

## 1.4. “Do it yourself”: Daniel Johnston’s demon

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### Abstract

This is an essay which describes and problematizes the homemade video for the song “Hard Time”, by American musician and independent artist, Daniel Johnston. As a craftsman, Johnston have been, since the late 1970’s, working on all instances to make his music known: recording, mixing, mastering, copying from tape-to-tape, drawing the art cover and walking around to give his tapes to passers. Although all this effort, he never made it to mainstream. His specific case justifies and provides foundation for a discussion on Do-it-yourself culture, primitivism, precariousness, and spontaneity in the range of pop music. As a result of the analysis of the mentioned video, a complex myriad of matters to be debated emerges (of sociological, aesthetic, communicational and historic character) proving to be a key subject to the understanding of DIY, for Johnston is, in a poetical way, an example of a musician doomed to keep doing everything by himself.

**Keywords:** Do-it-yourself culture; Daniel Johnston; primitivism; spontaneity.

1. As from the decade of 1970, especially from the behavioral outburst provoked by the punk movement, the motto Do it yourself reached unheard-of, even unexpected, proportions. That which was, in its embryonic stage, a kind of existential flag to teenage musicians, that also looked like an invitation to dilettante action and a prompt-defense argument against eventual criticism to technical precariousness and inaptitude (to the lack of skills in the playing of musical instruments, for instance), became little by little something much more serious and representative: it became an effective political program, a critical proposition, a declaration of principles, the ensign which was capable of summing up an in-the-making real ideology<sup>3</sup>.

Nowadays, DIY can be understood as a conceptual formulation, in some occasions taken as a kind of synonym or equivalent to the very idea of *underground*. It is as if it were impossible to talk about alternative and independent music, aside from the big industry, without bumping into, at any time, such expression and the set of meanings and cultural practices it comprises and designates. In the extent of pop music, DIY is a powerful semantics-maker, a most strong rubric, which aids to the comprehension of a huge gamut of genres, expressive forms,

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<sup>3</sup> Punk is the product of a bunch of causes (Hebdige, 2004). It is risky (even worse: it is false) to isolate one single igniting historic agent or seek to identify very “clean” or easily noticeable social processes amidst the effervescence of lived life, be it in London or in New York, in the second half of the 1970s. This said, it is good to admit that the anticipations, the dance of consequences, and the time deployments we suggested might not have happened in the exact order in which they appear here. It is then more indicated to think of a field of simultaneities (almost perfect ones), advancements and retreats, restraints and accelerations which are ongoing and/or alternating. Most important of all is retaining the idea that Do it yourself thrived, acquired forms and unthinkable translations.

production modes, affective and aesthetic displays, authorial and stylistic traces. From authors such as Eloy Fernández Porta (2008, 2013) and Simon Reynolds (2010, 2012, 2013), among others, we propose a brief discussion about DIY, looking to comprehend both some of its significant variations, and also the network of conceptual affinities in which the expression is inserted and acquires meanings.

The discussion shall not advance, however, without us having some level of factuality at hand, a set of empirical occurrences that may come to help, providing a bigger basis (and some additional sauce) to theoretical arrangements. In this fashion, the speculations of conceptual character, the very thematic angle, will be given some circumstantial anchors, defined according to the “quakes” that establish the igniting effect they exert on general argumentations. It is specifically the case of “Hard Time<sup>4</sup>”, amateur video conceived and starred by the American artist and independent musician, Daniel Johnston. Being authorized by an essay, we are going to be moving freely around punk and its spinoffs, genres and sub-genres in the horizon of massive popular music. We will be going through them, looking for instances at times annoying, at times suspicious, but always rich and not well dealt with. This way we hope to indicate, even if briefly – through a small list of names –, the field of forces, the game of correlations in which the experience of Johnston will be inserted and taken as a protagonist.

2. In an inspired study on Batman (or, more precisely, about the “Biennial of Gotham”<sup>5</sup>), Eloy Fernández Porta concludes mentioning graphic artist and underground illustrator, Igor Hofbauer’s work. For him, Hofbauer’s work had a very interesting peculiarity: it is as if it had survived in there, in some way, an artist in an *adolescent state*, taking notes of the songs he likes, inscribing them in the middle of deregulated images he creates; these images, by the way, and their strong colors, their constructivist features<sup>6</sup>, would be uncouth but filled with passion, usually embodying not only the names of his favorite bands, but also the profiles of his beloved comic heroes. It seems to be a rather intimate and introspective effort, made for himself (better: for himself above all). It is as if he was trying to preserve a kind of “primitive

<sup>4</sup> The video can be found in <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoY2gOix0s>. In July 23<sup>th</sup>, 2014, it had 26,719 views.

<sup>5</sup> “The Biennial of Gotham” investigates the way through which some contemporary artists (Nicolás Uribe, Carlos Pazos, Öyvind Fahlström, Isabel Samaras, Mark Chamberlain, Terry Richardson, Joyce Pensato, and Bill O’Neill make the list), in their personal creations, borrow from Batman’s figure and mythology. The starting point is a scene from the movie *Batman*, directed by Tim Burton in 1989, in which the Joker, played by Jack Nicholson, invades Gotham City’s art museum along with his evil gang, and starts to vandalize that “sacred environment”, running over the exhibited works, scratching them out as he wished, knocking them down, in a typical anarcho-pop performance. It is a reflection on the tensions (and also the juxtapositions) between art and comic toons, institutionalized culture, and popular mass culture in current times. It is a reflection on what to do before cultural tradition and about how we should behave when going through the galleries of a museum (even if it is an imaginary museum).

<sup>6</sup> Constructivism was an artistic movement which appeared in pre-revolutionary Russia. Their palette of colors (strident red, black, and white, most of the time), their geometric forms, and the structural qualities they developed in their paintings, banners, and illustrations, became very well-known and later on influenced many designers and pop music groups. “Kraftwerk, German pioneers of electronic music, had wide usage of the constructivist aesthetics with their famous cover for the record *The Man-Machine* (1978)”, highlights Will Gompertz (2013, p. 202). Scottish band, Franz Ferdinand also gave constructivist forms to the covers of their records and to the videos released in the beginning of the 2000s (Gompertz, 2013). [Translation of Gompertz’s quotation was made by the authors. The original, in Portuguese: “O Kraftwerk, pioneiro alemão da música eletrônica, fez amplo uso da estética [...] construtivista com a famosa capa do álbum *The Man-Machine* (1978)”]

joy", derivative of the first and most tender contact with pop products (be them rock, comics – pop culture, in general). Thus an intermediate style is created, says Fernández Porta (2013, p. 101), characterized by "this synthetic and carefully dirty feature, *ingenuistic more than naïve*, halfway between the school notebook and the art zine, that was made popular in the last years by a whole kind of *good bad drawers*.<sup>7</sup>"

Hofbauer could be implying that pop imagery depends very little on any overproduction. Actually it would be about an endeavor of young daydreaming adolescents, and, to some extent, isolated and kept-to-themselves people, to their crises and their mental images. Their practice very naturally seems to belong essentially to them, not to big corporations or professional drawers. It could not be any further from the grown-up world. It could not be more unacquainted to the world of formal and institutionalized markets. Therefore, it is not by chance that the band Shellac is among one of the most frequent appearances in Hofbauer's illustrations. Since the mid-1980s, the guitarist and producer Steve Albini (currently in chief of the afore-mentioned American act) has been working on kinds of soundscapes and musical approaches which are as much as dirty as intentionally careless – *positive sloppiness*, we might call it – that have been providing support and input to the new generations of punk music (from Nirvana, in the beginning of the 1990s, to the band Metz, around 2010 – sticking to two cornerstones of Sub Pop releases<sup>8</sup>).

Dealing with this, at our times, is dealing with the *technical production of spontaneity*, as Fernández Porta says. Surely an artist such as Daniel Johnston – both a musician and an illustrator – can be seen and can be better understood as a typical case of this very generative process. A generative process, for that matter, whose valences – technique and spontaneity, as we have seen – are also strength lines, important common threads for the more extensive reflection on culture and pop music.

**3.** *The Devil and Daniel Johnston*, the biographical movie directed by Jeff Feuerzeig, in 2005, might be the best calling card, the most viable introduction to the weird and difficult world of the singer born in January of 1961, in Sacramento, California. Awarded at the Sundance Film Festival with Direction Award: Documentary, the movie emphasizes Johnston's mental problems, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia and severe bipolar disorder<sup>9</sup>. What emerges from it, to some extent, is a heroic narrative, about artistic overcoming and redemption. But there is another relevant aspect, recurrent throughout the plot, not dissociable to the previous

<sup>7</sup> Translated by the authors from the original, in Spanish: "ese trazo sintético y cuidadosamente sucio, ingenuista más que ingenuo, a medio camino entre el cuaderno escolar y el artzine, popularizado, en los últimos años, por toda una estirpe de buenos malos dibujantes".

<sup>8</sup> Small record label held in Seattle, United States. A big portion of bands associated to the grunge scene of the 1990s belonged to Sub Pop's staff. It is possible to say that there is a "Sub Pop sound", it being very characteristic, forged with distorted guitars, and with references to punk and to the English heavy metal of the 1970s. For Simon Reynolds (2010, 2013), DIY ideology had, as one of its main consequences, the creation of an "anti-corporate micro capitalism", not necessarily identified with the left in the political-party spectrum, but disturbed by the sluggishness and lack of imagination of commercial bureaucracy. Sub Pop might have been described – in its initial moment, at least – as one label which assumed this model of catalyzing "productive unit", more agile, more attentive, and more organic.

<sup>9</sup> Given the proportions, all necessary safeguards taken, Johnston could be compared to Arthur Bispo do Rosário (1909[?]-1989), Brazilian visual artist, who also suffered from schizophrenia and produced all of his oeuvre while secluded at Colônia Juliano Moreira, a psychiatric hospital in Rio de Janeiro, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Silva, 2003). Both demand more accurate comprehension in regards to associations between madness and artistic creation.

sub-text, concerning the representation of a self-built genius (and, by extent, “self-healed”) amidst the social adversities and psychic confusion he battles against.

Even though he is depicted as “a genius defeated by his own genius” – as said by Leandro Antunes, in a feature published in *Rolling Stone Brasil* magazine, which was made due to the coming of the singer to Brazil in April, 2013 –, Johnston makes the classic symbol of the American *self-made man* work. In a more complex and less glamorous register, it is quite the truth. The myth is now inverted, translated to an image of physical decay, incorrigible romantic love, and paternal dependence. Well, even in a market society, of ferocious competition, and vigorous pragmatic precepts, success must not be seen as an absolute category, monolithic or one-dimensional. On the contrary, it must be gauged in a more comprehensive calculation, in an *ad hoc* equation, involving risks, available resources, misfortunes, and always incidental pretensions.

*The Devil and Daniel Johnston* gives us the portrayal of someone who went to hell, faced his personal demons – the title of the movie is not a mere coincidence! – and came back, having fled the way he could, in a ragged mental health; someone whose oeuvre cannot be evaluated coherently without the component of, let us say, being “subjective” or “clinical”. I. e.: the kind of do-it-yourself experience that he incarnates occurs both inside and *also outside* of stricter social demands and sociological reasons – some of it being diverse from those ones which ruled the DIY practices of standardized punk, for example (Hebdige, 2004; Reynolds, 2013, p. 49-68). Here, as a last resort (or as in a first resort, as we wish to observe), it is about finding a source of self-esteem, the gear to psychic stability.

The homemade forms of production, the studio as a workshop – the family’s house garage as a symbolic premise, *primordial ground* –, the tactics of self-expression doubling over, oscillating between illustration (naïve!?) and music (*art brut!*?), the search for authorship as a search for stability in the world are very sensitive topics, and Johnston’s case displays it as few others do. At the same time, the low-budget production<sup>10</sup>, personal distribution – the demo tapes passing on from hand to hand, copied singularly [“– Holy patience, Batman!”] –, the nearly empty concerts, in poorly appropriate places, and mouth-to-mouth publicizing were also underlying the life story of that who is the great *beautiful loser*, the dearest *white trash* of American indie and college rock in the decades of 1980 and 1990.

It is not surprising at all that artists such as Beck, and Jad Fair, bands such as Sonic Youth, Nirvana, and Wilco – some were his actual partners, in varied adventures and varied musical projects – have him in the highest regard. After all, Daniel Johnston’s sociologically-unmotivated DIY, in spite of his roots and emotional foundations, can still work for an ideological use, it can still be capitalized sub-culturally. Through it there is even another manifestation of the mythic substrate, another inescapable bias – would it be another “dead-end road”? – of aesthetical debate: the figure of the *authentic creator*, with the purity and innocence of a child, the artist connected to the “soul of the world”. And what does he do? How does he produce? It is worth following it.

<sup>10</sup> Due to scarcity of financial resources, Johnston ordered big batches of already-recorded audiotapes which contained sermons of Anglican and Evangelical pastors. Such tapes turned out to be cheaper than blank tapes. In them he recorded his compositions in a direct fashion, playing it all live, with no cuts. That was then the final product, a noisy product, permeated by hissing and very perceivable flaws between songs. Every now and then, at any given interval, excerpts of the religious sermons originally inscribed could be heard.

4. "Precariousness" and "amateurism" are not appropriate words to describe the video that was made for the song "Hard Time", in an imprecise moment between 1980 and 1990<sup>11</sup>. Apparently, in an inattentive glance, they are useful expressions to us and – it is imperative to admit! – hold good indicative power, they grasp with much precision that which is being sighted on screen. There is no denial: we are before an amateur and precarious register. It is almost embarrassing. Just open your eyes and see it. However, there is a driving dynamics over there, there is an "imaginary engagement" – projective delirium (!) – that perhaps constitute the more expected rocker component of any artist that intends to be recognized as such<sup>12</sup>. Here Daniel Johnston puts on a real show. It is at this level that assessments are insufficient and crippling.

Harmony structure and repetitive phrasing of the song are not serious matters. Very little is explained by the song's lyrics (one among many to be dedicated to his eternal inspirational muse, Laurie Allen<sup>13</sup>). But there is a rather suggestive *emotional ambiance*, seldom approached: intimate, spontaneous and self-complacent. All of that is above – in its phenomenological relevance sense, at least – its evident precariousness and amateurism, so easily discernible.

Everything leads us to believe Johnston is at home, possibly at his living room, with his closest friends only, no one but them. What do we see? We see the "artist" being introduced by an impromptu master of ceremonies – it is the band's own drummer, in a double role –, we see an Elvis Presley poster used as a curtain, through which Johnston comes to public, ceremonious and classy; we see musical instruments hanging on the wall – some others on the ground, leaning on furniture; we see diverse objects (pillows, vinyl records, beer bottles), loosed up, left alone to chance in the inside of the modest residence; we see the musicians as laid-back and everyday-like clothed as possible (shorts, sleeveless shirts, flip-flops).

The spectacle begins. Promptly what comes to surface is background, complete and sudden, which turns out to be explicit and gives us a funny feeling of proximity. Actually, everything became background. The living room is the stage. The stage is the living room. Is that a rehearsal? We do not know. It is quite tough and even unnecessary to tell it. Such distinction does not make the slightest sense anymore. After all, the video for "Hard Time" looks like a draft, an unfinished drawing. It is there – in this intimate sketch, made for oneself – that an emotional trigger essentially connected to rock survives, unadulterated and untouched, almost with no translation, leaving it to be synthesized on Daniel Johnston's

<sup>11</sup> "Hard Time", the song, was recorded in 1986. It came out in an EP in 1991, released by Austrian label, Seminal Twang. The video must have been shot around this time.

<sup>12</sup> In the preface to the book *Después del Rock. Psicodelia, postpunk, electrónico y otras revoluciones inconclusas* (Reynolds, 2010), Pablo Schanton says that two "popemes" guide Simon Reynolds' texts: the impetus to deconstruct the ideological discourse of pop, and the temptation to give in to their bewildering appeals (Schanton in Reynolds, 2010, p. 10). A "popeme", if we well understand it, can be equaled to that which Roland Barthes called photography's noeme, in the book *A Câmara Clara* (1984): the essential distinctive feature. Without the critic's weapons and detachment, Johnston lies completely subdued to the fatal hedonism of pop music.

<sup>13</sup> "The Devil and Daniel Johnston" would not be such a worthy and elucidative documentary without introducing us to Laurie Allen. And she is indeed there, with all the prominence she deserves. Allen is Johnston's first teenage crush, and by him has never been overcome, and never reciprocated. There is an enormous repertoire of love songs dedicated to her, among which "True love will find you in the end", re-recorded by Beck Hansen, among others. Out of curiosity and as a complement – as initial contribution to a future study on the experience of romantic love conditioned to the experience of pop music –, check on Heatley and Hopkinson, 2011.

automatic gesture, his arm up, setting the strong measures, the rhythmic stresses, in deep, trance-like concentration. It is the self-building of a fan as subject and rock star.

Suspended in a door-sized span, Elvis is the curtain-image through which one must go through.



Figure 1 - Suspended curtain



Figure 2 - Johnston entering the scene

Camera movements – travelings, irregular closes, absence of editing – give us the narrower sense of scenic scenario in which we are in. The performance of the band happens even in the puny limits of a living room – at the back, there seems to be a kitchen, a dining table. Johnston attracts our attention, as sole protagonist. He is literally at the center of the room – absolute ruler of our line of sight. Most of the time, the camera follows him. It is of use noticing the way he interprets the song, its highlights being, apart from the just-mentioned emphatic arm gesture, the reverence and liturgical seriousness he conveys. There is no sense of humor involved whatsoever. There is only respect. Deep respect.

The ghost of Elvis Presley has been clearly evoked: it is manifested in the way to hold the microphone, before a single pedestal for the display of lyrics or any other papers; it is manifested on the subtle way to bend his legs, to move his hips and lean on the ground in an attack position – as one who, at any given time, will need impulse or retraction. As someone who is receding in order to pray.



Figure 3 - Arm Gesture



Figure 4 - Receding in order to pray

In a private regime, of very restricted circulation and visibility, characteristic of the time it was registered – MTV and VHS days –, Johnston's performance is rather intimate, proving itself worthy, without any need of exterior rationale or justification to legitimize it *from the outside*, beyond the room – the living room – it occurs. It is nonchalant art. But what is the nature of this work? Can we see it in fact as a *work*? What kind of investment does it demand? What kind of investment does it dismiss? Little and much. It is hard to measure.

5. Labels and catalogs, tags and post-its. It is impossible to approach pop music without falling within the handling of classifying categories. Among them, the category of "music genre" is the most absorbing. Unmistakably it was the one which imposed itself in the course of history. Obviously such rubrics bring us more functionality, give us more practicality to operate (to guide our taste, to filter information) amidst heterogeneous and sloppiness production (Silveira, 2013, p. 07-41). We live in "Tagstonbury"<sup>14</sup>, said Eloy Fernández Porta, a pun alluding to famous music festival Glastonbury, held in England. Highly frequently, debating pop music is debating "isms" (that is: genres and sub-genres) which inhabit it. Thereby, not even Johnston's exhibit in his private home can be separate from this recurrent analytical bias. So how do we classify it then?

"Primitivism" is a good word. It may be an alternative. It is a pertinent variable, in a network of similar conceptual variables. If we were to resort to aesthetic categories, we would say we have a naïve artist, that his art is *rough art*, not polished up, no knots, no final arrangements, no consciousness neither prepared concepts. It is pure nature and immaculate spontaneity. It is the ingenuism that Fernández Porta (2013) spoke of. In Tagstonbury, Johnston is the naïf made up into the primitive artist.

Some interesting complications arise then. The first one: Johnston is an *amateur in extremis*, but even so he is not out of the cataloguist game; on the contrary, it is one of his landmarks, it is perfectly antipodal to mainstream artists, overproduced and market-oriented<sup>15</sup>. Differently said: the ideological spectrum (where choices and aesthetic judgments are taken, where genres and their frontiers fossilize, be them more or less fluid) will never be complete without this demarcation. Therefore, Johnston is still an echo, a resonance chamber to what he seems to deny. He points eloquently to the space from which he absents himself.

Second one: among the available labels, *primitive* seems to be the most self-evident, it seems to be the least conceptual of all, it seems to be, weirdly enough, the most *natural*. "It is a tag which presents itself as if it was not a tag: the label that was given by Nature"<sup>16</sup>, comments Fernández Porta (in Guimerà, 2013). It is a stealthy *ism*, which is not taken as such and, because of that, serves pretty well to the reaffirmation of old and strong stereotypes

<sup>14</sup> For the Spanish author, Tagstonbury is "the experiencing of musical material in which the nomination and the capacity to classify sound convert into an in-person and even Dionysian social experience, which is inseparable from the listening per se" (Fernández Porta as cited in Guimerà, 2013); [Translation made by the authors from the original, in Spanish: "una vivencia del material musical en que la nominación, la capacidad para clasificar el sonido se convierte en una experiencia social, presencial y incluso dionisiaca, que es inseparable de la escucha propiamente dicha."]

<sup>15</sup> The DIY culture does not presents itself only as a resistance culture to mainstream, but also as a system of propositions: it proposes to different genres of pop music – like folk, punk, and garage rock, most of all – how to record, advertise, and organize shows on one's own. At the same time, it models the system of specialized magazines, stimulating the appearance of fanzines. Thus DIY acts as an invariable code, shared by different cultural systems.

<sup>16</sup> Translation made by the authors from the original, in Spanish: "Es un tag que se presenta como sí no fuese un tag: la etiqueta que puso la Naturaleza".

associated to art and artistic creation, such as the *romantic artist*, the *misunderstood genius*, or the *born poet*. It is the idea of *art for art's sake* in one of its returns.

Third complication: is it possible to perfect the art of being naïve? Can I *gain* naïveté? Can I become voluntarily more puerile, throughout the years, getting closer and closer to the romantic, lo-fi spontaneity of Daniel Johnston – as John Frusciante, for instance, does (or tries to do) in his cult solo career? What implications does it have to do in relation to the very nature of this primitivism? After all, the acted primitive, lived as a deliberate choice, a conscious aesthetic option – let us face it! – does not seem to be the best primitive. The good primate is a real unconscious, whose motor is imitation, conditioned reflection, and untamed instinct. He does not opt. Does not wonder. Does not change. He does not know of himself. Therefore there is a considerable difference between choosing for precarious, on one side, and on another, extremely opposite, live it as real embarrassment, without even noticing it. Good precariousness escapes to the *stylistics of precariousness*.

As we can see, Daniel Johnston's demons are not few. There is yet a fourth complicating factor: the historical variable. In a career of more than thirty years, the Californian singer has seen the growth, the popularization, the breakdown, the contingent disappearance, and very likely, the re-functionalized re-appearance of different technological regimes (musical instruments, effect pedals, audio and video devices, sound gear and sound mixers,...), in successive swift generations, one after the other. When it comes to pop music – it is worth remembering –, spontaneity is also a matter of reach and technical intermediation<sup>17</sup>.

Nowadays, spread in social networks, shown in flat-screen television sets or on crystal-liquid computer monitors, the images of "Hard Time" sound even more curious, dorky, and attractive. Before them, we feel nostalgic – taken by a "reflexive nostalgia"<sup>18</sup>, as Reynolds puts it (2012, p. 30). We miss it all: that time, that haircut, the gauge of that camera – that lost adolescence. That single moment, that single take, now met again on YouTube, became a Monument of Culture (Reynolds, 2012) – perhaps a Monument of Barbarity (Benjamin, 1986).

6. However it may be, the homemade video we examined here, even if picturesque, is a great source of matters to be problematized in the multi-layered debate on profile, there being included the limitations and the power of pop music in our contemporaneity. As from it, or because of it, diverse discussions are opened: 1) of *sociological* character – the policies of

<sup>17</sup> DIY culture, to a good extent, derives from the invention of two media devices: audiotape and PortaStudio. In mid-1960s, audiotape provided a bigger time of audio storage, allowing also new sound signals to be recorded on previous inscriptions. Quickly consumers started to pass their discs over to tapes, giving an exponential dimension to recorded music. Punk movement emerges at this process' peak, with the proposal of musicians recording their songs on their own. Later, in 1979, PortaStudio is made popular, a kind of portable audio recording studio which brought attached a 4-channel sound mixer, one or two audiotape decks, and controls for in-and-out-of-signal buttons, volume control, along with bass, mid, and treble. Adding four simple microphones, this device would give amateur musicians the possibility to record a complete rock band, live, controlling and equalizing each instrument's volume. It was a great equipment for the production of demonstration tapes which would serve to try and convince big record companies. Thus bands began producing their home tapes, with no need to worry about the high cost of studio hours, neither about phonographic industries' impositions. However, it consisted of much lower audio quality, caused by the use of tawdry, low-priced, poorly adjusted, out of tune, or even scrapped equipment.

<sup>18</sup> Reynolds (2012, p.30) resorts to Russian theorist, Svetlana Boym to establish a distinction between "restoring nostalgia" and "reflexive nostalgia". The former stands on folklore and romantic nationalism to feed collective ego, alluding to past glories. The latter is of personal tone, intimate, refraining from entering the political arena, complying in a melancholic acceptance that the past cannot be retrieved.



identification through music genres, the policies of cultural resistance, the marginal existence to the phonographic market; 2) of *aesthetic* character – such as the intrinsic estimation of performance, the lo-fi and unpretentious stylistic, the amateurism as the last haven of authenticity in rock; 3) of *communicational* character – about the systems of registration and the media circuits necessary to autonomous production; 4) of *historic* character – be it as the reinvigoration of a finished history, here revisited (in a retromania [Reynolds, 2012]), in a recollection, as one who looks at an old photo album, be it as the register of a utopian search, a *trans-historic* search, the rescue of a primordial drive, *the real thing*, which occurs out of time, and will not change nor will be reached by it.

Each one of these threads of discussion could be even more explored, sub-divided, and filled with many other topics, many other sub-items. Each one of them would end up meeting consistent correspondences and articulations with the others. They would be unfolding one into the others. And we have not even mentioned – in order not to insist in an even more delicate debate – the more *psychiatric*-related functions and biases of excessive drive, and the experience of self-publication of Daniel Johnston.

It is indeed incredible that such a simple and carefree video can be covered up with significant relevance and a plethora of meanings nowadays, which it might be so representative of our age, and brings up current questions. What we did here was no more than a first scrutiny, a first try of approximation. An essay, only that.

In any case, we hope we have evinced that the cultures of Do it yourself, of lo-fi, of sentimental protocols – the resistance through small rituals, such as friends in their revelry in a mess of a garage, as "Hard Time" is, in a nutshell – always find ways to perpetuate, securing the space they need, the symbolic power they produce before the majority pop, surviving and oozing through the cracks of media systems and hegemonic culture (with their dictates, their prerogatives, their expectations, and their ways of *doing well*). May Daniel Johnston and his demons be with us for a long time.

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