half stars, with two fours, one four and a half, and one five (for *Metallica*)(Considine, 1992: pg 191).

Innovative, incendiary and influential, Metallica almost single-handedly reinvented thrash, transforming it from monochromatic hyperspeed sludge into a music capable of remarkable depth, resonance and beauty.(Considine, 1992: pg 191)

Metallica, then, have been historically viewed as perhaps the most exemplary of the genre to which the band's music had historically belonged (that of thrash/heavy metal). Jeff Spurrier wrote in an article (originally published in 1988 and republished in *Guitar Legends* Metallica issue) titled "Metal Militia" that

Although Metallica is one of the leading proponents of speed metal, the band has distinguished itself from its peers with complex song structures, issue-oriented lyrics, long songs that defy handy radio formatting and an appreciation for melody even within the over-amped environment of metal, a genre not known for subtlety.(Spurrier, 1996: pg 12)



It is important to note that Metallica's success in the 1980s was without the aid of radio or video support. Considine noted that it was *Master of Puppets* that marked Metallica's real commercial breakthrough, going platinum despite an almost total lack of airplay. Not that the band was in any way radio-friendly: with an average (song) length approaching seven minutes and a sound that is unrelenting in its aggression, the album accommodates no one. (Considine, 1992: pg 191)

In a strange parallel with KISS, the band's initial success was based on a strong word-of-mouth response from the fans.<sup>21</sup> Jeff Spurrier wrote in the aforementioned 1988 article "Metal Militia" of the band's grass roots support. "Their following has been built by word of mouth not hype or MTV or radio play" (Spurrier, 1996: pg 104). Music that is supported primarily by fans despite a lack of support from radio and video networks makes a claim to authenticity (for example, the Grateful Dead). "With their reliance upon word-of-mouth popularity and a casual, down-to-earth style, the band has become a true grass roots phenomenon" (Spurrier, 1996: pg 12).

The first instances of negative valuations of Metallica as inauthentic came in 1991 in response to the band's *Metallica* album. The historically authentic band was labeled as "sellouts" (and inauthentic) in regard to suspicious features of the new album: the band had chosen a mainstream producer and the songs were (to some extent) more radio friendly. In regard to their new producer, Bob Rock, Jeff Gilbert wrote in "Black Power" (reprinted in *Guitar Legends*) that

Taking on the Metallica project was a critical step in his otherwise Top 40-oriented career. "People will be saying Bob made Metallica sound like Bon Jovi," remarks James. "They don't realize that no one screws

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<sup>21</sup>As Gene Simmons told Resnicoff, "As soon as [1975's] *Alive* came out, a double album which sold millions and millions with no radio, no videos, critics hated us...the people spoke" (Resnicoff, 1996: pg 31).

with us, except us. Bob fit right into the program and the direction we were going."(Gilbert, 1996: pg 18)

It is precisely this new direction that James Hetfield is referring to that worried the fans and raised concerns in regard to selling out and authenticity. Certainly, Rock's commercially successful background has raised more than a few eyebrows among Metallica's many supporters. The notion of Hetfield and company opting for the producer's trademark approach - crisp, clear guitars and radio-friendly hooks - is enough to severely traumatize fans who drink in sledgehammer chords like they're mother's milk.(Gilbert, 1996: pg 18)

The worry, then, is overproduction (that is, towards pop). Production is often a concern in regard to authenticity. As Steve Jones writes,

A good sound is not necessarily an authentic one. A common criticism found in magazines like *Rolling Stone*, *Creem*, *Spin*, and many others is that a recording sounds too slick or glossy, that is, overproduced - the sound may be good, but at the expense of feeling, authenticity. The average musician is caught between wanting to sound good and wanting to sound authentic....(Jones, 1992: pg 193)

Were the calls of "sellout" only a result of a slicker sounding Metallica?

Another possibility is the possessiveness of the fans. As Sarah Thornton writes (in regard to club undergrounds),

it seems to me that "to sell" means "to betray" and "selling out" refers to the process by which artists or songs sell beyond their initial market, which, in turn, loses its sense of possession, exclusive ownership and familiar belonging. In other words, selling out means *selling to outsiders*....(Thornton, 1994: pg 180)

Fans of Metallica may simply want to keep their band to themselves, and the more accessible and popular the band becomes to outsiders, the less the original fans can claim sole possession.

Of course, one might argue that the aesthetic changes Metallica made for both 1991 and 1996 did not represent bowing to commercial pressures but

were rather reflections of maturity. As Simon Frith wrote in regard to concerns of the band Hüsker Dü and their signing to a major label, "... their problem is not selling out but growing up"(Frith, 1988: pg 93). It is important to note that the changes that Metallica have gone through in regard to its last two releases have been received positively as "evolution" by some rock writers.

Metallica's 1991 *Metallica* album was released just prior to major shifts in popular music. Jonathon Gold wrote in *Spin* that the "Last time Metallica recorded an album, the pop-structured though recognizably Metallica-esque *Metallica*, Lollapalooza was just beginning, and the "Seattle sound" referred to Queensrÿche"(Gold, 1996: pg 97). The "alternative" or "grunge" musical genre (best exemplified by Seattle bands Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Soundgarden and as featured on the alternative-minded Lollapalooza tour) is often affirmed as the bomb that leveled heavy metal. Tom Beaujour wrote in *Guitar Legends* that *Metallica* was

heavy metal's swan song, or at least the last recording to be successfully marketed as "metal." Today, *Metallica* stands as the last towering monument to an era marked by bombast and excess.(Beaujour, 1996: pg 59)

Although successful, *Metallica* may have done better. As Gold notes it "...had the misfortune of coming out on the cusp of grunge..."(Gold, 1996: pg 97).

As the Sex Pistols were to punk, Nirvana were to grunge and what has come to be known as "alternative rock." It might be argued that Nirvana actually had more of an impact on the direction of popular music than the Sex Pistols and punk. Furthermore, the death of popular heavy metal is most often linked to a particular Nirvana song. In an article in *Guitar World* titled "Metal Health" by Tom Gogola, the Nirvana song "Smells Like Teen Spirit"

is consistently presented as the blow that knocked the wind out of heavy metal. Gogola quotes Jani Lane of the band Warrant.

Warrant's breakup, however, was a direct result of the changing of the guard, as Lane bluntly reports: "I believe that 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' was the song that ushered out the arena rock scene and ushered in alternative rock."(Gogola, 1996: pg 188)

According to Gogola, one record company, CMC, "...has carved a niche by signing bands that had glorious runs through the Eighties only to die ignominiously at the advent of Nirvana"(Gogola, 1996: pg 188). The critical response to Metallica cannot be separated from the critical shift in attitude towards "alternative" music, itself once considered authentic. Six years after the release of Nirvana's *Nevermind*, the term "alternative" has become "...an overused meaningless word that has taken an evil etymological turn in this post-"Smells Like Teen Spirit" world"(Dawn, 1996: pg 22).

In any event, the domain of popular music had changed dramatically between the release of *Metallica* and *Load*, Beaujour quoted guitarist Kirk Hammett in his article "Born Again" for *Guitar Legends*.

"When we were making our last record, nobody even knew who the fuck Kurt Cobain was!" Kirk Hammett, at ease in the lounge of the New York City recording studio, where he and the rest of Metallica are rushing to finish their sixth album, *Load*, is acutely aware of how much the musical climate has changed in the five years since the band put out their last studio recording.(Beaujour, 1996: pg 59)

However, as Gogola proudly declared, "Pump your fist in the air and breathe a sigh of relief: metal has survived the grunge revolution"(Gogola, 1996: pg 41).

The focus of rock writers in regard to the 1996 incarnation of Metallica was not entirely on the music. As Steve Jones writes, popular music consumers, and producers, regularly go to sources apart from the music itself to determine the authenticity of a performance,

the meaning of a lyric, or the character of a performer.(Jones, 1993: pg 79)

In regard to Metallica in 1996, consumers needed only to look to the first of two aesthetic changes made by the band between *Metallica* and *Load*: their new look. As Vinny Cecolini wrote in *Hit Parader*,

Ironically, the biggest controversy currently surrounding the band centers on their new, shorn-lock hair cuts. Some of the band's loyal fans seem more concerned with the length of their hair than their music.(Cecolini, 1997: pg 23)

Indeed, almost every article addressing Metallica in 1996 mentioned the band's new look. David Fricke, in *Rolling Stone*, noted that the band members

have all cut their metal-dude locks in the past year. (The 33-year old Newsted, who buzzed his crop about three years ago, is letting it grow out again.) Hammett, a body-piercing enthusiast, has a labret - a small silver spike - dangling from just below his lower lip.(Fricke, 1996(b): pg 36)

This focus on the change of appearance of the band may be attributable to the fact that Metallica changed its look from the genre of heavy metal and its strict everyman's uniform of jeans, black t-shirts and long hair to a more style-conscious or trendy look.

Many of the rock writers attempted to link the change in the band's appearance to the change in the band's music.

Perhaps nothing reflects Metallica's embrace of Nineties musical values more than the band's striking new hairstyles, although both guitarists are reluctant to attribute significance to the cosmetic change: "I had fucking long hair for 20 years! Of course I cut it!" grumbles Hammett.(Beaujour, 1996: pg 59)

Snierson also felt the change in the look of the band reflected the change in the music. "For those insistent on searching for a deeper meaning, think of the shorn 'dos as a trimming of the band's prog-thrash excesses..."(Snierson,

1996: pg 38). It was *Rolling Stone*, in its special "Year In Rock" issue, that had the most fun with the change in the band's appearance. Two pictures, a "before" picture featuring original bassist Cliff Burton and the boys with long hair, cutoff t-shirts and jeans, and an after picture of the band at the 1996 *MTV Video Awards* sporting the new look, are offered for perusal. The caption below the two pictures reads

What the...? 1996 marked the first studio record in five years, *Load*. Along the way, there was another development. Note the photo at top: the scraggly hair untouched by conditioner, the Everyguy T-shirts, the jeans the fellas had since seventh grade. Now consult photo 2. Hello, styling products! What well-groomed hair, brushed tastefully off the forehead! Dig the shiny shoes, the fly threads! Where's the cell phone?(Dunn et al., 1996/1997: pg 62)

This ironic reception has fun with the changes, and ultimately displays an indifference to difference. The other comments on the change in the look of the band are uncritical in that they are merely pointing out that the changes in the look of the band are connected to the changes in the music and don't value the changes positively or negatively.

The second and arguably more important aesthetic change that the band displayed in 1996 was their sound on their 1996 release, *Load*. As Beaujour reported in *Guitar Legends*, "Five years after the epic "Black Album" the music world had radically changed - and so had Metallica"(Beaujour, 1996: pg 58 - 59).<sup>22</sup>

Some rock writers merely noted that the band had changed and did not evaluate this either positively or negatively. Jonathon Gold wrote in his record review of *Load* for *Spin* that the "... famous Metallica guitar sound - precise hollow bursts of white noise with the midrange cut all the way out - is nowhere to be heard"(Gold, 1996: pg 97). David Browne noted in

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<sup>22</sup>It should be noted that *Load* sold relatively well, debuting at #1 on the *Billboard* charts.

*Entertainment Weekly* in an article titled "Load Warriors" that the record shows a "... new sense of economy and concision..."(Browne, 1996(b): pg 57), and noted that "Ironically, grunge, a music born of far less musicianly boys and girls, has made the once famously raw Metallica sound slick, almost mathematical"(Browne, 1996(b): pg 57). Although labeling Metallica's sound as "slick" might be viewed as a negative valuation, Browne's review was ultimately uncritical.

More often than not, the reviews of *Load* tended to come down on one side of the fence. Mick Antoine wrote in his review for the *Mirror* that "*Load* is a heavy downer with its commercial overtones that verge on corporate rock with a capitol C"(Antoine, 1996: pg 16). Giving the record a rating of five out of ten, Antoine pledged "Count on this reviewer to not only ditch his promo copy but not bother ever seeing the band live again"(Antoine, 1996: pg 16). Antoine's review can be seen to have reflected the criteria of valuation of authenticity in that it judged the music as corporately corrupted.

The title of J.D. Considine's review in *Guitar World*, "Sad But True," gave away the direction his thumb was pointing. Although he gave the record three stars out of five, he informed the reader that there have been some major changes in the music between *Metallica* and *Load*:

Unfortunately, none of them are for the better.

Well, all right ... the haircuts aren't so bad. But the songs? Over-long, unimaginative and, for the most part, stuck in an enervating, mid-tempo plod, these tunes achieve what many fans would have considered impossible - they make Metallica seem boring.(Considine, 1996(a): pg 103)

Considine called the music on *Load* "grunge-by-numbers," opined that "...*Load* hardly seems like the work of innovators," and concluded by stating that "This is a *Load*, all-right. And you don't have to be Beavis or Butt-head

to figure out of what"(Considine, 1996(a): pg 103). Though Considine's review was negative, it did not judge the album by the criteria of valuation of authenticity. Rather, the judgment seemed to have been based on criteria of valuation pertaining to innovation.

Mitch Joel, in his review of *Load* for the *Hour*, was more disappointed than anything else. He gave the record a rating of three out of five, and wrote that "*Load* veers further away from past glories"(Joel, 1996(a): pg 16). He concluded that "Overall: the length...and the look...yield an unsettling verdict - the metallic throne has been vacated"(Joel, 1996(a): pg 16). The album was judged by criteria of valuation as to whether or not it was faithful to the past recordings and the genre they belonged to, that is, truth to their historical career path.

Other rock writers, however, valued the new record positively. David Fricke, in *Rolling Stone's* special "Year In Rock" issue, wrote in the "Year In Recordings" section of the fickle nature of some of the band's fans. "If Heavy-Metal fans are supposed to be such hardcore loyalists, what is it about a few haircuts, some eye-liner and a little songcraft that throws them onto such a dither?"(Fricke, 1996(a): pg 190). Fricke praised the record as the heaviest of the year, and reported that Hetfield was growing up. In this case, the criteria of valuation might be referred to as "weight."

In his *Musician* article titled "Monsters of Pop," Mac Randall discussed the radio-friendly *Load* single "Hero of the Day:"

Have our favorite purveyors of doom and crunch gone soft?

The rest of *Load* answers that question with a resounding no. But it also rams home what most Metallica enthusiasts have probably figured out already: This band's never going to make another *Kill 'Em All* or *Master of Puppets*.(Randall, 1996: pg 85)



Randall thus acknowledged the concerns of fans who would have Metallica frozen in the 1980s, but essentially told them to get over it. The new version of Metallica was valued positively, if different, and Randall opined that "...as pop songs go, "Hero of the Day" ain't too shabby"(Randall, 1996: pg 85).

Randall ultimately embraced the record and the new sound of the band:

To sum up: 14 songs, nearly 80 minutes of music that at its best (which is often) easily outweighs any would-be competitors. Was it worth waiting five years for? Absolutely.(Randall, 1996: pg 85)

Thus, Randall was indifferent to the shift in genre, and judged *Load* within this new genre positively.

Chuck Eddy wrote in *Spin* of this shift in genre. "Truth be told, they're not even playing heavy metal anymore - *Load* is more a boogie record, not to mention the catchiest and least pompous album the band has ever made"(Eddy, 1996: pg 68). Eddy was indifferent to the difference in terms of remaining true to the metal genre, but ultimately valued the music as catchy and modest.

In *Guitar Legends*, Beaujour valued the music on *Load* positively as a freshly infused hybrid of Metallica-style metal and grunge.

Metallica's new 'dos, however, are peanuts compared to the musical makeover undergone by the band. *Load* is a fiercely modern album, combining the moody melodicism of Seattle's best bands with the skull-splitting crunch that only Metallica can deliver.(Beaujour, 1996: pg 60)

In his *Rolling Stone* review, titled "Into the Groove: Metallica realize it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing," David Sprague called the music on *Load* "...post-grunge '90s rock," and gave the record four stars out of five (excellent)(Sprague, 1996: pg 85). Sprague, then, acknowledged the affect that the grunge/alternative "revolution" had on Metallica, and yet still valued the music on *Load* positively.

In his record review of *Load* in the *Georgia Straight*, Steve Newton called the new music "first-class raunch," and described the music as an "...accessible spin on the gritty machine-gun style of Metallica's early thrash outings"(Newton, 1996(c): pg 65). The music, in this case, was valued in part for its accessibility to the mainstream.

Whether Metallica's *Load* was valued positively or negatively, authentic or inauthentic (or otherwise), all rock writers noted major changes in the band's sound. The question arose: to which genre did they belong in 1996? As Jonathon Gold wrote in *Spin*, "It's even harder to figure where Metallica might fit now on AOR playlists..."(Gold, 1996: pg 97). Snierson described the band's situation.

Today, fresh from a where-have-*those*-guys-been hiatus, they find themselves in another strange place - an alternative-dominated world where metal music serves largely as a macho reminder of '80s overkill. But not only are Metallica surviving, they're trampling the alternative landscape with a leaner sound, a No. 1 album...scads of modern-rock-radio play, and - the ultimate alterna-visibility gig - top billing on this summer's Lollapalooza tour.(Snierson, 1996: pg 36)

Cecolini wrote that the band members "...find it hysterical that angry listeners are calling alternative rock radio stations complaining about hearing Metallica between the Smashing Pumpkins and Oasis"(Cecolini, 1996: pg 22).

Tom Beaujour asked the band in *Guitar Legends* how they feel about where they fit in.

GW: The listening public's tastes have shifted radically since you made your last album.

Hetfield: They've completely shifted since we started writing the songs for *this* record.

Kirk Hammett: In the time between albums, we watched all this shit fly by and wondered, "How does Metallica fit into this?" And then we realized that we didn't fit into it at all, never have, and never really will.(Beaujour, 1996: pg 61)

This is the odd position that Metallica find themselves in: they have moved from being an alternative metal band in the early to mid 1980s, to a more mainstream rock band in the late 1980s and early 1990s, to a newly alternative (but mainstream) "modern rock" categorization. Unlike REM, who manage to somehow maintain their alternative status despite mainstream success, Metallica are not embraced by the alternative-elites.

Significant to this thesis was Metallica's 1996 headlining of the annual Lollapalooza tour. As this concert tour has historically been seen as the premier showcase for alternative rock bands, Metallica's headlining of the event was problematic for both alternative fans and fans of Metallica (and for rock writers). The headlining of the tour by a mainstream heavy metal band could be seen as problematic for alternative fans in that this seemed to conflict with the history and genre associated with Lollapalooza. This also seemed to be a betrayal of Metallica's historical selves, as they placed themselves in a performance situation (for alternative fans) that was outside of the genre to which they had historically belonged. The reception of Metallica as headliners was, thus, mixed. Jason Pettigrew wrote in an article titled "Lolla, Lolla, Lolla, Get Your Weirdos Here" in *Alternative Press* that "Lollapalooza...enters its sixth year with a line-up that's exciting ticket-holders and hardening cynics"(Pettigrew, 1996: pg 16). Though fans were receptive, many rock writers viewed Metallica not as their newly alternative/modern rock version, but as their early 1990s mainstream heavy metal incarnation (which, the criticism went, was wrong for Lollapalooza). A given rock writer's opinion seemed to depend on exactly how they view Metallica (that is, which genre they belong to) and how they view Lollapalooza itself (as an alternative or mainstream tour).

Some rock writers pointed out that neither Metallica nor Lollapalooza are truly alternative. Dan Snierson announced in his *Entertainment Weekly* article that "Alterna-rockers are irate: thrash kings Metallica headlining Lollapalooza '96?!" (Snierson, 1996: pg 34). David Wild wrote in *Rolling Stone* of "This summer's decreasingly alternative Lollapalooza - with such up-and-coming acts as Metallica, Soundgarden and the Ramones..."(Wild, 1996(b), pg 52). Also in *Rolling Stone*, David Fricke commented on Metallica's "...controversial headlining stint on this year's is-it-or-isn't-it-alternative Lollapalooza tour"(Fricke, 1996(b): pg 34).

Rock writers also wrote of the high metal content in 1996's Lollapalooza, even renaming the event "Metalpalooza"(Pratt and Swanson, 1996: pg 72). Chuck Eddy reminded *Spin* readers that the metal factor isn't new: "First let's get one thing straight: Lollapalooza has pretty much *always* been a heavy-metal fest"(Eddy, 1996: pg 68). According to Eddy, "...if anything, this summer's roster is a return to normalcy"(Eddy, 1996: pg 68).

So to call the 1996 tour a sellout just because Metallica have a dumb name and used to wear long hair constitutes either fishing for headlines, a conspiracy theory, or short-term memory loss.(Eddy, 1996: pg 68)

As with the Sex Pistols reunion and tour, many writers found Metallica's headlining of Lollapalooza to have been somewhat "punk." Fricke wrote in *Rolling Stone* that

With their typical disdain for the ordinary, Metallica have confronted both the droning predictability of big arena shows and the tribal polarity of the modern- and hard-rock audiences by crashing the Lollapalooza and mosh-pit party - at the top of the bill.(Fricke, 1996(b): pg 64)

Mark Geiger, a co-founder of Lollapalooza, told Pettigrew in *Alternative Press* that this shaking up of the predictable was their thinking, and that

"Metallica get it"(Pettigrew, 1996: pg 16). In a *Rolling Stone* article titled "This Old 'Palooza", Greg Cot quoted Metallica's James Hetfield as having said "The alternative-elite part of Lollapalooza seems to have been forgotten"(Cot, 1996: pg 31).

"The idea that we weren't supposed to be here is why I agreed to do Lollapalooza in the first place," Hetfield said. "There was absolutely no way I saw us playing Lollapalooza before this year. Now, I don't think it fucking matters."(Cot, 1996: pg 33)

Metal crusader Vinny Cecolini pointed out in *Hit Parader* that 1996 was Lollapalooza's most successful year, valued the hard rock/metal version of the tour positively, and compared it to Europe's "Monsters of Rock" traveling festival(Cecolini, 1996: pg 22).

Many rock writers wrote that Lollapalooza co-founder Perry Farrel was unhappy with the naming of Metallica as headliners of the tour, as well as with the rest of the metal lineup. As Cot recounted in *Rolling Stone*, "Farrel had introduced the festival in 1991 as a celebration of alternative sounds and lifestyles"(Cot, 1996: pg 31). The switch to a more mainstream group of acts reportedly angered Farrel. Montréal's *Mirror* remarked in its Lollapalooza lineup announcement that "...the lineup for the main stage reflects the departure of founder and "alternative guru" Perry Farrel, with an even higher amount of power chords in general"(*Mirror*, May 16 - 23, 1996: pg 14). Cot noted that "...this was not the Lollapalooza that Perry Farrel built"(Cot, 1996: pg 31).

Fricke reported in *Rolling Stone* that Farrel"...has excoriated the '96 main-stage menu - a testosterone blowout co-starring Soundgarden, the Ramones, Rancid and Screaming Trees - as a betrayal of his original anti-mainstream, indie-rock concept"(Fricke, 1996(b): pg 64). This can be seen as a conservative, alternative-elite position. *Rolling Stone* (Fricke, 1996(b) and

Dunn et al., 1996/1997), the *Alternative Press* (Pettigrew, 1996), *Entertainment Weekly* (Snierston, 1996) and *Hit Parader* (Cecolini, 1996) all mentioned Farrel's unhappiness with the 1996 version of Lollapalooza.

Only Jason Pettigrew of the *Alternative Press* criticized Farrel's negative comments.

Farrel's lambasting of Lollapalooza could be likened to a disgusted parent upset with how his child ended up, or perceived as a sly media manipulator gaining easy exposure for his new dance-based festival venture Enit. (Pettigrew, 1996: pg 17)

To conclude, some rock writers employed the criteria of valuation of authenticity to the 1996 incarnation of Metallica in their reporting of the fact that the band was going beyond the boundaries of the genre to which they had historically been articulated. However, although a few writers noted that the band had betrayed their genre and fans by changing their sound and look, most of these writers were ultimately indifferent to this change (although they made a point of mentioning it) or indeed valued the new sound positively.

The reception of Metallica in 1996 by the rock writers did not tend to reflect a postmodern sensibility. Although many writers were indifferent to the difference in Metallica's sound and their shift in genre, the writers ultimately judged them positively or negatively within the new genre to which they were placed by the writers. Only the skateboard magazine, *Big Brother*, seemed to reflect a postmodern sensibility, in that they were indifferent to the difference between the Metallica of old and the new Metallica, and they had fun with the band (McKee, 1996: pg 77). The only other display of a postmodern sensibility by the rock writers was their coverage of the band's position on why they were headlining the "alternative" Lollapalooza tour: to summarize, "Why the hell not?"

Metallica's 1996 return, then, was judged by different criteria of valuation. The coverage of the change in the look of the band was ultimately uncritical, in that it simply announced that there had been a change. Similarly, the discussion of the sound of the band as having changed was not generally received critically (positively or negatively) in terms of valuation. The change in the look and the sound of Metallica were linked by the writers, however, in that the changes in the sound were said to be represented in the changes to the look of the band, and that the look of the band reflected changes in the sound. Thus, if the music was valued negatively or as a "sellout," then the haircuts may be viewed as a visual signifier of selling out. If the change in the sound of Metallica was viewed as evolution, then the new look of the band might be viewed as a sign of maturity or refinement.

At issue, it seems, was the quality of the music, to be evaluated positively or negatively within the genre they belonged to in 1996. That is, the criteria of valuation tended to be concerned with judging the music on its own merits. Considine viewed the music on *Load* as bad grunge, and noted that it was not innovative. Joel judged the music negatively based on it not being faithful to the genre to which Metallica's music previously belonged. Randall judged the music as good pop, while Eddy valued the music as good boogie. Both Beaujour and Sprague saw the music as a hybrid of Metallica's earlier music and grunge, and valued this positively. And Newton called the music "first class raunch," and valued it positively for its accessibility.

In regard to Lollapalooza, some writers seemed to have forgotten the shift in genre that Metallica exhibited in 1996 and returned their metal crown to them in judging their headlining of Lollapalooza as incongruous. If the band were now fixed in the alternative/modern rock genre, then headlining Lollapalooza should not have been problematic. Metallica began their rise as

an alternative heavy metal band, became mainstream metal gods, and emerged in 1996 as the headliners of the newly mainstream alternative (modern rock) Lollapalooza tour. Metal fans didn't want them, the alternative-elites didn't want them, but the mainstream alternative fans embraced them and made the 1996 Lollapalooza tour the most successful one yet.



## Chapter Five:

### Conclusions

#### Never Mind The Authentic:...

This thesis shows a complexity in regard to the ways in which rock writers evaluate particular popular music events (such as the 1996 incarnations of the Sex Pistols, KISS, and Metallica) beyond both the criteria of valuation of authenticity and what may be referred to as a postmodern sensibility. In short, the framework of authentic versus postmodern receptions of popular music events is too binary and limiting. Still, it may be seen that the criteria of valuation of authenticity are not the primary criteria of valuation of rock writers today. Furthermore, within the domain of rock, a historical shift may be seen to have occurred in the last twenty-five years from criteria of valuation of authenticity to other concerns (such as what might be termed a postmodern sensibility).

Both rock and authenticity depend on difference. If one is or becomes indifferent to difference, then concerns to the authentic and what is and isn't rock are subsumed or subverted by other concerns such as an appreciation of fun, spectacle and authentic inauthenticity. The "death of rock" and the decline in the prominence of the criteria of valuation of authenticity can be seen as historically linked: for when one becomes indifferent to the difference between rock and non-rock or the authentic and the inauthentic, the distinctions or criteria for the distinctions no longer matter. When rock became mainstream and not about revolution or difference, there was a shift to other concerns in the valuation of popular music (including, but not limited to, what may be called a postmodern sensibility).

If the ideology of authenticity is becoming irrelevant, then the difference doesn't make a difference; it no longer matters and one can, in very noticeable ways, become rather blasé about the configurations of rock taste.(Grossberg, 1992a: pg 236)

Of course, the ideology of authenticity is not becoming irrelevant. Rather, debates over authenticity within rock and popular music will continue to take place in the future.

Beyond the analysis above, and in order to highlight regularities within/between the rock press, the articles cited have been divided into five sub-genres: lifestyle magazines (*Rolling Stone*, *Details*, *Spin*, and *Entertainment Weekly*), musician oriented magazines (*Guitar World*, *Guitar Legends*, and *Musician*), glossy (monthly/bimonthly) "alternative press" magazines (*Alternative Press*, *Request*, and *Magnet*), the monthly newsprint alternative press (*Exclaim!* and *Discorder*), and the weekly newsprint alternative press (*Mirror*, *Hour*, *Georgia Straight*). The reception by the rock writers of the 1996 incarnations of the Sex Pistols, KISS, and Metallica were categorized according to the criteria of valuation they seemed to espouse. These results were compared with others within a given sub-genre to attempt to find regularities or patterns (to find, for example, if lifestyle magazines tended to reflect a postmodern sensibility in their coverage of the chosen bands in 1996). Furthermore, rock writers to whom more than one article was referenced were evaluated as to whether they consistently reflected particular criteria of valuation. These writers are: J.D. Considine (*Guitar World*, *Baltimore Sun*), Dave Thompson (*Alternative Press*), Matt Hendrickson (*Rolling Stone*), Steve Newton (*Georgia Straight*), Chris Yurkiw (*Mirror*), Mitch Joel (*Hour*), David Browne (*Entertainment Weekly*), and David Wild (*Rolling Stone*).

For some rock writers (and, as discussed below, for some fans), the criteria of valuation of authenticity are still employed. In terms of regularities, musician magazines (*Guitar World*, *Guitar Legends*, and *Musician*) tended to use the criteria of valuation of authenticity in its coverage of the three events chosen for this study. A rock writer that consistently employed the criteria of valuation of authenticity was J.D. Considine (writing for the *Baltimore Sun* and *Guitar World*).

### ...You Wanted The Spectacle/You've Got The Spectacle...

What I am calling a postmodern sensibility is characterized by an indifference to difference, and values the authentically inauthentic, spectacle and fun. In terms of regularities, lifestyle magazines (*Rolling Stone*, *Details*, *Spin*, and *Entertainment Weekly*) tended to reflect a postmodern sensibility in terms of criteria of valuation in their coverage of the Sex Pistols and Kiss. The glossy alternative press magazines (*Alternative Press*, *Request* and *Magnet*) and the monthly newsprint alternative press (*Exclaim!* and *Discorder*) tended to reflect a postmodern sensibility in their coverage of all three events. The weekly newsprint alternative press (*Mirror*, *Hour*, *Georgia Straight*) reflected a postmodern sensibility in its coverage of KISS. The authors which reflected a postmodern sensibility are Dave Thompson (*Alternative Press*), Chris Yurkiw (*Mirror*), David Browne (*Entertainment Weekly*) and David Wild (*Rolling Stone*). It should also be noted that the rock writers in *Rolling Stone* (Nilou Panahpour, Matt Hendrickson) tended to exhibit a sarcastic tone.<sup>23</sup>

It should be noted that the postmodern sensibility has not and will not supplant or supersede considerations of the authentic. Furthermore, it is not

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<sup>23</sup>Of course, a sarcastic tone is not exclusive to a postmodern sensibility.

meant to be implied that this postmodern sensibility is either more current or more progressive than considerations of authenticity. It is important to note that the relationship between these two "poles" (serious versus fun) is not binary: rather, the relationship is more complex. The criteria of valuation of authenticity and this postmodern sensibility are not truly separate or exclusive. Some rock writers are concerned with the authenticity of a given incarnation or event, others exhibit an ironic, postmodern sensibility, while still others do both (or neither).<sup>24</sup> Today, it may well be the case that in order to be successful, popular music acts must play to both sides of the coin: that is, strive for authenticity while winking (with the use of ironic gestures) to the consumers (fans, critics, etc.) that this is of course an impossible goal.

In the end, rock, like everything else in the 1990s, is a business. The result is that style is celebrated over authenticity, or rather, that authenticity is seen just as another style. It has become increasingly important for performers and directors to incorporate signs of their ironic cynicism. Within the emerging languages of these formations, authenticity is no better than and no worse than the most ironically constructed images of inauthenticity. (Grossberg, 1992a: pg 234)

Thus, rather than being separate and exclusive, both concerns to authenticity and a postmodern sensibility can function conjointly.

It is important to note that these two sets of criteria of valuation are not the only sets: that is, that this dyad is not exhaustive, as a given event can be valued by the criteria of valuation of authenticity, by a postmodern sensibility, by both, or by neither.

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<sup>24</sup>The Sex Pistols were considered to be authentic and postmodern in the 1970s, and they were judged using both criteria of valuation in 1996.

### ...(And Nothing Else Matters?)

The identification of a given valuation as not having been by the criteria of valuation of authenticity does not necessarily signal a postmodern sensibility, and vice-versa. It is important to note that these are not the exclusive means of determining the value of a given popular music event. It is not the case that each of the three events discussed were only evaluated by criteria relating to authenticity or a postmodern sensibility (that is, it is not an either/or situation).

As exhibited by Robert LaFranco's positive valuation of KISS in *Forbes* (based on criteria of valuation pertaining to business acumen or success), there are alternative criteria of valuation.<sup>25</sup> The evaluation of the 1996 incarnation of Metallica was not based strictly on the criteria of valuation of authenticity (although they were judged in part in their straying from their historical career path, which speaks somewhat to the criteria of valuation of authenticity), nor did it reflect a postmodern sensibility. As discussed in chapter four, the two aesthetic changes by the band (their appearance and their sound) were received uncritically in that the changes were acknowledged but not evaluated. These two aesthetic changes were linked, however, in that if the change in sound was judged positively, the change in appearance was seen as a reflection of this positive change (and vice-versa). The rock writers were indifferent to the shift in genre (which might seem to reflect a postmodern sensibility), but ultimately judged the music positively or negatively by criteria of valuation other than those concerning authenticity or a postmodern sensibility based on the music itself. Alternative criteria of valuation that the 1996 incarnation of Metallica were evaluated by included

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<sup>25</sup>Again, it is not meant to be implied that LaFranco can be considered a rock writer, or that *Forbes* can be included as part of the rock press.

those related to innovation (or lack of), the faithfulness to their old genre, the quality of the music within a new genre (for example, good vs. bad pop or boogie), the quality of the hybrid of their old genre and another genre (modern rock or grunge), and by the music's accessibility.

In terms of regularities, the lifestyle magazines tended to show indifference to the difference or shift in genre by Metallica, and judged them within their new genre by alternative criteria of valuation. Also, Mitch Joel of the *Hour* consistently employed alternative criteria of valuation than those pertaining to authenticity or a postmodern sensibility in his coverage of the chosen events of 1996.

The final segment of the title of this paper, ...(And Nothing Else Matters?), implies nihilism and the end of authenticity as criteria of valuation. This, however, of course, is not the case. Many fans believe in/subscribe to/employ the criteria of valuation of authenticity; whether it be conservative punks (the punk-elite) or disappointed Metallica fans that feel their bands have sold out or are acting inauthentically, the criteria of valuation employed is that of authenticity. A disgruntled Metallica fan expressed his disgust with the 1996 incarnation of Metallica and their perceived shift in genre in his website entitled "the official Alternica homepage."

With the name Alternica on the lips of 13 year-olds everywhere, Green Day-like success is just around the corner. The new album, titled *Load*, signals major changes for the band's sound. Alternica has abandoned their legions of die-hard metal fans, who have supported them since their rise out of the San Francisco Bay area in the early 80's, in an effort to woo the lucrative 'Alanis Morrissette' market. *Load* does this successfully.

...Producer Bob Rock has painted an alternate portrait of Alternica...a

stunning contrast to the last album, simply titled *Alternica*. The previous record was filled with trademark power chords, riff-crunching intricacies, and lyrics that could scare the habit off of a nun. *Load* carries none of these heavy metal trappings. Instead, the songs are light, airy, and downright pleasant.

#### The Kirk and Lars Theory

After years of vegetarianism, Kirk Hammett has acquired a blood disorder whereupon he can no longer summon any feelings of aggression. He tries writing the sort of riffs from the old *Master of Puppets* days, but can only come up with stuff like the twinge sitar chorus in "Mama Said."

After years of hiding his true inner self, Lars Ulrich has come out of the closet. That's right Lars is gay. It is also true that his most inspired music writing comes after having sex with his favorite partner, Kirk. Lars and Kirk also share a fascination for wearing make-up, among other things. They love to smear the make-up over each others bodies. I wouldn't keep those drumsticks that Lars likes to throw in concert . . . you just don't know where the hell they've been. (<http://members.aol.com/alternica/index.html>)

Though the author of this webpage exhibits a sarcastic, ironic tone, the underlying sentiment is that Metallica has sold out (that is, that the 1996 version of Metallica was inauthentic in relation to the Metallica that preceded the release of *Load*). Thus, if one is interested in studying the use of or subscription to the criteria of valuation of authenticity in regard to popular music, perhaps the object of inquiry should be the audience rather than rock criticism.

Steve Jones believes that (the requisite) further study is required in regard to authenticity and rock, and writes that this work's goal should be to discover which sources *outside* music the musician, fan, critic and so on, goes to in search of establishing authenticity and credibility. Though this may simply be further removing us from the issue at hand, or substituting one constructed text for another, it is important to recognize the whole range of influences working within

popular music generally, and the music industry specifically, that are organized specifically for the creation and maintenance of credibility and authenticity.(Jones, 1992: pg 207)

In this thesis, the 1996 incarnations of the Sex Pistols (their reunion and tour), KISS (their reunion and tour), and Metallica (the release of their album *Load* and their headlining of the Lollapalooza tour) and their receptions by the rock press have been examined in order illuminate how criteria of valuation were espoused by rock writers in regard to these events. Rather than a binary ("two pole") situation in which these events were judged either by the criteria of valuation of authenticity or those reflecting a postmodern sensibility, a more complex situation was found. In regard to the criteria of valuation dyad of authenticity and the postmodern, it is demonstrated that these two poles are actually not exclusive (and are indeed inseparable). Furthermore, this thesis shows that there are alternative criteria of valuation which do not reflect concerns to the authentic or the postmodern. It is also shown that a single author, such as Nardwuar the Human Serviette of *Discorder*, can employ varying criteria of valuation within the same article.

This study examines just three events from 1996 and offers only a glimpse of the ways in which particular criteria of evaluation are espoused by rock writers in the rock press. This work is neither exhaustive nor representative of the whole in terms of rock criticism and criteria of valuation (the three bands discussed can only be loosely grouped together as white, male, hard rock).



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## Appendix I:

### Soundtrack to this Thesis:

Eurythmics: Greatest Hits, Metallica: Ride the Lightning, Neurotic Outsiders: Neurotic Outsiders, The Cult: Pure Cult, ZZ Top: Greatest Hits, Operation Ivy: Energy, NOFX: I Heard They Suck Live, Various Artists: The Ultimate Eighties, David Bowie: changesbowie, Sonic Youth: Washing Machine, Metallica: Master of Puppets, Nada Surf: high/low, Anthrax: Attack of the Killer B's, Nirvana: From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah, Smashing Pumpkins: Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness, REM: Monster, Mike Flowers Pops: A Groovy Place, Jaymz Bee and the Royal Jelly Orchestra: Cocktail; Shakin' and Stirred, Primus: Tales From The Punch Bowl, Ramones: Acid Eaters, Various Artists: Kiss My Ass...Classic KISS Regrooved, Various Artists: If I Were a Carpenter, Ramones: Greatest Hits Live, Sex Pistols: Filthy Lucre Live, Mötörhead: the Best of, Metallica: ...and Justice For All, Weezer: Pinkerton, Various Artists: A Tribute To Hard Core Logo, L7: Hungry for Stink, 54-40: Sweeter Things, Stevie Ray Vaughn and Double Trouble: Greatest Hits, Dick Dale and his Del Tones: The King of the Surf Guitar; The Best of, Madonna: The Immaculate Collection, The Beautiful South: The Best of, Ramones: Ramonesmania, Spinal Tap: Smell The Glove, The Presidents of the United States of America: II, Duran Duran: Decade, Arlo Guthrie: The Best of, Smashing Pumpkins: Siamese Dream, Black Sabbath: We Sold Our Soul to Rock and Roll, Hagfish:...rocks your lame ass, Boney M: Gold, Kenny G: miracles: The Holiday Album, Elvis Presley: If Every Day Was Christmas, Rush: Chronicles, Go Gos: Greatest Hits, Poison: Greatest Hits, Matthew Sweet: Altered Beast, the Misfits: Collection II, Twisted Sister: Stay Hungry, The Presidents of the United States of America: The Presidents of the

United States of America, Black Sabbath: Paranoid, L7: Hungry For Stink, Hole: Live Through This, the Breeders: Last Splash, Elastica: Elastica, Green Day: Insomniac, Hanson Brothers: Sudden Death, Various Artists: The Rolling Stone Collection 1977-82, Various Artists: The Rolling Stone Collection 1982-86, Various Artists: Punk-O-Rama Vol. 2, Urge Overkill: Saturation, Bad Religion: All Ages, Smugglers: In the Hall of Fame, Guns & Roses: Appetite for Destruction, Concrete Blonde: Recollection, Sloan: One Chord to Another, Prince: The Hits/The B-sides, Various Artists: The Rolling Stone Collection 1969-70, The Cult: Pure Cult, Barenaked Ladies: Gordon, Various Artists: X-Games Volume 1, Queen: Greatest Hits I & II, Pat Boone: In a Metal Mood: No More Mr. Nice Guy, Beatles: 1962-1966, Beatles: 1967-1970, L7: The Beauty Process: Triple Platinum, Minor Threat: Complete Discography, REM: Green, Various Artists: Soundtrack: Pulp Fiction, Blondie & Pat Benetar: Back to Back Hits, Bloodhound Gang: One Fierce Beer Coaster, Cake: Fashion Nugget, REM: New Adventures In Hi-Fi, Various Artists: Before You Were Punk: A Punk Tribute to 80's New Wave, The Osmonds: 21 Hits, Matthew Sweet: Blue Sky On Mars, Pixies: Surfer Rosa (& Come On Pilgrim), Bad Religion: Stranger Than Fiction, The Offspring: Ignition, DaftPunk: Homework, REM: Eponymous, Frank Black: The Cult of Ray, Metallica: Kill 'Em All, Various Artists: Absolute 90s, Pennywise: Full Circle, NOFX: White Trash, Two Heebs, and a Bean, Judas Priest: Living After Midnight: Greatest Hits