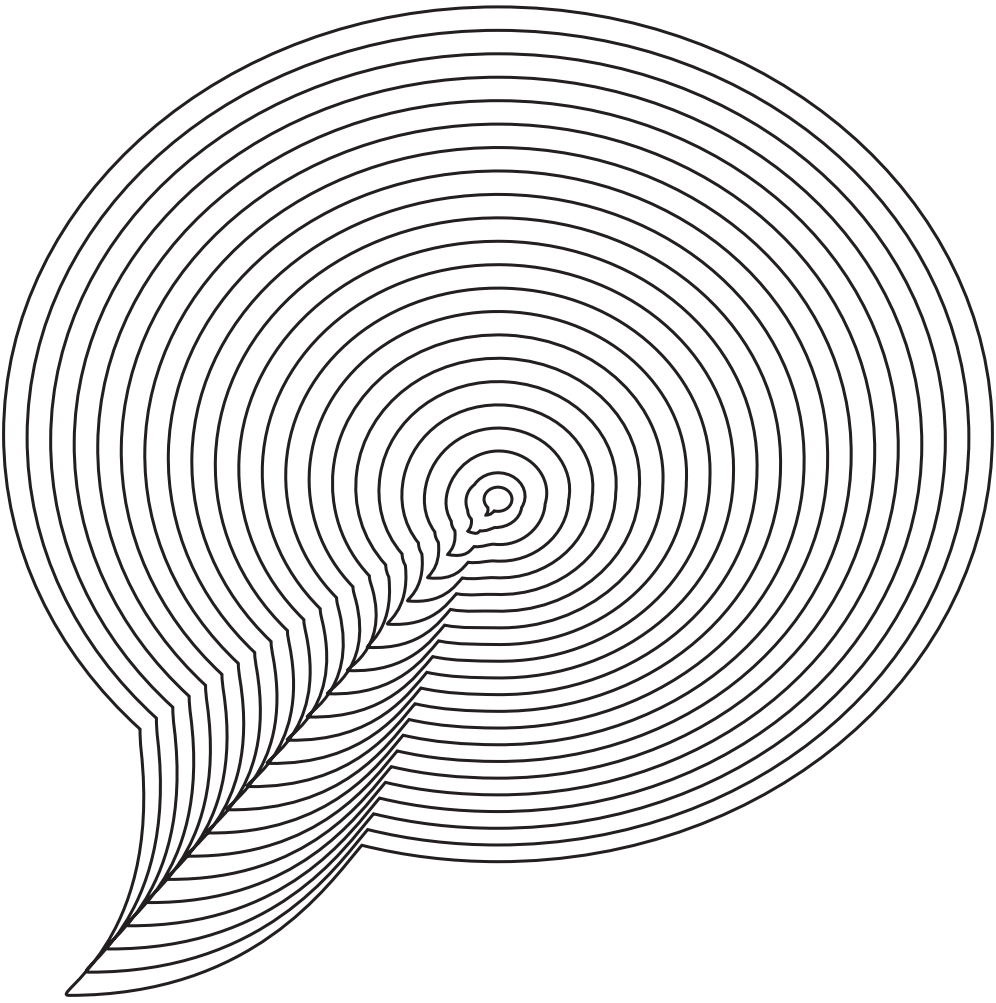

This bulletin is in lieu of an interview (in German) with Diedrich Diederichsen by Silke Otto-Knapp which was scheduled for April 18, but had to be canceled at the last minute because of a slipped disc. They were due to discuss the influential German pop culture magazine *Spex*, particularly the period around Diederichsen's tenure as editor during the second half of the 1980s. *Spex* is low-key legendary in certain art and music circles, with a reputation slowly and surely abetted over the years by only ever having been published in German. Not being fluent ourselves, we were curious to understand second-hand — yet from the horse's mouth, so to speak — what made *Spex* so specific; how the writing affected the milieu being written about, and vice versa.

We had also intended to translate a few bits and pieces of Diederichsen's *Spex* writing in order to trigger or otherwise punctuate the conversation with Otto-Knapp. From a shortlist of suggestions he sent along, one title in particular seemed too promising not to pursue. "Hören, Wiederhören, Zitieren," published in the January 1997 issue of *Spex*, is an overview of 1996 in the form of an in-depth analysis of the then-current state of quotation in pop music. Its subtitle gives an idea of the flavor: "A proposal towards some elements of a theory of signs." In light of our initial premise, we reasoned, "quoting" such an explicitly time-bound piece would likely foster productive displacements in both language (German to English) and time (1997–2013). Reading again, translating, publishing.

So began a process of German translation that frequently felt more like Chinese whispers. Otto-Knapp began by drafting a more or less literal English rendition, which was processed into a superficially more streamlined equivalent by Stuart Bailey, recalibrated into something far more convincing by Matthew Vollgraff, and more or less rewritten by Angie Keefer. The outcome was returned to its original author, who made further amendments. As the piece was assembled piecemeal, slowly circulating among this team paragraph by paragraph, it became increasingly apparent that Diederichsen had been in the process of inventing his own highly idiosyncratic language. How have the various inflections of pop quotation conceptualized here altered in the 15 years since? This is perhaps the first question for the interview still to be staged.

Special thanks to Diederichsen for letting us republish another piece from his past. Scans of the original pages are archived along with his other writing at www.diedrich-diederichsen.de.

Cover image by Scott Ponik

LISTENING TO MUSIC MEANS LISTENING TO MUSIC OVER AGAIN

Listening to music over again is generally considered something different from, say, looking repeatedly at a picture. When looking at a picture again, an impression may be intensified, but when listening to music over again this effect is merely secondary: music is made for repeated listening, whistling along, interpretation, and reproduction. I don't hear music "anew" if I listen to it more often or more closely; rather, this is the way it becomes accessible to me at all. A melody or another linear tonal sequence is only mastered when it's "in one's head." This mastery through aural reduplication means the transposition of sense data into signs. Music made purely of signs would be nothing more than language; on the other hand, an abundance of asemiotic sensory input that cannot be processed becomes pure white noise, which hardly exists today when more and more noise-effects take over the function of the elements of a melody.

WHAT I ALREADY KNOW REFERS ME TO THE PLACE I GOT TO KNOW IT

This means, however, that developing an understanding of a piece of music doesn't consist of just getting to know it better; every step is accompanied by familiar and remembered elements, which, in their repetition, become *signs.* Each element, repeatedly recognized, automatically refers me, the listener, back to a past moment, back to another place; specifically, back to the time and place I first discovered it. Meanwhile, those moments that have not yet been absorbed or discovered refer to the present tense of listening, to my physical presence here and now.

Further, it's only possible to perceive music adequately if the first listen already contains elements for subsequent listens. Two elements enable repeated listening — the kind that repeat within the song itself, and the kind that are already familiar from other songs, other sounds, heard elsewhere, heard before. Ontologically, repetition and repeatability are the guarantees of music in the same way a picture frame is a guarantee, a material support, for a picture. An image "actually" could be endless and dissolve; music "actually" is singular, ephemeral, and unrepeatable. "Once it's in the air it's gone. You can never recapture it again." (Eric Dolphy)

MUSIC AND ARCHIVING: THERE IS ALWAYS MORE TO KNOW AND TO NOT KNOW

When we listen to music, the proportion of already-known and identically-reproduced music grows. At the same time, the total amount of music, including new music, also continues to increase. What remains is the necessity to distinguish, when listening, between relating to what is new, and recognizing what is already known — that is, between creating signs and reading signs. No music can get by without a balance of new and known. When we listen to the known — or rather, the share of what is known — we are reminded of something outside our present experience, while our encounter of the new gets mixed in with our (new) present experience.

Both absence and presence, then, are part of listening. Only by listening again to recorded and archived music can we (theoretically, at least) push back the share of the new. The dramatic increase in our multifarious experiences with identical recorded music, along with the equally dramatic proliferation of music's distribution in general, means that we make an ever greater number of cognitive choices between known and unknown. It also increases our capacity to (subjectively) identify grades of recognition — of the recording, the composition, the sound and tonal quality, the motif, the genre, the function, the place of origin, and the milieu. Most of the time, we are dealing with vague mixtures of such identifications, which are unclear to ourselves.

FOUR TYPES OF LISTENING: RECONSTRUCTIVE, REFERENTIAL, "RHYTHMIC-SPATIAL," AND "EXPRESSIVE-DYNAMIC"

We listen to new sounds or songs by reconstructing them mentally, that is in an immanent way. But we listen to what we already know *referentially* — that is, with reference to another place and time, be it an objective, articulable example, or some less coherent, subjective encounter.

In his *Philosophy of New Music*, Theodor W. Adorno distinguishes between two types of listening: *rhythmic-spatial* and *expressive-dynamic.* In the former, since rhythm "virtually suspends" time by carving it up into

equal measures, it spatializes music as well as those listeners who follow the rhythm; while in the latter, one concentrates on processing time, with one's own capacity of singing as its point of departure. Both belong to the category of "reconstructing" listening, which guides the listener along with the music. In this respect, they are unlike "unfocused" listening — listening, that is, to something already known, which ultimately is oriented towards an absence (e.g., circumstances of previous listening experiences). But these identifying forms of listening produce a relationship between the given musical signifiers and the absent content, such as the scene of a first auditory encounter, by various, highly different means.

POP — THE MORE IMPURE, MORE REFERENTIAL, MORE REPETITIVE MUSIC

In the broadest sense of the word, quotation is an effort to gain control over these absent elements. But one could just as well say that the quote's function is to make clear the distinctions between what is present and what is absent, between the current and referential aspects of music. There are countless degrees of referentiality, ranging from the most obvious to the most nebulous hints and allusions. Similarly, listeners exhibit varied degrees of receptivity to intended and unintended features of music, not all of which are necessarily accessed or grasped in the moment.

But I am interested in the special role of quotation in pop music because pop is conventionally cast on one side of the divide between "pure" and "impure" music. Traditionally, pop music has been considered impure because it is supposedly determined more by commercial conditions; it caters to its public, and non-musical elements play a decisive role in its reception: text, staging, presentation, performance, and politics. Furthermore, instead of partaking in the "progress" of musical expression (a linear phenomenon), pop music is thought to develop eclectically (a spatial one).

Although not even the strictest apologists of composed serious music would vouch for them anymore, virtually all these claims about pop's "impurity" pertain to its referentiality, literary quality, and proximity to language. They concern its specific political concerns, its economic dependencies,

and the musical material itself. This material is said to emphasize a song's memorability and infectiousness, its continual recycling, its reminding its audience again and again — of moments in the moonlight, or after the cinema, or of days when the rain came. According to this view, pop music deviates from its own musicality, always headed towards big moments, strange and familiar melodies. You've heard this somewhere before … can you remember?

STRONG QUOTATION

When I say something is a strong quotation, I mean to imply that it (1) appears obviously alien to its musical context; and/or (2) is already complete (without needing the contextualization of the music that surrounds it); and/or (3) doesn't leave the task of localizing the familiar part to the listener. In general, the quotation also refers to what is absent in the present, and therefore points toward the semiotic nature of any music, its proximity to language. This allows for the deciphering and clarifying of "weak" quotations, sharpening the senses to notice the absent within the present. Thus quotations steal from the realm of presentness and reconstructive listening and deliver the loot to the territories of dreams and digressions from the present.

The other truth, often ideologically put forward by representatives of other kinds of music — on the fringes of pop music, or within non-popular music — is that a far greater proportion of elements in musical systems are contra language, without referential function. "Purity" in music therefore refers to that which neither vaguely distracts, nor leads to any specific place.

IDEOLOGY AND REGRESSION

Of course, this discourse tends to legitimize a "regression of listening," in the same way that the antagonist's side does when referring in a totalizing way to notions like clarity, reference, or dreaming-as-listening. But this regression doesn't work the way Adorno imagined it, with one type of listening asserting itself against another. Rather, what I wish to

dispute is the frequent insinuation that one of the two types of listening (either "reconstructively listening to what is currently present" or "referring semiotically to what is absent") represents the true nature of music, and that other is a symptom of its decline.

The metaphysical defense of the first authenticist type of listening ("reconstructive listening") is still more dominant in the world of musical ideologies than any other position. But the postmodernist anti-authenticism of the second type seems to me no less ideological. Indeed, in times of a so-called "second postmodernity" and, given phenomena like the reevaluation of Easy Listening and the Cinema of Quotations (*Zitatkino*), in some places it has even become hegemonic.

In what follows, then, I will present some pop-historical scenes and scenarios (which I have apotheosized as ideal types) in order to redraw the battle lines between the polar opponents of "quotation" and "pure music." Three tracks from this year round off the list. They inspired these reflections, and thus legitimize the publication of these thoughts in the context of an overview of 1996.

1972: ROXY MUSIC, "RE-MAKE/RE-MODEL"

This track, placed programmatically on side one of the first Roxy Music album, is, if not the first, then certainly one of the earliest songs to spotlight extrinsic components as such — and in turn marks the beginning of the first postmodernism in pop music. At the same time, both title and lyrics state that what is new is created from what is already over, from what is already finished — and this procedure should be exemplary. The song's almost didactic explanation of its own design principle turns it into a kind of manifesto. The referential elements are treated in the same way that bands would otherwise single out instrumentalists by introducing them as soloists during the final number of a concert. Such moments are the musical equivalent of rolling credits in a film. They are meant to convey: *these are the constitutive elements of what you just experienced as a whole.* Roxy Music uses them to say that the elements of their music are not the musicians, but prefabricated parts.

In a typical collage in the tradition of the avant-garde in the visual arts, a new context typically reveals something critical or comical about an original context, or about some element removed from it. The individually isolated elements in "Re-Make/Re-Model," on the other hand, relate constructively, even euphorically to the new context itself—that is, to the very fact that it has been constructed from these different components. At the same time, these quoted components intensify the absent experiences, those which occurred sometime in the past, and which the music now delivers in addition to the past moments any music refers to (because it is listened to repeatedly) to such a degree that a discourse of nostalgia emerged in the early 1970s. Nostalgia became a key word, not in a general sense of longing, but a specific longing for a specific past.

1982: ABC, "THE LOOK OF LOVE"

This was that happy moment in which a potentially regressive regime of total absence, a regime of longing and memory, merged with a new presence-machine, the disco beat, assisted by technologically renovated machines retrofitted to the newly powerful here and now of the discotheque on the eve of its rechristening as the "club." Although ABC were, among the bands of '82, the ones that shouted "quotation!" "literature!" and "Hollywood!" the loudest, they leaned already heavily on the precursors of club music. (For instance, in their use of the digital Fairlight sampling synthesizer, or the proto techno-futurist Trevor Horn as producer.)

In other words, ABC's point of reference was to a body wholly, metaphysically present in the here and now, and this marked a completely new relationship to the quotation, one which so far owed its existence to the absence of the very reference points it referred to. This music derived its claim to presence not by compulsorily following a line, but by the beat. Whereas a musician like Mahavishnu John McLaughlin asserted the dominance of expressive-dynamic listening over referential listening in its most regressive form (endless guitar solos: presence as endlessness, not eternity), ABC's vindication of the here and now was not laden with regressive effects, simply because the spatial-rhythmic listening was linked with referential listening in a new way: point of reference was the here and now, the absent was present.

While producing the hip-colonial Malcolm McLaren record "Duck Rock" that same year, Trevor Horn learned from Cuban percussionists that the metrum, the reference for the heartbeat in African Cuban music, lies not on the beat but in the intervals between beats. The body, the ultimate recipient of presentist music, doesn't reside in the *oomph!*; it hangs its mailbox on the syncope. The *oomph!* of '82, however, doesn't even target the body of later dancefloor metaphysics; it aims instead at the ever-elusive opposite: pure absence. The numinous counterpart to the elaborate literariness of ABC's citation pop was so successful and so truly present because its *oomph!* was the negation of a most perfect absence. Without this innovation, the song would have been pure kitsch.

But ABC's — and more elegantly, Scritti Politti's — staging of absence, dreaming, and reading was achieved not by emphasizing "already complete" and "recognizably foreign" elements, but by openly not claiming any elements as their own. Marked as vaguely recognizable, yet also difficult to locate, quotation was brought to a new level — to a sound of citation based partly on the discretion and ambiguity of its allusions, and partly on the ironic sensibility of the musicians as subjects. Thus, even while the "reconstructive, comprehending" listening mode was dominant and there was lot to recognize, there remained still more to understand.

But this was hardly some ambivalent game about the well-known motif of an assumed familiarity with all components of pop music; rather, it concerned the precise triggering of specific zones of reference. Irony wasn't invoked just to serve up distance or derision, but as a melancholy acknowledgment of the evacuation of strong subjects from pop music, including both (then much-despised) rock and (then much-admired) soul. From what were once intense references, a sense of dissolution was now brought to bear upon an imagined or recollected Big Bang of pop music history, but also upon the equivalent experience of any sound in an individual's emotional history.

(1976) 1986 (1996): HIP HOP

The signifying and referential elements of hip hop, particularly since the advent of sampling, are conceived as the fragments and the witnesses of

an original unity. Though one doesn't necessarily have to believe in an original unity to accept the idea as a technical and metaphorical precondition for diasporic cultures (or for those that consider themselves diasporic).

Despite hip hop's emphasis on the extracted, the found, and the cited, unlike classical collage it has never laid claim to a new and discontinuous worldview against the background of a hitherto tacit and untouched historical continuity. Instead, and in complete contrast, hip hop has consistently set itself the task of recovering an original unity presumed to have existed before the diasporic confusion, and has attempted to bring this into the present as a new, virtual unity. By appropriating all variety of local forms of black music, the hip hop track bundles disparate strands of the past into a utopian reconstruction of origin.

Confronted with the forms of jazz, funk, and other kinds of music identified with the African diaspora, hip hop created a new unity by way of similarly-treated samples, all of which evoked different versions of the past, and yet, in the pure present of the sampled loop, spoke only of THE past. Consequently, the quote took on the additional role of bringing forth the absent past — the lost unity, the origin — into present music, instead of merely referencing that absence, as it had before. In other words, the loop paradoxically provides both the trace AND construction of collective memory in the here and now.

This is the only explanation for how samples manage to give voice to a past that is at once concrete and generalized. On the one hand, hip hop's quotations are highly specific and recognizable, explicitly marked trails leading to the record collections of parents and older brothers. On the other hand, a looped James Brown sample — to name only the most well-known example — doesn't remind us for very long of any historical James Brown or his specific recording from year X.

After some time, the looped quotation speaks of the past only in general terms, since every citation, once it becomes a loop, tends to lose its referential character — the quality that conjures what is absent. In the loop, the memorial aspect of association is literally *danced out* of the quotation; but since it is neither possible nor desirable to erase its referential structure entirely, one's own time also congeals to a certain

extent, becoming, in part, the future, inasmuch as it stands up against presentness and the presence of the past.

1986–1996: TECHNO

No other music is defined by the pressure to be both present and IN the present as much as techno. Thinking back to the early days, one could differentiate techno from other mostly instrumental electronic dance music according to indicators that suggested a commonality with the history of pop music. Music that did not contain any such indicators, or sought to obliterate them, was called "techno." Hence, something *radically new.* The radically new isn't permitted to offer any support to first time listeners; so, in order to be understood, it repeats itself incessantly, and thus solves the problem of absence and recognition by referring every 1.5 seconds to the moment 1.5 seconds ago. The absent, remembered moment, then, is always just a few seconds or centimeters away.

By the same token, the listener who is physically following along—breathing, feeling the pulse—reassures him/herself of his/her identity. The success of techno, so extreme in its conception and realization, is partly due to the fact that it is something already familiar to us from the minimalist tradition and from non-Western music. And regardless of whether its success is achieved with beats or other substitutes for the pulse, it in fact solves what is ultimately an ideological and technical problem for all pop music: *all body, all present, no distractions.* This has been the ambition of many musical forms and movements, especially the sort that tend to retreat to holiday islands and Third-World beaches before actually reaching their goal. The end of any similarity to language or symbolic quality—from one loop to the next and so on to satori . . . . The feeling of traveling back from second to second, from past to present, from absence to presence, from signifier to signified, and synchronizing all this with small intervals of experiences of the self, reveals the meaning of everything that can and does happen in-between these moments.

The question remains: how to get back from here to history, and from there to the city—that is, the place to which signs refer, even in their most extreme excesses—when the signs are not just obscured, but

actually disappear. With techno, Adorno's "regression of listening," his "radical spatialization" was followed through to the end, rendering forms of experience to spawn some new kind of subjectivity *beyond listening.* This is a significant achievement of the techno years — especially as the resulting subjectivities can't entirely be explained by the logic of post-Fordism.

1994–96: DRUM'N'BASS

If we understand drum'n'bass (assuming we really believe in a Hegelian philosophy of history) to be the synthesis of hip hop with ragga on the one hand, and with techno on the other, it would look like this: molecular traces of references in what were once breakbeats and other raw material forcing the past (trans-individualized history) into the presentness of the individual-physical dance experience.

This differs from techno insofar as it doesn't completely absolve its relationship to a past and to an absence, although it is already ritualistically purified, cleansed of these — a process that had begun with hip hop. In drum'n'bass, it's not just about what happened 1.5 seconds ago anymore. In fact, something completely different happened 1.5 seconds ago. Once again, one has to look for what is referred to, and it seems more likely to be found on the inside than on the outside.

Unlike hip hop, references are not located in the original scene of the diaspora and its subsequent dispersion, they are radically internalized, even when, objectively speaking, they originate somewhere else. In contrast to the mid-1980s, references are now barely recognizable unless recognition is explicitly intended; the main thing is always the desired status and the degree of construction of a reference.

In the case of drum'n'bass, the status of a reference is far more determined by its connection to a community, and has much more to do with an actual, existing community than does techno. That said, the references are far from the distinctively tribalist, nationalist, and diasporist ones characteristic of hip hop, which always speaks about (and to) a particular community.

1996: BECK, "JACK-ASS" / LOVE INC., "HOT LOVE" / ROCKERS HI-FI, "UNEASY SKANKING"

While Mike Ink (at least when he appears under the alias Love Inc.) is not the only musician to insert referentiality into an otherwise intact non-referential techno-structure in a manner familiar from hip hop, he is by far the least restrained. His use of T. Rex's intro to "Hot Love," and his decision to even use the same title, positions the track as more cover version than quotation. In fact, he uses only a few seconds from the original. The power of techno is evident in that, while nothing has been added at the level of melody, the track has nevertheless been transformed into something completely different: internal memory is made to triumph over the (external) memory of obvious quotation. Yet over time, the subtlety and autonomy of the new track's non-melodic interventions produce effects that can no longer be accounted for within Adorno's concept of spatialization.

Like the Trevor Horn anecdote, these interventions are "Cuban" insofar as the (only moderately African-American-influenced) beat doesn't "divide evenly" (the core of Adorno's accusation of spatialization), but instead shifts its foundations around syncopations and irregularities. On another level, the beat does something comparable to the construction of melodic lines. To bring the obvious reference to a static standstill and reduce it to the rank of a dull beat; and to bestow the conventional "underlying" beat with the quasi-narrative function of a melody line —such is the current *summa summarum* of pop music after techno and 1982 (Scritti Politti, ABC, Human League, Heaven 17). This is a pop music that consciously exploits its own semiotic nature and proximity to language—and also knows how to abolish both.

Rockers Hi-Fi are up to something similar; they don't even have to put Bach in a loop to make his airy, melodic, but repetitive harp music the background for a dramatic bass line. Beck, in turn, shows the same strategy can work even beyond a dance music context. Like Mike Ink, Beck is aware that today quotation can't just be about shining a light on pop music's constructedness, exposing its historicity and semiotic nature. Moreover, it can't be about exhibiting rarefied source material and surrendering it, in the form of an obvious quotation, to the legitimation of

commodities. Both approaches typify the wrong-headed methods pursued by the rediscovery of Easy Listening, and the (naturally heterogeneous) related art forms of some second wave postmodernists including David Lynch, Oliver Stone, and Quentin Tarantino. For Beck, as for Mike Ink, the most obvious references (e.g., Bob Dylan's "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," as played by Them) oscillate advantageously, as though by second nature, between the collective resources of radio listeners (in their arbitrariness) and the great canonical names of pop history (thereby calling up the authority of that history). Beck criticizes this canon and above all the commodified "history" that has grown in economic importance since the invention of the CD. Yet Beck can achieve what might be his goal —separating these great moments from their "pop history" packaging, and offering them to the collective memory of an emancipated history— only by making a kind of pact with that which is most recognizable.

It is this recognizability that has made the business of "pop history" possible in the first place. The reclaimable history to which quotation refers is restored, to a degree, through a defamiliarizing and surprising use of fragments, which entails neither exaltation nor denunciation. The remembered ruins of the church, a groovy-revolutionary hippiedom, are preconditions for Beck's work. As his "Jack-Ass" whines above the Dylan/Them track, the self-referential nature of the loop eclipses the memory of the original, producing an effect of that-was-really-something, which lingers on as an emotional residue. This is the only way pop history can remember how it really was.

Very uneasy skanking.

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