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Structuring the Collapse: Semantics, Sampling, and Divorce in The Wigmaker in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg

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On myths "Favorite Show Bird Couple": Sampling, Semantics, and Divorce in To Live and Share in L.A.
"The Wigner in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg" Project Title

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Structuring the Collapse:
Semantics, Sampling, and Divorce in
The Wigmaker in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg

Benjamin A. Oyler

College Scholars Senior Project
Mentor: Dr. Leslie Gay

June 7, 2006

Introduction

Rock band To Live and Shave in L.A. has roamed the American underground music scene for over a decade, releasing albums that defy simple musical categorization. None of the band's albums typify their confrontational intentions and noisy aesthetics better than their 2002 double CD, *The Wigmaker in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg*. A product of seven years of creative labor on the part of To Live and Shave in L.A.

(TLASILA) front-man Tom Smith (Om Myh), *The Wig* was released to near-universal critical acclaim. *Blastitude*, *Pitchfork Media*, and *Perfect Sound Forever* were just a few of the notable media sources to cover – and rave about – the release of *The Wig*.¹ Critic Kelly Burnette, for one, calls the album a “true work of excess”, a “masterpiece” built up in “ROCK, virility, transgression, and waste.”² The reality of the album's creation is complex: the labor-intensive period of time during which Smith produced *The Wig* was accompanied and informed by the collapse of his marriage. In the album, Smith sought to portray his divorce through shifting perspectives, complex characterizations, and “from all angles.”³ Thus, *The Wig* is steeped in psychological, social/interpersonal, and sexual metaphor, revealed through a confluence of twisted character and gender perspectives.

In order to achieve an accurately complex representation of the divorce narrative, Smith constructed the album from both original and incorporated or sampled sources that overlap and collide to create a fragmentary, violently discontinuous sonic experience.

¹ Larry Dolman, “To Live and Shave in LA,” *Blastitude*, February 19 2002, <http://www.blastitude.com/11/pg4.htm>; Kelly Burnette, “Come Be My Enemy So I Can Love You Too,” March, 2003, *Perfect Sound Forever*, www.furious.com/perfect/toliveandshaveinla.html; Jason Nickey, “To Live and Shave in LA: The Wigmaker in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg,” *Pitchfork Media*, September 13, 2002, www.pitchforkmedia.com. See also Max Black, “Dusted Features,” *Dusted Magazine*, www.dustedmagazine.com.

² Burnette, “Come and Be.”

³ Tom Smith has been extremely informative to my understanding of the workings of *The Wig* and has responded in great depth to all of my inquiries concerning the album.

These unsettling sonic qualities contribute to the aura of marital collapse; musical fragmentation and sexually explicit, aggressive lyrics are essential in conveying the album's subject matter. I will argue herein that all sampled sources (sonic, visual, and lyrical), as well as the technologies that allow for their use (derived from dub, electroacoustic, and *musique concrète*), contribute a fundamental semantic dimension to the work and to the construction of the marriage/divorce narrative that underlies *The Wig*.

Methodology

The construction of this paper and my understanding of TLASILA's music have developed largely from my personal communications with Smith. These informal conversations took place via email from late August 2005 to April 2006. In the course of our discussions, he divulged a number of key elements in his work, including his artistic and musical influences. The work we discussed ranged from dub and electroacoustic (see below for a detailed discussion) to punk, rock n roll, and surrealism. He kept the discussion of his musical background to a minimum, but made it clear that that his early groups Peach Of Immortality and Boat Of were formative and highly experimental.⁴ Further, he maintained that his childhood in Georgia, surrounded by the roar of stockcar races, was central to his interest in sound and noise.⁵

Due to *The Wig*'s relative obscurity, most of my musical analyses, including innumerable hours spent trying to pinpoint sampled sources, have been performed outside of any single scholarly methodology or technique. Rather, I have used an interdisciplinary web of scholarship, rock criticism, and my own detective work to

⁴ Tom Smith, emails to author, August 30 and September 14, 2005.

⁵ Tom Smith, "To Live and Shave in LA Bio," *To Live and Shave in L.A.*, <http://www.toliveandshaveinla.com/bio.htm>

unravel *The Wig*'s knotted exteriors. The particular scholarships I have chosen to employ elaborate many of the basic tendencies for postmodern artists (including Smith) and some provide analyses similar to those I undertake here. Musicologists Tom Service and Susan McClary both tackle the works of wildly eclectic composer John Zorn and, in many ways, provide analogues to my work on *The Wig*.⁶ Other scholarship cited below has aided in my conception of postmodern musical composition and contributed to my understanding of narrative and semantics in *The Wig*'s oblique world.

Postmodernism and Music

An ostensibly postmodern work, *The Wig* carries with it many of the qualities and baggage of 21st century music. In the postmodern musical landscape, scholars have argued that 20th and 21st-century music listeners have greatly restructured their methods of listening and that, accordingly, composers have altered their methods of composing. Scholars, such as musicologist Rose Subotnick, have emphasized the notion that postmodern listeners' responses to musical sound are "as diverse, unstable, and open-ended as the multitude of contexts in which music defines itself."⁷ Sociopolitical movement toward globalization, accompanied by increasingly widespread sources and outlets for information distribution have prompted this shift in thinking and encouraged a re-centering of power into the hands of the listening subject. Further, some scholarship argues that all contexts and histories are inextricable from the structural and formal qualities of musical composition. According to art-music historian Simon Miller, even

⁶ Tom Service, "Playing a New Game of Analysis: John Zorn's *Carny*, Autonomy, and Postmodernism," *British Postgraduate Musicology*, vol. 5 (2002); Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁷ Rose Subotnick, *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), xix – xlvii.

the most basic and essential harmonic and rhythmic figures that underpin much of the music in the Western world are part of defining historical circumstances.⁸ This line of thinking encourages the dissolution of the schism between “high” art music and “low” popular music, as it seeks to contextualize both within a wider framework and to deemphasize the tradition of placing power in the hands of autonomous compositional geniuses.

Postmodern composition emphasizes the validity of all cultures and modes of thinking, allowing for the incorporation and use of a wide variety of sound-sources and compositional methods. According to musicologist Jann Pasler, postmodern works often include such techniques toward the end of deconstructing and shattering narrative. She argues that this stands in contrast with modernist notions of collage, juxtaposition, appropriation and quotation as functions of style, only useful in parody, satire and assertions of power.⁹ Overall, quotations and musical samples contribute to an increasing interconnectedness in postmodern composition. Networks of sound can be woven out of disparate sources and utilized to construct new musics; in postmodern composition, this method eschews the modernist power dichotomies in favor of incorporation without political or social bias.

Musicologist Tom Service’s 2002 article on John Zorn’s highly fragmented piece for solo piano, *Carny* (1991), grapples with many issues related to the signification of quotations and samples in musical works. Service’s study attempts to unravel the complex of quotations and references in *Carny* and situate them within the context of

⁸ Simon Miller, *The Last Post: Music After Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 2-24.

⁹ Jann Pasler, “Postmodernism” ed. L. Macy (Accessed 20 February 2006) <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

postmodern semantics. Service argues in support of Postmodernist Frederic Jameson's notion that in postmodern art,

Objects that were formerly 'works' can now be reread as immense ensembles of systems of texts of various kinds, superimposed on each other by way of various intertextualities, successions of fragments... The autonomous work of art thereby... seems to have vanished, to have been volatilized.¹⁰

Service views *Carny*'s sonic components (its "soundworld") as radically polytextual and argues that the piece is an amalgam only coherent in its systematic incorporation of an array of musical quotations.¹¹ In Service's understanding, the piece is merely the sum of its parts; he argues further that, in general, postmodern texts can only represent the "infinite reproducibility" of all sounds and images.¹² Though it is quite unlike *Carny* in many respects, *The Wig* is fundamentally rooted in the kind of intertextuality that Service outlines and is subject to many of the same difficulties for postmodern definitions of meaning.

A similar line of discussion is put forth in music theorist Jonathan Kramer's article "The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism" (1999); here Kramer suggests that sources quoted or incorporated into a new musical work can simply exist as decontextualized quotations, unchanged and semantically indefinite.¹³ His argument focuses on the notion that postmodern works evade and dissolve coherent meaning, rather than construct it. He discusses a number of general qualities of postmodern musical works including irony, fragmentation, and disdain for the "unquestioned value" of

¹⁰ Service, "Playing a New Game," 2-3.

¹¹ Service eventually opts for a weaker form of this argument, viewing Zorn's work as somewhere between total fragmentation and within the ideological confines of a musical work, but makes no effort to systematize or understand the plethora of references in *Carny* as individually important to meaning in the work, *beyond* their notational relevance.

¹² Ibid., 2.

¹³ See Jonathan Kramer, "The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism," *Current Musicology*, no. 66 (1999): 7-20.

structural unity.¹⁴ These qualities undermine possibilities for linear, holistic musical narrative and reveal the danger in purely positivistic analysis. In Kramer's view, referentiality has no certain purpose in music; thus, quotations can float unobtrusively outside of a given piece's semantic structure, if such a thing is even determinable. Meaning is diffuse, fragmented, and incomplete, resonating with the increasingly disjointed lives of those in the Western world. According to Kramer, the modern reliance on coherence, continuity, and linearity is something that postmodern composers have intentionally rejected along with many other facets of modernity.

Taking a different position, musicologist Susan McClary, while acknowledging the problems of signification in postmodern musicology, has determined that comprehensible meaning can in fact be present in postmodern works.¹⁵ McClary takes as an example another Zorn piece, *Spillane* (1986), and argues that while the piece is not imbued with the unified coherence of a 19th-century musical work, it does have a determinable coherence. A person of the 21st century often has access to the extensive media sources from which Zorn draws and, thus, something of a skeleton key to his compositional method; as media participants, we are able to piece together a semantic structure through comprehension of Zorn's media references. The disparity between McClary's and the other scholars' views is indicative of the turbulent climate of postmodern musical scholarship, in which the most basic understandings of meaning and intent are called into question. Each of these scholars suggest in a different way that there is a fundamental need for new methodologies for understanding polytextual musical works.

¹⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵ McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, 139-169. McClary provides an excellent overview of the complexities of postmodern musicology.

Postmodernism and Sexuality

Postmodern scholarship concerned with sexuality and gender in music provides an essential context for understanding the album's complex of sexualities. Jeffrey Kallberg outlines the repressive constraints fostered by the dimorphism implicit to traditional conceptions of gender, arguing that recent scholarship has increasingly rejected such binaries in favor of new historical and cross-cultural models.¹⁶ He argues further that accompanying this cultural shift in scholarship is the tendency to reject biological models of gender in favor of a notion of gender as culturally-constructed. This idea helps break apart many of the steadfast essentialist arguments that catalyze oppression through reliance on dubious arguments for the "natural" origins of gender. Finally, he suggests that gender is a "relational phenomenon" and that the power complexes that arise out of constructed ideas of gender are overlapping, often contradictory, and create larger "cultural patterns of validation, marginalization, and rejection."¹⁷

McClary likewise argues that gender constructions are unstable and can be undermined through artistic means. Taking *The-Artist-Formerly-Known-as-Prince* as a quintessential example of gender-bending, McClary argues that masculinity and "the subject" are decentered in The Artist's music.¹⁸ The implications of such representations of gender are important, particularly as they contribute to the subversion of traditional, sex-based conceptions of gender that perpetuate oppressive power structures. While McClary pinpoints such moments of radicalism in particular musics, she holds that many of the age-old binary constructs of gender are still extant.¹⁹ Feminist scholar Neil

¹⁶ Jeffrey Kallberg, "Gender" ed. L. Macy (Accessed 25 April 2006) <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

¹⁷ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁸ McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, 153-157.

¹⁹ Ibid., 53

Nehring agrees, but argues that the tendencies in postmodern scholarship (see above) have hindered scholarly progress rather than allowed for new conceptions.²⁰ According to Nehring, the diffusion and fragmentation of the centered subject contributes to the undermining of feminist progress. Again, there is no scholarly consensus on the widespread implications of representations of gender in postmodern music.

Background and Musical Contexts

The Wig's concern with marriage and its sexual, social, and religious underpinnings leads to complex issues of gender within the work. Many of the arguably non-essential aspects of sexuality and gender are viewed in a strict, unchangeable light within the practiced doctrine of marriage.²¹ Further, within the bounds of the heteronormative marriage institution, stable, biologically-based sex and gender are basic assumptions and contribute to broader issues of power difference; the exclusionary practices of the marriage institution are justified through biological or God-given notions of normativity.²² *The Wig* seeks to artistically dissolve the marriage narrative and replace it with a fragmented depiction of divorce in which neither sex nor gender is stable. This takes place through the album's dense array of characters (see below) and its vigorous rejection of the religious, sexual, and social foundations of matrimony.

Some background information on Tom Smith and his formative influences will help further illuminate various dimensions of his work in *The Wig*. In many of my

²⁰ Neil Nehring, *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism: Anger is an Energy* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Productions, 1997), 7-17.

²¹ Kenneth Whitehead, *Marriage and the Common Good* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 1-15.

²² Paula S. Rothenberg, *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2001), 501-505.

conversations with Smith, he stressed the importance of electroacoustic, dub, and *musique concrète* in his own compositions. He first experimented with electroacoustics and *musique concrète* as a young man in college:

My relation to an academically typified methodology of electro-acoustic music is, in fact, rather cozy. At the age of eighteen (1974) I enrolled in my first electronic music class at Valdosta State University in Valdosta, Georgia. We never received much instruction (we were tossed into the lab and told to fend for ourselves), but those of us who stuck it out managed to create music which conformed, naively, to our still-nascent aesthetic impulses. I took the class for a year, and then moved on to the student radio station, where I honed my sound production skills.²³

Electroacoustic composition refers essentially to the process of utilizing found or recorded sounds as compositional materials; these sounds can then be manipulated by the composer via computer and other resources to create a finite, albeit abstract, composition.²⁴ Tom Smith's early experiments under the To Live and Shave in L.A. moniker (adopted in the early 1990s) with fellow sound engineer and bassist Frank "Rat Bastard" Falestra were created in the manner of many electroacoustic compositions. The composers located sources, including a "half-eaten" Rolling Stones tape, soundtracks from pornographic movies, and various loops made from available musics, all of which they would then proceed to plunder, manipulate, layer, and mix.²⁵ These methods, which would later become central in fully-formed To Live and Shave in L.A. compositions, were influenced as much by the Perry/Tubby dub process as by academic electroacoustics.

Smith has suggested in a number of interviews that dub is the "thumbprint" for his work; he first encountered the dub methodology in the guise of Lee Perry's *Super Ape* in

²³ Tom Smith, email to author, March 5 2006.

²⁴ For a fuller discussion of electroacoustic processes and aesthetics see Simon Emmerson, ed., *The Language of Electroacoustic Music* (London: Macmillan Press, 1986) and Thomas Licata, ed., *Electroacoustic Music: Analytical Perspectives* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002).

²⁵ Smith, "Bio," 5.

1976.²⁶ The term “dub” refers to the practice of reggae producers altering previously extant reggae recordings to create new sonic environments; producer/performer Lee Perry is one of its most important practitioners.²⁷ To Smith, dub methodology would come to represent the obsolescence of genre and the failure of taxonomic methods to elaborate any real truth about the nature of music.²⁸ His encounter with this new music would start him on a path toward the fusion of dub, rock, and electroacoustic/*musique concrète* compositional styles in the format of *To Live and Shave in L.A.* As dub would take a pre-composed reggae tune and then, via mixing board and vocal overdubs, manipulate, derange, and reshape it, so too *To Live and Shave in L.A.* would plunder every imaginable sonic vault toward the purpose of total inclusion.²⁹

While there are stylistic and cultural differences, it should be understood that dub and electroacoustic composition have some essential things in common. Both can be viewed, ostensibly, as methods – not genres – that employ preexisting compositions, quotes, musical figures, sound effects, etc, as the main source of fodder for new compositions. Further, they both bring into question conventional notions of authorship and stress plurality over autonomy. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, they are both mediated by and products of their respective relationships to technology. Without tapes, sound recording equipment, and mixing boards, dub and electroacoustic music would not exist as such. This point is extremely vital to the development of *To Live and Shave in*

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See Chris Potash, *Reggae, Rasta, and Revolution: Jamaican Music from Ska to Dub* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 145-16.

²⁸ Tom Smith, email to author, March 5 2006.

²⁹ For a rich discussion of dub and its musical variations, see Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'N' Mix* (New York: Routledge Press 1987).

L.A. as well, since the band can be seen as part of the lineage of these disparate forms of composition.

Technology and PRE

Scholars have made clear the essential importance of understanding the role of technology in 20th and 21st century musical composition and musicology. R. T. Lysloff and Leslie Gay argue in *Music and Technoculture* (2003) that culture and technology are not discernibly separate and are mutually reinforcing and adaptable, each imbuing the other with meaning specific to various contexts.³⁰ Dub, particularly, bears out this principle: in the mid-1960's, reggae composers confronted with new mixing and audio technologies shifted the mixing board from a functional role in post-production to the forefront of composition, thus becoming dub composers.³¹ The newly developed dub sounds were linked inextricably to the technologies that were utilized in the compositional process. TLASILA's own relationship to various studio and compositional technologies – mixing techniques, computer manipulation, recordings (both created and appropriated), and other sonic devices – is likewise completely sympathetic. The musical maelstrom that To Live and Shave in L.A. creates is inextricable from the processes that help shape it.

The synthesis of dub process and the philosophically elaborated notion of electroacoustic composition led Smith toward a “robust synthesis” of his own; a musical metaphysics that he has termed PRE. PRE encapsulates the sonic and methodological universe of To Live and Shave in L.A. More than a compositional method, PRE is a way

³⁰ Leslie C. Gay and R. T. Lysloff eds., *Music and Technoculture* (New York: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 5-20.

³¹ Potash, *Reggae, Rasta, Revolution* (1997): 153.

of merging the diffuse, complex layers of media-mediated music and art to which postmodern persons are exposed. In my correspondence with him, Smith gave the following explanation:

pre is simple: even in the late 70s, with no internet downloads, i was voraciously eclectic in my appreciation of music. i wanted to hear everything, even the things that gave me the creeps. it didn't matter if it was "cool" or misbegotten and reviled - i preferred establishing my own parameters. as with fine art or cinema, and certainly with literature, there is circularity. essential human experience, although tremendously mediated by technology, remains constant (though not static). pre applies not to the music, or groups of artists, but to our understanding and perception of art itself.³²

He elaborates further that PRE expands the processes that underlie dub and electroacoustic music into a holistic conception of the possibilities for incorporating external, sampled sources into new artistic works. He stresses that PRE is focused on inclusiveness and incorporation above all else; it is a method in which all possible sources can be recast and restructured in order to arrive at a new synthesized context. In terms of his produced work, *The Wigmaker in 18th Century Williamsburg* is the definitive example of the application of this concept to composition. Constructed from a plethora of sound sources – from aging rock riffs and radio quips to snippets of unintelligible dialogue submerged in quirky tape juxtapositions – *The Wig* is a point of merger that, taken as whole, suggests new meanings for the external sources it draws into its body. Each bit of sound, dialogue, lyric, or sonic color becomes something new in light of the structuring principles and underlying themes of the work.

The PRE aesthetic is only made workable through the vast array of technologies available to the postmodern composer. As new technologies are incorporated into the ever-widening toolboxes of composers and producers, the possibilities for sonic variation increase. In the 20th and 21st centuries, music and culture have completely mutually-

³² Tom Smith, email to author, September 15, 2005.

dependant relationships with technology; this has become fundamental to music-making, production, and consumption practices.³³ Cultural studies scholar Paul Théberge makes the following point:

Popular musicians who use new technologies are not simply producers of prerecorded patterns of sound (music) consumed by particular audiences; they, too, are consumers – consumers of technology, consumers of prerecorded sounds and patterns of sounds that they rework, transform and arrange into new patterns.

Thus, computers and other techno-devices, while created for various purposes, are easily socially reconfigured and incorporated into (and, thus, participate in the changing of) the myriad discourses that surround popular and academic composition. Music can perpetuate shifts in the creation of new technologies, just as the technologies can perpetuate shifts in the creation of new music. In Théberge's view, technology is inextricable from both the creative process and the product of creative action. In the shape of PRE, technological adaptation works to create a situation in which Smith is able to seamlessly incorporate sources from various media outlets – radio, albums, previous TLASILA recordings, found “tapes”, film, etc – into his work, thereby recontextualizing seemingly disparate pieces of sonic information. There is a vast body of usable sounds available to a composer as steeped in current and burgeoning technologies as Tom Smith; essential to his art is the careful and adroit incorporation of these into the processes that shape his musical works.

Smith's tenure as an engineer at studios in Miami provided him with much of the requisite knowledge to spend four years tweaking, mixing, and remixing his songs and textures for *The Wig* at Microgroove Studios in Atlanta, Ga. Smith informed me that during the composition and subsequent manipulation of *The Wig*, he had at his disposal

³³ Paul Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology* (Hanover: University Press, 1997), 1-13.

“all the studio outboard gear on earth...all the computer stuff available through 2000...then mix everything together.”³⁴ His access to a wide variety of technologies enhanced the possibilities for post-production in TLASILA’s music and, in turn, the tension and contrast generated by the clash of the sampled and original materials became fundamental to *The Wig*’s sound. The technological processes that allow for his method of sonic recombination arise from his background in dub and electroacoustic music. In dub, the manipulation of previously ordered and composed material creates a sense of humorous, spaced-out sonic disorder; in *The Wig*, it creates an atmosphere of dire, preordained emotional collapse. Importantly, these musical practices hinge on Théberge’s analysis of musicians’ consumption practices in contemporary music genres, including electroacoustic composition.³⁵ An essential facet of PRE and, thus, Smith’s music-making is the consumption, change, and adaptation of new technologies, including those that allow for extensive sampling procedures.

Approaching Analysis

Analysis of any musical work is a difficult process, but *The Wig* is particularly abstruse and complicated music and its analysis involves a number of interrelated dimensions. Taking a cue from Robert Walser,³⁶ this analysis does not treat these dimensions as separate and distinct; a holistic analysis must include the relationship of music and analysis to cultural contexts. The sound is, thus, connected with the visual and lyrical

³⁴ Tom Smith, email to author, April 16, 2006.

³⁵ Théberge, *Any Sound* (1997), 48-50.

³⁶ Robert Walser, “Popular Music Analysis: Ten Apothegms and Four Instances” in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19-27. Walser suggests that a frequent problem with contemporary musicology is its attempt to separate culture from formal analysis, or music from the social forces that create it. He argues quite effectively that many of the established binaries in academia have done little more than create further dilemmas that musicologists then attempt to unravel.

components – all of which are threads that weave the fabric of formal structure – that then in turn are couched in the contextual aspects of the work. In *The Wig* the first dimension is comprised of the visual (album artwork), sonic, and lyrical components of the album. These are interlocking and complexly layered throughout the album's lengthy duration; all elements are littered with references and incorporated bits of sound and image that help construct a picture of the fragmentation of divorce. The second is the formal scheme of the album, the way it is arranged in time and utilizes temporal markers, duration, dynamics and contrast to support the structures of its meaning(s). The last are the social (including marriage) and technological dimensions through which all materials are filtered and which provide a link to the concepts of dub and electroacoustic music, as well as to the broader issues of postmodern music in general.

My interpretation of *The Wig* hinges heavily on the numerous question and answer sessions I have had with Tom Smith from September 2005 to present, as well as on my own readings of the results of the analytical process. This is a requirement in order to dig up and understand individual references that comprise the body of *The Wig*. The layers of the album unfold slowly and, at first, appear somewhat impenetrable. Part of the sensation of impenetrability comes from the album's sheer sonic density; another part comes from the complex language from which the lyrics are constructed.³⁷ The network of references and sampled sources appear mostly hidden on initial encounters with the album, but frequent listens demystify much of this content. However, it should be noted that such an analysis is by no means complete; instead, the process here is to determine how particular aspects of original/composed sound, lyrics, and sampled

³⁷ See Burnette, "Come and Be," for a discussion of Tom Smith's lyrical density in *The Wigmaker*.

sources overlap, collide and merge to represent the tragic fragmentation (both literal and figurative) of a marriage narrative into the tumult of divorce.

Travelogues

A broad-strokes picture of *The Wig*'s visual and structural layout is a necessary precursor to the more rigorous analyses of its internal content. The album unfolds over a total duration of nearly two hours and is broken into 20 songs and seven "travelogues" on two CDs (see table 1). Both CDs contains ten songs, while the second contains a reprise of the first CD's third travelogue. The travelogues are short chronological markers every 4 to 5 songs, punctuating the action and reminding the listener of the album's progress. They are constructed from audio samples of what seems to be an old documentary; Smith claims that the source is 8mm tape found in a dumpster outside of Sync Recording Studio in Miami.

The first travelogue opens the album and briefly describes the start of a couple's journey to Williamsburg to visit the "city that has turned back time". Each subsequent travelogue documents the couple's further progression through the town of Williamsburg, including their stops at the wigmaker shop and an old mill. The travelogues are sonically manipulated at each occurrence, reflecting the irony, in light of *The Wig*'s divorce theme, of their baroque storytelling.

The travelogues are the main pillars of the structural continuity in *The Wig*'s formal layout. They lend the album a sense of development, though not necessarily a sense of linearity as, ostensibly, the theme is divorce; however, the travelogues' existences point toward a definite formal plan on the part of Tom Smith.

Table 1

CD ONE	CD TWO
Travelogue 1	Travelogue 3 (reprise)
Blandina, Oberwilding '77	The Notorious D-1 and D-2
Nor Swollen-Bellied Comet Blown	<i>Song of Roland</i> a Single Corkscrew Curl
Bled into <i>Minar Thirty-Aught</i>	'Twas He who Pricked with an Awl
Full-Choke Wigmaker's Vise	Viet Harlan, Brown Dress Bob
New Poem Dramatized for Lux Cudgel	Travelogue 4
Travelogue 2	The Famous "Mad Bronze"
Tortillon Fluff	Is This Good for Vulva?
The "Rose" the Vehicle of <i>Miss High Heels</i> .	Displaced by Double Bed
Ideas Make Men Hard	Travelogue 5
When My Rifle Went Sour With Preposterous Headdress	To Backstab, to Schism
Fills Mouth and Cunt with "Pathetic Route"	Loudspeakers for the Poet's Famous Disques
Travelogue 3	Travelogue 6
	Honeycomb Tripe

Due to the album's density and length, the travelogues are the first and most obvious aspects of overarching structure that compel the listener toward the finish. They effect a repeated return to the main theme(s) in order to keep the listener within the semantic boundaries of *The Wig* as a whole. There is not a direct relationship between the content of each subsequent travelogue and the various songs that surround it, though the divorce theme permeates all elements of the album. This fact suggests that Tom Smith intended

the travelogues to function as both structural points of reference, as well as a sort of ironic metacommentary on the album as a whole.

The travelogue metacommentary – a running series that is entirely derived from sampled sources – is integral to the representation of a failing marriage that comprises the bulk of *The Wig*'s content. As discussed above, the travelogues progress in a more or less straightforward fashion (on their own terms) outside of the action that takes place within the songs. They describe what seems to be a happy or contented marriage between a woman named “Mildred” and an unknown first person narrator, presumably an ironic cipher for Tom Smith. Smith told me:

most onlookers' conceptions of a marriage are baroque, necessarily manicured. within the nucleus, however, truths swirl in tangles. and the pain is tempered with just as many accompanying, often conflicting emotions.³⁸

This is quite significant within the broader scheme of the album, as it suggests that Smith created the travelogues as a foil for the representation of divorce that lies subsurface. The “baroque, necessarily manicured” travelogues resonate with a bitter irony that contrasts with the more cathartic, vicious, and conflicted content of the songs themselves. As the songs spin out confused, violently shape-shifting notions of sex, human interaction and, ultimately, divorce, the travelogues present a straightforward and comprehensible narrative of a happy couple. Smith's computer-based manipulation of the sonic qualities of the travelogues provides one dimension of their irony, while the narrator's voice and the obviously maudlin subject matter provide another. Lastly, the travelogues can be seen as the first and clearest instance of Smith's use of sampled/incorporated sources for the creation of new meaning in his work. Viewed externally, the sound material utilized for the travelogues most certainly had an educational or descriptive function; recast in the

³⁸ Tom Smith, email to author, September 15 2005.

context of *The Wig*, they become something far more menacing and unsettling in their pervasive irony.

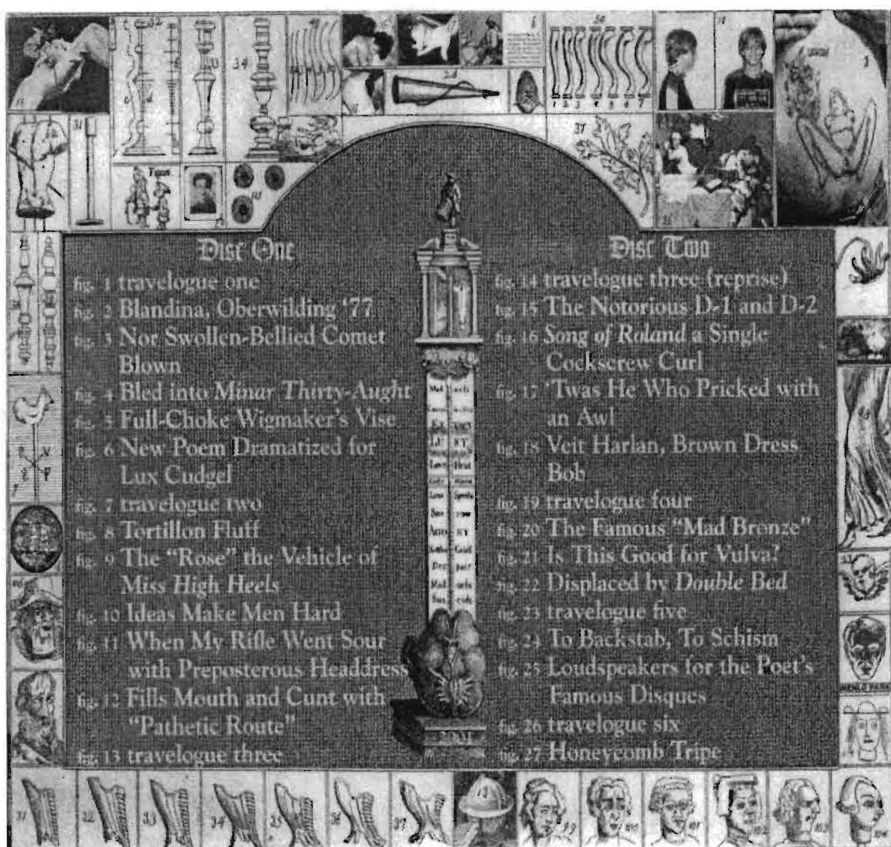
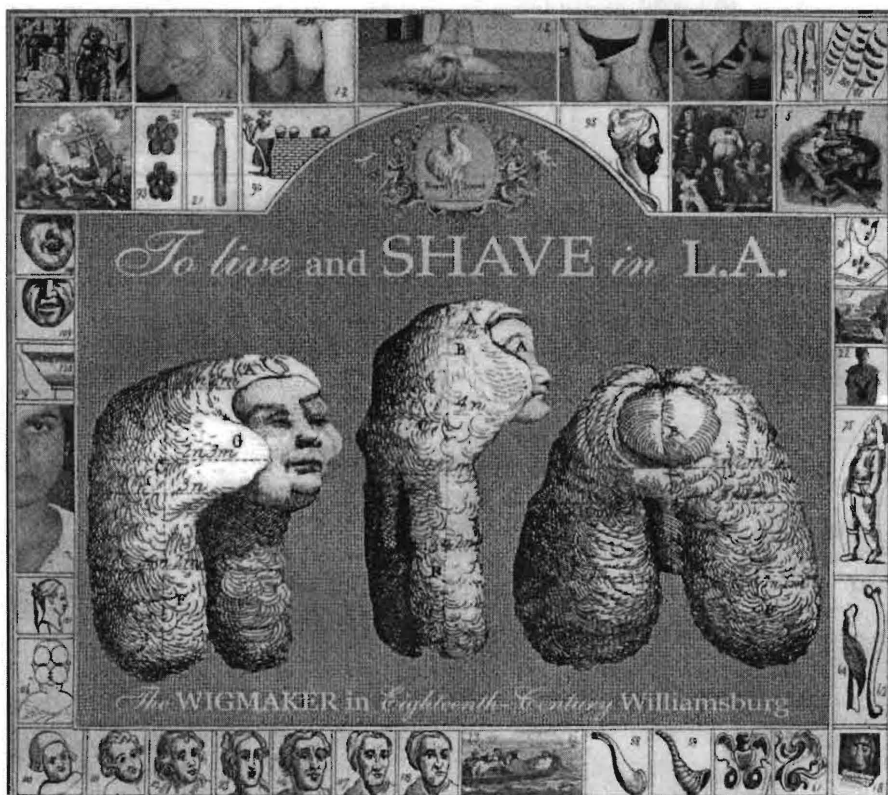
Hogarth and *The Wig*'s Album Art

The Wig's visual component – its album artwork and graphics – is another dimension of the album that provides many clues about the meanings of the music contained within. A warped revision of 18th-century artist William Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* (1753) plates,³⁹ the album cover consists of a montage of carefully placed images that position Hogarth's work alongside references to pornography and pop-culture (see figs. 1 and 2). The segmented, numbered photos and imitative bits of art that run along the borders of the front and back of the album situate the action in the 18th century, playing with the notion of various kinds of beauty and vulgarity. Many of the boxes contain numbers that refer specifically to tracks on the album itself; for instance, the track number of each travelogue can be found in a different box, each of which contains a different image corresponding to movement or direction (i.e. a weathervane, globe, boat, etc.). Similar image-track relationships – including a link between a young Bill Gates and the song “Ideas Make Men Hard” or a bit of poetic text and “New Poem Dramatized for Lux Cudgel” – create yet another layer of metacommentary.

Hogarth's original conception of his *Analysis* was to breathe new life into English art and to attack artistic connoisseurs and elitists. The *Analysis* was book written with “a view of fixing the fluctuating ideas of taste,” with accompanying drawings and pieces of demonstration.

³⁹ See William Hogarth, *Analysis of Beauty* (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974) for reproductions of Hogarth's images.

Figures 1 and 2; Front and back covers for *The Wig* (Copyright TLASILA 2002)



It included a great deal on aesthetics and criticism as the foundation for a polemic.⁴⁰

Smith utilizes Hogarth's imagery for his own sort of polemic that is rooted in angry emotional catharsis and treats the notion of "beauty" as another point of irony. Placing pornographic images beside Hogarth's original drawings satirizes and destabilizes the seriousness of Hogarth's intentions and attacks the possibility of attaining a meta-conceptualization of beauty. This resonates further when linked to the sonic dimensions of the album itself – certainly not a traditionally "beautiful" piece of musical art. Again, metacommentary on the album's themes provides a further glimpse of the deeper forces of meaning at work in *The Wig*.

The travelogues and Hogarth-esque album artwork function together as organizing principles for the general layout of *The Wig* as a piece. These visual and chronological reference points, taken as metacommentary, are essential to the sense of structure passed on to the listener/viewer. An important notion underlying this conception of the album's structure is that Smith creates these metacommentaries out of sampled or incorporated sources. Smith has sonically manipulated the original source content of the travelogues and plundered and warped Hogarth's art; he has then restructured these disparate sources into a central position in *The Wig* as metacommentary and facets of structure. Smith both comments on and satirizes Hogarth's intentions in creating the *Analysis of Beauty* and, in turn, develops a force of commentary on the internal meanings of *The Wig* as well. Thus, meaning in these incorporated sources is changed and adapted for the purposes of creating new meaning

⁴⁰ Hogarth's own text, *Analysis of Beauty*, published in 1753, is comprised of many of the sources Smith has plundered for *The Wig*'s cover. However, other Hogarth images, most importantly *The Five Orders of Periwigs* reveal further dimensions of Smith's art. See Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: Art and Politics* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993) for material on Hogarth's intentions with *Analysis* and *The Five Orders*.

and function in light of a new context. These sources do not operate in a manner of simple quotation but, rather, become integrated parts of an original artistic object. The process of assimilation and changing meaning of the sources directly arises out of Smith's PRE concept; Smith suggests that all sources are useful and can be made relevant and functional in an artistic context distinct from their origins. In practice, the art of incorporation and sampling is made possible by adapted technologies while the sampled sources – including images like Hogarth's – inevitably change meaning in the process of appropriation.⁴¹

Sonics, Samples, and Noise

The Wig's sonic dimensions are linked inextricably with lyrical themes and structured in relationship to texts and, thus, must be analyzed with respect to Smith's words. *The Wig*'s music operates mostly in terms of shifting timbral and rhythmic (or arhythmic) structures controlled by the cascading, complexly interwoven vocal parts. Traditional metrical divisions, harmony and melody are not present and are replaced with sonic dynamics focused on the entrance and disappearance of samples, vocal parts, and textural change. Smith mediates the various vocal and musical structures with computer manipulations that provide for rapid timbral shifts, typically at specific chronological intervals but often in the middle of phrases and sections. The sonic result is disorienting, visceral, and fragmented; *The Wig* is a set of songs in which a feeling of improvisation is

⁴¹ Composer Simon Waters argues in "Beyond the Acousmatic" in *Music, Electronic Media, and Culture* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000), "changes in the nature and structure of our communications technologies fundamentally alter the meanings of what is transmitted by, for example, determining the context of reception or by selecting certain material as significant...It is no longer innovation in material but the context in which that material is used or experienced that determines what it might mean" (70). See also Gay and Lysloff, *Technoculture*, 15-20.

regularly present, but it is clear that the music is carefully structured according to guiding themes.

The Wig's sonic world is populated by hundreds of samples, most of which materialize quickly, disappear, and have origins that are difficult if not impossible to determine. Radio sounds – including the voices of DJs and announcers – occur regularly throughout the album, often alongside chopped-up, sonically mutilated Muzak sections. The voices of the radio announcers are muffled and distorted, but key words frequently punch through the mix, such as “Can ya’ll make some noise for me please?!” in “New Poem Dramatized for Lux Cudgel”. In the same song, an excerpt from an unknown orchestral chamber group (piano, voice and strings) appears amidst squealing oscillators and white noise. These sounds mingle to create an aura of fragmented dissolve – soaked in tawdriness and cynical irony – that is juxtaposed against the hard seriousness of the lyrics. Individual samples and references may be unclear as to origins, but recast in *The Wig*'s sickly glow, they become part of a dense sonic and semantic structure.

The track “Tortillon Fluff”, whose titular reference is to an invented female protagonist, contains many of the lyrical and sonic elements that are characteristic of Smith's musical chaos. The song opens with an intense mixture of cut-up Muzak sounds bathed in white noise, followed by a short bit of audio sample in which a young woman's voice enters to narrate,

Seven Cuban Army officers in exile were at me all night. Tall, sleek, slender, Spanish types with smooth, dark muscular bodies with hair like wet curl on their heads and between their legs.

Wildly intense noise follows, accompanied by wah-wah bass, synthesizers, electric guitar, and percussion to fill out the texture. There is no discernible metric consistency and timbre is in perpetual flux – Smith's voice is the most consistent and prominent

performing force. His voice articulates lyrics and pitches, but is spread across a wide sonic spectrum; computer manipulations of various kinds alter its timbral qualities and staggered entry-points and heavy layering produce the effect of multiple voices. This contributes to the sense of narrative discontinuity and fragmentation, particularly the inarticulate anger of an estranged voice. Lyrical passages arranged into stanzas provide the structural divisions, but are not rhythmically rigid in the context of the sound. Rather, as Smith delivers the lyrics in free-time with heavy timbral manipulations on the voice, the supporting textures change. The lyrics themselves are obscure and symbolic, but clearly contain two protagonists: a woman named Tortillon Fluff and an unnamed male. Fluff (“the slave who was not poetic”) engages throughout the song in various types of coitus with what appears to be multiple partners. The lyrics emphasize debasement and sexual promiscuity as Fluff’s principle characteristics.

At the conclusion of the song, the initial female narrator reenters, finishing her previously begun graphic description of a sex act with multiple partners. Her tense, awkward delivery suggests that she is neither a professional actress, nor speaking from memory. As her speech ends, another narrator enters recounting the same tale; this time the speaker is a young man. This gender reversal is aurally unsettling and confusing to the listener, contributing to the sexual ambiguity of the whole song. The narrators that Smith chose to recount the same erotic tale underscores the idea that *The Wig* is concerned with the representation of a collision of the sexes. Both narrators communicate the same passage to the listener, but the story becomes fundamentally altered as the sex of the narrator changes. The roles of the sexual participants are made less definite and Fluff’s place as the central protagonist is called into question. It appears

that Smith is commenting on the nebulousness of truth when coming from multiple sources, particularly in the complex realm of sexuality and marriage.

The idea that “truths swirl in tangles” is essential not only to this seven-minute song within *The Wig*, but also to Smith’s models of marriage and divorce and, thus, to the semantic infrastructure of the album as a whole. Smith’s notion of PRE conceptualizes this version of truth as radically changeable, adaptable and indefinite. It follows that any artistic or musical sounds that perpetuate an idea of truth cannot be rigidly understood or classified. In one interview, Smith divulged, “‘Context’ is infinitely malleable...I can contextualize a nine-tenths empty bottle of Vicks DayQuil as a totemic referent within Jacobean dramaturgy by mere suggestion.”⁴² His point, albeit somewhat tongue-in-cheek, is that art cannot be readily systematized into categories or immutable truths; sounds are present, absent, impalpable and transient, and our reception of them operates in much the same way. In “Tortillon Fluff,” the samples (altered and retransmitted from their original sources and given new semantic weight) help to construct fundamentally the meaning of the piece – though meaning in all aspects of *The Wig* is as complex as the divorce it seeks to represent.

The element of sexual debasement and quasi-pornographic sound and lyrical content that colors much of “Tortillon Fluff” contributes to the communication of *The Wig*’s broader themes. As the institution of marriage operates in the West, marital union between man and woman is seen as a contractual, sacred bond that delineates socially sanctioned sexual roles and rules.⁴³ The participants in a marriage, then, commit to

⁴² Tom Smith, email to author, March 6, 2006.

⁴³ See Whitehead, *Marriage*, 1-15 and the “Propositions on the Doctrine of Christian Marriage” as dictated in John R. Connery, *Contemporary Perspectives on Christian Marriage: Propositions and Papers from the*

sexual honesty and devotion, making a conscious decision to remain faithful to one another. In “Tortillon,” Fluff’s dubious sexual antics counter any traditionally held notion of sexual fidelity and purity, particularly that which is outlined by the doctrine of the Church.⁴⁴ Fluff represents promiscuity and sexual deviation from Church-sanctioned practices and the unnamed narrators of “Tortillon” can be seen in a similar light, as their pornographic descriptions of sexual encounters with multiple partners suggests. The function of these characters within the scheme that Smith has devised in *The Wig*, then, is as ciphers or foils for the real figures in the divorce. As sexual devotion is central to marriage, sexual promiscuity can be seen as its negation – a refutation of the bonds of matrimony and the Church’s dicta.

Moral and Spiritual Dimensions

The ideas of morality and religion extend deeply into *The Wig*’s inner-workings, popping up with great frequency throughout the album. A number of saints and religious or biblical figures are referred to cryptically in the lyrics – Blandina, Hilarion, Paul, Rachel, Peter, and Catherine (as well as a host of unnamed monks and bishops) all receive either passing mention or prominent roles. These persons then are recast as protagonists, parodies and ciphers in *The Wig*’s profusion of bizarre characters. For instance, St. Peter becomes a thinly-veiled symbol for male genitalia in “The ‘Rose’ the Vehicle of Miss High Heels”, while St. Blandina becomes a grotesque harlot in “Blandina, Überwilling ‘77”. The sacred, sainted qualities of these figures are permuted, distorted, and negated, as Smith depicts each one in variably perverse and debased sexual scenarios. In “To

International Theological Commission (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1984). The Catholic Sacrament of Matrimony includes God in the union between participants in marriage.

⁴⁴ See Whitehead, *Marriage*, 14-15.

Backstab, to Schism,” the visceral, emotionally violent effect of the combination of religious figures and apocalyptic overtones in the lyrics is stronger than any literal interpretation:

Grace leapt on Hilarion's back-
 Having legs and feet like those of an ass
 With monks she has a subtler chore
 Later lists of seven often dropped “despair”
 Brought down the first with snakelike lies
 With wings each eighty cubits long
 Swarthy hue not usurer's spill
 Dating the deed at the end of the tale
 The sign of the cross and the name of psalm
 Sister typed dumb in demon balm
 Wealth the way to brutal ranks
 And the thousand-year reign of shifting saints
 Drunk stared fish-eyed into shock
 “Goddamn my stink-ass luck!”

To backstab to schism gloss
 Victorian Charles presumes disgust
 Listed as cause of her distaste
 Cares that sweep her sleepless waste away

Grace leapt on Rachel's child of rape
 Having legs and feet like jaded Catherine jape
 With monks in last-sung death place
 To backstab, shoulder, schism...

As in the much of the work of experimental writer W. S. Burroughs, Smith's words have intense impact in their emotional power and confluence of sexually complex meanings.⁴⁵ Like Burroughs, Smith seeks to lay bare all corridors of his consciousness, to suppress no possible version of the truth. The sexuality that Smith's music and words exude is grotesque and nebulous, breaking with many of the traditional ideas of sexual orientation or gender representations; similar arguments have been used to praise (and chastise) Burroughs's work.⁴⁶ Smith has stressed his affinity for Burroughs in interviews

⁴⁵ See Robin Lydenberg, *Word Cultures: Radical Theory and Practice in William S. Burrough's Fiction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-10.

and the relationship between the two writers' highly sexualized, cathartic, and socially-critical words is apparent in style, tone, and substance.⁴⁷

At many points during the album, Smith juxtaposes sexualized and violent images with sacred, religious, or traditional mores to create an aura of conflicted moral decay. "Full Choke Wigmaker's Vise" bears out this technique – its very title is a combination of contrasting elements. The title plays with the multiple meanings of "vise": 1) it is a vice grip, or "full-choke," 2) an immoral habit, and 3) a character in an English morality play that represents wicked behavior.⁴⁸ The song's action focuses on the moral disposition of an unnamed male protagonist "worn by debauch," floating both inside and outside his point of view. Another unnamed character criticizes the protagonist's sexual and moral choices by saying,

"Just a poor pillar of Sodom, pig-
If you've perchance bored in any wise
Might get swallowed by the spathes
Of full-choke wigmaker's vise!"

This, along with the odd, occasionally punctuating shouts of "Wigmaker!" throughout the song, make an interesting connection between the travelogue metacommentary and the action of the album. In "Full Choke," the Wigmaker is an unnamed person or force, potentially violent in nature, that maintains an operative power over the song's protagonist. The protagonist is to be punished for his sins, crushed in the Wigmaker's vice (vise). This stands in stark contrast with the descriptions of the Wigmaker shops in travelogue two:

The small peruke, or Wigmaker's shop, was nearby, and a very fascinating craft

⁴⁷ For more on Burrough's unique literary style, Barry Miles *El Hombre Invisible: William Burroughs, a Portrait* (London: Virgin Publishing, 2002).

⁴⁸ Robert Potter defines a Vice as an "agent of temptation," sent to lead the pure and chaste into debauchery. See Robert Potter, *The English Morality Play: Origins, History, and Influence of a Dramatic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1975), 38-39 and 107-108.

shop. Here the peruke maker still makes the wigs which were worn by the upper class many years ago.

Unlike the nostalgic, affirmative description of the Wigmaker in the above, “Full Choke” describes a dangerous force manifest in the same being. The shouts of “Wigmaker!” sound like condemnations of the protagonist; Smith is again making a point about the nature of truth and appearances. By condemning the protagonist with the term “Wigmaker,” he is suggesting that the character possesses a hidden dimension – or wears a wig to cover his intentions. While the Wigmaker represents a couple’s love and traditional values in travelogue two, it represents deceit, condemnation, and emotional tumult to the protagonist (and his interlocutor) in “Full Choke.” The semantic content of “Full Choke” both draws from and complements that of the travelogues. Thus, the travelogue samples produce an umbrella of meaning that creates contrasting, contradictory messages and, therefore, meaning in the album’s songs.

The connection between “Full Choke” and travelogue two is unstable, a quality that adds constant tension to the album. The process of ironic metacommentary generated by travelogue two and negated by “Full Choke” is the result of a powerful use of sampled, electroacoustic materials. Drawing the source material for the travelogues from found tape and reshaping its innocuous content into something both ironic and threatening, Smith has created an important dimension of meaning in his work. He has effected a polarized image of two married couples – the couple of the travelogues and the couple of “Full Choke” (and the rest of *The Wig*) – through the juxtaposition of sampled and original material. It is this process that allows for the depiction of the divorce and, particularly, conveys the emotionally tumultuous undercurrent that runs through marital dissolve.

Noise

The relationship between sampled and original sounds in *The Wig* is complex and often the two sources are not easily distinguished from one another. This is due in part to Smith's use of his own music to construct the initial demos and source-recordings for *The Wig*. He told me, "the initial demos [for *The Wig*] were created on cassette (just loop ideas, etc., most drawn from previous [TLASILA] recordings, but others obviously pilfered)."⁴⁹ These were then mixed with newly recorded material to construct the basic tracks for the album. The basic tracking resulted in many sounds that are fundamentally white noise; synthesizer/oscillator din, tape sounds, and the sometimes cacophonous results of computer distortion and sample-warping provide an intense sonic backdrop for Smith's lyrics. However, though the album's relationship to noise is sympathetic, it is not exclusive – Smith emphasizes that *To Live and Shave in LA* is not a noise band.⁵⁰ Noise is a dimension in TLASILA's work, but it is neither a chosen genre nor a working premise for the construction of their material.

In *The Wig*, noise is used as tool to evoke a mood of emotional distress and confusion. The layers of dense sound and noise (which are mostly constructed from manipulated recordings) overlay and merge to create moments in which structure is completely indiscernible. These parts of the album, however, create dynamic contrast with the sections in which lyrics or travelogues delineate the formal scheme. The noise itself is reflective of the incommunicable element of the dissolve of a human relationship; Smith uses noise as a sonic outlet for aggression and violence, filling in the gaps where words could not possibly function. Mary Russo and Daniel Warner argue that noise is

⁴⁹ Tom Smith, email to author, April 16, 2006.

⁵⁰ See Smith, "To Live and Shave," and "Gathering Buds," *Blastitude*, www.blastitude.com for further discussion on his opposition to exclusively "noise" acts such as Merzbow or Whitehouse.

not an absolute state, nor always distinguishable from a “pure” signal, but that noise is always culturally conceived as a negative force – noise is “pain.”⁵¹ In a broader analysis, cultural theorist Jacques Attali argues that noise bears a relationship to power struggle: “In noise can be read the codes of life, the relations among men...Everywhere codes analyze, mark, restrain, train, repress, and channel the primitive sounds of language, of the body, of objects, of the relations to self and others.”⁵² In this way, Smith’s use of noise in the context of *The Wig* can be viewed as an abstract kind of power struggle, in which wordless aggression is the bearer of his truest sentiments.

Changing sampled sources into noise through computer distortion and alteration is, in effect, another way of structuring their meaning and giving them new weight. Every bit of vocal, sonic, or rhythmic noise created through technological means helps shape a vision of the painful, destructive aspects of divorce. The complex of distortions and sonic dissonances that use samples as their fodder are new representations of objects incorporated into a contextual framework that hinges, in part, on its inability to truly and clearly express anything with definitive certainty. As Smith says of his intentions,

I wanted to speak truth to pain. A four-line abstract would have been insufficient. The challenge was to first allow for and acknowledge bias and duplicity, and then attack memory (and sentimentality) on all fronts.

Thus, Smith’s creation must incorporate into its arsenal the strongest musical weapon of attack: brutal, relentless noise. Deconstructed samples lead to violent din and disjointed

⁵¹ See Mary Russo and Daniel Warner, “Rough Music, Futurism, and Postpunk Industrial Noise Bands” in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, eds. (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2004), 47-54.

⁵² Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 1-20.

aural sound-worlds, painting a stark picture of the confusion of bias, memory, and sentimentality as they are fed through the emotional ringer.

Gender and *The Wig*'s Cast of Characters

The above analyses unearth a number of elements or characteristics of *The Wig* through which Smith's conception of marriage and divorce are realized. Characters' shifting perspectives, as a function of the PRE methodology, comprise the discernible narrative action and representation of divorce in *The Wig* while simultaneously launching an assault on the traditionally sentimentalized conception of marriage. Each song possesses not only one or two narrator perspectives, but typically at least one or more distinct characters: the Wigmaker, Blandina, Lux Cudgel, Fluff, High Heels, Venus, Smelly Joe, Mad Bronze, and Honeycomb Tripe are some of the colorful and bizarre protagonists of Smith's songs. Their names, like most of the music in *The Wig*, are constructed from "sampled" elements. They refer, variously, to poets and rock bands, real-world war criminals and saints. Not one of the characters centers *The Wig* as a whole; rather, each character exists within the insular world of a particular song, only to be replaced or permuted in subsequent songs. They mingle and overlap with unpredictably first and third person narrators, creating a diffuse network of perspectives. While *The Wig*'s characters sometimes appear to have distinct names and personas, they often participate in similar kinds of sexual debaucheries, infidelities, or even acts of violence. Lack of steadfast individuality in the characters – scattered character play – lends a hand in representing the collapse and confusion of divorce and acting as a foil against the baroque, sentimental marriage represented in the travelogues.

Gender roles in *The Wig* are, accordingly, as indefinite as the album's characters. All characters are depicted as both sexually aggressive and subservient; desire, lust, hate, violent aggression, and infidelity are just part of the myriad qualities that all of Smith's characters exude. The perspectives are rarely clearly those of defined men or women, though Smith is the conduit for their voices in nearly all situations throughout the album. Often, within the span of one song, the narrative perspective shifts from male to female, from first person to third person, from the viewpoint of a particular character to that of an outside observer. These shifts undermine any stability in terms of character sexualities and social gender roles – outside of the ironic travelogues, there is no sentimentalized depiction of man and wife in *The Wig* and certainly no picture of enduring love or even mutual respect.

The violence and sexual aggression inherent in most of Smith's characters reveals issues of power that arise in divorce and, perhaps, even marriage. The struggle for power and various types of control is depicted as a central component in divorce. These struggles are both conscious and unconscious, dictated by the heteronormative traditions of society but also by each person's uniquely constructed set of attitudes and biases. Instead of depicting divorce as a two-sided, man versus woman break in the marriage narrative, Smith stresses the wide-range of attitudes, emotions, and social and sexual dimensions that accompany all human relationships. Outside influences as well as inner, psychological perspectives are manifold and unstable, never certainly defined, and are subject to the power struggles latent in the interactions of a (formerly) married couple. The sexual violence prominent throughout the album acts as a metaphor for

marital power struggle. “Displaced by Double Bed” contains some of the album’s most vivid, violent imagery:

Mouth strewn across the floor
Virtue teathed, nipples, bloody balls-
A body riven by the death drive
And fragmentation of its parts
Stuffed into biting, sucking tongues

The explicit, sexual nature of these lyrics is linked with images of violence and disintegration to create a particularly intense picture of erotic struggle; graphic depictions of sexuality and vulgar language in *The Wig* function as a coarse deconstruction of the “manicured” traditional attitude toward marriage. “Displaced” concerns infidelity, a world in which a relationship is “marred by photocopy dirt” and “words are wolves”. Whether or not the song’s material is literally autobiographical, it speaks to the troubled, discordant strife of a couple in the last stages of emotional collapse.

Conclusions

Essential to all *The Wig*’s representations is the friction and dissonance of sonic turbulence that is one of the most powerful aspects of album’s sound. As discussed above, scholars have situated noise in the context of power struggle. In *The Wig*, noise is one dimension of the representation of struggle in marriage, but only artistically meaningful when coupled with the lyrics. The violent sexualities represented in the lyrics are given weight through the aggression and tumult of *The Wig*’s purely sonic qualities. Both, then, are constructed through a combination of sound sources, the collisions and tensions created through stark juxtapositions of samples, and the dub-like manipulation of prerecorded materials. In *The Wig*, noise is not a quality that can be linked exclusively to any particular sonic state, such as white noise, computer/synthesizer noise, or guitar

distortion. The noise contained therein is a product of the album's nature as a post-dub or electroacoustic work; the collage of sounds and lyrics, as well as the overlapping voices that deliver them, creates not only a sonic noise, but an emotional one.

Ultimately, narrative is both structured and dismantled in *The Wig*'s musical bedlam. Traditional, sentimental notions of marriage are set-up and attacked; Smith's use of the travelogues as structuring motives is an ironic gesture that both comments on the subject matter of the album and functions as an assault on marriage. *The Wig*'s sonic characteristics are used as support for this aggressive destruction of a marriage narrative and its accompanying gender and sexual roles. Simultaneously, Smith creates a vivid metaphor for the confusion and emotional trauma of divorce through an endless convergence of disparate sonic sources, recast and given new meaning in *The Wig*'s multifaceted context. The dust never quite settles in *The Wig*, but Smith's final "howl of cynical resignation" – the album's coda – "Honeycomb Tripe" sums up well:

Honeycomb Tripe raped a stargazer
 (Used a belt to tie her arm)
 In a copse of beeches there we stood
 And died, prolonged, repentant!

...Honeycomb Tripe, my violent one
 Over your victims' burning heads
 Man-axe dwarfed your mother's curse:
 "You can never be unfaithful to the dead"

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