Complex Density:

A Quantum Regionalist Reading of Midwestern Literature and Pop-Punk

by

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Abstract

      This thesis examines Midwest regionalism in the digital age and pop-punk as a new form of regional text. Ryden has suggested that the Midwest should be read like a tapestry, full of individual narrative "threads" that come together to form a whole picture. Manalansan has suggested a sort of porousness—the Midwest as a membrane, a passing-through or an in-between. Giffels, on the other hand, has framed the Midwest as a "thriving Void," one that allowed punk to grow before it spread to any other part of the country. The thesis expands upon metaphors of the Midwest suggested by Ryden and Manalansan to address regionalism in the globalized digital age, using quantum theories of engagement offered by Boler, Phillips, and Forlano and digital critical regionalism adapted from architecture by Theodorou. The project aims to show how a quantum theory of regionalism is better adapted than previous metaphors to capture the infinite production of information that now characterizes the Midwest.

      The methodology includes an explicit layout of operationalized definitions of the quantum theoretical groundwork of the thesis. Then, the project traces hardcore punk's roots in Detroit specifically using a compilation of testimonials gathered by former scene member Tony Rettman, and traces the music's lineage from hardcore all the way to modern-day pop-punk. The project explores commonalities between pop-punk and literature, and ways in which their differing modalities change definitions of region and the country's perception of regional space. In the final part, the thesis examines the creation and distribution of mp3s, and explore why the mp3 is the perfect "container technology" to hold pop-punk as Midwest export.

      As tech companies (like Amazon) move into the Midwest, it becomes more and more crucial to understand the Midwest's relationship with the digital industrial: data and information have replaced cars and appliances as the region's chief exports. The generation of data is quick and practically unlimited, and the pieces, like pixels, can come together to form a high-definition, multi-dimensional portrait of the region. This thesis aims to explore how the introduction of "big data" and globalized information transmission has already affected the way that the Midwest tells its own story; it could also work to predict how the rest of the country understands the Midwest as the physical center of new industrial data.

Keywords: regionalism, Midwest, pop-punk, quantum theory, data, industry

Contents

Introduction

The literature of the Midwest and the Midwestern Rust Belt is almost as hard to characterize and describe as the Midwest itself. The Midwest is a unique and eclectic mix of people with such different ideologies, backgrounds, and experiences—whose histories refuse to align and all clamor for attention and representation. The landscapes are porous; farms and rural areas are slowly absorbing the ruins of industry, the history of the suburbs intertwines with the history of the urban areas. The Midwest is absolutely a distinct region: it is *not* the South and *not* the East Coast and *not* the West Coast, but the characteristics that make it so—more gut feelings than anything—are particularly hard to capture and put into words. Some authors, including Mark Weinberg, Philip Meyer, Charlie LeDuff, and Jennifer Egan, argue that this is because the Midwest is the heart of the United States—a microcosm of the U.S., even—and as such, the story of the Midwest is inseparable from the story of the Unites States at large. This is true. And it is precisely the reason the Midwest's definition remains so elusive, as does the definition of Midwestern literature.

The truth is valued in the Midwest, but is only one of a trifecta of different understandings. In the Midwest, there are stories, there is fact, and there is history—all entirely separate—only sometimes they serendipitously correspond and become truth. Midwestern literature has long been preoccupied with these chance collisions that create truth, from 1916 poetry anthology *Spoon River Anthology* to short-story collection *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) to novels *Blood on the Forge* (1941), *Middlesex* (2002), and *American Rust* (2009). LeDuff approaches these themes with a journalistic eye, in *Detroit: An American Autopsy* (2013). Mark Winegardner's *Crooked River Burning* (2001) also takes up these topics in an epic love letter to Cleveland that takes readers from the '40s all the way to the present, explicitly addressing and

teasing the threads of narrative, fact, and truth out and tying them together across time. Considering some of the common themes persist across hundreds of years, scholars have struggled to find a way of reading Midwestern literature that aligns all the works' similarities, while also acknowledging their vast differences.

Previously, the thematic relationships in Midwestern literature have been envisioned and theorized through Ryden's metaphor of tapestry-weaving—the "little histories" become the threads with which the "big history" is woven—the tapestry physically contains the detail of each thread, but the overall picture is much more than just a series of anecdotes. However, with the deluge of intangible data-driven, digital, and musical exports that is overtaking the very physical history of Midwestern exports, a new model becomes necessary. Ryden's threads become tangled and multi-dimensional, existing in multiple locations and times and creating different vector relationships in each state. As a result, I will introduce a new model to address this multi-dimensionality: quantum regionalism. In either case, however, Midwestern literature becomes a methodology more than a genre: it is a way of approaching writing, for an author; it is a way of approaching a text, for a reader; and it is the relationship that is formed between the author, the reader, and the common region through the use of the text.

Additionally, the evolution of technology and travel requires a new way of examining cultural and regional texts; thus paving the way for the introduction of Midwest pop-punk as a supplement and as a smaller building block, capable of capturing some of the same themes and essential regional elements as a book or a short story, but in a much more streamlined and widely distributable fashion. The introduction of pop-punk also brings with it the question of new media formats and digital regionalism—a philosophy that can be adopted (or appropriated) from architecture into literature. Digital regionalism allows for the preservation of "essential regional

elements" that identify a structure as part of a specific region, as well as acting as signage or landmarks for people that happen to come across the structure or the text that allow them to locate themselves in relation to the art.

More concretely, Midwestern literature can be characterized through an exploration of some of the themes and topics that recur frequently over a number of the texts. Ideas of loyalty family, home, industry, and place pervade these texts, closely tied with work and the idea of masculinity and strength, gender and fate, and gender and space. The act of staying versus leaving becomes a highly gendered, crucial element of characterization and narrative. Belief in destiny and chance and their relationship to persistent hope also characterizes Midwesterners and their stories: often sports are an excellent representation of these sorts of "impossible hopes," and are used as a metaphor for race, for hope, for destruction, for despair. Midwesterners also have seemingly supernatural, or cultural connections to the landscape, the natural, and the weather. The people are almost as much a part of the land as the earth that, inch-by-inch, reclaims the rusting steel beams of decaying factories; and so stories of the Midwest often invoke nature and the natural as a means of understanding the human.

What is particularly interesting—and becomes another central question of this exploration—is how (and why) a number of songs by Midwestern pop-punk bands explore the same themes in their music. In five minutes or less, many songs by bands like La Dispute, Real Friends, and The Wonder Years raise a number of the same questions as the novels—while simultaneously offering a highly portable, multimodal experience of their home regions. What about the regional identity of the Midwest fertilizes these various forms of expression and their range of common themes? How does the musical medium (and the mp3's form) shape new of regionalism, specifically related to the Midwest? The novel and the song (and even the album)

are fundamentally different in their treatments of various topics, but perhaps they come to have some of the same effect when considered in the current digital age. The portability and design of mp3s also allows for the development of new metaphors surrounding the newly portable and newly concentrated regional experience that comprises one of these songs. The act of touring mirrors the almost-escape in its inevitable return. The bands themselves often cite their surroundings as crucial influences on their sounds and their processes of creating. The region influences not only product, but also process.

Of course this short foray does not cover every theme that recurs in these texts—it would be impossible to do so! However, so many of these themes and questions are universal. People in every region of the United States struggle with values, family, and fate. Even more people follow sports. Silicon Valley is the home of technology, not Michigan. Of course, these things are all true: these are universal themes. However, as in the examples explored above, what sets the Midwestern examples apart is their consistent appearances throughout Midwestern texts. A text about, say, New York requires only the name of the location, requires only the setting in order to invoke readers' cache of literary working memories and allusions. Readers understand New York, or Paris, or California, and associate these locations with a strong idea of *something*, a strong belief or impression, an experience or a bank of literary memories—something that cannot be said, necessarily, for the Midwest. And so, like the characters so often rely on the unsaid in Midwestern texts, the Midwest relies on what is *not* said and what is not obvious in order to define it. As in most respects, on the surface, the Midwest looks plain—uninteresting. "Flyover country," to put it as so many East- and West- Coasters do. However, the distinctness of Midwestern literature requires time and patience to excavate, and to reveal. Once it is

established, though, the genre moves into sharper focus—not necessarily easier to describe or to characterize, but easier to see and examine.

In the first part of the thesis, we look more closely at methodology and metaphor, exploring quantum regionalism, its warrants and its shortcomings. The following parts act less as sequential "chapters," but more like concurrently extant particle states—by examining a particle closely, we freeze its state, but do not forget that it simultaneously inhabits another form. The first of these states is the absorbance state—the great inhale that brought so many people to the Midwest during the auto industry's heyday. We look at the music that originated in the Midwest—rock 'n' roll and hardcore punk—and we trace pop-punk's lineage through to modern Midwest pop-punk. In the second state, on transmittance, we look at the view from the outside in. We look at the Midwest's industrial exports—first automobiles, and now data and information—and we compare how the Midwest looks from the outside in to how it looks from the inside out. We examine the act of touring, the transmittance of packaged regionalism in the form of pop-punk songs, and question the meaning of leaving and almost escaping. Finally, we look at compression and collapse, and their implications on the other states of the Midwest. While collapse has been, since the '80s, the popular image of Detroit and of other Rust Belt cities, collapse is becoming slowly replaced by compression. Finally, we will look at the implications of the introduction of music into the Midwestern canon, and see what conclusions can be made about the new Midwest regionalism.

Methodology: Quantum & Digital Regionalism

> *"[T]he 'paradox' is only a conflict between reality and your feeling of what reality 'ought to be.'"[1]*

> *"I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum physics."*

> *- Richard Feynman*

Throughout this project, I take some risks in adapting certain methods and approaches from other disciplines and applying them to the study of literature and region. While some aspects of these derivative approaches might not align completely with their originals, I believe these risks can be justified by the increase in range of "motion" (so to speak) and understanding in the field as a result of the introduction of these new approaches. By explicitly laying out these concepts, I hope to provide explicitly operationalized definitions of these concepts in this context and to acknowledge where theoretical shortcomings may be.

The first critical approach is introduced from architecture, and the rest are adapted from quantum physics: together, they create a powerful new way to read the Midwest and its multimodal exports. While I am by no means an expert in (or even deeply familiar with) quantum physics or architecture, the striking similarities between the ways that architecture understands location and quantum physics understands states of being have captured my attention.

Digital regionalism is itself a modern adaptation of critical regionalism, a more traditional architectural school of thought, designed to describe and characterize what it means to be *located* in a globalized world. Boler describes quantum entanglement as "non-linear,"

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[1] Richard Feynman, *The Feynman Lectures on Physics* (1964) Volume III, p. 18-9

"dynamic," and a system that "queers the binary of the individual and the group" (qtd. in Boler and Phillips). These themes, as will be revealed later in the thesis, are crucial aspects of understanding life and art in the Midwest. Thus, while my construction of architectural and quantum concepts in the following chapter would not be fit for analysis by experts in the respective fields, I have tried to utilize the general concepts as accurately as I can. Other scholars like Boler, Phillips, and Forlano have begun studying entanglement as a social phenomenon, as well, but have not (as of yet) applied the ideas to regionalism specifically.

I argue that, in the case of the Midwest, a new regional export requires a new understanding of regionalism. As regionalism and data become parallel in form and function, and as data (regional particles) become smaller, quantum regionalism can help us understand that regional particles—the "essential" features of regionalism, or the collapsed region—are transmitted around the globe. In this thesis, the data (or the collapsed regional export) will be music in the form of mp3s. While mp3s do not, of course, comprise all data that are and will be exported from the Midwest, the process of creating an mp3 file also has a unqiue implication for our understanding of regional distillation and identity in and outside of the Midwest.

The key concepts we will adapt for regionalist readings are *Digital Regionalism, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, quantum entanglement*, *black holes*, and *wave-particle duality.* As stated earlier, my purpose here is simply to introduce these concepts and set up an operational framework for the rest of the thesis; the exact nuances and applications of these various concepts will be further explored and disentangled throughout the next chapters.

Digital Regionalism

Digital regionalism is a fairly recent architectural concept that stems from critical regionalism and globalization (Theodorou 12). Digital regionalism is, at its core, the study of

how to maintain crucial cultural and regional design features in an increasingly globalized world

(12). In other words, in an age when skyscrapers and suburbs look the same across the globe,

how do we keep the crucial and defining features that allow us to know where we are? Critical

and distinct regional designs begin to function as landmarks, giving us a cue that we are where

we want or need to be. Musically and digitally, this can take the shape of the incorporation of

distinct sights, locales, or sounds, or even the tying-in of a regional backstory to a presented

work of art.

Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle

In order to conceptualize quantum entanglement, we must first understand Heisenberg's

Uncertainty Principle. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle states that we can only measure a set

number of characteristics of a particle at one time. Thus, by this principle, we can only measure

the momentum of a particle *or* the position, not both: the knowing of one automatically inhibits

our ability to know the other (Feynman, "Ch. 1").

Quantum Entanglement

Based on Heisenberg's principle, this particular phenomenon refers to how two particles

become paired, or "entangled." In short, two pairs of particles share the same characteristics

across space and time. When one particle from each of those pairs become entangled, one

particle "spins" one way and the other particle changes its spin to be complimentary to the first

particle's spin. They not only determine each other's motion—in the past and in the future—but

also the motion of the other particles in their respective pairs. The temporal element of

determining past and future spin is referred to specifically as retrocausality (Feynman, "Ch. 18").

Even the most brilliant quantum physicists do not fully understand *why* particles spin in

the ways that they do—i.e., how they come to spin "up" or "down" and determine the spin

directions of the other particles in their entanglement and in their respective pairs (Feynman).

Richard Feynman suggested a sort of "consciousness" that determined the particles' spin. His

theory of consciousness only occurrs on a microscopic scales, however, and does not operate as

"consciousness" in the humanistic sense (i.e., its interactions are determined).

Black Holes

Black holes are paradoxes: they work entirely differently in theory than they do in reality.

According to a model simplified and showcased in a 2013 graphic in the New York Times[2], a

theoretical particle in a theoretical black hole can move in and out of the black hole while also

preserving all its information upon exiting the black hole (DeSantis). In theory, this exit is

smooth (or, what the reserachers call "drama-free"), which violates no laws of physics

(DeSantis).

In reality, a particle's exit from a black hole is far from drama free—instead, there is a

firewall that surrounds the entire black hole and creates friction and "drama" upon exit, which

would cause the loss of information the particles must preserve (DeSantis). In order to explain

the preservation of information, then, the particle must be connected to another particle inside of

the black hole (like a chain). This would not be paradoxical except that a particle can only have

one connection to another particle—but in a chain model, the particle must be connected to two

other particles: one other particle on the outside of the black hole (that pulled it out), and one

more particle on the inside of the black hole (that helps it preserve its information) (DeSantis).

The solution to this particle, scientists have theorized, is that the *same* particle exists both

inside and outside of the black hole, connected by a wormhole (DeSantis).

Wave-particle duality.

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[2] "The Firewall Paradox," *The New York Times,* August 12, 2013.

Particles can inhabit multiple states simultaneously, but can only be studied in one state at a time. Light particles, in particular, exhibit wave-particle duality—meaning, they exist simultaneously as particles and as waves, but can only be studied in a *superposed* state (Hawking and Penrose, Feynman "Ch. 4"). The act of observation reuslts in quantum *superposition*, which is the collapsing of the particle and the wave states into a new and unique state (Hawking and Penrose, Feynman "Ch. 4"). This principle also dictates, conversely, that any quantum state will be a combination of two different quantum states.

Using the above framework, we can begin to think about the Midwestern experience in quantum terms—we can complicate Ryden's threads, allow them into move into multiple dimensions on simultaneous timelines and show their three-dimensionality. By doing so, we can gain a more accurate understanding of how the "threads" exists between and across different states.

Content: inhales/exhales

> *Like other forms of contemporary mass communication, popular music simultaneously undermines and reinforces our sense of place. Music that originally emerged from concrete historical experiences in places with clearly identifiable geographic boundaries now circulates as an interchangeable commodity marketed to consumers all over the globe ….*
>
> *These transactions transform—but do not erase—attachments to place.*
>
> (Lipsitz, 1994:4, qtd in Jones 2002)

In Midwest history and storytelling, fact, nostalgia, and truth act as multiple states of the regional particle. These states only temporarily settle into one track or another when closely examined; but the examinable state in addition to the knowledge of the states of being that are *not* present, comprise history. Many scholars argue that the Midwest must be known story-by-story, book-by-book, and landscape-by-landscape (Ryden, Lauck). In literature, these would be threads—but the metaphor of threads in a tapestry does not capture the difficulty (impossibility) of understanding, describing, and capturing all of the threads in one single snapshot. In new quantum model, I propose, there is an acknowledgement that, by pinning down one particle (or one narrative—in this case, one song) the others slip away, so, to take one out of the context of the others would be to obliterate important aspects of history.

Manalansan et. al. argue that the boundaries between different regional aspects are more porous than they might initially seem: for example, the "escape" from the rural might not constitute an arrival at the urban or the suburban. Instead, the concept of "escape" might be complicated to include temporal escape, or temporal escape that is not necessarily constrained by physical space (Manalansan 4). Additionally, the idea of the Midwest—"the Middle"—as an always-point of departure, "simultaneously a catalyst for movement and a marker of stasis."

(Manalansan 6). Rosen, similarly, draws a comparison between the Midwest and the skin, providing us a protective "membrane" that protects the individual and the collective: the membrane contains space, matter, and time, and provides a location for homeostasis to happen. The Midwest, then, is a giant incubator; The Void is "The Flatness," the skin, and just as it is difficult to define what makes a person, it is difficult to define the Midwest due to its existence in interactions between people, in relationships, in recognition of certain patterns and cycles, compatibility, and "expectations between writer and reader" (Rosen 96).

The common denominator in all of these metaphors is the membrane, the barrier, or—to invoke the black hole metaphor—the dramatic exit. All of these conceptualizations provide a theory of the firewall, but none actually explain how cultural/regional objects pass over the firewall. The quantum theory, however, allows for movement in and out of the Midwestern black hole in the form of the wormhole. The wormhole transcends temporal and physical boundaries in order to allow for the experience of the same regional particle—in this case, music—both inside and outside of the Midwest. The boundaries were, at first, more difficult to cross and the wormhole took the shape of 'zines and records and eventually VHS tapes that were mailed around the country; as technology has rapidly added another state of existence to the region, the wormhole has become much more smooth and therefore the boundaries more porous.

In order to understand music as the wormhole, though, we first need to understand the music and its void.

The void.

"What is the Midwest but a thriving void?" (Giffels 2015).

Punk needed a void and a void it received. Punk scenes grow out of the deliberate destruction of normativity. In the late 1970s and early '80s, the massive deflation of Detroit and

its surrounding areas rendered much of it barren. Punks slowly encroached on the city proper,

even though they still *lived* in the suburbs. Critic Lester Bangs described Detroit at the time as

"a huge mouth with all its teeth rotted out," and further noted that, "[i]f this is true, the Cass

Corridor was the most abscess-ridden part of the whole pie hole" (Rettman 83). Where better for

the punks to settle, then, than the Cass Corridor? Specifically, the Freezer Theater, which would

become "the central meeting point for the whole Michigan/Ohio hardcore scene," localizing and

physically realizing a scene that had previously only existed in the abstract, in correspondence,

and more recently, in video (85). An abandoned theater, as the name would suggest, The Freezer

Theater seemed a perfect place to transform into a venue: sold for cheap, located near abandoned

houses "burned out during the sixties riots,"—perfect, as fewer residents meant fewer cops (85).

However, fueled by rage and its pride in an ultraviolent scene and culture, hardcore punk

had only a few years before it became a danger to both participants and unlucky residents of

Detroit—mostly, as it turns out, people of color. The addition of the new subgenre of Oi! Punk

to the mix catalyzed further racism. In London, bands had started singing about how to get rid of

waves of new (brown) immigrants in their city who were "stealing their jobs," and the Midwest

punks—also jobless and surrounded by brown people—followed suit, beginning the neo-Nazi

"trend" that would eventually consume and kill the scene by '85.[3] Rettman describes the scene's

fall as something almost inevitable, mob-like and colossal, but destined all the same:

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[3] The rise of skinheads and neo-Nazis in hardcore is a story that everyone who grows up in the scene is taught not to condone or repeat. Despite the attempts at education and inclusivity, however, the ramifications of this particular period are still present, especially in the lack of diversity of most local scenes and performing groups, as well as in the whitewashed history. Punks of color, including myself, often struggle to balance loyalty to such an exclusively straight, white, male scene and accountability to community and to self. Many—like (ex-)punk scholar Mimi Nguyen—make the decision to leave the scene altogether.   I write this note to acknowledge that there are hundreds of other stories of punk, all just as real and important to the development of the scene, but due to systematic race-, gender- and sexuality-based oppression, have never surfaced as dominant stories or "legends" of punk.

"Although I do not sympathize or condone what any of those people [skinhead
neo-Nazis] were, you can sort of see [what was happening]. A lot of their parents
were being laid off from the car manufacturing plants because people were buying
foreign cars. These kids didn't see much hope and they needed a scapegoat"
(Rettman 140).

Though the idea of shirking capitalism (not working, basically, or "fuck[ing] the system"/
"The Man") has been represented as an important tenet of punk, what is especially interesting to
consider is that the earliest punks started making music because they *wanted* jobs—jobs they
could no longer get. These were kids who were set to do much worse than their parents, and
they did not take to it well. Consider The Replacements, one of the earliest formative bands that
was active in the mid- to late-seventies: they, first, began playing music to "keep [themselves]
out of trouble and away from the factories" (Azerrad 198). Their musical careers began as a way
to avoid the inevitable, but by "God Damn Job"—featuring the lyrics "I need a god-damn job"—
it became another way the band pioneered the "loser" mentality that has, interestingly, skipped a
generation and re-emerged in today's pop-punk (Azerrad 206, 187). Even their name, "The
Replacements," was meant to be a play on their own feelings of helplessness: "Westerberg felt
they should think in terms of taking the place of something—'Like maybe the main act doesn't
show, […] and instead the crowd has to settle for an earful of us dirtbags'" (Azerrad 199).
Already, this introduces the question of authenticity, of belonging, and of agency and escape.
The Replacements represented complacency, or "anarchy without the rage" (Azerrad 187).

The rage would soon emerge. Hardcore began as a way for jobless, hopeless kids to
express their anger at their circumstances and their lives; soon, it spiraled out of control.
Rettman describes the chaos that would erupt from abandoned house venues as the scene began

to die: young white suburbanites came into the city for a show and left behind used needles,

broken glass, and sometimes even brutally beaten or dead bodies in the streets, all while being

completely ignored by the cops (147). At least one punk was killed outside of The Freezer

Theater and left; what had been, ultimately, a brotherhood, was imploding—not unlike the

fraternal relationships of the factories into the race riots of the '60s and '70s. Rettman says: "If

the cops ever rode by, which was rare, they would just stop, look at three hundred little bald

white kids hanging out in the street and say, "Wow you guys are fuckin' stupid!" (94).

The white kids on the scene did not face any kind of consequences for their destruction;

instead, people of color were quickly and violently pushed out of the scene.   Midwest hardcore's

founding members were turning away, no longer recognizing the scene they had built and

wanted to be a part of. "Suddenly," Rettman says, "You'd get people who wouldn't listen to Bad

Brains because the singer was black, or you'd get skinheads attacking black people at the shows

or outside the venues" (153). The culture became much more dangerous; not only were people

at the shows or venues unsafe, white suburbanite neo-Nazis made sure the area was significantly

more dangerous, as well.

> "Detroit's music always revolved around this racial exchange. But with the
>
> hardcore thing, that was the first music to come out of the city where there was no
>
> racial exchange whatsoever; there's nothing remotely black coming from that
>
> music. The funny thing about it though was for these kids to find somewhere to
>
> play, they had to find some shitty storefront in the ghetto. So it was the soul
>
> music of the suburbs that had to be played in the inner city" (Rettman, 94).

Soon after, the scene died out completely. "Once there were hardcore records influenced

by hardcore, it was done. […Hardcore] was supposed to be a music of no tradition!" (Rettman

143). Whether or not it was really "done" is arguable; what did definitely happen was that bands (many of them from the east or west coasts—think Minor Threat, Black Flag, Dead Kennedys, etc.) survived and became the next wave of hardcore. Fighting fascism and neo-Nazism in the scene became popular, if a little one dimensional, but it was already too late to save the Midwest scene. While it lasted, though, "The Detroit hardcore scene was dirty but true. Hardcore skate punk kids supported their local bands, and the bands supported the hardcore skateboard kids. It was a true brotherhood amongst friends, and it was probably the best hardcore scene ever" (Rettman 157). The whole thing lasted just six years.

The entire contained outburst of hardcore, as well as its music, 'zines, and culture, reflect the very Midwestern story of the "almost-escape." Characters—or real people, in this case— come *this close* to breaking a cycle, whether it be poverty or boredom or complacency, and just at the crucial climactic moment, recede and retreat to repeat themselves, seemingly, for eternity. Pop-punk is different than hardcore in that it is self-aware of this, and riffs on the genre standards in what sometimes seems like a parody, and what sometimes seems truly hopeless. Take, for example, the chorus of The Wonder Years' song, "We Could Die Like This," on their album *The Greatest Generation*. This album follows *Suburbia I've Given You My All and Now I'm Nothing* and *The Upsides*—both collections of songs about leaving, about touring and being away from home and family—and it is about dying in the suburbs.

> Operator, take me home.
>
> I don't know where else to go.
>
> I want to die in the suburbs.
>
> A heart attack shoveling snow all alone.
>
> If I die, I want to die in the suburbs.

I want to die in the suburbs. (TWY 2012)

Up-tempo yet simultaneously yearning, there is an element of complacency here that had not been so starkly present in the previous albums. It is perhaps about understanding, finally, that the Midwest (as the literature seems to suggest) cannot be left behind. Like touring, and like so many stories and novels seem to suggest, Midwesterners always end up coming back— whether they want to or not. Charlotte, the protagonist in Jennifer Egan's novel *Look At Me* is a model transplanted to New York from Illinois who discovers this inevitable pull. *Look At Me* is, more generally, about data and information industries, identity, and inhabiting space and landscapes. However, the novel's action begins when Charlotte crashes her car coming from New York and wakes up with metal screws and plates from small-town Illinois embedded in her jaw and face (Egan 12). Charles Baxter's character in "Westland" discovers this as he tries desperately to drive his car into a concrete wall, ending or even beginning *something* other than his regular routine, but fails. He drives past, succumbing to sameness, to complacency, and does not even seem to be upset (Baxter 39).

These fleeting moments of hope, and their accompanied senses of profound loss, Giffels argues, may be "our legacy." (Giffels 8). "Neither […] hope [or] loss [..] can exist without the other, and yet at every turn it is necessary to believe that at some point one will ultimately conquer. And that will be our [the Midwest's] legacy." (Giffels 9). He writes in reference to the Cleveland Cavaliers, one of the Midwest's many terrible sports teams, but the sentiment obviously applies to music, too. Historically, sports have been one of the things Midwesterners choose to love and invest themselves in because "[the teams] needed to be loved […and we] needed something to love"—music functions similarly, though not exactly in the same way (Giffels 8). Sports have also often functioned as a site of racial boundary-blurring and surprising

progressiveness, as well as a symbol of the endless hope/loss cycle. Music adds to the depth of

this metaphor in that it allows Midwestern artists to represent themselves deliberately and

intentionally in the art that they create. A win or a loss in a sports game may come to

accidentally represent a larger occurrence—or, it has been assigned a nostalgic or artistic

regional significance—but music does so with the intent of capturing a moment, a "little

history," in Ryden's words (Ryden). Midwest pop-punk is how Midwesterners are representing

themselves. It is the insider's perspective of the inside.

The music.

But, as we discussed at first, the wormhole deals with the merging of the inside and the

outside, or the creation of a passageway that allows space on both sides of the membrane to be

connected. Both the music (as a form) and the content of the music deals with the overlay of

multiple states of existence and being; and especially, considering the Midwest's manufacturing

background, the importance of objects as anchors for wormholes. The songs are, themselves,

artifacts—distilled and manufactured three to five minute explorations of regionalism—but deal,

content-wise, with regional artifacts as well. Grand Rapids, Michigan-based band La Dispute,

especially, utilizes a distinctly Midwestern way of writing and understanding history on their

latest two albums, *Rooms of the House* and *Wildlife*.

In their most recent studio album, *Rooms of the House*[4], La Dispute explores a handful of

Midwestern themes with surprising depth and clarity, considering the medium. During one of

their alternative seated performances last year at the Detroit Masonic Temple, they spoke about

how "the House" for which their album was named was intended to be a prototypical

Midwestern house; their lyrical inspiration was the way that the House takes up the story of all

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[4] Hereafter referred to as *"RotH."*

the people who live in it. Even from the titles of songs on the album like "Hudsonville, MI 1956" to "The Child We Lost 1963," to "Scenes from Highways 1981-2009," which, incidentally, do not appear chronologically, it becomes evident that the band is less focused on telling a linear history than dipping into the highly personal, highly specific, and microscopic histories of a few characters, and then using those histories to tell a larger story on the album as a whole.

Manalansan's concept of temporal escape comes to mind here: by creating a non-chronological, temporally disordered compilation of regional particles, La Dispute creates the experience of the wormhole for the listener. Transported between locations, between localities, and between temporalities in mere minutes, the boundaries between the urban/industrial, the rural, and the suburban are transcended with ease.

"Objects in Space," the last song on the album, begins quietly, with a slow, even beat and defined, single notes on the guitar. Dreyer, the vocalist, comes in with flowing, spoken lyrics that adhere to but are not limited by the drumbeat.

> Yesterday alone I laid everything out on the carpet—
>
> Books, kitchen things, objects with specific purpose (or none)
>
> Arranged them sideways in a grid on the floor, there unmoored
>
> Out of context, then considered it
>
> First the whole picture, then everything individually
>
> Humming along at the deadest pace imaginable
>
> One object then another and then the next
>
> And I wondered what they meant there
>
> If they meant anything still. (Objects in Space)

With these few lines and the spare instrumentals, the band has described the act of creating

Midwestern history, the examination of the particles and the freezing of the particle states. Here

we see objects as physical representations of small experiences of history, almost in the same

ways that the songs function in the context of novels and narratives. These are small histories, of

course, objects that organically exist in different forms, particles that are first "unmoored" from

one another and from their "context," but then together "considered" as a "whole picture," and

again "individually" ("Objects in Space"). The consideration of the parts, first separately, then

together, then separately once again speaks to the ambiguity and the difficulty in condensing

parts into the whole. Once they are amalgamated, then, what do these objects mean? What have

they meant? What are the ways in which these two questions, these two different and potentially

conflicting states of existence push against each other and create the same kind of tension that

makes telling the (hi)story of the Midwest so difficult?

> Today I moved everything from the floor to the table in the dining room;
>
> Placed each thing carefully without reason—
>
> or at least without one I understood or could describe
>
> --there on the table together, and when I was done and stepped back I realized
>
> what I had made:
>
> keepsakes, pictures, letters, ordinary objects all collected there:
>
> A memorial.
>
> [….]
>
> And I knew I had to take it down before anybody else saw. (Objects in Space).

Here, Dreyer describes quantum entanglement: the objects come into contact in a kind of

microscopically conscious state ("without reason […] I could understand or describe") across

space and across time, then determine each other's "spin" or narrative trajectory. Together, they create retrocausal meaning—the memorial takes shape as a collection, as a multiplicity, not as a series of individual items. The "group/individual binary" has, again, been disrupted (Boler).

The implicit shame in the memorial is also worth exploring; where other regions unabashedly create memorials to and by themselves, the Midwest is excruciatingly private. As explored in the short stories "Return of a Private," "You're Ugly, Too," and "Westland", dialogue in the Midwest is about what remains *unsaid*, sometimes even more than what is said. Characters engage in limited dialogue, and instead communicate both to each other and to readers through an elaborate system of implications. An audience must read closely and carefully to identify what is *actually* being said. Tensions between the public and private also speak to issues of inside versus outside, what things seem like and what they are.

On "Hudsonville, MI 1956", vocalist Dreyer speaks over bars of rhythmic, yet uneasy chords: "There are moments of collapse […]/You can kick but you can't get out/There is history in the rooms of the house" ("Hudsonville"). These inescapable, overlaid histories speak to an appropriated notion of a black hole*,* the momentary experience of the collapse of time and space; a direct inhabitation of multiple states of being across temporal-spatial zones that Manalansan refers to, condensed into one pinpoint—one single particle (Manalansan). These themes are reflected also in Philip Meyer's novel *American Rust,* a text that deals with the difficult complexities of hope, family, loyalty, and physicality in a tiny town named Buell, Pennsylvania. Isaac, a protagonist, fails to escape his small Midwestern hometown despite huge potential and frames the idea similarly, explaining: "Different layers and all kinds of old crap buried in the muck, tractor parts and dinosaur bones. You aren't at the bottom but you aren't exactly at the surface, either" (Meyer 8). Like the rhythmic, repeated chords during the beginning of the song,

the feeling of urgency does not subside *nor* does it change the composition of the song—

moments of tension and victory and tragedy are written and valued but do not by themselves

change the course of Midwestern history. There are bursts of wild emotion but, like waves, they

are always resolved, re-incorporated, and re-absorbed into the music.

The songs on *RotH* span fifty-three years and several generations, highlighting singularly

intense moments of connection between the past and the present, the listener and the lyricist, the

people to each other and the land that surrounds them: the wormhole. Like *American Rust's* Poe

(who chose to stay despite an opportunity to leave his hometown) and Isaac who live in a post-

apocalyptic post-industrial town that is "return[ing] to a primitive state," full of people who

"[either] went on welfare [or] went back to hunting and gathering," specific interactions between

Midwesterners and the landscapes around them form important and organic physical anchors for

the regional experience.

"First Reactions After Falling Through the Ice" is something of a parallel and a

counterpoint to Poe's assertion that "[w]ild meat heals you" (Meyer 24). Beginning with quick,

muddy major chords, "First Reactions" features vocals that alternate between screaming and

whispering; Dreyer describes walking out over a frozen lake in spring and trying to predict the

pattern of the ice cracking, then falling through and the subsequent moments of panic. However,

also juxtaposed with the immediate accident are also the connected histories of "permanent

estrangement," of wondering what would have happened had he left, "gone to school," skipping

forward to his own death, then skipping back to a premonition, all within two minutes. Three

parallel states of existence of this one single particle (song, experience) are collapsed into one—

their simultaneous reality is acknowledged, but only one reality can be examined at once. The

knowledge of the multiple simultaneous existences of all the realities and all of the potentials in

one place, however, creates the history. All of the different threads of potential interact with one another, determine each other's directions, and change the overall course of the song. The tempo of the song, its length, and the juxtapositions of so many different states of being give the song a layered feeling—almost as if the band is creating a site of entanglement and duality within the song itself. Similarly, the song is very hard to follow with just one listen—not just because of the literal acoustic mixing, but because so much information is contained in such a concentrated space.

In terms of process, the landscape also played an especially important role during La Dispute's record-writing. For four weeks, the band left new homes all over the United States, rented an isolated cabin in northern Michigan together, and wrote the entire record. Bassist Adam Vass describes the house as "the sixth man" present and definitively states that the record "would've sounded much different if it had been recorded in a different location," thus establishing the importance of physical place, both on the macro- and the micro-level (*Tiny Dots*). The House in the song is symbolic of a Midwestern house, and the members themselves—despite having moved all over the country—still chose to write the entire record in Northern Michigan because that was the only place such an album could have taken shape. In the quantum model, this would mean that the information contained in a black hole particle could only be created *within* the "black hole"[5], despite being able to be "read," or studied, after exiting through the wormhole. Guitarist Chad Morgan-Sterenberg cites birdsongs as an inspiration for certain riffs, evidencing a symbiotic relationship between the music and the landscape, as well as a snapshot of the band's process embedded in the listener's acoustic experience.

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[5] There are extreme implications to referring to the entire Midwest as a *black hole*, which might not be entirely accurate. For the purpose of this particular project, the Midwest is simply a region that *functions like* and *shares properties with* a black hole, rather than *is* a black hole in all its entirety and complexity.

On 2011's *Wildlife,* La Dispute deals with more urban landscapes; with the membranes and firewalls and the crossing overs between the two. On "Safer in the Forest/Love Song for Poor Michigan," Dreyer sings rhythmically over a quiet, precise melodic guitar, describing a fantasy of leaving, of taking 75 northbound all the way Up North, and ending with this climactic verse.

> To a Boring, Desperate City,
>
> It's been weeks since I've been around you.
>
> […]
>
> Are they now building up, or breaking down and boarding up the fronts?
>
> Has the whole town been foreclosed now?
>
> And what happened to those youthful dreams sunk deep in the river weak?
>
> […]
>
> I need to leave. I can't marry this place.
>
> I won't bury the past. I just need a change of scenery.
>
> I will hold these old streets sweetly in my head like her, and I will praise their
>
> bravery always and again.
>
> Let tongues confess the plague of joblessness, a temporary illness.
>
> Let us wave their flag from there to here then over and again and let us hope for
>
> better things, even though we may not ever get them.
>
> We will rise again from ashes one day.
>
> […]
>
> I need to leave but swear I will carry you in me until the end.
>
> So Tuebor, my home! ("Safer in the Forest/Love Song for Poor Michigan")

While this is a song about leaving, it is also a song about the inability to leave. It is a song, in a sense, describing the firewall—the factors that go into the "dramatic exit" that researchers describe at the boundary of a black hole. While particles do not, presumably, have consciousness, this song describes the human as the particle that is continually drawn back into the black hole that is the region. This is a song about loyalty, and more than it is about forced entrapment, it describes an unwillingness to leave and a desire to hold out hope—as Giffels also wrote—in the most unreasonable of situations. Egan's character Charlotte in *Look At Me* escapes to New York City to model, but ends up in a violent car accident when visiting her hometown of Rockwood, Illinois. After her accident, she ends up considering issues of industry, of data, of information and identity in the modern age. During her reconstructive surgery, the doctors reshape her face with screws and metal plates—industrial sundries that Rockwood is famous for—leaving her with her regional identity physically implanted in her. Dreyer in "Love Song" describes almost a similar situation—both the escape and the inevitable return, and in the absence of the return the implanting of region into the body and into the mind. "I will carry you in me until the end," Dreyer sings (screams), "I won't bury the past." The city (either Grand Rapids or Detroit, presumably) is likened to a lover, "old streets [to be held] sweetly in my head like her," or "married." The cities are their own characters, their own like Winegardner's *Crooked River Burning*, whose inscription says, "This book is a love song to [Cleveland], the grand, misunderstood city she [J.] came from."

Form: compression vs. collapse

Theory/thinking.

Until now, we have looked at the Midwest as a collapse of different states of existence into one. By its very nature, collapse is something violent, airless space packed with the understanding of histories and lives in pinpoints of time. The collapse of the auto industry, the ice collapsing in "First Reactions," the empty, collapsing homes and factories in the center of Detroit: all black holes of sorts. Collapse has been a defining feature of the Midwest's "content"—its history, its narrative, its happenings—to the rest of the country for some time. So, then, how does pop-punk-as-mp3 become the perfect *form* to convey this sort of quantum collapse? This is especially difficult to investigate as the answer, in a sense, defies discursive analysis: the answer is as much in the distribution of the music and the paraphernalia as it is in the content. People all around the world are fans of The Wonder Years, La Dispute, Real Friends, and more; the bands play internationally every year or every other year. I would like to look at the interaction between the distinct locality of their music and their nationwide and international audiences through an exploration of the mp3.

The mp3 is the globalized form of music; the musical skyscraper. Though records and cassettes are resurging in popularity as collectors' items, the mp3 is ubiquitous due to its ease and convenience of transport, as well as its small size (Sterne 839). The logic behind the creation of the mp3 itself bears a striking resemblance to the assembly line models popularized by the auto industry: "once standardized, data could be moved with ease and grace across many different kinds of systems and over great distances frequently and with little effort" (Sterne 829). This seems to mirror MacPherson's understanding of modern coding as an object oriented language resulting from an assembly-line mindset; in code, as in mp3s, and parts of an industrial

machine, efficiency is defined by sparseness, and by ability to be moved and replaced when necessary (McPherson *DDH*). However, as with physical production, digital production has also been forced to create a "new industry infrastructure" involving what Sterne calls disintermediation, or a process of eliminating the middleman—in this case, record companies and physical record stores (Sterne 222, 224). "In its most extreme form disintermediation would essentially result in de-industrialization […]" (223). So, the bands in question are increasingly able to reach out directly to their audiences, who are no longer so much a product of geographic communities as communities of engagement and desire (Sterne 227). Essentially, today's equivalent of the 'zines, taped shows, record stores, and venues (like the Freezer Theater) have been moved online, and people who have a desire to participate are now able to participate in real-time, regardless of physical location. However, this may also complicate our sense of the concept of belonging.

Enter digital regionalism, adapted from architectural criticism. The key question becomes: what are the key features in a song and in a text that allow readers to know where they are in the context of the story? We have discussed the landmarks in Midwestern art that allows the reader or listener to know where they have been placed. As Jones writes, "the geographic location of a particular group or sound is […popularly described as] an anchor" (213). However, a key feature of pop-punk is that it—unlike many other Midwestern texts—has been transmitted globally. So how do these theoretical regional landmarks function when the song has been uprooted from its physical place?

A recording of a song "fr[eezes] the moments in time during which the sound of music [is] generated *and* capture[s] the space within which the sound occur[s]" (Jones 214). It then "transports" that sound globally in a "container technology" (a technology that acts upon its

contents): an mp3 (Jones 214, Sterne 833). Thus, the mp3 is, in a sense, the creation of a tiny

new temporal-spatial region—a wormhole—allowing the reader to pass through time and space

to inhabit a little piece of the region for the length of the song.   In other words, a song is like a

snapshot of a particle at one or two different points in time, measured in different states of being,

and exported as a *whole* piece of information, and the listener's experience is superposed onto

and entangled with this exported product in order to create a whole different regional experience

every time. In the act of listening, audiences "learn about place and displacement. Laments for

lost places and narratives of exile and return often inform, inspire, and incite the production of

[…] music. Songs build engagement among audiences at least in part through references that tap

memories and hopes about particular places …" (Lipsitz 1994: 4, qtd in Sterne 228.) These

themes of exile and return, leaving and coming home, touring, and distribution resurface yet

again; senses of home and belonging are explored through pop-punk's lyrics, attitudes, and

themes yet are inherent to the form.

Consider, for example, these stanzas from The Wonder Years' song "The Devil in My

Bloodstream" on their album *The Greatest Generation*:

> "We wiped out all the buffalo
>
> Around the turn of the last century
>
> And so it's factories and sawgrass,
>
> Wheat fields and asphalt laid in front of me.
>
> The Midwest feels like a hollow place
>
> That we filled with love and industry.
>
> […]
>
> Well, I wanted to see just a little bit of everything.

Let me be.

[…]

It's sixteen hours straight to home

From the heart of North Missouri,

And so I searched through my great grandpa's memoirs

For the devil in my bloodstream.

[…]

I bet I'd be a fucking coward.

I bet I'd never have the guts for war.

'Cause I can't spend another month away from here.

These frantic rest stop phone calls don't get answered anymore.

But I, I wanted to know if I could please come home.

So let me know." ("TDiMB")

Much like the La Dispute song we examined earlier, this song collapses tens (if not

hundreds) of years in a few moments. While the first two stanzas are sung softly over muted

drumbeats and piano, the third stanza erupts when Campbell (the vocalist) begins to yell and

drums, guitars, and bass come crashing in. The whole song is about being torn—about being

placed and displaced, about inhabiting hundreds of years of history in one's own life, signaled

especially by the use of the pronoun "we" repeatedly in the first stanza.

In the first stanza, the same landscape is transformed over and over again so rapidly that

the effect becomes instead a representation of simultaneous states: the death of the buffalo, the

introduction of factories, then their demise and the blank empty asphalt (which itself invokes the

image of the void and the black hole). The Midwest as a "hollow" place that "we" invest

ourselves into in order to make narrative and history make sense. This song, again, demonstrates the collaborative superposition that must take place in order to make sense of the hugely different, yet porously bounded landscapes that all seem to collapse and separate in turn with ease.

The Midwestern leaving and return is also visible in the last stanza—despite his attempts to leave, his desire "to see a little bit of everything," he *cannot* stay away. He has alienated his connections in the region, his family, and yet he must "come home." The draw of the region is inevitable. Like the concept of the tour of duty invoked by the mention of his great-grandfather's service in World War II (additionally supported by the fact that the album is called "The Greatest Generation"), his leaving is traumatic, as is his return. The third stanza's tone is also violent, desperate, and fearful—the collapse and compression in the form of identification and disidentification across so many years and so many bounded landscapes and regions can be incredibly jarring and traumatic.

For the listener, though, Lipsitz's theory takes full effect—listeners can locate themselves, both physically and mentally, in the music. The invocation of place and then the desperate sense of displacement works to create the similar—though much compressed—effect that the literature does: the sense that the character will never surface, will never break the cycle of the almost-departure. For Midwestern listeners especially, it becomes extremely easy to superimpose one's own experience on the lyrics—these are commonly identified parts of the Midwestern experience. However, for non-regional listeners, the tone of the song incites feelings of fear, of panic, and of desperation, and the narrator never breaks the surface. In this way, the song manages to be slightly different things for different audiences, but both as close to the "real" regional experience as is possible.

Process/making.

      The *making* of mp3s also has interesting implications on the relationship between artist and listener. Mp3s, as mentioned previously, are designed to be compact and easy to transmit. The way that this is done, however, is through the process of encoding (Sterne 833). There are six main steps to encoding, but I would like to focus on the psychoacoustic principles that inform these steps. Sterne calls them "psychoacoustic tricks," and they are intended to take a file and make them smaller and more lightweight (834). The first is "auditory masking," which Sterne describes as an assumption that a listener will only hear the louder of two concurrent sounds. The second is "temporal masking," which assumes that if two sounds of different volumes occur within five milliseconds of each other, we will only be able to hear the louder one. Finally, the concept of "spatialization" describes the cutting of certain sounds that are out of most adults' hearing ranges (835). Essentially, spatialization is when a "snapshot" of a moment of sound is taken, and everything outside of a normal adult's hearing range (for example, sounds from 16-20khz) are thrown out in anticipation of the ear's inability to hear them anyway (Sterne 835). In other words, "The mp3 plays its listener. Built into every mp3 is an attempt to mimic and, to some degree preempt, the embodied and unconscious dimensions of human perception in the noisy, mixed-media environments of everyday life" (835).

      If digital regionalism represents an elimination of a text's non-essential regional features, and an mp3 represents the elimination of a file's non-essential acoustic features, then is a song by a band from the Midwest about the Midwest not the most distilled form of critical regionalism available to us at this time? Or is it, simply put, stripped and watered down? There is a balance to be struck, of course, but just as the consideration of what sounds make the final cut of a song is important, so is the consideration of what stories make the final cut into a region's (or a

nation's) history. The mp3 as regional export is small and portable, but it is also, itself, lacking in scope. However, the format of an mp3 is uniquely suited for a conveyance of Midwest regionalism. Usually, when a comparison is made between the Midwest and the East Coast or West Coast—or even the South—the Midwestern narrative is masked, or hidden by the "louder" narratives and regionalisms. Similarly, when the Midwest acts as a microcosm of the United States, its history is subject to temporal masking—like the entirety of the creation of punk, the story does not gain momentum until after it leaves the region.

Pop-punk itself is loud and raucous, as much about what the listener invests in the experience as it is about what the artist puts onto any given track. While the artists do pay attention to detail, as evidenced in the bands' lyrics and processes, the general idea is that the music is a collaborative experience—and the various differences that might come about as a result of the process of digital compression might function less as "losses" and more as entries, or gaps, for the listeners to fill. This is also a kind of quantum entanglement in the way that Boler meant it: as a social phenomenon or experience. In a song, the artists, the listeners, the landscapes, and the imagery (the cabin in the woods, for example, the birds in the forest) all become superposed into one single particulate experience.

An operational example of the losses as entries might be the way that La Dispute chose to premiere *Tiny Dots,* their documentary about the making of the *RotH* album. Shortly before the documentary was set to be released, the band posted a limited list of different locations across the country where the documentary would be screened (much like a tour announcement). It showed for one night only on the same date and time in venues across the country. The film itself was heavily reliant on the landscape of Northern Michigan—and, in a very similar sense, as we have been discussing throughout the paper, a compact regional experience. The documentary

strove to be a visual aesthetic translation of the regional conceptualizations that the songs themselves embody: it even began with a caption: "The following film is a snapshot in time" (*TD*). Fans of the band drove hours to see it together, to experience the creation of the album in northern Michigan, just as the band members themselves flew hours home in order to write and record the album in their home state. The travel many of the fans undertook resulted in temporal-spatial escape through the experience of the documentary, and a brief immersive trip in that the film was heavily aestheticized based on the music, and made as an imitation or translation.

As Berland notes, "the ongoing (re)shaping of listening habits is tied to our sense of location: where we are, where the music can take us, where we *belong*" (1998: 133, qtd Sterne 226). Again, the audience takes an active role in this construction. The Internet can facilitate the "freezing" and "transport" of the music across the country and across the globe, but it still relies on consumers and musicians and their relationships to drive this trade (Sterne 833). It also relies on the power of the music to "take" the listener somewhere—in what is the most succinct and easy way possible (Sterne 227). In this way, perhaps, the bands are not distributing *music* so much as they are distributing intense, packaged, compressed regional experiences. Though this phrasing implies negative connotations, perhaps it is an exciting way to view digital landscapes, communities, and audiences. As Jones quotes, "the Internet has filled the void left by the demise of live […] music venues" (Paul, 1996 qtd in Jones).

The void appears again, here, as a lack of the physical, another black hole in the (hi)story of the Midwest. Midwesterners, in their characteristic persistence, are not fighting the collapse but working to control it this time: using compression. Compression is the controlled form of collapse. The land absorbs the factories as music absorbs region. The first was unpredictable,

traumatic—the second, entirely of the region's own making. In a mode that is so often removed from the tangible and physical, perhaps these songs function as a way to—instead of anchoring someone to a region—pin the region to the individual, sustain it, and superpose it onto the individual. Our ideas of *belonging*, then, and *being from*, dramatically shift in meaning.

Discussion.

  This section is, by no means, an end to this project.

  Rather, it is a beginning. Digital production is inextricably tied to the infinite, as is the multiverse implied by the quantum reading. The speed, scale, and ease of production outpaces Ryden's tapestry, it outpaces Manalansan's metabolic process. The instant production of packaged and unified regional experiences parallels, most closely, the quick movement that is possible through wormholes. So far, we've looked at punk from the '80s and how it grew into modern pop-punk; we've explored music distribution, regional exports, industry, data, and identity. I have made an attempt to introduce pop-punk as regional text—a type of regional text, especially, that can quickly form, reform, and re-adapt. We have read the Midwest as a black-hole-like space, full of particles carrying information that have become entangled (in some cases) and travel in and out of the region through digital wormholes. We have read music as narratives of quantum entanglement, and looked at how entangled narratives can retrocausally produce connections through porous temporo-spatial boundaries.

  Social quantum entanglement also has interesting implications for the stories that remain untold—both in this thesis and in the scene at large—for queer punks and punks of color, especially, whose stories have been erased or overwritten. Many queer punks and punks of color (like Mimi Nguyen) were exiled from scenes comprised of folks who existed in self-imposed isolation. In that process, though, they left part of themselves behind. There is always a connection between punks, ex-punks, and their scenes, and there is always a tension between responsibility to a mostly-white (often violently so) scene and one's own community. Examining the ways in which people become entangled with one another despite isolation and

exile, and the ways that those relationships persist despite the introduction of space and time, might continue to reveal important aspects of the quantum model.

It is important to acknowledge that, as Mimi Nguyen says, "punk is an unwieldy object of study" because "it's a moving target" (Nguyen, "Punk"). The more parallel individuations surface, the more particles there are to (dis)entangle, and the further this project will expand. In this particular thesis, already, I have left out countless songs, venues, bands, scenes, books, poems, and stories. There is no history, only narratives, stories, patterns, cycles, states of being. In addition to the things-as-they-occur, there is also the question of nostalgia, and how the nostalgic revision of history (things that were *and* things that never existed) can in itself create hundreds of thousands of parallel realities.

Looking towards a linear future, as companies like Amazon move into the Midwest and continue integrating data-as-industry into the landscape, the particle states will become even harder to pin down. The Midwest, according to Giffels, a void—we have determined it functions as a black hole—and it is still as unknowable as it was when the auto industry began collapsing. Could the introduction of intangible exports in the form of music, data, and information fill it? The current trend seems to indicate not—but also that filling "the void" or attempting to fill the "hole" should perhaps not be the goal. Instead, the goal seems to be to *transform* the void, turning losses into entries. The mp3 is the Cass Corridor of music—the collapsed/condensed form becoming an invitation rather than a boundary—but also the generic skyscraper of music distribution. The region is rebounding, quickly, but in which directions?

Another important consideration is where this reading of the Midwest as a black-hole object does not function. This thesis primarily deals with Detroit and other industrial rust-belt cities—could it be that the rust-belt cities themselves are the black holes embedded in the fabric

of the region? Or is the region itself a large black-hole space that possesses the properties and functions of a black hole? As we have discussed thoroughly, there are hundreds of ways to experience the Midwest, dependent on setting (for example, urban, suburban, industrial, or rural) or actual geography (for example, southern Illinois versus northern Illinois). Surely, the black hole could not describe the function of every single different Midwestern experience.

Black holes themselves compress the objects that enter them into points of infinite density. As the Midwest's story is broad, it is also dense and difficult to parse. As we begin to explore infinite smallness and infinite complexity on an entirely new scale, we also begin to see infinitely dense and complex possibilities for human expressions. As La Dispute describes it, moments of Midwestern experience are "tiny dots on an endless timeline." ("Woman (In Mirror).")

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