

Edited by Asif Siddiqi



One-Track Mind

Capitalism, Technology, and
the Art of the Pop Song



**ASHGATE POPULAR AND
FOLK MUSIC SERIES**

One-Track Mind

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of the Pop Song

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Cover credit: © Getty images

First published 2023

by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-367-55372-2 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-55373-9 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-09320-6 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003093206

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Newgen Publishing UK

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15 LCD Soundsystem—“All My Friends” (2007)

Gabrielle Cornish

If James Murphy is having fun, he sure doesn't show it. Backlit and dressed for a funeral, the mastermind behind the group LCD Soundsystem stands still, staring straight into the camera, and mouths along as a steady stream of open fifths and octaves on the piano underlines his announcement.

“That’s how it starts.”

Murphy’s face, painted white with silver geometric patterns, shows no emotion (see Figure 15.1). He breaks with the camera only occasionally, and only then to stare down at his feet, as if unsure whether to continue. Yet the music hammers on, building through the addition of bass, drums, and synths. Four-on-the-floor, glittering keyboards, unshifting harmonies: these are all the markers of a fast-paced, upbeat dance track. But Murphy, even as rain falls on his head and pyrotechnics erupt, stands still as the world around him crumbles. It’s as if he’s saying, “Go ahead. Dance. Here I am, and here I’ll stay.”

That’s how it starts.

So goes the music video for LCD Soundsystem’s “All My Friends,” the climactic track off the group’s second album, *Sound of Silver* (2007). And so, too, goes Murphy’s general aesthetic: he stands steady, constant, and stuck in time, as younger acts pass him by. Murphy was thirty-seven when the album was released—ancient compared to the denim-clad hipsters who danced to his music night after night in dirty Brooklyn clubs and dimly lit bars. Yet Murphy, with disheveled sand-colored hair and eternal five o’clock shadow, doesn’t seem to mind. He’s here to make music and make you dance. When the beat takes over, the man himself disappears.

This essay takes “All My Friends” as a starting point to explore the post-9/11 indie music scene in New York City. The September 11th terrorist attacks fractured a New York City that, already in recovery from the dot-com bubble crash at the end of the ’90s, was swiftly changing. The New York City that arose from the rubble, defiant and in the spotlight, brought with it new challenges for young artists. In both lyrics and sound, “All My Friends” recreates the past to engage with the present. The track draws on musical styles that range from synth-driven new wave sounds of bands like New Order to the electric bass-heavy style of younger indie groups like the

Strokes. All the while, a steady four-on-the-floor drum pattern undergirds Murphy's lyrics, which, resisting and reiterating partying tropes, are both an elegy for lost youth and a panegyric to the wisdom that comes with age. *Sound of Silver* would go on to top several best-of-the-year and best-of-the-decade lists, with "All My Friends" as its centerpiece.¹ As the indie music scene aged into the new millennium, Murphy became the frontman for the transitional decade.

Murphy himself represents a microcosm of New York history: he arrived in the city at the end of the 1980s, established himself as a leading producer and sound engineer in the 1990s, and became an icon of a nostalgia-laden dance music scene in the 2000s. His rise to fame straddled the 2008 recession, which coupled the hope of an Obama presidency with massive economic upheaval and instability. The Millennial generation, born between roughly 1980 and 1996, graduated into the worst economy in recent history. Yet Murphy, a Gen-Xer at least ten years the senior of any Millennial, became something of a figurehead for this younger generation. All the way, he made no secret of his age—and his relative uncoolness—which only made him more engaging to a generation beset by an uncertain future.² Perhaps more than any other song on *Sound of Silver*—a title that referred to the aluminum foil coating the walls of the studio but perhaps just as applicable to aging men and changing hair colors—"All My Friends" centers this generational schism.³

In many ways, the music behind Murphy's resigned vocals in "All My Friends" defies analysis. The track is repetitive; it builds not through harmonic development or tension but through addition: instruments join in, the volume rises, Murphy's voices grows strained. And then, just as quickly as it begins, this additive structure evaporates. Or, perhaps, not quickly, but only after minutes of the beat pulsing forward: it's hard to tell with LCD Soundsystem, as repetition leads to timelessness. This phenomenon is, in many ways, key to understanding dance music. It is process—musical, lyrical, and visceral—that organizes the meaning and rhetoric of the genre.⁴ In this essay, I take this process—the music's gradual "unfolding" over the course of the track—seriously as an organizing structure.

Ultimately, Murphy's song is as much a critique of coolness as it is an attempt to dance away reality—a tenuous balance the musician keeps throughout much of his work. A slippery category of social and aesthetic critique, "cool" is perhaps best defined tautologically: something's cool if, well, *it's cool*. You know it when you see it, hear it, feel it. Yet nebulous as it may be, ideas of "cool" and "uncool," of "hip" and "unhip," underscored much of the discourse around New York City's music scene in the 2000s. Your coolness could shift based on what you did, what you knew, who you didn't know, and who else was in the room. Fleeting and always in motion, cool might be better thought of as an assemblage—a gathering of networks, aesthetics, genres, discourses, and people—than as a single concept. But in late capitalism, "cool" and its more polished cousin, "interesting," have become key categories of aesthetic experience.⁵ Positioned within the "retromania" of the

first decade of the new millennium, “All My Friends” plays with notions of aging, fashion, and nostalgia to compelling—and very cool—ends.⁶

That’s How It Starts

In 1988, Murphy came to New York City from a small town outside of Princeton, New Jersey, to attend college at NYU. (His time as a student was brief, but he settled in the city for good.) He’d played guitar in bands and sang throughout high school but quickly found himself outpaced by more skilled musicians. Instead, Murphy picked up the drums and found their dynamic potential enlightening and empowering. “I thought, ‘[The drums] are great,’” he recalled. “You hit them harder and they get louder.”⁷ Murphy then cycled through a series of bands, all of them relatively short-lived and mostly unsuccessful. He soon established a presence, however, running live sound for concerts, and learned the ins and outs of sound engineering from Steve Albini and Bob Weston, both of whom had established themselves both as skilled musicians (in the band Shellac) and as successful engineers and producers in the recording field. It was at this point that Murphy began in earnest to explore and validate the sounds of disco and dance music. A self-described “obsessive audio nerd,” Murphy had stayed away from the genre for years. As Luke Jenner, lead singer of the Rapture, recalled: “When I first met him, James Murphy didn’t like two things: he didn’t like Bob Dylan, and he didn’t like disco.”⁸

Murphy befriended David Holmes, an Irish DJ, and Tim Goldsworthy, a British producer, and the three would become fixtures in Manhattan’s Lower East Side, where they would gather—either to DJ or to dance—at Plant Bar in the East Village and other hot spots for young music lovers in the late 1990s. Holmes and Murphy had a falling out at the end of the decade, and the former returned to the United Kingdom. Murphy, however, continued working with Goldsworthy, and by the beginning of the new millennium he had produced some of the most popular tracks in the scene, like the Rapture’s “House of Jealous Lovers.” Jonathan Galkin, a young producer, took notice of Murphy’s production skills, and a fruitful partnership between the three was born.⁹

DFA Records (also known as Death from Above) took up residence in an unassuming office in the West Village in 2001. The label quickly became a vessel for some of the newest and coolest music and threw parties—often DJ’d by Murphy—that introduced the hipster scene to a wide array of new acts: the Rapture, Juan McClean, Shit Robot, and more. Even as their local fame grew, the studio kept things casual (Murphy even took up residence on the couch for a bit), and their parties helped build the burgeoning dance scene. Yet even with DFA’s success, the record label maintained its penchant for Murphy’s signature irony. The label’s motto—even some two decades after its founding—is “Too old to be new, too new to be classic.”

The new millennium ushered in a period of uncertainty and rapid change for New York City. The dot-com bubble, which had brought unchecked

speculation and expansion to the stock market in the 1990s, burst in March 2000.¹⁰ The financial boom had helped cement Manhattan as a global financial center, and the resulting influx of capital and young professionals had transformed the slow trickle of the displaced middle class to the outer boroughs into a flood.¹¹ Musicians and creatives who, like Murphy and his friends, had made a home in Manhattan were forced out to Brooklyn—and Williamsburg in particular—to cultivate a new artistic community. The 2000 Presidential Election and subsequent legal decision in *Bush v. Gore* contributed to a loss of faith in American institutions, which had already been shaken by the economic turbulence. That which seemed certain suddenly seemed fleeting, and many of the city's creative class felt jostled by the millennium's shaky start.

No event brought more change to the city, however, than the September 11th terrorist attacks. Beyond the death toll and physical destruction, the attacks transformed cultural hierarchies and modes of production.¹² Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who had before been distrusted and despised by most of the city's intelligentsia, became a symbol of renewal and survival.¹³ Artists took to the stage and the canvas to try to work through the impossible trauma of the attacks.¹⁴ And the reverberations of 9/11—itself a booming sonic event—were soon heard in music.¹⁵ The September 11th attacks changed the cultural landscape of the entire country—and indeed, the entire world.

For musicians in New York City, the attacks upended their daily lives in drastic fashion. With death looming overhead—quite literally, for the city blanketed in soot and debris—simply “following the rules” seemed no longer an option. As Tunde Adebimpe, lead singer of TV on the Radio, recalled:

After 9/11 we basically decided there [was] no reason for being here besides to make the things we like to make and share them or not share them, because who's keeping score now? Try to find some kind of joy or meaning in your own life, because it's suddenly really fucked up outside.¹⁶

Echoing Adebimpe's dispassion, the producer, critic, and DJ Sarah Lewitinn (Ultragrrrrl) argued that in such an uncertain time, the best thing one could do was enjoy the moment: “Post-9/11 NYC had the energy that you were gonna die anyway—taking a subway, opening mail, walking down the street—so why die sober?”¹⁷ Life had changed in a single morning, and an uncertain future gave way to a more engaged present for many.

Murphy, however, was largely unfazed by the terrorist attacks. It had already been a heartbreaking year for him, with his mother's death in April and father's death in August. By the time of the attacks, he had already experienced his fill of tragedy. “When the towers came down, I was pretty blasé about it. To me it felt really normal. ‘Well, my dad's dead. The person who held the world together while I was a crazy person is gone’.”¹⁸ In the months following 9/11, Murphy slept at the DFA office and was broke. Yet in his ascetic existence, however, he found a renewed vigor for music-making that echoed Adebimpe's and Lewitinn's casual indifference. “That was kind of

a lonely period," he recalled. "But something really radical happened. It broke me free, in a way. Every day I thought, 'I'm going to die.' 'Losing My Edge' and the next wave of energy and combat was really driven out of that."¹⁹

Released in 2002, "Losing My Edge" throws notions of aging, fashion, and "coolness" into sharp relief. Murphy speaks listlessly over a cartoon drum machine with the kind of sounds one would expect from a children's Casio keyboard; he used a boom box with a built-in synthesizer, a gift from Adam "Ad-Rock" Horowitz of the Beastie Boys.²⁰ Stumbling through on the back of the beat, he tells us how he is slowly being overtaken by the "kids [who] are coming up from behind," kids from France, London, Tokyo, Berlin, and—of course—Brooklyn who reeked of "borrowed nostalgia for the unremembered '80s." Part defiant, part resigned to his fate, Murphy rattles off a list of times when he "was there": the first Can show in Cologne in 1968, the Paradise Garage DJ booth, the first Suicide rehearsals. It's telling that at one point he shouts, unprompted, "Gil Scott-Heron," whose poetic composition "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" (1970) is as immediate a precursor to "Losing My Edge" as anything. Murphy follows this list of firsts with a list of records he owns, bands he knows, instruments he's played, parties he's attended. "I had everything before anyone," he proclaims, half-heartedly planting his flag for all the hipsters to see. (Critic Sasha Frere-Jones said that the track was "closer to standup comedy than to pop music."²¹ Meanwhile, Stephen Malkmus, the lead singer of Pavement, has called it a "dance-rock workout."²²) Throughout it all, the lo-fi accompaniment hovers around a single pitch—G—and provides a steady foundation for Murphy's increasingly unsteady vocal flailings. Murphy *is* cool, and he can prove it with records and stories. And yet the loathing turns inward, and rather than boast of his imagined accomplishments and street cred, he mumbles them lethargically and admits that the kids are "better-looking people / with better ideas and more talent." Foregrounding quantity before quality, Murphy critiques his own collector instincts and wonders if he, like those "coming up behind" him, knows what he really wants.

The song was an almost immediate hit and achieved the rare feat of being "cool" without trying, with sincerity and a cheeky nod to indifference. As the writer and critic Andy Greenwald later reflected:

The thing that makes pop music so great is the way it parallel parks on the bleeding edge of cool: nothing could be better at this moment than this beat, this feeling, this chorus. It takes something ephemeral and impossible and for three-to-four exhilarating minutes, it makes it accessible and real. "Losing My Edge" is a song that's already bled out. It sticks its nose in all the parts you're supposed to ignore: jealousy, resentment, sarcasm, age. But it's not obnoxious in the way that "funny" music often is. The real trick is that it's hitting you while it's heckling you—the song bangs, even if the vocalist is a crank. I still don't quite know how he did it. Most breakthrough singles are about first love. "Losing My Edge" is about first



Figure 15.1 Guitarist Al Doyle, keyboardist Nancy Whang, lead singer James Murphy, bass guitarist Phil Skarich, and drummer Jaleel Bunton of LCD Soundsystem at the Virgin Festival in Baltimore, Maryland, on August 4, 2007. Credit: ZUMA Press, Inc./Alamy Stock Photo.

loss. And the second. And the third. And etc. etc. until everyone is just a jaded music critic in the bar right after the ugly light switches on. And you're dancing too much to care.²³

Journalist Marc Spitz similarly found the song's indictment of cool to be both liberating and accusatory. "Once the elation wore off," he recalled, "you realized that he was taking the piss. And there was no being a rock snob again after that song ... James Murphy reduced rock snobs like myself and himself to an utter cliché in eight minutes."²⁴ The track flourished among "rock snobs" and hipsters alike, going on to be included amongst the top tracks of the 2000s in lists compiled for *Pitchfork*, *Rolling Stone*, and *NME*.

Murphy, too, seemed to sense a danger in the nostalgia that permeated New York City's culture in the early 2000s. Musicians increasingly turned to the past for inspiration over the course of the decade, not only in their "little jackets," as the song accuses, but in recycling sounds and beats, reissuing albums and remastering box sets, and reuniting groups for world tours. As Simon Reynolds writes:

The 2000s [had] been about every other previous decade happening again all at once: a simultaneity of pop time that abolishes history while

nibbling away at the present's own sense of itself as an era with a distinct identity and feel.²⁵

And the September 11th terrorist attacks were a turning point in this recirculation of the past in music, with the resurgence of musical experiences ranging from the sounds of the 1960s to cassette culture playing a pivotal role in the altered cultural landscape.²⁶

It Comes Apart

The music of LCD Soundsystem was uniquely positioned within the post-9/11 music scene, when a desire to live with abandon and to experience the present contributed to a flourishing resurgence of dance music and synthpop.²⁷ Since the 1970s, dance was linked to self-actualization and agency through the body. Disco, the genre in which this was the most prominent, drew both applause and ire for this very reason; its association with Black and Brown queer bodies was a threat to white masculine supremacy.²⁸ Yet, despite the discursive battles being waged around the genre, disco's greatest power was in its ability to transcend words. "From the beginning," Tan Lin writes,

it was *always better not to think*. As an operating system, disco is not, as is mistakenly thought, an explosion of sound onto the dance floor but an implosion of pre-programmed dance moves into a head. No one really listens to disco, not even the listener; it is passively absorbed by a brain connected to a dancing body.²⁹

Raving has even been anecdotally trumpeted as a treatment for depression: dance cures all.³⁰ Tracks like "All My Friends," drawing on disco's characteristic four-on-the-floor kick drum and accented hi-hat strikes on the upbeat, enabled a dancer to get lost in the groove—to get caught up in the flow.³¹ At the same time, however, the gritty percussive timbres and graininess of Murphy's voice clearly gesture to the post-punk dance music of the early 1980s. Murphy's taste in dance music, explored not through individual albums but rather through the experience of DJs and New York City clubs in the '90s, reflects a sort of nebulous imagined past in which Donna Summer and Gang of Four gyrated next to each other on the dance floor.

If, as the oft-cited platitude goes, "where words fail, music speaks," then one might irreligiously say that where music falls short, drugs make up the difference. For decades, popular music has been linked to drug use. Yet for many years, Murphy had avoided them (at least the harder ones) completely: the man was notoriously straightedge and, like many stridently indie rockers, found them uncool.³² When he finally tried ecstasy at a party in the late 1990s, he had something of an epiphany:

I was like, "Sure, I'll try [ecstasy]." I was just going to try it to try it, but then it was the greatest thing ever! It was fucking awesome and I was

dancing and I was happy and I had a revelation: this is actually me. I was fully me. I was dancing and I was fully conscious. I wasn't sloppy. I wasn't drunk. I was alert and I was aware that I really enjoyed dancing. "This is me dancing. This isn't the drugs dancing. This is the drugs stopping myself from stopping myself from dancing."³³

The dance music of the past races into the present with "All My Friends." If in "Losing My Edge" Murphy had somewhat reluctantly accepted his age and maturity compared to the hip young Brooklynites, then in "All My Friends" he embraced it with both arms. More than any of the group's previous releases, *Sound of Silver* seemed to turn to earlier styles to illuminate the musical moment. "It's the album," argues critic Ryan Leas, "where LCD's retro behavior shifts from genres sitting next to each other in jarring and interesting ways into a blended monoggenre."³⁴ In an early review in *Pitchfork*, Mark Pytlik went even further, saying the album was "as close to a perfect hybrid of dance and rock music's values as you're likely to ever hear."³⁵

The track begins with a piano playing a pair of octaves and dyads (A and D) in both hands. The right hand beats a steady pulse, while the left stutters at moments. Rising in the mix, the bass jumps between octave As while sixteenth notes in the hi-hat begin to trace the beat measure by measure. Electric guitar comes in—once again reiterating the dichotomy between A and D—while reedy synths fill in the chords. The tonal center is somewhat ambiguous: A major seems the most likely culprit, but without any major cadential motion or resolutions, the D (a fourth above or fifth below, depending on your reading) casts uncertainty throughout.³⁶ The mix is heavy but agile: there are many moving parts joined in counterpoint, but the beat drives onward. The kick drum and initial piano pattern are all we need—everything else is ornamentation, welcome and evocative, but of ancillary importance to the visceral four-on-the-floor that Murphy manically pushes forward. This is music that combines the best of rhythm with the most fundamental of harmony: music that moves the body while standing still.

Murphy knows this. Falling on the backside of the beat, his words are both a call to action and a call to stasis. His lyrics seem to reinforce this lateness; he speaks of nights out and dancing until dawn, of parties with friends and strangers alike, yet at the same time showing his age through references to Pink Floyd ("Set controls for the heart of the sun") and reiterating his many years of experience.

This is music that you *feel* just as much as it makes you listen. Music for the body as much as it is for the mind. Murphy moves you, effortlessly, because he doesn't need to *try*. Whatever your drug of choice may be—controlled substances or the delirium that comes from being young, unafraid, and totally lost—there's a place for you in "All My Friends."

The dance floor is a purgatory, one, Murphy sings, that can knock you off your feet, lead you to stumble home, and destroy you in the most delightful and exhausting of ways.

“I wouldn’t trade one stupid decision,” he reflects, “for another five years of life.”

Repetition is key to “All My Friends.” Indeed, while some scholars have dismissed pop music’s proclivity for repeating itself as a crutch for the uninspired, the process that unfolds over the track’s seven-and-a-half minutes is a deeply pleasing one. The “process pleasure”—as the musicologist Luis-Manuel Garcia has called it—that comes from repetitive dance music is one that both prolongs and amplifies sensation.³⁷ For Murphy, repetitive rhythm, rather than melody or harmony, made a song powerful. “Lyrically and vocally,” he told NPR’s Terry Gross in a 2010 interview,

I was never all that interested in melody or great voices, and musically, I was never that interested in chord changes. I always just liked to find something that kind of did one thing for a really long time and did it very well—or just had a physicalness to it that I really liked. ... Just repetition and rhythm.³⁸

He further elaborated on his austere compositional process in an interview with Red Bull Music Academy:

I try not to put too much stuff in, and I try also to leave gaps. Like, usually in songs that’s one of the reasons I like the intros and outros. My songs are not very short, typically. I don’t get in and get out. I’m not nearly as obsessed with melodies and hooks and things that you’re supposed to be thinking about. So a lot of times it’ll be little elements in the beginning, or breakdowns where things can feature, so that I can feel satisfied that there’s something to dig into and look at ... So I try instead to let things [i.e., sounds] have their little lives, ‘cause intimacy is what gets me. Physicality and intimacy is what gets me.³⁹

Indeed, even at its most expansive, Murphy’s music tends to develop gradually and additively. His song “45:33,” which he wrote for the sportswear company Nike (despite not being a runner himself) in 2006, combines disco’s repetitive rhythms with unending ambient drones reminiscent of Brian Eno.⁴⁰ The title, too, seems a not-so-subtle reference to John Cage’s “4’33” (1952), a piece that requires the performer to remain totally silent for—you guessed it—four minutes and thirty-three seconds, leaving the listener to ponder only the sounds of his surroundings.⁴¹ Nothing, perhaps, is as repetitive as the banal soundscape of everyday life.⁴²

But everyday life tends to be loud, too. With the addition of each instrument into the mix, “All My Friends” grows increasingly louder; it’s less a crescendo than it is a series of rising plateaus. But for Murphy, too, this process is crucial. Connecting sound with bodies, loudness is essential to his music. “I

like to make sure we're not punishing anybody on those frequencies that hurt your ears," he recalled,

but I do like the visceral, physical experience of bass when it's attached to the rest of the sounds. I think it's bodily. The first shows I saw were really bodily loud, and it was a really incredible experience for me. Like, your adrenaline goes up. You kind of have a fight or flight experience that can be maintained in a nice way by volume.⁴³

For Murphy, this all comes back to the process he discovered with his first taste of ecstasy. "For me," he stated simply, "I need a certain amount of volume to turn the brain off."⁴⁴

Throughout "All My Friends," loudness builds, steadily, jarringly. Chaotically. Eventually, volume succeeds and supersedes, trading repetition for decibels as the track's organizing principle. The song ends with a flurry of kick drums, hi-hats, brittle guitars, and soaring synths. The piano dyad, covered by noise, remains the only constant while Murphy, his voice increasingly hoarse, shouts his lamentations of friendship and aging. Then, as suddenly as the chaos began, it ends. The drums stop, the guitar rings, the synths take one last gasp. If the song's birth was slow—building from silence to order—then its death is fast. Chaos, the final screams of an aging man, cuts sharply to silence.

Reviews of the album capitalized on Murphy's age compared to his peers in the genre (lovingly called, by one reviewer, "disco-punk")⁴⁵. One critic even went on to ask "how a chubby 'old' guy [Murphy] became king of the hipsters."⁴⁶ Yet the album was also universally praised for its ability to connect young Millennials with the previous generation. "By combining undeniably catchy beats with lyrics about regret, coolness and nostalgia," Gilbert Cruz remarked,

Murphy has hit on a formula that appeals both to 20-somethings who just want to lose their bodies to the music and to their more dignified elders who are beginning to realize they won't be able to do the same for much longer.⁴⁷

Perhaps even more abstractly, Murphy seems to have captured a particular moment of postmodern malaise.⁴⁸ The drugs are gone and the sun is coming up; morning gives the weary partier the chance to survey his destruction—to clean up the scraped knees and broken glass in between glasses of water and aspirin. Maybe he'll do it again tomorrow, maybe he won't. Today, though, friends or no friends, there's recognition of his mortality, tempered by a hangover.

Conclusion

Then, in 2008, everything changed. Not so much Murphy, of course; he still sits, dust-colored hair awry and with the general air of a wise elder. But as the

nation reckoned with the financial crisis and subsequent recession, so too did the New York City music scene reckon with a new generation of indie groups. Vampire Weekend, a group formed by students at Columbia University, looked not to the past for musical inspiration as much as they did to places outside of New York: to rhythmic traditions from Latin America and the African continent, spurred on by drummer Chris Tomson's studies of world music and ethnomusicology. ("Cape Cod Kwassa Kwassa," from the group's 2008 debut, features a Congolese *kwassa kwassa* rhythm alongside lyrics about young, upper-middle-class white identity.)⁴⁹ Compared to its predecessors like LCD Soundsystem and the Strokes, Vampire Weekend's polished, erudite tunes about punctuation ("Oxford Comma") and French domestic architecture ("Mansard Roof") represented a pivot toward a hipsterdom that had an Ivy-League pedigree and wore Vineyard Vines polo shirts. "Vampire Weekend are a band of guys who went to college," observed music editor Jenny Eliscu, "and the Strokes are guys who didn't go to college."⁵⁰ It was a hipsterdom more Hamptons than Portland, more Upper East Side than Williamsburg.

Along with the new wave and disco rhythms, drug use—especially psychotropics—also fell out of fashion. "With millennials [as opposed to Generation X]," recalled Karen O of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, "there's a big divide, a big divide. And I was right on the edge of that, but definitely falling into the 'angst-ridden, more sex in our entertainment' side of the divide."⁵¹ Vampire Weekend's frontman, Ezra Koenig, concurred: "When I picture people who consider getting fucked up on drugs or getting naked as some sort of rebellion, I picture people from my parents' generation, and it feels deeply boring and done."⁵²

Vampire Weekend were the kids Murphy feared were "coming up from behind." And while LCD Soundsystem would go on to release another album, *This Is Happening*, Murphy began to lose interest. The group announced that they were disbanding in February 2011. Two months later, at Madison Square Garden, they played their final show.

The kids, it seems, had finally caught up.

Except, much like his music, Murphy tends to ebb and flow with time. In December 2015, LCD Soundsystem released a deeply ironic Christmas single, and two years later their album *American Dream* dropped, swiftly becoming the number-one album in the United States.⁵³ With his typical self-loathing and introspection, Murphy anticipated a certain amount of discontent amongst his followers. He feared—perhaps rightfully so—that many would see the reunion as a sellout or way to cash in on indie nostalgia. "We're not just playing Coachella," he asserted.

We're playing all over. We're not just having some reunion tour., We're releasing a record (sometime this year—still working on it, actually), so this isn't a victory lap or anything, which wouldn't be of much interest to us. This is just the bus full of substitute teachers back from their coffee break with new music and the same weird gear—or as much of it as we still have. ... Thank fuck we were never skinny and young. Or at least

I wasn't. That always happens with bands. ... They aren't fat when they come back, typically, just, I don't know, thicker. I was lucky to start this band kind of fat and old, so there's no, like, "look how YOUNG they were!" shit to even find on the internet.⁵⁴

It's easy to picture Murphy, grey beard and sandy hair askew, smiling when he wrote the final sentence:

"I mean, we were younger and everything, but we weren't young, if you know what I mean."

Notes

- 1 "2007's Best Albums," *The Guardian*, December 7, 2007; The Wire, "Records of the Year," *The Wire*, December 2007, 37; Josh Tyrangiel, "Top 10 Albums of 2007," *Rolling Stone*, December 9, 2007.
- 2 Larissa Wodtke, "The Irony and the Ecstasy: The Queer Aging of Pet Shop Boys and LCD Soundsystem in Electronic Dance Music," *Dancecult* 11, no. 1 (2019), 30–52.
- 3 Note, for example, lyrics in the album's title track: "Sound of Silver, talk to me / Makes you want to feel like a teenager / Until you remember the feelings of / A real-life emotional teenager / Then you think again." For more on the tinfoil walls and inspiration behind the title, see Sophie Harris. "LCD Soundsystem's 'Sound of Silver': 10 Things You Didn't Know," *Rolling Stone*, March 12, 2007.
- 4 Stan Hawkins, "Feel the Beat Come Down: House Music as Rhetoric," in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- 5 Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
- 6 Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (New York, NY: Faber and Faber, 2011).
- 7 "James Murphy: The Man Behind LCD Soundsystem," *NPR*, June 21, 2010.
- 8 Lizzy Goodman, *Meet Me In the Bathroom: Rebirth and Rock and Roll in New York City, 2001-2011* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2017), 51.
- 9 Michaelangelo Matos, "Behind the Scenes at DFA: Jonathan Galkin," *Resident Advisor*, September 21, 2011.
- 10 Roger Lowenstein, *Origins of the Crash: The Great Bubble and Its Undoing* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2004).
- 11 Loretta Lees, "Super-Gentrification: The Case of Brooklyn Heights, New York City," *Urban Studies* 41, no. 12 (2003), 2487–509; Jason Hackworth, "Postrecession Gentrification in New York City," *Urban Affairs Review* 37, no. 2 (2002): 815–43.
- 12 Craig Calhoun, Paul Price, and Ashley Timmer, eds., *Understanding September 11* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2002).
- 13 Giuliani was even named *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year" in 2001. His revival was short lived, however. See Jack Newfield, "The Full Rudy: The Man, the Mayor, the Myth," *The Nation*, June 17, 2002.
- 14 John Bell, "Performance Studies in an Age of Terror," *The Drama Review* 47, no. 2 (2003).

- 15 Timothy Rice, Lorraine Hiromi Sakata, Nazir Jairazbhoy, and Ali Jihad Racy, "Musical Perspectives on Sept. 11: A Roundtable on Music, Community, Politics, and Violence," *Echo: A Music-Centered Journal* 3, no. 2 (2001); Gage Averill, "Soundly Organized Humanity," *Echo: A Music-Centered Journal* 3, no. 2 (2001); Jonathan Ritter and J. Martin Daughtry, eds., *Music in the Post-9/11 World* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007).
- 16 Goodman, *Meet Me In the Bathroom*, 205.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 206.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 282.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 283.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 287.
- 21 Sasha Frere-Jones, "Let's Dance," *The New Yorker*, May 3, 2010.
- 22 Josh Terry, "Stephen Malkmus Listens to LCD Soundsystem," *Noisey*, January 29, 2019.
- 23 Goodman, *Meet Me In the Bathroom*, 287.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 289.
- 25 Reynolds, *Retromania*, x-xi.
- 26 See, for example, essays by Jeffrey Roessner, S. Todd Atchison, and Craig Eley in *The Politics of Post-9/11 Music: Sound, Trauma, and the Music Industry in the Time of Terror*, eds. Brian Flota, Joseph P. Fisher, Stan Hawkins, and Lori Burns (London: Taylor and Francis, 2011).
- 27 It's perhaps unsurprising that the rallying cry for many American teens in the late aughts was "YOLO": "You Only Live Once."
- 28 Steve Dahl, Dave Hockstra, and Paul Natkin, *Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died* (Chicago, IL: Curbside Splendor, 2016). Although in his account Dahl downplays the racism and homophobia behind the event, both of these elements have been well documented in the intervening decades. See Tim Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Culture, 1970-1979* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2010); Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around*, 2nd edn. (New York, NY: Faber and Faber, 2007).
- 29 Tan Lin, "Disco as Operating System, Part One," *Criticism* 50, no. 1 (2008), 88.
- 30 Kieran Dahl, "How I'm Raving My Way Out of Depression," *Noisey*, April 10, 2017.
- 31 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (London: Harper Perennial Classics, 2008).
- 32 Goodman, *Meet Me In the Bathroom*, 65.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 66.
- 34 Ryan Leas, *Sound of Silver* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2018), 36.
- 35 Mark Pytlik, "LCD Soundsystem: Sound of Silver," *Pitchfork*, March 20, 2007.
- 36 Frere-Jones has pointed to this tension between A and D as elevating "All My Friends" to the top of Murphy's output. See Frere-Jones, "Let's Dance."
- 37 Luis-Manuel Garcia, "On and On: Repetition as Process and Pleasure in Electronic Dance Music," *Music Theory Online* 11, no. 4 (2005).
- 38 Terry Gross, "James Murphy: The Man Behind LCD Soundsystem," *Fresh Air*, June 21, 2010.
- 39 Todd L. Burns, "James Murphy Lecture for Red Bull Music Academy," *Red Bull Music Academy*, 2013.

- 40 John Burgess, “45’33’.” *The Guardian*, November 15, 2007.
- 41 It’s not surprising then that Murphy has sampled eminent minimalist composer Steve Reich in some of his remixes. See Martin Schneider, “LCD Soundsystem’s James Murphy Folds Steve Reich into His Epic Bowie Remix,” *Dangerous Minds*, November 12, 2013.
- 42 In an interview with Sasha Frere-Jones, Murphy recalled that “he wasn’t necessarily thinking of [famed minimalist composer] Reich” while writing “All My Friends,” but that “he doesn’t mind the comparison.” See Frere-Jones, “Let’s Dance.”
- 43 Gross, “James Murphy: The Man Behind LCD Soundsystem.”
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Nate Chinen, “Still Disco-Punk, Still Spoiling for a Fight,” *The New York Times*, March 18, 2007.
- 46 Jody Rosen, “The End of LCD Soundsystem,” *Slate*, April 4, 2011.
- 47 Gilbert Cruz, “All Yesterday’s Parties,” *Time*, May 24, 2010.
- 48 J. D. Connor, “Fiction in Review,” *The Yale Review* 99, no. 1 (2011), 178–86.
- 49 Simon Reynolds has suggested that the world music genre-mixing characteristic of Vampire Weekend and similar groups also stems from the omnivorous listening practices of younger people who grew up with easy access to internet and song streaming. See Goodman, *Meet Me In the Bathroom*, 527.
- 50 Goodman, *Meet Me In the Bathroom*, 528–29.
- 51 Ibid., 548.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Sam Wolfson, “Why the Indie Band Never Dies: Fake Breakups, Permanent Adolescence, and Cash Comebacks.” *The Guardian*, November 4, 2017.
- 54 James Murphy, “Let’s Just Start This Thing Finally with Some Clarity,” *LCD Soundsystem.com*, January 2016.

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