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“I Get a Thrill from Punishment”: Lou Reed’s
Adaptations and the Pain They Cause

Jonathan Smith

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

“I Get a Thrill from Punishment”:
Lou Reed’s Adaptations and the Pain They Cause

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This paper explores two adaptations by rock musician Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground and *Metal Machine Music* fame. Reed has always been a complicated and controversial figure, but two of his albums—*The Raven* (2003), a collaborative theater piece; and *Lulu* (2011), a collaboration with heavy metal band Metallica—have inspired confusion and vitriol among both fans and critics. However, both adaptations, rich in intertextual references, at once show Reed to be what music historian Simon Reynolds calls a portal figure—offering a map of references to other texts for fans, indicating his own indebtedness to prior art—and to also be an uncompromisingly unique and original artist. This thesis analyzes both *The Raven* and *Lulu* and their adaptive connections to their source texts (the collected works of Edgar Allan Poe and the Lulu plays by German modernist Frank Wedekind) through the lens of adaptation theory. Although both albums, especially *Lulu*, were vilified by fans and critics alike, an exploration of both texts and their sources reveals a more complicated reading of the albums, as well as shedding light on adaptation theory. Reed’s adaptations, in particular, offer compelling new insights into notions of fidelity—between an adaptation and its source, as well as between Reed and his career—and also promote alternative forms of listening pleasure, which challenge cultural and music industry boundaries regarding contemporary music. Lou Reed and his adaptive practice occupy a crucial position in the adaptive process, in both rock and heavy metal music.

Keywords: Lou Reed, Metallica, Edgar Allan Poe, Frank Wedekind, Adaptation Theory, Heavy Metal, Rock Music, Adaptation, *Earth Spirit*, *Pandora’s Box*, *Lulu*, *The Raven*

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Introduction:

“Indiscretion in the Streets”: Adaptation Theory & Lou Reed

There is no denying that Lou Reed has long stood as one of rock music’s dominant figures. His influence on pop music’s development spanned five decades, beginning with his impressive work with The Velvet Underground (sometimes referred to as The Velvets) and continued through his varied solo work. The documentary *Lou Reed: Rock and Roll Heart* contains prominent artists such as David Bowie, Patti Smith, Thurston Moore, and David Byrne pointing to Reed and The Velvets as primary influences on their own desire to be musicians. The Velvets, while obscure in their own time, influenced punk in the 70s, and served as a primary “model for the second wave of the New York art-underground rock scene,” inspiring artists like Sonic Youth, Television, Lydia Lunch and Tom Verlaine (Martin 63). Their influence continues to this day. David Bowie, an early Velvets fan, claims Reed “brought rock and roll into the avant-garde” (*Lou Reed*). Classical composer Philip Glass believes The Velvets performed a much more consciously experimental music than was acceptable in most popular music during the 60s (*Lou Reed*). In the wake of Reed’s death in October 2013, there was an outpouring of tributes, commentaries, retrospectives and other statements, overwhelmingly stressing that Reed was a true, uncompromising original.

What is often mentioned, but less frequently explored, in many discussions of Reed’s expansive career is that his work is saturated not only with intertextual references, but also with adaptive and appropriative practices that draw on sources across media, especially in music, literature, film, drama, and visual art. Through his oeuvre’s abundant references to other texts, Reed exemplifies the qualities of what music critic and historian Simon Reynolds (channeling

work by theorists Mark Fisher and Owen Hatherley) calls a ‘portal’ figure, an artist or band that “directed their fans to rich sources of brain food, a whole universe of inspiration and ideas beyond music” (132). A portal figure, he continues, “works most potently when the connections being made cut across ‘different cultural domains’: from music to fiction or cinema or visual art” (133). Reed’s intertextuality often functions like a “Further Reading/Viewing/Listening” section of popular and obscure, contemporary and historically distant, texts, offering “a map of [Reed’s] taste buried within [his] music for obsessive fans to dig out” (133). Reed’s originality, unsurprisingly, did not happen in a vacuum, but depended on the work of other artists who inspired him, as well as the specific time, place and socio-cultural moment he was living in (Hutcheon xvi). Ever quick to voice his appreciation and celebrate his heroes, Reed was always vocal about who inspired him and how they did so in interviews, performances, and his lyrics.

Adaptive and appropriative practice within the creative process is more the norm rather than the exception. William Burroughs correctly asserted that “the work of other writers is one of a writer’s main sources of input . . . just because somebody else has an idea doesn’t mean you can’t take that idea and develop a new twist for it” (78). Copying the work of others has long been understood as an important way artists initially learn their craft (Reynolds xxxiii). For example, Reed learned guitar by listening to and imitating songs he heard on records and on the radio (*Lou Reed*). In Reed’s formative years he was copying 50s rock and roll songs and also writing copycat tunes—car songs, surfing songs, whatever was currently popular—for the budget label Pickwick in New York City¹. Yet on the side he was also writing original song lyrics and developing his personal style and skill, which was based heavily in the literature of Delmore Schwartz, Hubert Selby, and Raymond Chandler.

Twisting the ideas of prior artists into new forms of expression, through both adaptation and appropriation, has been one of Reed's defining characteristics as a musician and lyricist; in the last decade of his life it pushed him beyond intertextuality to tackle more overt and ambitious adaptations², namely *The Raven* (2003), inspired by the life and works of Edgar Allan Poe, and *Lulu* (2011), an adaptation of fin-de-siècle German playwright Frank Wedekind's *Lulu* plays *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box*, which tell the story of a young woman and social climber, who, through her sexuality, ensnares and destroys men in her quest for riches and pleasure. Reed, by placing a sustained spotlight on Poe and Wedekind, makes his taste map, at least on the surface, even more "explicit and exposed" (Reynolds 133). Where many of Reed's influences appear through more appropriative techniques like intertextual referencing and allusion, his adaptations are both "autonomous works" and "deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works" not originally authored by Reed (Hutcheon xiv). To understand Reed's uncompromising creative process, particularly regarding these adaptations, it is necessary to consider both Reed's albums as well as the texts he draws on, adapts, and revisits.

Better understanding these albums, particularly as adaptations, first requires cultivating what T.S. Eliot calls "the historical sense" which one obtains through examining the historical tradition(s) within art (2320)—not to simply sustain past traditions, but rather to gain a "perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (2320). Understanding how Reed's adaptations conform to and differ from their influences and sources requires some knowledge of the past, both specific artistic works as well as the creative and critical movements in which those works were created. There is value to both similarity and difference, as no period is without its strengths and weaknesses, and an adaptation's pros and cons can hardly be quantified by merely tallying its similarities and differences to the source. Reed's *The Raven* and

Lulu must also be seen within their specific historical context, which offers insights into why Reed would choose to do these particular adaptations and why they are important. While aesthetics and form are useful ways of determining the quality of an artistic work, the question I hope to address more fully here is what Reed hopes to do with these adaptations—why he chose these texts and what can be learned from his intertextual interpretations.

Poe and Wedekind, while the primary authors being adapted, are only two forces among many influencing Reed. All the amassed material from a lifetime engaged with art and lived experience is accumulated in Reed's head, which serves as a "receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together" (Eliot 2323). In Reed's younger days he would always carry a notebook to collect quotes, stories, and anything else he thought valuable that he heard from the people around him (Bockris 131). Thus much of his early work was not autobiographical, but firmly rooted in fictional representations based on the lives of others—a kind of "fictional reenactment" to use Thomas Leitch's term (282). This collecting and repacking also relates to ideas expressed by the artist Brian Eno, who recasts artists less as creators and more as "connectors of things" (qtd. in Reynolds 130). Eno believes "innovation [is] 'a much smaller proportion' of artistic activity 'than we usually think'" (qtd. in Reynolds 130). Eno, a self-described synthesis and "anti-musician" (Martin 104), believes that the contemporary artist "*perpetuates* a great body of received cultural and stylistic assumptions, he *re-evaluates* and *re-introduces* certain ideas no longer current, and then he also innovates" (qtd. in Reynolds 130, emphasis in original). Eno's philosophy highlights many of the tensions surrounding adaptations, particularly the way they are often expected to be both an original work and a copy—a kind of mechanical simulation—of the original. Eno believes that copying an original opens up "another

world that exists: a world of carefulness and meticulousness, and deceit as well” (*Imaginary Landscapes*). Eno contrasts Jackson Pollock’s wild style to the style required to exactly copy a Jackson Pollock, seeing both as real creative possibilities.

Yet Eno’s Pollock example only suits copies made within the same artistic medium. Adaptations across media, in contrast, make creating an exact copy impossible, and Lou Reed departs from Eno in that he never aspires to replicate the original, especially in terms of aesthetics and form; instead Reed takes the original in a new, distinctive direction, and believes innovation is of greater influence than Eno does. In this sense, Reed is re-evaluating and re-introducing the texts he chooses to adapt, building his version from what came before, but always in order to adjust the conversation and interpretation surrounding the original text to include his own perspective and insight. Reed’s method embodies Romantic notions of originality and authenticity, Modernist ideas about aggressive opposition to prior traditions, and Postmodern techniques of radical appropriation and adaptation.

In his theory of postproduction, Nicolas Bourriaud writes that “an ever increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of preexisting works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products” (7). Add to this Linda Hutcheon’s belief that “adaptation has run amok” (xi), and “art is derived from other art; stories are born of other stories” (2). Adaptations are a form of “cultural recycling” (3) of prior stories and ideas. Hutcheon believes that “in the workings of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception” (177); it is through adaptation that “stories evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places” (176). Regarding Lou Reed, John Cale, an artist arguably pursuing new sounds and concepts even more rigorously than Reed, disparagingly described Reed’s solo work as regenerating “the same material over and over again, in different

form” (Thompson 41). Unlike Cale, Hutcheon and Bourriaud are not as quick to see such repetition of material as negative, for their theories are meant to show how contemporary artistic production works “with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, which is to say, objects already *informed* by other objects” (Bourriaud 7, emphasis in original). Such assertions are meant to destabilize notions of originality, creation, and newness, revising them to account for the amount of recycling of old art into new forms.

In trying to destabilize opinion surrounding originality and creative process, current trends in adaptation theory and other examinations of digital culture frequently reject theories of originality and creativity developed during Romanticism, ideas now often viewed as outdated, even passé. The current movement seeks to distance itself from ideas propagated by the Romantics, who valued the primacy “of the original creation and of the originating creative genius” (Hutcheon 4). Hutcheon counters these concepts by correctly describing Western society as having a “happy history of borrowing and stealing or, more accurately, sharing stories” (4). The Romantics, however, would not discount Hutcheon’s claim, for abundant intertextual referencing is in their own works. Adaptive and appropriative practice within Romanticism served some “grand transformation of letters, the arts, imagination, sensitivity, taste and ideas” (De Paz 30). This transformation was seen as “a struggle in the name of a higher reason, one in harmony with the real complexity of human beings” (30-31). Essentially, the Romantics sought new, undiscovered territory, something Reed would readily identify with. Certainly these Romantic poets sought through their writings to elevate the artist, particularly the poet, to a higher plane of existence, defining themselves as having a keener sense of the beautiful and an ability to experience an “intenser and purer pleasure” felt in excess (Shelley 839). They also believed authors to have “ideas, feelings, intentions, and desires which emerge in the act of

composition,” that create artistic artifacts, being essentially unmediated by external forces, but pure expression is the inner self of the poet (Bennett 49-51). And yet, external forces remained prominently utilized by these authors through their own appropriation of prior texts. In any case, Romantic theories of creation and originality had much to do with upsetting neo-classical and Enlightenment traditions they saw as mechanical, lifeless, and overly rational to which they proposed alternative approaches to creating and reading literature³.

Wordsworth and Coleridge’s reaction against the neo-classical tradition expanded what pleasure could be gleaned from poetry, upsetting the hierarchy and artistic canon in the process. They claimed their poetry encouraged pleasure “of a kind very different from that which is supposed by many persons to be the proper object of poetry” (267). This revised notion of pleasurable poetry challenged traditional notions of aesthetics and the pleasure gleaned therefrom, and was an “attempt to overthrow the reigning tradition” (Stillinger & Lynch, Introduction 8) regarding literary canons and hierarchies. Like Hutcheon, there is a “de-hierarchizing impulse” within Wordsworth and Coleridge which opposes the explicit and implicit derision volleyed at their work (xii). This reaction against the tradition also helped frame the neo-classical tradition as disconnected from the contemporary culture and common people, and a tradition and class of stodgy and oppressive elites that everyone should be revolting against.

To further revise notions of poetry, Wordsworth famously claimed in the revised preface to the 1802 printing of *Lyrical Ballads* that creations stem from the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (265), suggesting that art basically sprang fully formed from nothing, the product of “impulse and free from rules” (Stillinger & Lynch, Introduction 10). But Wordsworth qualified this statement by also claiming this spontaneous overflow occurs “at the moment of

composition,” influenced “by prior thought and acquired poetic skill” (Stillinger & Lynch, note on the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* 262). These components were to be repeatedly combined in order for quality artistic creation to occur (Wordsworth 265). Contrary to poetry appearing ex nihilo, Wordsworth and Coleridge used existing material around them, confirming Percy Shelley’s own belief in “A Defence of Poetry” that “every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors” (841). As evidence, Wordsworth’s poem “I wander lonely as a cloud” stems from an experience documented in Dorothy Wordsworth’s journal, written two years prior to Wordsworth’s poem (D. Wordsworth 396). The poem did not spring forth from nothing, but was, to use Hutcheon’s words, “borrowed” or perhaps, considering Dorothy’s subjugated position, more accurately “stolen.” Another example is Wordsworth’s claim that his poetry imitated “the very language of men” (267), adapting authentic language into poetry— the language functioning as a source text that is and is not a text (Leitch 281). It is obvious that Wordsworth and Coleridge do not copy the exact language of common folks, but adapt and appropriate that language, offering their own “fictionalized reenactment” (282) that injected creative, innovative variation for poetic effect. Thus, even the Romantics, while believing in some kind of “unconscious creativity” (Stillinger & Lynch, Introduction 11) stemming from the individual through which external influences flowed, still believed that external influence was an important and necessary part of artistic creation. Lou Reed appears to feel the same way, whose blend of spontaneous creation both as a lyricist and guitar player was coupled with his meticulous, even obsessive, quest for specific sounds. And in this quest Reed has often insisted that he makes records for himself, where only his opinion matters (Thompson 57); thus the audience is “written out of the work” (Bennett 50). Reed follows the theories of Friedrich Schlegel and John Stuart Mill, being aware of and attentive to an audience he pays no heed to

(Bennett 50). Reed believes his albums come primarily from inside himself, the external material being assimilated into his own being and mediated through his own inner creative expression.

Reed, like the Romantics, essentially put more emphasis on innovation than contemporary artists like Eno or theorists like Bourriaud do. Eno admits to often not finding the extreme fringe of experimentation all that interesting; he would rather push out a bit and then return to a more familiar position (*Imaginary Landscapes*)—a somewhat peculiar statement considering his own exploratory output. Reed, however, is more willing to explore the edges, finding more pleasure and fun in pushing limits than in holding to familiarity—which he somehow manages to do within an often small creative pallet and chord range. Reed’s adaptations, like his entire oeuvre, contain both the familiar self and the frightening Other (Hutcheon 174)—that label placed upon anything seemingly unfamiliar and threatening. Yet Reed did not find the Other quite so frightening; in his case, what was familiar, predictable, and comfortable was often more frightening than the unfamiliar and mysterious. For Reed, to “repeat without copying, to embed difference in similarity” (Hutcheon 174) demanded prioritizing difference over similarity. Consequently, difference becomes a quest for something new, even original, even if that new and original thing contains many disparate parts of familiar traditions and works. Reed, like Simon Reynolds, always believed that “the future is out there” (428), even “within reach” (Reed, “There is No Time”), and that future contained distinctly new possibilities.

Yet certain strands of contemporary society are not necessarily looking for what is new or original, as attitudes regarding originality and newness continue to change. Bourriaud proposes that the current artistic question has changed from “what can we make that is new?” to “how can we make do with what we have?” (11) There is something strangely static and cynical underlying this question, as it supposes that nothing new can be made, as if human imagination

has reached its creative limits. Certainly found objects and using what is around you has been innovatively used—consider the modern art of Marcel Duchamp, the pop art of Andy Warhol, or the Dogma 95 film movement. But those were innovative precisely because they expanded notions of art and creativity in interesting ways that had never been done before.

In music, a movement like glam rock, which Reed and Bowie were hugely instrumental in popularizing, “harked back to the fifties without replicating it” (Reynolds 291). Glam’s use of 50s musical styles, turned into decadent pastiche, was the first movement of its kind, thus rendering it a new, even original moment in the development of rock music. Reed’s glam hit *Transformer* shows his own love of 50s tunes, as well as being an album more about Reed’s time with Andy Warhol and the Factory crowd than with the current moment in 1972. “Walk on the Wild Side,” a song based on both Nelson Algren’s 1956 novel of the same name and different characters Reed met at Warhol’s Factory, combines nostalgic adaptation with contemporary innovation and style, embodying many aspects of glam rock. Glam utilized the method of adaptation without resigning itself to only making do with what it had. The past, rather than simply a place to retreat into, became a key inspiration in creating a new sound, thus maintaining a vibrant creative present that still looks to the future and all the possibilities it suggests.

This thesis hopes to illustrate how Reed’s adaptations operate on a similar principle of using the past in order to encourage a vibrant creativity in the present. Reed’s adaptations reveal compelling new thoughts about adaptations and adaptive process, as well as critiques of contemporary music culture. Reed proves himself to be a persistently challenging force to commonly held attitudes within music culture and adaptation theory. Chapter 1 will focus on *The Raven*, Poe’s notion of perversity, and the challenge of fidelity within adaptive theory and practice. Poe was an important influence on Reed, permeating the peripheral shadows and

subtext of Reed's songs and thematic interests. Numerous songs in Reed's career examine Poe's notion of perversity, where, according to Poe, people enjoy or at least feel compelled toward "doing wrong for the wrong's sake" (Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse" 403). Reed's characters, as well as his own volatile life, follow the assertion that "we persist in acts because we feel that we should *not* persist in them" (Poe 403). *The Raven* is Reed's most sustained meditation on perversity, where Reed's adaptive practice is itself perverse.

In *The Raven*, Reed takes Poe's poems and short stories, as well as Poe's personality—and the myth surrounding it—and weaves them together, rewriting many of the lines and generally showing little interest in preserving Poe's original language. To this rewriting, Reed prefaced his performance of "The Raven" on his live album *Animal Serenade* by somewhat glibly commenting, "Not that [Poe] asked me to do it; he's been dead, so he couldn't defend himself." For Reed, the ideas within an author's work can remain alive, but the author is indeed dead, as is the critic or fan who would gripe about Reed taking such liberties with Poe's work. Reed didn't make *The Raven* for critics or as a devotional piece to Poe. Yet Reed's comment also assumes that Poe would wish to defend himself against Reed's interpretation and possible misuse of his texts. As one who rather militantly asserts his ownership over his work, asserting the primacy of the author over a text, Reed understands the annoyance and even outrage Poe might feel at seeing his art so misunderstood and trashed by another artist and alleged fan. Certainly Reed admires Poe, but that does not mean he wishes to simply copy Poe. According to Reed,

Edgar Allan Poe is that most classic of American writers—a writer more peculiarly attuned to our own new century's heartbeat than he ever was to his own. Obsession, paranoia, willful acts of self-destruction surround us constantly. Though we age we still hear the cries of those for whom the attraction to

mournful chaos is monumental. I have reread and rewritten Poe to ask the very same questions again. Who am I? Why am I drawn to do what I should not? I have wrestled with this thought innumerable times: the impulse of destructive desire—the desire for self-mortification. (Reed, *The Raven* liner notes)

Reed's obsession with perversity and darker impulses within the human heart—"a passion for exactly the wrong thing" (Reed, *The Raven* liner notes)—is thus of primary concern in his adaptation, turning *The Raven* into a personal project informed by Poe's life and texts. While it is clear that Reed likes Poe and considers him particularly relevant to American society in 2003, *The Raven* is not about simply channeling Poe's ideas into music; Reed uses Poe's ideas to (re)address issues of self-destruction and perversity from his own perspective and within an early-21st century world, raising the interesting question of whether or not fidelity to a source text can be achieved through perversity—defile the source to illustrate Poe's point.

A persistent tension regarding the creation, reception and interpretation of adaptations, is how they are often expected to remain faithful to their source, yet also stand on their own as autonomous works, reflecting the adaptor's personality and interests. While contemporary adaptation theory rejects the notion of fidelity as rarely being the goal of adapters (Hutcheon xiii; Leitch 127), many creators and consumers of adaptations continue to value fidelity, though how and why they do is perhaps as varied as their reasons for not adhering to fidelity. Reed, an artist who has little problem changing people's original work to meet his own style, appears to respect and believe in the notion of fidelity, yet does not believe fidelity can only be achieved through "slavish copying" (Hutcheon 20). Instead, *The Raven* emphasizes how adaptations represent significant departures from the original, both in order to channel similar ideas as the original text and to expand on those ideas in new and interesting ways. As with any dialogue, adaptations

reiterate, reinterpret, revise, and expand on what has come before. This is not unique to adaptations, since these same things happen within all artistic process, but with adaptations the source is meant to be known and considered without being seen as the sole authority or final word on the subject. *The Raven* pushes back on the primacy of the source, giving respect for Poe while demanding equal respect for itself. It furthermore pushes back on ideas of fidelity, offering an expanded definition of what it means to be faithful, where deviation and sometimes aggressive erasure of the source is its own form of fidelity.

Chapter 2 will focus on Reed's final studio release, *Lulu* [2011], which takes Reed's adaptive practice to possibly even more challenging extremes. A more obscure source text than Poe, Wedekind's *Lulu* plays tell the story of the femme fatale character Lulu, a woman who seduces and destroys men through her unrestrained sexuality. As with *The Raven*, perversity and obsession lay at the heart of this work, though to rather different effect. *The Raven* was a collaborative album containing a huge and impressive cast of artists, musicians and actors alike, but *Lulu* is a collaboration with one group, the heavy metal band Metallica. If fans and critics thought Reed's collaborative choices were odd with *The Raven*, few expected Reed to team up so enthusiastically with the most popular metal band in the world. *Lulu* was created in part because Reed wondered whether or not Wedekind's plays still contained any shock value over a century later, and if not, what he would have to do to make those ideas shocking again. The primary shock comes in the collaboration and the execution, which was ridiculed by listeners everywhere. *Lulu*, even more than *The Raven*, was a critical, commercial and popular failure, challenging both Reed and Metallica's most devout and forgiving fans. The perplexity listeners felt listening to *Lulu* rapidly turned to hatred as the internet swiftly declared *Lulu* one of the worst albums of the year and perhaps even of all time (Berman). What this initial reaction fails to

consider is how this adaptation challenges notions of acceptable adaptive practice, as well as current acceptable forms of musical collaboration and expression. Reed's oppositional approach to contemporary music culture exposes the music industry and music culture to be severely restrictive to creative experimentation, deterring opportunities for breaching new creative territory.

Lulu was released during music culture's own intense fixation with its own past, where retro scenes and revival movements existed across the music spectrum. Music critic and historian Simon Reynolds sees much of this movement as embodying an often obsessive and nostalgic fixation on past styles, genres, movements, or periods in pop music history—the pull of the past overpowering the push for the future (xiv). Bands explicitly tap into past traditions to create what they claim is a faithful embodiment of a bygone golden age of musical brilliance—fidelity pushed to its terminal extreme, creating “a fabulous simulation” rather than a living, evolving music culture (Reynolds xxxv). Reynolds is suspicious of such extreme replication, seeing it as exemplifying how too much of contemporary music adapts its forbearers without bringing anything new. Works of this kind, rather than attempting to create new movements that push for the future, seek to simply regress into the past, a kind of escapism through the “slavish copying” (Hutcheon 20) adaptation theorists insist few artists strive for and Lou Reed so vehemently hates. Rather than build upon the past in order to say something new and relevant to the present (as The Velvet Underground did by merging avant-garde classical music techniques to 50s and 60s rock and roll) that will lead to an exciting future (the explosion of punk and the experimental surge of post-punk), the goal in much contemporary pop music is to create perfect simulations through “endless repetition,” turning the moment into a monument (Reynolds xxxvi).

Amidst this trend of faithfully reconstructing valued forms and aesthetics, Reed and Metallica released *Lulu*, an album that so explicitly violates and abuses tradition, form and aesthetic that it appears to be the most dickish middle finger to the masses Reed and Metallica could deliver, a flagrant and “proud disregard for their fans” (Berman). Yet Metallica’s lead guitarist, Kirk Hammet, insists that *Lulu* was a fun chance to “make something really cool and different” (Hammet interview). It was not intended as a cruel joke toward fans or the music industry, as Chuck Klosterman believes (Klosterman), but was meant more as a creative experiment, an opportunity for different artists to collaborate in a way neither had done before. *Lulu* violates preconceived notions of form and aesthetics, which means that to examine it requires different expectations and listening practice, as well as a different definition of what counts as pleasurable music. In going so completely against the grain, *Lulu* embodies a recurring sentiment in many Lou Reed songs, most explicitly stated in 1982’s exceptional “The Blue Mask,” that “I get a thrill out of punishment / I’ve always been that way.” There is something substantial to transgressing tradition and popular opinion—something Wedekind was also doing with his *Lulu* plays.

Using Wedekind as a reference to the past, as well as drawing upon their own professional careers, Reed and Metallica draw attention to the growing pressure within the music industry and culture to not explore and experiment within rock music. The goal is to do what is safe and what has been done before, where abrasive meanderings into heretofore uncharted territory of collaboration and adaptive practice is frowned upon. Reed and Metallica defy that trend, suggesting in the process that the expectations and demands of popular opinion and industry trends are strangling the life out of music. *Lulu*’s failure reiterates Frederik Jameson’s claim that the contemporary world is one where “stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all

that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum” (7). *Lulu* emphasizes the “necessary failure of art” (7), caused by the cultural landscape, by essentially qualifying as a failure itself, both formally, aesthetically, commercially, critically and with fans. Reed, in recontextualizing Wedekind’s ideas that sexual obsession is terminally destructive to fit the cultural climate of 2011, reinterprets and rewrites *Lulu* as a vulgarized display of musical and creative impotence. This “supreme violation” (Reed, “Pumping Blood”) becomes Reed’s final release before his death, which can be seen as either his last spiteful swipe at the critics and masses he contended with his entire career, or as his last push into the unknown, affirming Sterling Morrison’s claim that Reed “was always trying to move mentally and spiritually to some place where no one had ever gone before” (Thompson 57). Reed believed the *Lulu* project “pushed [him] to the best [he’s] ever been” (Reed & Metallica, interview), and after it was panned he shrugged and claimed, “I don’t have any fans left” (The Guardian)—an overstatement, to be sure, but the point is clear: the restraining attitudes of fans and critics who eschew notions of originality and experimentation, and wish Reed would simply conform to their expectations renders them hostile to his own sense of creative and artistic autonomy.

Part of my business in this thesis is that of C.S. Lewis in *An Experiment in Criticism*, to examine “different ways of reading” (5). Music criticism and contemporary art continuously runs the danger of becoming “entirely dominated by fashion” (8), where microfads and flash-in-the-pan trends, so prevalent in the digital age, overrun more rigorous and disciplined examination. Lou Reed’s adaptations have received scant attention of this more patient and disciplined sort, but instead have been viciously assaulted by knee-jerk reactions from critics and fans who have little patience for slowing down and asking more delicate and probing questions. My hope is to

examine these albums through “charitable interpretation” (Jacobs 1). Reed considered *The Raven* “a record made of love” (Reed, *The Raven* liner notes), and it seems only fair that I examine his work in a similar fashion. The initial response to *Lulu* treated it “as so many lamp-posts to a dog” (Lewis 112); declaring it one of the worst albums of all time forgets that “condemnation is never quite final” (111) as “dethronements and restorations are almost monthly events. You can trust none of them to be permanent” (105). Such oscillation in what culture deems great and worthwhile in many ways makes determining whether or not *The Raven* and *Lulu* are brilliant works of art virtually impossible and always subject to change. The initial critical response to these albums reaffirms rock critic Robert Christgau’s wise observation that, as a “reviewer’s medium,” rock critics “almost never get the focus right—if only because reviews are written on short deadlines while important records reveal themselves over long ones” (x).

Adaptation studies has already made commendable progress in expanding and augmenting the discussion of adaptations into a more nuanced examination of their merits. Reed’s adaptations, which scholars have not yet considered, are a vital contribution to the study of adaptations and in further formulating a theory of adaptations. In Reed’s mind, to not take Poe and Wedekind’s ideas and expand on them according to his own method and style would be to reject the very notion of originality and artistry—obsessive, fetishistic copying would only trivialize what made both artists so potent in the first place—and would make the entire creative and adaptive process a vacuous waste of time. Through these two albums Reed’s explorative practice dismantles what it means to be a successful artist, and assaults entrenched attitudes toward listening pleasure, as well as the pleasure of experiencing an adaptation. Reed reminds us that retelling stories is a natural part of our culture and that to retell, to adapt, is not to be unoriginal; rather, the texts of other artists can and should be catalysts toward new, unexplored

territory. Originality and newness, far from being decaying ideals of bygone ages, remain persistently evident. Adaptations do not destroy originality and the possibility of the new, but rather ask us to reconsider how those ideals are defined, Reed's adaptations, composed within a career fraught with mistakes and failure, propose that one's legacy can remain uncompromisingly original and substantial.

Chapter 1:

“Wrong for the wrong’s sake”: Perversity & Fidelity in *The Raven*”

All the greatest truths of every sort are completely trivial and hence nothing is more important than to express them forever in a new way and, wherever possible, forever more paradoxically, so that we won’t forget they still exist and that they can never be expressed in their entirety.” – Friedrich Schlegel

“Obsessions (intellectual and other) rarely disappear, even if they do mutate.” – Linda Hutcheon

“It was well said of a certain German book that “er lasst sich nicht lesen”—it does not permit itself to be read. There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told.” – Edgar Allan Poe, “The Man of the Crowd”

Edgar Allan Poe has been a major influence on Lou Reed’s entire career, though he does not explicitly appear in Reed’s work very often. Like so many influences, Poe mostly lurks in the background and in the shadows of Reed’s work, vaguely referenced either through a title, like 1979’s *The Bells*, or through thematic parallels: Reed’s fixation on perversity and obsessions with the darker impulses in himself and human nature at large. It was not until 2001’s *POetry*, a collaboration with dramatist Robert Wilson, that Reed most explicitly adapted Poe—in this case, for the stage, providing the music and lyrics to Wilson’s visuals. Reed then reworked the songs of *POetry* and recorded them as the 2003 double-album, *The Raven*, featuring an impressive cast of guest performers and a blend of rock music and dramatic readings. The album’s reception was mixed, as some praised its adventurous romp through Poe’s world and themes (Williams) and others railed against its vulgar triteness (James).

The Raven is a strange, polarizing, and exhausting album, resisting easy branding or interpretation. Like the old man in Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd,” who the narrator is unable to ascribe any meaning to, *The Raven*, and by extension Reed, is a perplexing album that eludes

easy categorization and evaluation. This in itself makes *The Raven* a rather fitting adaptation of Poe, himself an odd, divisive and perplexing individual, author and critic. Yet despite, or perhaps because of, Poe's oddities and his contested place in American literature, he is one of America's most popular literary figures, with his legacy almost more popular now than ever before. Some of Poe's popularity is correctly explained by Carl Sederholm and Dennis Perry as something stemming from the myth surrounding Poe, which "gives the public a perfectly archetypal horror writer, one complete with dramatic life, outrageous fiction, and a mysterious death—in short, a ready-made literary legend" (1). Poe, and the myth surrounding him, appeals to American popular sensibilities in a way almost unparalleled in American literature; hence why Lou Reed properly describes Poe as "the most classic of American writers" (Reed, *The Raven* liner notes). Poe and his tales of "obsession, paranoia, [and] willful acts of self-destruction" (Reed, *The Raven* liner notes) evoke Schlegel's belief in paradoxically trivial and essential truths that remain persistently relevant, demanding to be retold, yet also resisting comprehension. Consequently, Poe haunts the American cultural psyche, providing rich material for adaptors, yet so many Poe adaptations are peculiar works that often offer incomplete expressions of Poe's ideas. Reed's adaptation, in many respects, is no different from the adaptations that have come before, but what stands out about *The Raven* is just how perverse Reed's telling is and how solidly Reed and *The Raven* embody concepts of the perverse and the unreadable, incomprehensible text.

One aspect of adapting literature that Reed would likely agree with is Julie Sanders' belief that "adaptation and appropriation are fundamental to the practice, and, indeed, to the enjoyment, of literature" (1). Adaptations of literature are created and consumed in part because of a love for literature, with the adaptation pointing to the literary source in order to encourage people to either revisit this earlier text or read it for the first time; adaptations do not necessarily

“seek to consume or efface the informing source” (25). Reed described *The Raven* as “my fastball . . . my 95 mile an hour pitch,” which reviewer Adrien Begrand rightly said was “aimed straight at your chin. You can choose to bail, and hit the deck. Or, you can dig in, and deal with it” (Begrاند). In other words, that *The Raven* is an overwhelming assault on the listener, appearing to be rather unreadable does should only encourage listeners to more rigorously engage their critical faculties to properly assess what Reed is up to, and formulate useful interpretations of his album.

Reed always voiced his love of literature and, unlike much academic scholarship and journalistic criticism, he did not believe literature was superior to rock music. He used literature as a reference point and inspiration because he loved it, but not because he saw literature as innately superior. Comments from Reed regarding his desire to write a rock album on par with Dostoyevsky or Shakespeare (Bockris 299) sounds like Reed endorsing “the primacy of literature as a touchstone” (Leitch 3), but Reed also asserted that “You can’t beat 2 guitars, bass, [and] drum” (*New York* liner notes). Reed saw writing music as similar to writing literature, explaining that “writing songs is like making a play and you give yourself the lead part. And you write yourself the best lines that you could. And you’re your own director. And they’re short plays. And you get to play all kinds of different characters. It’s fun” (203). *The Raven* is a more bold realization of that idea, for it takes Poe’s verse and prose and translates them into a kind of rock music-radio theater hybrid, demonstrating how little Reed subscribed to hierarchies of the arts. Important art, for Reed, deserves to be promoted through intertextual referencing and adaptive practice. Reed, as an artist and fan, embodies one of the primary reasons people both adapt and enjoy adaptations: for the pleasure, or fun, of (re)visiting old stories, often familiar stories, but this return is always different for adaptations are “more than simple imitation” (Sanders 2).

Enjoyment and fun are descriptors perhaps not often used to describe *The Raven*, and its initial reception, recalls early Reed biographer Peter Doggett's observation that it has become something of a "critical commonplace that Reed was a genius of the sixties and a sorry wastrel thereafter" (iv). This opinion is further exacerbated by Reed's age, which aligns him with the "natural greying of rock music," where the general assumption is that his age makes him incapable of producing great work, or that it will at least never stack up to his earlier brilliance (Reynolds xiii). *The Raven*'s length and unhinged form also do not, on the surface, conform to Reed's prior work, making it potentially off-putting for fans. But Timothy Ferris's comment regarding *Berlin*, which was a radical departure from the hugely popular *Transformer* that preceded it, could just as easily apply to *The Raven*: "prettiness has nothing to do with good art, nor does good taste, good manners, or good morals" (qtd. in Bockris 222). An album about perversity, composed by the "poet of . . . splintered nerves" (Bockris 205), should quite logically be assaultive and confounding.

Reed radically churns Poe's stories, characters, personal life, and thematic ideas together, making no effort to partition off each of these stories into their own self-contained, mechanical presentation of each story and poem. Nor does Reed try maintaining the same formal register across his album—the shifts in tone and execution are often radical and jarring, setting the listener on edge, uncertain of where Reed is going or what he is up to. Reed jumbles it all together, creating a disorienting chaos, a kind of swirling vortex not uncommon in Poe's work (see *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *A Descent into the Maelström*, and *Eureka*) that operates through "attraction and repulsion," which are "the *sole* properties through which we perceive the Universe" (Poe, *Eureka* 575). In *Eureka*, Poe presents the Universe as beginning "in harmonious order, though embedded with attractive and repulsive forces. These forces are in balance until,

inexplicably, the diffusive force strikes an uneven balance which causes apocalyptic fragmentation that increases separation and diffusion of the fragments” (Perry 17-18). Reed’s album hits like its own bifurcation—a repulsive element (his adaptation) standing in tense relation to Poe’s attractive stories (the source text). The process of attraction and repulsion creates a swirling vortex as these polar elements contend with each other, while moving toward reunification. Within *The Raven* Reed juxtaposes seemingly oppositional and conflicting songs by placing them next to each other: the hammy “Edgar Allan Poe” leads into the more poetic “The Valley of Unrest,” the clumsy “Change” becomes the evocative “Fall of the House of Usher,” the obliterating “Fire Music,” gives way to the beautiful “Guardian Angel.” Reed seems to deliberately keep the songs at odds with each other, creating stylistic, tonal, and thematic rifts—the universe, the self, the album continually breaking and contending with itself. In the center of this storm is the listener and a torrential whirlwind of thoughts and meanings influenced by the interaction between Reed’s adaptation and Poe’s own work.

The concept of perversity within *The Raven* is of primary interest to Reed, but he does not approach the subject as directly as Reed’s liner notes suggest. Yes, perversity is one of the primary topics, but how Reed addresses that topic is much more complicated than simply identifying key tracks, lyrics and musical structures. Reed uses the nature of *The Raven* as an adaptation as a central component to considering the issue of perversity, becoming both the subject and the approach. In doing so, Reed illustrates how “doing wrong for wrong’s sake” can be both a hindrance and a benefit. Paradoxically, Reed’s perverse approach to adapting Poe and addressing perversity opens up new ways to understand the complicated and oft-contested issue of fidelity.

The Raven opens with “The Conqueror Worm,” a dramatically over-wrought performance by Willem Dafoe over distorted, droning electronics and guitar. The music comes in first, and this swirling cacophony, instead of pointing us to Poe, directs us to Reed’s own landmark drone/noise album, *Metal Machine Music*. In a much more subdued entrance than that of *Metal Machine Music*, Reed brings one of his most famous and influential works right to the fore, declaring himself the center of this creation. Deliberately thwarting any expectations of hearing unaltered Poe, Reed’s own artistic stamp validates Thomas Leitch’s claim that “fidelity itself, even as a goal, is the exception to the norm” (127). Likewise, Hutcheon claims that of the many motivations behind adaptation, “few involve faithfulness” (xiii). Reed appears to have abandoned fidelity within the first minute.

The issue of fidelity is one that current adaptation scholars are trying hard to move past, believing, as Hutcheon does, that the “profoundly moralistic rhetoric” (85) so common in fidelity criticism is deeply insufficient, in part because “the morally loaded discourse on fidelity is based on the implied assumption that adapters aim simply to reproduce the adapted text” (7). This kind of reproduction is fundamentally impossible, because “adaptation is . . . repetition without replication” (7). Even if textual fidelity were the goal, it is inevitable that an adaptation across different media will be “haunted by traces of many other texts. Some of these ghost texts are subsidiary sources the adaptation more or less consciously imitates” (Leitch 129). In Reed’s case, the first moment of haunting comes with drawing upon his own creative past, forcing the listener to move through *Metal Machine Music* to get to Poe.

The challenge within fidelity criticism is to not digress into trite declarations of the original always being better, or to simply examine the degree of fidelity by tallying perceived similarities and differences. Adaptations have traditionally been subject to “constant critical

denigration” (Hutcheon xi), often rooted in perceived infidelity of the adaptation to its source, as well as a general perception of adaptations as derivative texts. Such a negative attitude regarding adaptations ignores the undeniable fact that Poe adaptations are wildly popular across popular culture. There is something about retelling Poe that is both attractive and repulsive to us. But stories retold must tread a fine line not far removed from the basic narrative strategy of verisimilitude, where the audience is able to willfully suspend disbelief, convincing itself that what they are seeing is “real,” while also being a creative fabrication—it is plausible within the narrative world, thus seeming realistic, when it is in fact no such thing. This same principle applies to the play happening within adaptations, where a plausible range of similarity and difference is met so as to appear “faithful” while not lapsing into mere copying. Following the source text too closely is as dull as deviating too far. But Hutcheon is correct that “we seem to desire the repetition as much as the variation” (9), for “repetition with variation [offers] the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change” (4). With Reed, who never seeks to follow the source too closely, the variation is often, at first glance at least, much more pronounced and foregrounded than the repetition. This makes perversity a fitting topic for Reed. But it also presents a peculiar problem: how do you faithfully adapt a concept rooted in deliberate transgression and defilement?

Reed had to have known that *The Raven* would be branded as unfaithful to Poe. Yet, true to his own knack for disruptive behavior, Reed made the album anyway, wading into the cultural storm regarding fidelity that Hutcheon calls “the moralistic fray” (86) to make the album anyway. Reed’s own masochistic inclinations make *The Raven*’s perversity a logical step in a long career of cutting sharply against expectations, often meeting harsh criticism that flowed like

“vicious vitriol-spew” (Bangs 170), and taking that criticism with a certain amount of glee. His career has led to wild leaps in sound and presentation, puzzling the majority who pay attention, resulting in both success and failure. If anything, Reed remained interesting (at least to some) because he was true to being unpredictable, exuding “repetition without replication” within his own career. His own perverse attraction to exploding expectations and sabotaging his own success and popularity makes his reflection on perversity in *The Raven* quite appropriate. That he would also examine perverseness perversely, in both his artistic aesthetic and his adaptive method, is right in step with his character, which does not necessarily make him more readable.

Deciphering Lou Reed, like unraveling fact from fiction regarding Poe, is its own act of futility. Artifice surrounds the author just as thoroughly as it encompasses the author’s stories. Reed’s own history of roleplaying is also underscored in the album’s continued reference to itself as a fictional, artificial construct. *The Raven* opens with special attention on itself as a theatrical representation, “Sit in a theater to see / A play of hopes and fears” (3). Except *The Raven* is not a theatrical play, but is playing at being a stage drama, broadcasting its fictional artifice—a studio album adapted from a stage adaptation of Poe’s fiction. Reed also makes Poe a character within his own work, reminding us that even Poe as a person has been heavily mediated by narratives that wish to shape him into some mythic personality that better resembles, and in turn explains, his fictional creations. Poe, the cultural mythic construct, is as fictitious as his stories, ever malleable to new cultural attitudes and pressures. Even the historical accounts that seek to separate him from this myth are narrative constructs that only get so close to the “real” Edgar Allan Poe before becoming new fictions.

Similarly, Reed has a long history of constructing his own personae. He is the “Rock n Roll Animal,” the “Phantom of Rock,” and has other titles to match stage and public personas

that are as much an act as any song narrative. With *The Raven* we see a peculiar kind of performance in the photographs of Reed taken by Julian Schnabel for the album, which show Reed dressed presumably as a character from *The Raven*. There is little clarification of what these photographs are meant to communicate, but Reed is very consciously performing, wielding a sword while wearing a long coat and sandals; standing by a grave; driving a car with his sword raised. Along with reworking Poe, *The Raven* reworks Reed himself and his own stories—everything is recycled and reinterpreted, with few traces of rigid replication, into a peculiar and rather opaquely erratic conglomeration of prior texts and personae that is a creative and autonomous work. All of this reiterates and underscores Reed's assertion that he doesn't have a personality (Bockris 13) and that "the figure he presented to the public didn't really exist" (Bockris 211). Actual Lou Reed and fictional Lou Reed are impossible to distinguish, making his personal question "Who am I?" rather potent and ever elusive, prone to manipulation and distortion, both from Reed himself and the surrounding culture trying to pin him down.

The kind of perversity at play in *The Raven* is both similar to past Lou Reed works, and altogether new. Poe's work presents unique challenge for Reed, who knows Poe's status in the American literary canon, and is also aware of a persistent hierarchy of the arts that places literature well above rock music. Robert Stam's belief that "literature will always have axiomatic superiority over any adaptation of it because of its seniority as an art form" (qtd. in Hutcheon 4) remains a popular position. This general assumption of literature's superior status does not consider that Poe has been and "is regarded by many as a sham artist, his works being more redolent of the carnival house of horrors than of the salons of serious art" (Thompson xiii). As Harold Bloom rather obnoxiously put it: "No reader who cares deeply for the best poetry written in English can care greatly for Poe's verse" (3). Poe is a divisive figure, unquestionably part of

the American literary canon (Perry & Sederholm 1), but somewhat grudgingly so, with clarification from critics like Bloom reminding us that he is in there, despite producing work “of a badness not to be believed” (1). He perplexes many, particularly in America and Britain, with his excesses of style and his fascination with the Gothic and the grotesque.

While Poe’s status might be a banally contested one, Reed knows that the pop community considers Poe a literary master. Thus, to adapt him is to connect himself to a major American author, operating within a “superior” medium. Such a challenge and opportunity to irritate people tickles his sense of masochism and his desire to cut against popular opinion. For Reed, adapting such a respected author, as well as some of his own past work (“The Bed” and “Perfect Day” explicitly, *Metal Machine Music* slightly less explicitly) is bound to rankle people’s nerves and sensibilities.

Such discomfort is evidenced in Pitchfork critic Brian James’ review of *The Raven*, which snobbishly claimed that “Reed is currently as clueless as his most spiteful detractors could suspect,” and “Reed's biggest problem has always been not realizing what he does best and, consequently, what he does worst” (James). James supposes that Reed’s intention is always to remain faithful to himself and his past work through pursuing a career of endlessly repetitive safe bets. James does not consider that Reed’s erratic, freewheeling, even manic career is precisely the result of constantly pursuing what is unfamiliar, what might even be completely wrong, as an artistic exercise. If anything the radical shift presented by *The Raven* is the norm rather than the exception. James’ claims seem to conform to the claim by Gerard Malanga that “Lou relished the idea of bad taste. Lou was into anything that had a disguise to it” (Bockris 138). Yet Malanga, having collaborated with Reed as a dancer in the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, does not see Reed’s penchant for bad taste and disguises as purely negative. For Reed, something that is

painful, upsetting, even just bad, potentially contains something attractive. This makes it very difficult to know when he is being serious and when he is joking. In his own words, “I’m the biggest joker in the business. But there’s something behind every joke” (210).

At certain points, it is easy to think Reed means *The Raven* as a joke. It does not sound like it from listening to him promote the album and gush praises about Poe’s importance to literature. Yet listening to *The Raven* requires facing some pretty peculiar moments, and asking some hard questions about whether or not Reed is preying on everyone’s gullibility, like he was accused of with *Metal Machine Music*, and which he was in fact doing with *Sally Can’t Dance*. It is hard to take the opening track, “The Conqueror Worm,” seriously when it contains such self-praising lines as “This motley drama—to be sure— / Will not be forgotten. / A phantom chased for evermore, / Never seized by the crowd” (3). There’s room to see this as speaking more to the theme of the entire work—“The tragedy, ‘Man,’” (4)—rather than to *The Raven* specifically. Yet there remains just enough ambiguity to wonder if Reed might be referring to his own work and its immortal place in history, as well as its elusive nature, which will eternally avoid being perfectly understood by the masses—Reed and his work becoming the Man of the Crowd that defies understanding and categorization. Furthermore, this statement alludes to Poe’s own *Eureka*, where Man is the central aspect of the universe, containing the internal strife found throughout the universe. The chaotic tension within the universe is also found within every individual.

The bold, even pretentiously narcissistic, statements in “The Conqueror Worm” seem woefully inadequate when, a few tracks later, the first rock song, “Edgar Allan Poe,” blasts onto the scene. The song is bizarrely un-Poe- and un-Reed-like, carrying none of the hard edge Reed has displayed in the past, nor any of Poe’s bite or mystery. Instead, according to Brian James,

“Edgar Allan Poe” “strikes like a PG-13 *Schoolhouse Rock* lesson with shabbier vocals.” Lines like, “These are the stories of Edgar Allan Poe / Not exactly the boy next door” (11) are indeed pretty poor. Yet, if Reed is meditating on his desire to do things he should not, then the misstep and failure of “Edgar Allan Poe” becomes a strange enactment of that very self-effacing, perverse indulgence. Reed can craft a poetic line, but no one would know it from listening to “Edgar Allan Poe.” Instead, the song is a cheap intro and portrait of a deeply important literary figure. Whether or not Reed means this as a joke or is completely serious is hard to say. There is certainly humor in this album, but if this is a joke it’s a bad one, which might be the point. In any case, the issue seems to have little to do with revering Poe. As a kind of sick joke “Edgar Allan Poe” makes the opening lines of the next track “The Valley of Unrest” seem bitterly relevant: “Far away, far away / Are not all lovely things far away?” With *The Raven* this is sometimes depressingly the case.

Yet it is hard not to see the perversity within such sick jokes and cheap decisions nestled against more substantial ones. At its most sinister, Reed’s decisions embody the sentiment within E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “The Sandman,” wherein Clara hypothesizes that

Perhaps there does exist a dark power which fastens on to us and leads us off along a dangerous and ruinous path which we would otherwise not have trodden; but if so, this power must have assumed within us the form of ourself, indeed have become ourself, for otherwise we would not listen to it, otherwise there would be no space within us in which it could perform its secret work. (96)

Clara’s belief turns perversity into both an external and internal force, in much the way Romanticism believed creative expression was largely interior, but also stemming from external influence. Beautiful expression and perverse expression essentially originate from equally

powerful forces both outside and within us—forces both universal and individual. Poe repackaged Hoffmann’s concept as his own version of the perverse, “universal impulse to act in irrational opposition to one’s own best interest” (Thompson xiv). Reed is no stranger to such acts, where sometimes his own artistic and commercial decisions appear “without comprehensible object” (Poe, “Imp” 403). Yet Poe twists Hoffmann’s idea to suggest that perverse behavior can “operate in furtherance of good” (Poe, “Imp” 405). Rather than always leading to destruction, doing the wrong thing can instead become the right thing, leading one toward success.

Reed’s career contains several examples of seemingly perverse decisions, which do in fact contain negative consequences, spawning positive results. Time has shown several of Reed’s career moves to have not brought him financial, or even critical, success in the moment, with some even sabotaging his popularity, yet in retrospect these albums are often considered some of his best works (The Velvet Underground albums, *Berlin*, *Metal Machine Music*). In the wake of *Transformer*’s popularity, “common business sense would have told Lou to solidify his foothold in the rock field by making another record that sounded like *Transformer* Lou, however, chose to duck inside the studio and record a depressing album [*Berlin*] . . . that would destroy his commercial credibility” (Bockris 217). Commercially speaking, *Berlin* embodied what Reed’s *Ligeia* addresses in *The Raven*’s “A Wild Being from Birth” (adapted from Poe’s “The Imp of the Perverse”): “We go to shrink from danger but instead we approach it. We are intoxicated by the mere idea of a fall from such a great height. This fall, this rushing annihilation—for the very reason it contains the most loathsome and ghastly images of death and suffering—for this reason do we most impetuously desire it” (95). The dizzying heights of commercial success and rock stardom Reed obtained with *Transformer* placed him on a precipice in which a fall would be highly public and shocking. Such success, offering such high degree of commercial and popular

failure, was just too enticing not to sabotage. *Berlin* was his plunge, a rock album completely antithetical to the glam rock spectacle of *Transformer*. It spawned vicious reviews—Lester Bangs called it “a gargantuan slab of maggoty rancor that may well be the most depressed album ever made” (169)—and sent him and his producer, Bob Ezrin, into deep, dark depression.

Part of Reed’s reasoning behind this commercial and popular suicide was that “it’s really boring being the best show in town” (Bockris 215). He also insists that he “had to do *Berlin*. If I hadn’t done it, I’d have gone crazy” (Bockris 217). While not a very forthcoming explanation, Reed’s personal motivations here contain both a personal and artistic necessity that helped preserve his sanity, albeit through a life of excessive and self-damaging drug use combined with probing the darkest of subject matter, while ruining his commercial popularity. That Reed’s personal sanity is preserved in part by the conflict and uproar caused by his wild antics seems to cut against and also uphold the perverse impulse to “act for the reason we should not” (Reed, “I Wanna Know (The Pit and the Pendulum)” 98). Reed does not like being liked, or perhaps more accurately, Reed believes a healthy rapport requires tension—attraction and repulsion between himself and his fans, ever in whirling conflict with each other. He wants the conflict and the tensions that come with shaking people up, charming them, and then upsetting them again.

Such interesting and dramatic shifts echo Poe’s own prickly position within his own society. While he was dismissed for his hysterical gothic style, he was also a very active critic, engaging in “professional literary warfare” (Thompson xiv) while seeing himself as “the poet of transcendental beauty” (xiv). He lived a seemingly contradictory position as both “an elitist aesthete *and* a social critic, both a hack *and* a genius, both earnest *and* disingenuous at the same time” (emphasis in original, xiv). If we accept Poe’s brilliance as an author, we must also acknowledge that he drew much inspiration from tabloid journalism and pulp magazines like

Blackwood – hardly the stuff traditionally associated with literary genius, but certainly an example of how much inspiration artists, great or not, gather from the world around them. All of this makes discerning Poe’s own motives and earnestness difficult to identify.

Poe, as an American Romantic, in many respects did not fit the mold of the romantic writer, particularly of the British variety. Poe’s bemused attitude toward romantic genius and Wordsworth’s idea that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (262) is perhaps best seen in his essay “The Philosophy of Composition,” which most scholars believe is satirical. The essay stems from his desire for someone to “detail, step by step, the process any one of [a writer’s] compositions attained its ultimate point of completion” (676). In explaining why such an essay has never been written, Poe suggests that “perhaps the authorial vanity has had as much to do with the omission than any one other cause. Most writers—poets in especial—prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition—and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the curtain” (676). The creative process is apparently too important for just anyone to know about. As Poe stated in his preface to *The Raven and Other Poems*, “with me poetry has been not a purpose, but a passion; and the passions should be kept in reverence; they must not—they cannot at will be excited with an eye to the paltry compensations, or the more paltry commendations, of mankind” (675). In all likelihood Poe is being a bit facetious in this division of art from the masses. Poe quite liked popularity and drew much inspiration from “low culture,” which makes him a more plebian guy than the myth surrounding Poe would have us think; he isn’t as broodingly on the edge of complete psychosis as popular myths portray him. Nor is he quite as stuffy. But he needled and criticized, upsetting the status quo, which alienated him from opportunities to further his fame and fortune.

While there are broad similarities between Reed and Poe, the two artists are also obviously dissimilar in many ways. Nevertheless, Poe's influence on Reed was significant and assimilated into Reed's own collection of personalities, which he drew upon whenever it suited him. While Reed might have passed himself off as a tortured romantic poet in college (Bockris 34), his own lyrical style is not that of the Romantics or of Poe, but is more direct, exemplifying a street poetics that feels contemporary yet out of time and place. This is not to say that Reed's style is less complicated or even less artistic. His distillation of Poe is not automatically less complex simply because he crams a huge body of work and cultural myth into a single recorded album.

As his sordid romp through Poe's world testifies, Reed's propensity for the perverse is complex, eluding easy categorization or explanation. Likewise, his approach to dealing with perversity forces listeners to radically change their expectations and assumptions about what a "faithful" adaptation of Poe should sound like. In violating notions of strict, copycat attempts of creating a seemingly faithful adaptation, Reed embraces the very idea of perversity, putting it on display for all to experience. This, however, is alienating to devotees of Poe expecting to hear Poe's language "untainted" by the presence of the adaptor. Reed always makes his presence known, laying claim to his works as his own, regardless of what other art influenced it. As a savagely transgressive work, *The Raven* reveals that through violating Poe, Reed embodies what Poe meant by perversity. In the process, Reed further remains faithful to his own career trends, offering challenging albums that often alienate fans and deter easy consumption. As Reed tellingly confesses in the final song "Guardian Angel," "The only way to ruin it would be for me not to trust me." Reed holds to his instincts and his gut intuition—a strategy that has led him true in the past, even while simultaneously leading him false.

Reed's approach, however, also challenges definitions of fidelity accepted by adaptation theorists. In wanting to throw out questions of fidelity in favor of other questions, scholars like Leitch and Hutcheon ignore creators and fans who continually value fidelity as a creative method and evaluative tool. There are many ways to remain faithful that do not include adhering to strict formal codes. Creators, fans, and scholars usually accept that exact replication is an exercise in futility. Fans and scholars, however, error in assuming that because exact replication is impossible, fidelity is impossible and therefore a non-issue. Fidelity may not be the primary motivation behind an adaptation, but it remains a significant component among many, and creative possibilities allow adaptors to find new methods of being true to their interpretations of the source. The definitions of a faithful Poe adaptation are as numerous as there are Poe fans, for each individual's definition is determined by their interpretation of the text, which, also opens up the possibility that faithful interpretation is every bit the exercise in futility that exact replication is. Thus, despite being fundamentally unfaithful, one's interpretation must appear convincingly faithful. The problem is that Reed is but one voice among many, and what his adaptation considers being faithful does not conform with so many other ideas, thus, entire swaths of listeners and readers deem *The Raven* unfaithful, with this verdict having more to do with Reed violating their own interpretations than any injustice to Poe's work itself. Furthermore, Reed's concept of fidelity must include being faithful to himself as an artist. He must make *The Raven* a Lou Reed record, autonomous and equal to Poe's own tales, as well as equal to other Reed albums. *The Raven* shows that not only are there different motivations for adapting a text, but there are also different methods of fidelity, some of which include rejecting it entirely.

Chapter 2:

Lulu as Lou Reed's "Supreme Violation"

"I don't think anyone who has been following my stuff is going to be surprised by what I've done with this new album." – Lou Reed, about his first solo album, *Lou Reed* [1972]

"*Why* is this surprising? An odd collaboration would be Metallica and Cher. That would be odd. Us—that's an *obvious* collaboration." – Lou Reed, about his last studio release, *Lulu* [2011]

"Rock and roll records are born out of tension." – Victor Bockris

Lou Reed and Metallica's 2011 collaboration, *Lulu*, was, with few exceptions, collectively panned by critics and fans alike as "totally unlistenable" (Klosterman), and an example of "musical legends high-fiving during a circle-jerk" (Hemmerling). Slightly less disparaging, but no more illuminating, was Stewart Berman's assertion that "*Lulu* is a frustratingly noble failure. Audacious to the extreme, but exhaustingly tedious as a result" (Berman). By all accounts *Lulu* is the true "Thing That Should Not Be." Like Frankenstein's monster, it appears to be the misguided product of otherwise intelligent minds who, when working on the project, saw it much as Dr. Frankenstein saw his creation: "How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form? His limbs were in such proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful" (Shelley 51). Yet just a few moments later, the mad doctor would exclaim, "Now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (51).

Unlike Dr. Frankenstein, Lou Reed never retracted his admiration for *Lulu*, insisting it was one of his best works (Lou Reed and Metallica, interview); he regularly included "Junior Dad," "Brandenburg Gate" and "Mistress Dread" in his concerts. On the surface⁴, Metallica seems to also stand by *Lulu*, with drummer Lars Ulrich recently reiterated his enthusiasm, feeling

“proud of [*Lulu*]” (blabbermouth.net). Ulrich has further stated that “[*Lulu* is] definitely very unique and whether it’s [unique] in a good way or unique in a not-so-good way, I have no idea yet. . . [W]hether it’s making a new sound or paving a new way, I have no idea” (Wikimetal). He might be dodging some hard questions with this statement, exposing some misgivings along with some hopes and fond affection, but he is also correct that the dust has yet to settle around *Lulu*. Despite the vitriolic outcry there is little denying guitarist Alex Skolnick’s observation that *Lulu* got “everyone talking and challenging their thinking” (Skolnick). It is easy when listening to and assessing *Lulu* to recall Reed’s own declaration “I never said I was tasteful. I’m not tasteful” (*Take No Prisoners*) and then to reiterate Robert Christgau’s comment after the release of *Sally Can’t Dance* (1974) that “Lou is adept at figuring out new ways to shit on people” (qtd. in Bockris 249). But Skolnick’s observation, as a guitarist often considered ahead of the curve, invites a more measured assessment of this perplexing, “ambitious and capricious” (Rosen) album. In short, we might be better served to not, as Frankenstein did, immediately reject outright this new, peculiar and seemingly unfamiliar creation.

With closer examination, *Lulu* begins to make a great deal of sense, and even seems like an obvious project, as Reed claimed collaborating with Metallica was (see epigraph). *Lulu* is Reed, once again, adapting a literary text, with his lyrics (re)treading familiar themes of sexual transgression, perversion and obsession, and backed by music that explores different formal and sonic approaches that become their own abrasions. Yet inserting Metallica into the mix appeared so out of character to listeners that the similarities to past Reed projects (or past Metallica projects) were overshadowed by both real and perceived differences. In relation to Reed’s career, *Lulu* embodies adaptation’s central nature as a text including “repetition with variation” (Hutcheon 4), with Reed’s past albums serving as a principle source of repetition, and Metallica

the primary source of variation. Understanding *Lulu* is not, however, as simple as old parts being combined with new parts, for in this particular combination, even the old, familiar parts are rendered unfamiliar.

Wedekind's plays, *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box*, dramatize the story of Lulu, a social climber who uses her sexual power to ensnare and destroy men. She moves from the elderly Dr. Goll to the artist, Schwarz, who is contracted to paint her portrait. But her relationship to Schwarz is equally doomed, and she subsequently moves from Schwarz to Schön, and then finally to Schön's son Alwa. The bodies continue to pile up as Lulu's unrestrained sexuality drives these men to their deaths, making Lulu one of the most iconic femme fatale characters in all of literature. When Lulu is forced to flee Berlin to escape the law, she first travels to Paris with Alwa, and then further continues to London, where, now destitute, she is forced to become a prostitute in order to support herself. It is then that she meets Jack the Ripper,⁵ who brutally murders her in the final scene.

Wedekind originally wrote *Lulu* as a single play, but it was immediately condemned by censors, and Wedekind was forced to make severe edits, condensing the play, dividing it into two works and eliminating many of the more offensive details.⁶ Consequently, *Lulu* was for decades never read or seen in its intended form. Wedekind never saw his play performed in its original form, and the divided and censored version is what people know best. Reed most likely drew much of his inspiration from the two plays rather than the single reconstruction; thus, his adaptation is based on a reworked, censored text rather than an original. Wedekind's *Lulu* offers a deep critique of late-Victorian attitudes toward sexuality and patriarchy, where Wedekind saw the culture as oppressive to women. Yet Wedekind's own perception of women was not particularly positive, and consequently Lulu's sexual power is as much to be feared as.

Reed's *Lulu* collapses Wedekind's work into a single album, albeit a long one. He discards the narrative structure and instead focuses each song around a specific theme rather than around plot points. *Lulu* contains no story, in the conventional narrative sense. Reed's take is more conceptual, obsessing over the issues raised by the plays. The point of view also shifts from song to song, with "Brandenburg Gate" told through a third-person narrator, and songs "The View," "Pumping Blood," "Mistress Dread," and "Cheat on Me" told from Lulu's perspective. The second half switches to the perspective of the men, with none of the narrators being explicitly identified. Familiarity with Wedekind's story helps narrow down the possibilities however. To further erase the narrative plot, "Pumping Blood" is the third track on the album, yet it is the track in which Lulu meets Jack the Ripper and is murdered with grisly excess. For listeners unfamiliar with Wedekind's plays the lyrics can seem disorienting and seemingly without cohesive structure. For someone who knows the plays, *Lulu* is equally maddening in its blatant rejection of the source's structure.

Lulu was vilified by fans and critics in two somewhat contradictory ways: first, suspicions that *Lulu* would be a colossal failure predisposed listeners to hate it (Klosterman). Audiences assumed that "Reed's crotchety, atonal poem-rants would be wholly incompatible with Metallica's fidgety riffage" (Berman). "The View" was the first song released from the album and it "confirmed everyone's worst suspicions," and consequently "the Internet had all the evidence it needed to preemptively crown *Lulu* the Worst Album of All Time" (Berman). The foolishness of trying to brand an album "the worst of all time" is readily apparent, an exercise in utter futility and flash-in-the-pan sensationalism. That Berman so easily uses the popular opinion of the internet to validate his own claims as a professional music critic reveals how power and influence, and the rising role of fans, has changed with the internet. Yet what continues is how

too often an album is dismissed based on faulty expectations and assumptions. Essentially, everyone expected *Lulu* to fail, then were pleased (and outraged) when it so easily appeared to confirm these suspicions. Yet this runs contrary to the other reason it was condemned: that listeners responded so violently stems from their own “thwarted expectations” (Hutcheon 4). The album might be seen as a failure, but it still does not conform to anything anyone had ever heard. It perplexes and disappoints, resisting the listener’s wish of getting a concrete grasp on what it is. *Lulu* so completely reworks the prior tropes of both Reed and Metallica that there is little sense of fidelity to their prior work. Thus, for most listeners, a first listen to *Lulu* is incredibly alienating, where no expectations or sense of familiarity is satisfied except for their reaction to it, which was based in expectations of failure.

Lulu’s alienating effect is crucial to understanding one of its most interesting aspects: namely, that the tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the aggressive violation of all our expectation, highlights a core conflict within the music culture that *Lulu* was released into. At a time when contemporary music culture and the music industry are embracing old forms through retro movements, revivalism, reunion tours, nostalgia tours, and deluxe album reissues, *Lulu* stands in brazen defiance, a “supreme violation” (Reed, “Pumping Blood”) of all that is currently considered acceptable among both the music industry and music listeners. Likewise, Reed’s approach to adapting Wedekind’s *Lulu* plays also deviates from several common reasons, as cited by adaptation theorists, for one artist to adapt another’s work. In essence, *Lulu* challenges the contemporary music environment, which Reed sees as hostile to creativity and unwilling to allow artists to take risks in exploring new frontiers of musical expression. Furthermore, *Lulu* disrupts and pushes back on certain common assumptions within adaptation studies, requiring everyone who listens to *Lulu* to do so with revised assumptions, expectations

and listening practices. In pushing to explore new musical realms and modes of creative expression, Reed not only preserves his own sense of artistic authenticity, but also encourages listeners willing to go along with him to expand their own listening practice, where they might discover and enjoy new forms of listening pleasure.

The new modes and pleasures within *Lulu* are embodied in the opening track, “Brandenburg Gate,” which presents familiar aspects of Reed and Metallica’s prior work, only to promptly destroy the familiar, replacing it with something confoundingly unfamiliar. Likewise, it immediately stamps out any hope for a faithful adaptation in the “slavish copying” sense. “Brandenburg Gate” opens with a string of references to multiple adaptations, reminding listeners how prominent adaptations are in art (including and especially in Lou Reed’s own art), but without uniformly praising all adaptations or insinuating that they all behave or should behave the same. Instead, these referenced adaptations are rolled into a larger and denser representation of music culture’s 21st-century crisis. The song therefore incorporates ideas of dissonance, failure, and transgression into its formal execution, baiting us with pleasurable sounds only to destroy both those sounds and our expectations.

The track opens with an acoustic guitar, sounding like a beautiful, even optimistic intro, where Reed is clearing his throat before telling us something lovely. Yet what we receive in the opening lines sharply contrasts with the buoyant guitar line. Instead we get an ugly visual amidst a massive stream of references:

I would cut my legs and tits off

When I think about Boris Karloff and Kinski

In the dark of the moon

It made me dream of *Nosferatu*

Trapped on the isle of Doctor Moreau

Oh wouldn't it be lovely

Self-destructive violence is paired with copious references to other works, including F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* itself an adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, which Reed loosely adapted into *Time Rocker*, a stage collaboration with Robert Wilson; German film actor Klaus Kinski, who played Count Dracula in Werner Herzog's 70s adaptation of Murnau's *Nosferatu*; and Boris Karloff, made famous as Frankenstein's monster in James Whale's 1931 adaptation, which used Peggy Webling's stage adaptation as its primary source rather than Shelley's novel. Reed's portal figure status is wildly apparent in this song, and this abundant referencing across different media offers "a living mosaic, a dynamic intersection of textual surfaces" (Sanders 3), which emphasizes how pervasive adaptations are within art's history. Whale's *Frankenstein* and both versions of *Nosferatu* are recognized cinematic classics, hardly qualifying as derivative art, which underscores how "there's nothing inherently wrong with remakes" (Ehrlich) and "to be second is not to be secondary or inferior" (Hutcheon xiii). Reed is aware of the debt many great artists have to other artists, and of himself as a beneficiary of past art through his own appropriations and adaptations. However, the adaptations referenced are great not simply because they are adaptations, but because they excel as films, both in form and (continued) cultural relevance. Murnau and Herzog are indisputable masters of cinema, and Whale, working within Hollywood, made lasting contributions as well. "Brandenburg Gate" asserts from the outset that a whole world of excellent, inspiring art exists. Further, much of this art is not original in the sense that it came first, but for Reed, there's something original (or at least innovative) in how some of these works powerfully repackage and retell their stories.

The string of references in “Brandenburg Gate” are also delivered at the speed of a mash-up or a Google search, where it is unlikely most listeners will be able to catch all the references and their attendant meanings without looking them up.⁷ Reed’s lyrical method reflects our internet age of immediate, instant access to every prior text that ever was—something the listener utilizes when looking up Reed’s references. In his lyrics, Reed casts his net wide to encompass film, music, literature and architecture to show how all the various arts and their new usable matter are intersecting and available immediately and, simultaneously, disconnected from history and context. All prior art made instantly accessible through the internet renders everything in the past available “in the present moment with no sense of either past or future” (Kirby). The overwhelming saturation of usable material thrown out in the lyrics is jumbled and (re)contextualized within music that is aesthetically a conflicted mess: the bright and striking musical entrances of Reed’s acoustic guitar and Metallica’s electric power are offset by the disconnect between Reed’s lyrics of self-mutilation and James Hetfield’s abrasively deflating scream, “Small town girl!” which sounds “like he’s trying to summon the next featured attraction at a strip club” (Berman). “High” and “low” cultures collide into a spectacular disaster, where the song teases us into expecting something familiar, but then destroys that expectation through a blatantly deviant insertion that brings the whole thing down. The song loses any semblance of harmony, and the disconnects within the song embody a grotesque representation of modern society’s inability to process our glut of information and channel it into a new and vibrant style. Instead, the mash-up of intertextual references and stylistic combinations create chaotic confusion, where the merits of both performing artists are zeroed out. Reed’s wishful thought, “Oh wouldn’t it be lovely,” hangs not only in the air before Metallica’s electric entrance, but

over the song, and the album as a whole—a yearning of “a little girl who’s gonna give life a whirl” (“Brandenburg Gate”) that is doomed to failure.

As the opening lyrics demonstrate, Reed writes Lulu’s character as having a conflicted relationship with past artistic works: she finds inspiration in them, yet they also drive her to fantasies of self-harm. She’s attracted to influential works, while disturbed by them. These works serve both positive and negative ends, showing the complex range of interaction and meaning listeners and creators have to the past. However, Lulu is a self-described fractured personality: “I have three hearts that I keep apart / Trying to relate / To normal feelings and the nighttime reelings / And some absynthe drunk so late.” Sex, drugs, and material wealth are her desires, made clear in “Cheat on Me” where she insists “I want to taste it all and have fun.” These old works are things of the past, serving little use in getting her what she wants in the present, and yet her divided nature still sees value in them. Lulu, like our present culture, is split between privileging “only the present and the immediate” while also being “excessively nostalgic, given over to retrospection, incapable of generating any authentic novelty” (Fisher 59). The past fills her with disgust and inspiration, with the Brandenburg Gate itself standing before her as an inspiration and symbol of hope. She stands at the Gate, believing in the false notion (like Napoleon in 1806) that walking through the Gate will lead her to triumphant success.⁸

The Brandenburg Gate, itself a piece of art and a cultural artifact, is historically a highly contested object within a highly contested space, its significance and meaning shifting through time according to external political and cultural forces (Ladd 72-81). The contested meaning of the Brandenburg Gate has existed for centuries, but its more recent history is most relevant to understanding its place in Reed’s lyrics. During the Cold War, the Brandenburg Gate was a contested space within the divided city,⁹ where “two Berlins had only one Brandenburg Gate”

(75). Significant protests and other demonstrations during the East-West conflict happened at the Gate (Taylor 61, 84, 319-320), rendering it a sought-after symbol of unity and an immediate symbol of division and contest. Once “barbed wire was rolled out across the area in front of the Brandenburg Gate” (170), signaling the beginning of the Berlin Wall and solidifying the city’s division, the Gate “resembled nothing so much as its newer neighbor, the Berlin Wall” (Ladd 77). This entrance that Lulu sees as a portal to a bright future also contains a bleak past where this door is actually a wall. The Gate offers the delusion of accessibility and opportunity, represented musically by Reed and Metallica’s dissonant musical styles, which themselves foreshadow what anyone familiar with Wedekind’s plays already knows: Lulu’s journey will end in failure and death. By adapting Wedekind Reed retells this terminal story, reaffirming the relevance of its terminality: the story ended tragically before, and it will do so again (and again, and again), the underlying message being that society has not come any further down the road in the century since Wedekind first penned these plays.

The first version of Wedekind’s play was described by critic Edward Bond as “the first modern play” (64), so potent in its aggressive social critique that “had [it] been seen soon after it was written, it would not have been fully understood” (65). The censored versions created their own scandal through their aggressive criticism of male-female relationships in Victorian society. Wedekind saw marriage “as a male-dominated institution in which women become mere objects of possession” (Willeke 28). Reed makes the aggressively oppressive use of marriage by men on women potently clear when in “Frustration” Schön,¹⁰ expressing his lustful and violent desire in what is likely an internal monologue, declares, “I want so much to hurt you / Marry me / I want you as my wife.”¹¹ Lulu, understands the constraints of marriage and even seems to take sadistic pleasure in the threat of domestic violence; yet through her sadism she upends the power

structure to make marriage and pain inevitable for the man as much for herself. Dauntingly, she tells Schön after her husband Schwarz has killed himself, “You’ll marry me in the end” (Wedekind 63). Men hold the power, but Lulu wields her own, inverting the violence within marriage to strike the man rather than her.

Another form of male dominance is through artistic representation, where women are often represented according to male perceptions of women. A primary object in the play is Schwarz’s painting of Lulu as pierrot, which follows the characters throughout the play (see *Earth Spirit* 14, 37, 84; *Pandora’s Box* 133) and shows Lulu as an object to be looked at, admired, and possessed. Yet the portrait is not simply passive, for its persistent presence emphasizes Lulu’s own power, made corporeal when Lulu enters the room dressed exactly as in the portrait and declaring “Here I am” (19), followed by Schön’s description of her as “A picture before which Art must despair” (20). When Schön then says, “I suppose you don’t realize what you are doing” Lulu responds, “I’m perfectly aware of myself . . . I’m only doing my duty” (20). As both a human being and as a constructed work of art, Lulu maintains an aggressive dominating presence within this world of contested power. While the men shape her to be attractive and looked at, which grants her a certain power, they paradoxically criticize her indecency. She embraces that power and reminds the men that they were the ones who gave it to her. Lulu, however, still remains a fictional character within Wedekind’s (and Reed’s) story, functioning as a demonic “imaginary projection” of Wedekind’s own sexist opinions of women (Boa 10). While Wedekind was intensely opposed to the patriarchy of his time, he nonetheless had his own attraction and repulsion to women; he had an “increasing bad conscience at [his] own collusion in a culture which was oppressive to women, yet at the same time [demonstrated] an inability to break fully free from the prevailing gender ideology” (10). Lulu is oppressed, but

she is also a vamp, designed primarily to destroy the men who desire her. She is both to be feared and adored. Her portrait, like herself, takes on that same power to “attract and repel” (“The View”), being, like Lulu, “the truth, the beauty / That causes you to cross / Your sacred boundaries” (“The View”). The men exude a hypocritical propriety, supported by moralistic rhetoric that condemns Lulu and her actions, while excusing their own.

It is notable that Lulu herself basically fantasizes the first bit of abusive fetishization when in “Brandenburg Gate” she declares, “I would cut my legs and tits off,” reminding us that Lulu herself contains a self-destructive personality. Everyone is implicated in this bloodbath; Lulu cries for Jack the Ripper in “Pumping Blood” to “Use a knife on me . . . I will swallow your sharpest cutter / Like a colored man’s dick.” The brutal violence here is both physical (to herself) and ideological (her racism). This line updates the moment in Wedekind’s uncensored version when Lulu, who is by this point a prostitute desperate for money, admits in an extended conversation with Jack the Ripper that before him “A nigger came . . . He didn’t want to pay” (203). By making this moment more explicit, Reed exposes the cruder details in Lulu’s desire to be violently abused as well as her work as a prostitute within a sex industry that contains a long history of racist rhetoric utilized to raise corporate profits.

In 2004 Reed was filmed reading taglines from pornos for Timothy Greenfield-Sanders’ documentary *Thinking XXX*, many of which contained the same exoticizing and violent racism he then uses in *Lulu*. It is hard to say how serious Reed is reading these lines. When he says lines like “Big fucking African brothers put it to the white bitch in hose” he does so with such absurdity, exposing the racist and sexist rhetoric’s utter stupidity.¹² The porn industry has long depended on sexism and racist exoticism to attract audiences—othering the product and the audience through degrading perceptions of desire and disgust. Reed further emphasizes this point

when Lulu challenges Jack (and by extension the listener): “If I waggle my ass like a dark prostitute / Would you think less of me” (“Pumping Blood”). Reed admits to a sick sense of humor, and when in *Thinking XXX* he spouts the line seeking to exploit “homeless black women” he breaks into laughter while commenting “That’s so awful, even for me.” The racism within “Pumping Blood” and *Thinking XXX* in many ways shows Reed’s own tongue-in-cheek satire, yet his execution is hardly without its own disconcerting acquiescence, as if he is fully aware of how within the sex industry so much is depraved and debauched, audiences crave it, but then shift the blame from themselves to one of the video’s Others—be it a woman or a person of color. The detestable way the sex industry exploits people of color and people, particularly women, relates to similar practices within the music industry and among fans regarding how music is marketed and consumed.

The degradation of Lulu is further emphasized in the album’s artwork, which features the mannequin “Lulu” from the Museum der Dinge in Berlin. The cover revises the portrait of Lulu as pierrot to present Lulu’s armless torso looking back at the viewer. Her reversal of the gaze implicates viewers in the act of looking at her, making them aware of just how they are looking at her, and therefore how they look at others. When the viewer’s gaze contains cruel intent and lustful desire, they are also implicated in the violence done to her. Those subjected to the same treatment as the Lulu mannequin “are meant to be dismissible objects / One fucks with” (Reed “Dragon”). The Lulu represented by the mannequin reiterates how violent male oppression turns women into mannequins to be looked at who are not allowed to speak or have a life of their own, and who are ultimately broken apart. The back cover shows the Lulu mannequin lying down in three pieces, a broken object. Her separate pieces indicate how Lulu has been fetishized by the men around her, and also emphasizes her male-constructed nature.

Breaking Lulu down into specific body parts also renders her unwhole and inhuman. The men looking and lusting after her fixate on her hair, shoulder, vulva, nipples, and collarbone, only mentioning her face in order to disfigure her by scratching it (“Dragon”). Fetishistic practice is not unfamiliar in contemporary America, where visual culture has developed a very powerful and effective fetishistic technique, which remains directed at women far more often than at men. Even a cursory examination of pornography shows how prevalent the fetishistic gaze is, coupled with the mechanistic aesthetic of pornographic performance. While taboo subjects like pornography, sado-masochism and bondage contain a greater degree of complexity than I am unable to address here, it is fair to say that the industry behind these subjects operates very similarly to other major industries, utilizing an alienating capitalistic format that devalues people and art in favor of profit and product.

Contemporary practices regarding art often dismember the work—memes, soundbites, sampling, gifs, and other developments within the postmodern and digimodern landscape fetishize aspects of an artwork without allowing it to exist as a complete work. Nicolas Bourriaud believes “the issue is no longer to fabricate an object, but to choose one among those that exist and to use or modify these according to specific intentions” (19). Similarly, to pull out portions of a larger work can similarly change the meaning of the portion taken, thus manipulating it to one’s own use rather than the use intended by the author, while potentially eroding the artistic integrity of the isolated portion. This makes *Lulu* all the more significant for being an album designed to be listened to as a complete work. These songs do not lend themselves to individual listens, but function better within the whole context. To purchase individual tracks for 99 cents apiece from iTunes would be to break apart *Lulu*, fixating on portions and thus succumb to the same fetishistic violence embodied in the album art.

Paradoxically, taking the album as a whole work is also what makes it so difficult to listen to, as few listeners seem able to cope with ninety minutes of brutalizing music. Digital music culture has fragmented the earlier practice of listening to entire albums by subscribing to Bourriaud's idea that works of art become objects to be used and manipulated according to our own desires. In this cultural landscape, C.S. Lewis' belief that "the many *use* art and the few *receive* it" (19) seems apt. For Reed, *Lulu* is meant to be received rather than used. It resists easy appropriation and dismemberment so common to contemporary attitudes toward music, as well as people's listening practices. Wedekind's play, however, was not so lucky, having been dismembered and diminished before anyone could ever see and experience the unsullied original. Yet, to Wedekind's credit, even the truncated *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box* were still able to bite and provoke, an effect the story has retained through the years as it "is still prophesying our and our children's future" (Bond 65). Ultimately, *Lulu*'s cover image and Lulu herself demonstrate how many works of art, like exploited people, exist in the 21st-century as fragmented, fetishized objects of desire.

In this light, both Wedekind's and Reed's *Lulu* are "about sex and money" (Bond 63). The sexuality of both Lulu and the men pursuing her is limitless, never diminishing, yet ultimately stagnant and useless. Where human sexuality is meant not only to preserve the species, but also to cultivate "human bonding, making humans human" (66), the sexuality in *Lulu* is terminally barren and destructive, both in terms of fertility and relationships. Lulu's sexuality seem limitless, yet she describes herself as a "passionateless wave upon the sea" and as having "no real feelings in my soul" (Reed, "Cheat on Me"). Similarly, the men have what seems to be limitless unfulfilled desire, who culminating result is. In "Frustration" Schön is terrified by what he sees as Lulu's power to emasculate him. He cries that Lulu "is more man than I" leaving

him “dry and spermless like a girl.” Schön’s sexism is very revealing what he fears more than Lulu’s power is that he becomes a girl, lacking the male means of procreation. While Schön has little desire for children, his sperm empowers his sense of masculinity in a way that, in his mind, surpasses any power a woman might gain from her own reproductive capabilities. By becoming spermless, Schön loses both his sexual power and his dominant place, becoming one of the oppressed rather than the oppressor.

Similar to Schön, Lulu’s own passions are equally destructive and in many respects just as vacant. “Cheat on Me,” strategically positioned as the central track, shows Lulu in a moment of fascinating introspection, where she grapples with her lustful desire for everything and to have fun, and the (self-)destruction that comes with that desire. Her cravings are empty of real substance, as are her relationships, and each subsequent experience becomes a form of cheating on herself, denying herself fulfilling experience. Lulu describes her situation thusly: “I have a passionate heart / It can tear us apart / I have the loves of many men / But I don’t love any of them”. Lulu’s unbridled passion is destructive; sex, rather than creating and nurturing, destroys (Bond 66). This is “sex [that] belongs to a mechanical world . . . The age of machines is also the age of capitalism . . . [T]he combination of sex and capitalism is destructive [and] creates the age of violence” (66).

The corrupting power within this fusion of sex and money is even more evident two tracks later in “Little Dog,” where the narrative perspective has shifted from Lulu to one of the men. This man, desiring Lulu, repetitively insists that “Money can do anything / Money can do anything / Money can do anything / Tell me what you want”. Again recalling prostitution, the lover believes he can buy Lulu’s sexual favors if he has the money to do so—power is obtained through money. Without money he will remain a “Little dog who can’t get in / Moaning at the

bed side / Moaning at each limb”. The impotence in this imagery shows both characters to be “haunted by economic need” (Willeke 28). The characters crave substance through economic exchange, but instead their lives are slowly diminished and disempowered: “Little dog who can’t get in / Can only cry but / Can not swim”. While Lulu holds power over men through sex, their money holds her to them. It becomes a mutual, albeit toxic, exchange of sex and money that eventually descends into violent destruction: the men die under her power, and she eventually loses her own power over this male-dominated world, as prostitution becomes a necessary means of survival, as well as a portal to destruction (Willeke 29). The vacant existence of the characters metaphorically asks: If people and arts are commodities to be used however the artist wishes, what happens to the value of those used? If consideration of the other is no longer necessary, then we have a late-capitalist disregard for people, which erodes the substance of one’s own life: Lulu is hollow because she does not care for anyone else. Likewise, the men in the story have no care for themselves and do not value Lulu above a usable commodity. This is a vacant existence, where characters obsess over each other, yet contain little substantive feeling for those obsessions. The obsessive crate digging referencing in music shows how the obsession with past musical ages holds little real substance, creating a world where we are attracted and repulsed by prior ages as well as our own age. Nothing has real substance, and any creation sits dissatisfied with its own time and its own creations.

Ultimately, the predatory relationship between Lulu and these men is perversion of the first order, completely lacking any fulfilling or renewing qualities—it embodies a terminal sexuality, where the goal is destruction of the self and other. Transferred into the 21st-century via adaptation, *Lulu* suggests that this problem of a sterile cultural landscape continues, with the more pervasive capitalist having become potentially even more terminal since the time of

Wedekind. The characters' loveless, futile, and barren sexual activity and desire, embodying a desolate cultural and artistic landscape, reframes theorist Mark Fisher's question regarding the contemporary capitalist landscape: "how long can a culture persist without the new? What happens if the young are no longer capable of producing surprises?" (3). If capitalism is a system of "Total Money" where everything is subordinated to the market's needs (Bond 67), then the wholesale adoption of a capitalistic society, particularly the late-capitalistic society of the 21st-century, creates a system rather than a culture; that is, commerce and economics override humanization and encourage dehumanization because "money must take precedence over social elements" (67). The character that embodies this design most terminally is, of course, Jack the Ripper, who savagely murders prostitutes and is the character that Lulu has been moving toward the entire time.

The merger of sex and money might not get more apparent than in the sex industry, where the product is literal people, whose bodies are packaged, marketed and sold. When demand changes, the product changes; humans are valued in so much as they maintain the industry and the market. Similarly, the music industry, according to guitarist Robert Fripp, "is not concerned with music" (ix), which would include creative artistry—music and artistry are but product, treated as poorly as many people in the sex industry are. Moby complained in the late 90s that, "There is so much pressure on the people at the label to generate profits that the music isn't allowed to breathe and artists aren't allowed to develop" (Kot 9). But for many execs in the music industry, Moby's complaint is of little concern, as their primary goal is the same as Lowry Mays, chairman of Clear Channel, who made it clear that "we're [the industry] not in the business of providing well-researched music. We're simply in the business of selling our customers products" (qtd. in Kot 12). Such a crassly one-dimensional system, however, as Moby

points out, “makes bad creative sense, and it makes bad business sense . . . So the major labels in the pursuit of quarterly profits are shooting themselves in the foot by putting out lowest-common-denominator music that works on the radio but doesn’t generate any loyalty . . . You have to fit the mold, and radio defines the mold” (Kot 9). These comments present well-documented and long-standing problems within the music industry, but do not account for listeners’ own continued desire for the industry’s product. The power structure within the industry is not as top-down as early Marxist thinkers would have us believe; consumers do have influence and power to change the products being offered—hence why musical trends come and go, changing on every whim.

While listeners do exert their own power and influence on the music industry, with the digital age showing remarkable influence coming from listeners rather than music executives, this should not be interpreted to mean that listeners are any more interested in exploratory, experimental music than music execs are. In many ways, both the industry and consumers continue to exemplify Reed’s sarcastic lyric “I’d try to be as progressive as I could possibly be / As long as I don’t have to try too much” (Reed, “Beginning of a Great Adventure”). If *Lulu* is any indication, this attitude remains persistent in the contemporary music culture, with its allegedly more democratic structure that empowers artists and listeners over industry leaders. Instead, what seems to have happened is that listeners and the industry continue to vie for dominant power while musicians and their art remains subordinate and diminished.

The collective reaction to *Lulu* noted how abrasive and “unlistenable” it was, as if formally and sonically challenging music was not a real thing—metal subgenres like grindcore, death, black, and drone metal, as well as industrial music, electronic body music (EBM), noise genres within rock, ambient and industrial music are also healthy subgenres all pushing formal,

conceptual and sonic barriers in ways still commonly perceived as unpleasant. The vitriolic hatred leveled at *Lulu* is in part the result of its primary audience being the wrong one. Without question more Metallica fans listened to *Lulu* than Lou Reed fans, for no other reason than there are more of them. But *Lulu* is far more a Lou Reed album than a Metallica album; the lyrics, the production team and guest musicians, the overall concept and creative process all are more in line with Reed's method and career than Metallica's. Hence the massive outcry from metalheads inflamed with rage over Reed's overwhelming presence (they seem to forget Reed's influence on early metal). Musician and producer Steve Albini rightly observed that "[*Lulu*] fits in with the rest of Lou Reed's canon much better than it does with Metallica's, and that's certainly the reason it was received so poorly." It was heard primarily by precisely the people who would least appreciate it. Distracted by Reed's presence, the metal crowd missed how *Lulu*, as an adaptation, connects to metal's already lengthy history of adaptation and intertextuality, particularly of literature. While Wedekind is obviously not as common a source within metal as, say, Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, J.R.R. Tolkien, Homer, and Ray Bradbury (to name a few), there is no question that Wedekind's issues of perversity, sexuality, and death are topics common to metal.

Given metal audiences' general ignorance of Reed's work, as well as the ever-growing impulse to hate anything Metallica does, *Lulu* was commercially doomed from the beginning, exemplifying the artists' own masochistic tendencies. Yet this masochism goes to such lengths as cutting against some of the reasons proposed by Hutcheon that artists make adaptations. For instance, adapting known classics often presents a chance for artists to gain some cultural capital by connecting their name to that of an established, canonized artist. Yet even here *Lulu* does not work. Wedekind is not a known canonical author in America and also Reed and Metallica are already seasoned, established musicians. They have nothing to prove in terms of cultural

legitimacy as they have already established themselves through approved classic albums within their own repertoires. Another common motivation is that adaptations can be financially very lucrative when adapting a popular artist. Yet *Lulu* could not possibly be seen as an attempt to “cash in” (86) on the marketability of Wedekind, since he carries none of the popular interest that Poe and Lovecraft do within popular culture right now and his name is not enough to sell this album. So many adaptations of classic literature happen because those stories, having stood the test of time, are familiar and beloved, not to mention existing in the public domain and not having any copyright fees. Low risks and high returns make adaptations of classics “safe bets” (87), works “spawned by the capitalist desire for gain” (89), *Lulu*’s abrasive nature cannot remotely be seen as either artist trying to play it safe or seek major financial returns.

Lulu does not play things safely in terms of common adaptive practice, but instead channels the policy established in the Velvet Underground days by Andy Warhol that “if [listeners] can take it for ten minutes, then we play it for fifteen. That’s our policy. Always leave them wanting less” (Bockris 120). Listeners have complained about how unbearably long *Lulu* even though *The Raven* is not only longer but feels longer. *Lulu*’s 90 minutes is long, especially for ten tracks. But consider early Velvets performances of “Sister Ray” that extend past 30 minutes, or the drone experiments of the Dream Syndicate that went on for two hours or more. When it was released, *Metal Machine Music*, at over an hour, was the longest solo album Reed had done, containing a locking groove at the end of the record which would repeat the last abrasive sound until the listener physically stopped the record—a perversely cruel move considering the already abrasive and abusive content. Also consider Reed’s ambient album *Hudson Wind Meditations* [2010] or his double-disc release with the Metal Machine Trio, *The Creation of the Universe*, a cacophonous instrumental experiment that shows Reed’s penchant

for noise and sonically adventurous live experiments, where impulse and instinct direct the music more than pre-crafted structure. In any case, Reed has dished out excessively long tracks for a long time. The key, though, is that modern audiences are now familiar with and accustomed to the length of Velvets tracks, even praising them for defying 60s popular trends that favored short tracks of two-and-a-half or three minutes. Rob Jovanovic reminds us that “in the early days many people walked out because they just hadn’t known what to expect and just couldn’t deal with it when they got it” (xiv). That the overwhelming majority of *Lulu* listeners also “walked out” reminds us that Reed still maintains the knack to enrage and appall an audience—he’s more than happy to brashly destroy their expectations of something conforming to the pleasant play between comfortable familiarity and surprising difference, opting for all out, brutalizing difference.

As in many of his previous works, in *Lulu*, Reed takes a familiar approach to music and again makes it unbearable to listen to. For fans who now proudly boast of listening to *Metal Machine Music* straight through, and who revel in the extended performances of “Sister Ray,” “Heroin,” and others, *Lulu*’s form of abrasion and abuse tests their limits to endure something far outside their comfort zones and expectations. Part of the pain comes through the disharmony in Reed and Metallica. Some critics point to James Hetfield’s vocals, stating how out of place and unbearable they are, such as his part in “Brandenburg Gate” or “Cheat on Me.” The two parts of Reed and Metallica never seem to coalesce as a unified unit, but remain a perverse mash-up of two parts impossible to harmonize. However, if transgression is central to Reed’s adaptation of Wedekind, it makes a certain perverse sense for *Lulu* to sound so wrong and to fail aesthetically. *Lulu*’s formal failure thus becomes central to its success as an adaptation, as well as conveying the disharmony and violent tensions between and within the characters. When Reed, during

“Pumping Blood” yells “Come on, James!” you expect the music to rise to a predictable climax, but the music does no such thing, instead it languishes at about the same level. Reed’s cry emphasizes the repetitive, stagnant nature of the music, which embodies a kind of static motion that is perfectly in harmony with the character and her impending death at the hands of Jack the Ripper. The lack of “emotional spikes or climaxes” (Phillipov 82) so common to more traditional heavy metal, especially within Metallica’s canon, is incredibly frustrating for a listener expecting and desiring that cathartic and emotional payoff. That Reed and Metallica deny the listener those spikes and emotional moments looks like a failure to conform, but such an assessment only works if their goal was indeed to execute traditional metal song structures, which they clearly are not.

By deviating from traditional song structures and patterns, *Lulu* points to philosopher Karmen MacKendrick’s belief, channeling ideas by George Bataille, that “every work displaces the tradition” (1). In adaptation, this means that every adaptation, every “(re)interpretation and . . . (re)creation” (Hutcheon 8) situated into the tradition “irrevocably alters the situation” itself (MacKendrick 2); the tradition is no longer what it was and our understanding of both the tradition and the “source” has changed. Reed, while always an experimental force, has not done a collaboration of this sort, aligning himself with a metal band of Metallica’s status before. Metallica, while containing many stylistic changes at various periods in their career, has never worked with an artist like Reed, or created music of this kind before. Even the poorly received *St. Anger* (2003), which pushed musical boundaries in interesting and often maligned ways, did not deviate so completely from Metallica’s musical format as *Lulu* does.

Following MacKendrick, it can be useful to consider Reed’s adaptations as counterpleasures to traditionally established forms of pleasure gleaned from engaging with an

adaptation. Hutcheon believes audiences desire the familiarity and change that comes with an adaptation (9). The degree of similarity to difference is often where the degree of pleasure experienced can be determined. For many, the closer (i.e. more “faithful”) an adaptation is to its source, or more specifically one’s personal vision and interpretation of the source, equates to greater pleasure. Yet it is possible for a dramatically different adaptation to still be immensely pleasurable. James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931) remains popular and adored by horror fans and scholars, while being radically different from its source texts. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* is, likewise, a cinematic masterpiece, though significantly different from Stoker’s *Dracula*. In music, Mastodon’s *Leviathan*, a heavy metal adaptation of Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, is overwhelmingly praised as a heavy metal album. Its status as an adaptation is more or less overlooked by many because its merits as a metal album are so overwhelmingly evident. The adoration for *Leviathan* sharply contrasts the denigration of *Lulu*, which is often maligned because it is *not* a metal album, with flippant quips about its adaptive failings thrown in for good measure. In one sense, *Leviathan* is a much more beloved album because it is more traditionally pleasurable than *Lulu*, meeting the expectations of fans and critics in a way *Lulu* does not¹³.

As a slight return to my earlier discussion of fidelity, one major reason why fidelity is eschewed is precisely in order to comment on the text being adapted—to subvert and counter the message of that adaptation. For instance, as Reynolds explains of music sampling, “the samples may be deployed in ways that are offensive to the originator” (316), potentially becoming a form of “digital iconoclasm” that can render a reworked track a “grotesquely misshapen doppelganger of itself” (317). Similarly, Tori Amos’ cover of Eminem’s “’97 Bonnie & Clyde” is meant as a critique of and response to the song’s blatant sexism and misogyny. Ben Folds’ cheeky cover of Dr. Dre’s “Bitches Ain’t Shit” dismantles Dre’s lyrics, exposing them as ludicrous and rather

incoherent, more laughable than profound. Yet the differences within Tori Amos, Ben Folds, and Mastodon, are forgiven by audiences because these songs still adhere to certain expectations; fans of Amos and Folds understand what is happening in these covers and never expected source fidelity, though they did expect fidelity to each artists' respective style—Amos fans are familiar with her feminism, Folds fans with his snide sarcasm. Mastodon can play fast and loose with Melville's text because fans are primarily interested in their musical skill and innovation, which is by all accounts, well ahead of the curve. Therefore, there is some sense of familiarity with each of these examples, some common pleasure to be gleaned from these adaptations. There are prominent similarities that allow listeners to more readily accept these adaptations.

Such familiarity is, however, much less the case with *Lulu*, where Reed and Metallica, by their very pairing, are already in deeply unfamiliar territory for many fans. The amount of variation within *Lulu* was too great for audiences to accept—this wasn't the band or artist they loved, nor were Wedekind's plays evident in any easily recognizable way. Yet such a radical reinterpretation as *Lulu* provides its own sense of pleasure precisely because it is so dramatically different. It presents a form of counterpleasure—"pleasures that run contrary to our expectations of pleasure" (MacKendrick 2)—suggesting there are more ways to enjoy a thing than initially thought. *Lulu* is an "inherently disruptive" (2), even "transgressive" text, exemplifying MacKendrick's claim, channeling Raoul Vaneigem and Michel Foucault, that there is a polymorphous range of pleasures, which empowers pleasure to "disrupt all manner of cultures and our very understanding of pleasure itself" (3). *Lulu* and much of Reed's career embraces a "tradition of disruption" occupying a "situation of displacement" (3) which should not be seen, as theorist Michelle Philipov advocates in her reading of death metal, "as a deficiency in the music" but as an opportunity to consider alternative "kinds of listening pleasure" (xiii). *Lulu*

follows MacKendrick's observation within different sexual counterpleasures in that "delight and pain are not readily distinguishable" (146). But rather than leaving us flummoxed and upset, it should give listeners an opportunity to consider boundaries and alternatives within music and musical pleasure. Listeners, much like Reed and Metallica in creating the album, are invited to explore "the edge of music" (Eno, *Neroli* liner notes), to see what new horizons might be out there. In the context of metal, Metallica were one of the foremost thrash metal bands in the 80s. Yet thrash, which embodied themes of rebellion and rejection of the "mainstream," has itself become the mainstream, which deflated much of the message (Philipov xv). This inspired further underground, extreme metal scenes, like death and black metal. For many, Metallica's own relevance as a countercultural force was undercut by their massive mainstream success, plus their musical shift to a more radio-friendly style throughout the 1990s, which launched Metallica to fame and fortune they could have never anticipated. Metallica became a commercial and popular powerhouse, where even *St. Anger* [2003] still made incredible money. For Metallica to collaborate on *Lulu* was the most radical departure from their tradition as they had ever managed to do. It conforms to no metal genre and to no point in their career. It instead sits as a complete anomaly, a savage deviation from everything familiar and comfortable. Hence its extreme failure among Metallica fans, who anticipated a Metallica album and instead got a Lou Reed album.

And yet *Lulu* is potentially Metallica's most countercultural product since their early days, embodying more of the message of early thrash metal, though not its formal trappings, than anything they have done recently—certainly more so than *Death Magnetic* [2008], which was a patently nostalgic grasp at their prior glory, but with only the skeleton of that earlier time and very little innovative substance of, say, *Ride the Lightning* and *Master of Puppets*. *Death Magnetic* is thrash metal puppetry, a stale monument to a bygone age; yet fans, caught in a

nostalgic desire for sameness, lapped it up—the gravitational pull of the past overpowers the push for the future. Metallica fans revolted over *Lulu*, showing a strange and ironically conservative tendency to reject fringe, countercultural projects that do not resemble the status quo. For a fandom that relishes Metallica’s tortured lyrical subject matter, it is strange that they were not more willing to explore alternative modes of musical pleasure, where the pain and suffering found in such counterpleasure endeavors could actually lead to a more pleasurable, even fulfilling listening experience.

Reed perversely adapts transgressive artists trying to rethink cultural and artistic assumptions who dealt commonly dealt with taboo subjects, disruptively inserting his own presence and opinion. Reed’s adaptations test the limits of what is acceptable adaptive practice (commercially, artistically) and what counts as a pleasurable experience with that adaptation. The concept of “counterpleasures,” however, recalls John Fisk’s assertion that “the pleasure of liberating repressed or subordinate meanings can never be experienced freely, but only in conflict with those forces that seek to repress or subordinate them” (64). Reed deliberately transgresses, as he has always done, perpetuating that conflict. Herein is a common paradox of pop culture: Reed, particularly as a solo artist, has both vied for commercial success (and obtained it) while constantly resisting the commercial mainstream, audience expectations and adoration, and industry demands. Reed likes to share what he loves (Reed, *The Talkhouse*), but he is aware that “it’s not hard to lose control of one’s environment,” especially “at the upper levels of popular success” (Somma 11-12). Therefore, he must contend with these forces to preserve himself and his art, while meeting industry and popular demands that allow him to be a working artist.

Reed's transgressions with *Lulu*, however, run even deeper than simply trying to propose new ways of hearing music. In the context of 2011, *Lulu*'s transgressions appear to be legion, yet many of the alleged failings within the album can also be seen, in a metaphorical sense, as playing out the problem of music and adaptation in the early stages of the 21st century. Reed's desire to break new ground is immediately problematized by adapting a prior text. If the album is in fact an artistic failure then it seems to follow Frederic Jameson's belief that one of the messages of postmodern art "will involve the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past" (7). Reed uses Wedekind's landmark work, Bond's proposed "first modern play," to juxtapose modernism's belief in originality, geniuses, and masterpieces, with contemporary postmodernism, or even digimodernism (Alan Kirby's term), wherein originality is devalued under the assertions, which adaptations theorists have thoroughly embraced, that "originality is overrated, that artists have always recycled, that there's 'nothing new under the sun'" (Reynolds 428).

Reed, always informed by the past but uninterested in repeating it, has potentially created an album that embodies one of contemporary culture's core problems: the lull in identifiable newness has us going in circles rather than surging ahead (Reynolds 428). This current form of hyper-stasis (427) has caused a massive adaptation and retro movement that involves "rapid movement within a network of knowledge, as opposed to the outward-bound drive that propelled an entire system into the unknown" (428). In other words, modern music is not going anywhere, but is simply spinning in ever-accelerating circles (427). What does such a closed system of recycling and repetition look like, and, to repeat Mark Fisher's question: "how long can a culture persist without the new?" (3). *Lulu*, as a terminal illustrative response to Fisher, enacts a horrible story of violence and depravity as a metaphorical representation of late-capitalist consumer

culture, wherein musical expression becomes frantically static, and characters are emotionally vacant and morally corrupt. In doing this, Reed agonizes over the possibility that there no longer is anything new under the sun, while knowing that there have in fact been artists and movements (Reed himself being one of those figures) that did in fact produce something identifiably new. Again, though, Linda Seger describes adaptations as “the lifeblood of the film and television business,” reminding us that the overwhelming majority of Academy Award Best Pictures are adaptations (xi). While part of that lifeblood contains artistic quality, the other part is profits – this is a business, after all. If success is more greatly determined by corporate consumer culture then success means failure, “since to succeed would only mean that you were the new meat on which the system could feed” (Fisher 9). Thus, *Lulu*, in order to become a unique and new achievement, would to some degree have to fail. It cannot sustain itself in this world of capitalist realism.

The repetition within contemporary music, where it is endlessly spinning in circles without going anywhere new or developing new ideas becomes a powerful metaphor within *Lulu*, powerfully and maddeningly dramatized in the unfaithful, exploitative, and ultimately futureless activities of the characters. “Cheat on Me” perhaps most successfully presents a meta-textual reflection on the crisis currently found in pop music’s continued return and reuse of old material. In using the men around her for her own fun, Lulu is essentially turning these men into the “raw material” to be used however she wishes, which in turn betrays herself. Lulu’s infidelity represents the conflict within adapting the story itself: Lulu becomes a stand-in for contemporary culture’s rampant adaptation and appropriation of prior works, where the overwhelming majority of recycled material is rather facile, showing little respect for prior texts and little interest in

creating something of substantial merit. Texts become commodities to be used indiscriminately in any way the adapter wishes.

Reed's deadpan delivery further underscores the emotional vacuity in Lulu's self-reflective questioning: "Why do I cheat on me / Why do I cheat on thee / Why do I cheat on me / Why do I cheat on me". The repeated question becomes cyclical, never really going anywhere new, but always cycling back to the same question. The rhyme connecting Lulu to the men she sleeps with places equal weight on both parties, suggesting that the damage done is equal between these characters, and that her betrayal of others betrays herself. The song extends to a rather ludicrous eleven-and-a-half minutes as the music slowly builds through false-starts, squeaks, and drones that eventually coalesce into a forward-moving structure. Yet the music, while appearing to take us somewhere is also not taking us very far, but instead drags out the same motifs beyond much reasonable utility. The lyrical repetition is equally overdone and Hetfield's presence is, again, somewhat intrusive, though not as out of place as it is on "Brandenburg Gate." While the process is drawn out longer than ever seems necessary, there is development. This counters the endless cycle to suggest the possibility that progression remains possible, though often difficult to achieve as the drag to remain in a fixed, stagnating position of creative paralysis is very strong. From a conventional standpoint this song is too long by half, with too much repetition and not enough variation—exactly the problem with so many contemporary adaptations seeking to faithfully adapt their source text. Thus, Lulu, as a "passionateless wave upon the sea" describes the crisis within so much of the music scene, which languishes in its desire for sameness rather than difference.

In the days of Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable, Reed recalled that people complained Warhol was ripping people off by charging them money for an uncomfortable show,

complaining that “it was violent, it was grotesque, it was perverted” to which all the collaborators responded, “what are you talking about? it’s fun, look, all these people are having fun” (Bockris 125). Many aspects of the EPI shows, such as light shows and projected video, have become staples of rock concerts today. The EPI by many contemporary standards would not be nearly as shocking as it was in its time, though the abrasive and violent music heard in the existing bootleg performances shows that the music has lost little of its edge and ability to shock and upset, feeling still fresh and full of creative possibility. *Lulu* might not feel nearly as rich and forward-thinking as The Velvets did in the late 60s, but it certainly dishes out some sounds and lyrics that are tough to swallow. And the creators are having fun. There is little satisfaction from Reed constantly talking about his projects as fun, as what exactly he means is sometimes unclear. But it is fairly safe to assume that if he is having fun, he is gleaning some sense of pleasure from what he is doing.

Ultimately, *Lulu* uses the process of adaptation to highlight the problems and difficulties currently facing a culture obsessed with adapting its artistic past. Where adaptation has become standard practice in the art industry, with so much of contemporary music retrogressing into its own past and getting stuck there, *Lulu* takes the past and brutally draws on its power to reach for the future and for something yet unheard. As with *The Raven*, Reed uses infidelity as a means of achieving an alternative form of fidelity, where the power of Wedekind’s play as a modern and offensively original work is embraced and used to strive for a similar result. Yet *Lulu*’s potential successes work through inversion, paradox and contradiction, suggesting just how perceptive Reed is as to the challenges one must face when striving for something new. In order to succeed, one must be ready and willing to fail. If success is entirely circumscribed by an industry and cultural attitude that devalues and sterilizes music, then the only alternative is to die. In some

perverse sense, Lulu's death at the hands of Jack the Ripper, and the demise of every other character, offers an alternative pleasure that suggests that such impending death can present a "door up ahead not a wall" ("Magic and Loss").

Conclusion:

“Let’s Lose Our Minds and be Set Free”

“Pleasure alone lends value to existence; whoever enjoys does not easily part from life, whoever suffers or is needy meets death like a friend.”

-Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*

“Lou Reed is my own hero principally because he stands for all the most fucked up things that I could ever possibly conceive of. Which probably only shows the limits of my imagination.”

-Lester Bangs

“And if it’s true, all so true, that you can’t live up to everyone’s expectations, and if it’s true you cannot be all things to all people, and if it’s true you cannot be other than what you are (passage of time to the contrary), then you must be strong of heart if you wish to work the problem out in public, on stage, through work before ‘them’ who fully expect and predict in print their idol’s fall.”

-Lou Reed, *Fallen Knights and Fallen Ladies*

According to Simon Reynolds, “Every gain in consumer-empowering convenience has come at the cost of disempowering the power of art to dominate our attention, to induce a state of aesthetic surrender” (71). There’s an “experiential thin-ness” (73) to how we consume music these days—low-quality mp3s, multi-tasking, portable listening devices with shoddy headphones: these things, while convenient and cool, also allow new, and at times negative, listening and consumption habits to develop, namely, that music becomes background noise, the subservient soundtrack to our daily toils lived out somewhere else rather than sitting down with an album and listening intently to it, as you must when going to the theater and watching a play or a movie. Albums like *The Raven* and *Lulu* which have roots in plays, are meant to be heard from start to finish as you would watch a play; listeners are meant to not just have the album on, but are expected to listen intently—something few people in 21st-century America have time for, as corporate and cultural demands require more and more of our time. Labor hours are up, prices are up, income is down are just some contextual aspects of a society that no longer has the time it once did for more devoted, even devotional, experiences with art, particularly music, which is so

much easier to incorporate into our multi-tasking lives than literature, movies and theater. Many listeners today, rather than looking for something that arrests their attention, sweeps them away with something unfamiliar, awe-inspiring, mind-boggling, instead (perhaps unknowingly) conform to the desire of *High Fidelity*'s Rob Gordon: "I just want something I can ignore."

Paradoxically, the diminished attention listeners give to music is coupled with them now enjoying greater access to music, as well as a more prominent voice in discussing art and also creating it. Digital technology has allowed listeners to become greater participants. Alan Kirby assesses this development quite well when saying, "Optimists may see this as the democratisation of culture; pessimists will point to the excruciating banality and vacuity of the cultural products thereby generated (at least so far)" (Kirby). There is a good and a bad side to all these developments, with particular tensions developing between the artist and the listener. Trent Reznor, also an artist not afraid to push boundaries, is an equally possessive and controlling artist, believing himself to have primary control over his work. He expressed his concern over the more prominent and immediate response from fans via the internet, and the potential damage this instantaneous feedback loop had on the artist's creative vitality:

When you've been around for a while and you've created, essentially, a brand, that has a certain level of expectation. And it encourages you to not color outside the lines if you pay too much attention to what you expect that fan base wants from you. I think many, many artists have suffered an artistic death by doing just that. I think we live in very dangerous times right now with the Internet and the feedback loop you can get from people who somehow feel their fingers are connected to an impulse—first second of hearing something, I need to write some reaction that gets blasted out to the world. . . [J]ust because everybody now has

the ability to be a self-publisher and broadcast every whim and thought to the world, it doesn't mean that that opinion is necessarily valid or needs to be consumed or listened to or paid attention to. [A]s an artist it's an incredibly dangerous time to pay attention, too much, to what other people think. Because it inevitably leads to either homogenous, crowd-pleasing, meandering work, or it leads to something that's just as insincere—just to go against that.

Reznor, like Reed, believes firmly that the artist, in order to do good work, must maintain control of their career and the direction of their art. Yet the shifting interaction between listeners and musicians presents a new amount of external pressure that artists must work with and sometimes contend with. Patti Smith presented the tension between the artist and their audience this way: “One wants to communicate with the people; one wants to mind-meld with the people, but one must do their work . . . and be the guardian of their work” (*Lou Reed*).

Lou Reed was an aggressive guardian, perhaps more so than either Smith or Reznor. And it was this aggressive and uncompromising approach that helped make Reed's work a vital contribution to pop music and experimentation. Reed wanted to be accepted by fans, have an audience and be praised for his work. But he would not bow to external opinion or do something because other people wanted him to. He stayed to his own path and his own instincts, which at times led him into error—as it does to everyone. There is something in Lou Reed's approach that does believe that innovation, however small that component might be, makes all the difference in the world. If innovation is a small portion of what artists do, as Brian Eno believes, the potential and vast possibilities within that tiny space are massive and mysterious. Yet Reed clearly did not believe that originality happened in a vacuum, with wholly new ideas and songs springing from nothing. The work of the past was there as inspiration and influence. Yet “between thought and

expression” (“Some Kind of Love”) was a vast realm of mysterious innovation. Reed claimed that “rock and roll, for me, has no limits; that’s one of my points about it” (*Lou Reed*). *The Raven* and *Lulu* are just two late-career examples of how few limits Reed thought rock music had. And while limitless possibility and the dangers of not having boundaries and restrictions are relevant and valid, testing the limits of those boundaries is a vital part of creative exploration and experimentation.

The Raven and *Lulu* show that adaptive and appropriative practices are very prominent features of our contemporary cultural and artistic landscape. Hutcheon is correct: adaptations are abundant. Yet this hardly suggests that there is nothing new under the sun and that originality is dried up and dead—to believe so embraces a market cynicism hostile to creativity. Intertextuality and appropriation are mainstays of artistic production, yet, as Reed’s adaptations show, far from representing some recycled past, good adaptations offer radical points of inspiration, opening up whole worlds of creative possibility, where the inspiring works of the past can be used to develop entirely new ways of thinking about and moving toward the future. Adaptations, like all works of art, are produced, according to Film Crit Hulk, by more alchemical means rather than by conforming to a checklist of x, y, z (Film Crit Hulk). Hulk believes great art originates from “A process where you combine intrinsically flawed elements and inherent limitations into something that comes together in a way that feels somehow alive and vital” (Film Crit Hulk). This same thing can be applied to entire careers. Reed’s career is not without deep flaw, yet individual missteps contribute to an entire career that is unquestionably great. His work carries the traces of numerous works of art, but brought together as he did and offered within the historical context that he lived, it is safe to say that there is something vibrantly original and lasting in what he created.

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¹ Copying is a mainstay of the record industry, serving as further advertising for currently popular songs. Often the Velvet Underground would be required to incorporate a number of covers of popular songs into their sets. That they insisted on playing their original songs so much was part of what alienated them from listeners and concert venues.

² Reed has always had big adaptation projects in mind, but circumstances prevented him from doing so. *The Raven* and *Lulu* can be seen as very personal fulfillment of lifelong dreams.

³ In so doing, the leaders of Romanticism essentially followed the same pattern utilized by the leaders within every other movement: they defined themselves in opposition to their predecessors in order to validate their own artistic endeavors. Adaptation theory follows this pattern as well and, like every movement, in distinguishing itself from prior thinking it often errors in slightly distorting prior thought, exposing its own (sometimes deliberate) misreading/misrepresentation of those earlier periods.

⁴ I say on the surface, because Metallica's praise of *Lulu* has largely been in statements like Ulrich's, yet they then undercut this confidence with strange comments reassuring fans that *Lulu* is not their new sound. After *Lulu* was released, and flayed by the public, they quickly announced a new album to come soon (it has yet to come). The *Beyond Magnetic* EP was released and Metallica basically never said anything about it again. Perhaps the most telling thing was Metallica's "tribute" to Reed at the 2014 Grammy Awards, where they performed their own song, "One", accompanied by classical pianist Lang Lang. It is a strange performance in its own right, but why they did not cover a Reed song, or collaborate with another of Reed's collaborators/friends to perform a track from *Lulu* seems like a clear indication that Metallica has little interest in fighting for *Lulu*, but is more willing to give it lip service in the press, while avoiding it in every other sense.

⁵ Wedekind played Jack the Ripper in the first staging of *Pandora's Box*.

⁶ The *Lulu* plays demonstrate that artists have constantly faced censorship and aggressive push-back from external forces, be they social, political, or commercial. Reed keenly understands this pressure, as his own work has faced this same aggressive opposition. The Velvet Underground could not get radio play for "Heroin" because it was too explicitly a drug song. "Sweet Jane" and "New Age" from *Loaded* were initially released in studio-truncated versions without Reed's consent. The studio rejected the original master of *Berlin* and forced Ezrin to cut 15 minutes of material before the label would approve its release. Such cuts devastated Ezrin, who, according to Reed, told him, "Don't even listen to it, just put it in a drawer" (Bockris 220). Ezrin "went back to Canada and flipped out" (220), suffering a breakdown brought on by his disappointment with the finished album and his drug problems. Reed understands too keenly having one's artistic aspirations sullied by studio intrusion, radio rejection and the blowback of popular opinion. Within the music industry, where minor compromises are virtually inevitable, the demands of commerce can and have forced musicians like Reed to not just make minor concessions, but to sometimes viciously and unwillingly transform their work into something significantly different from its intended form (Barker & Taylor 4). Naturally, this has great consequence on how listeners hear and interpret both the artistic work and the artist.

⁷ "I'd need a damn computer to keep track of all these names" (Reed, "The Beginning of a Great Adventure").

⁸ A success that, following Napoleon's example, comes at the subjugation of others.

⁹ Reed has used the divided city as a metaphorical backdrop before with *Berlin*. Therein the divided city symbolized the divided and collapsing relationship of Jim and Caroline, the latter eventually killing herself after a life of sex, alcohol, drugs, and losing custody of her children. Berlin, for Reed, has long been a symbol of fracture and collapse, as well as a source of deep inspiration. Reed seems to keenly understand how our relationships to things and places is never one-dimensional, but often contains multiple layers, which are often in conflict with each other.

¹⁰ Reed does not specifically identify the narrator in "Frustration" as being Schön, but the song surrounds a man's jealousy toward Schwarz, also not mentioned by name, but identified as an artist. *Lulu* is actually the only name in Reed's album, putting all the emphasis on her, while clearly shifting perspective, particularly in the album's second half, to the perspective of some of the men. Erasing the names, in one respect, echoes common practice in early silent film adaptations of novels which relied on the audience's knowledge of the source text to fill in narrative details. In *Lulu* this not only further references this key historical period which Reed already wants us thinking about, but it also alienates the majority of the audience hearing the album—they are not familiar with the source and thus have little pre-knowledge to draw on. Having no names these characters become stand-ins for ourselves, further implicating us in the album's depravity.

¹¹ Schön's frustrated lust for Lulu stems from his jealousy that Lulu is married to Schwarz, which echoes the jealousy expressed by Severin in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*: "I am seized by a mortal fear. I have a presentiment that this man can enchain her, captivate her, subjugate her, and I feel inferior in contrast with his savage masculinity; I am filled with envy, with jealousy" (102).

¹² This is further found in Reed's review of Kanye West's *Yeezus* [2013], where he dismisses West's own racism and misogyny: "Many lyrics seem like the same old b.s. . . . [H]e thinks that getting head from nuns and eating Asian pussy with sweet and sour sauce is funny, and it might be, to a 14-year-old . . . How can you take that seriously?" (Reed, rev. of *Yeezus*). Reed can't take these lines seriously, just as he can't take the rhetoric in pornos seriously. Yet *Lulu*'s use of the same tactic reminds us, again, that behind such jokes might be a substantive point about the vacuity within Lulu and the sex industry.

¹³ This is not to say *Leviathan* isn't forward thinking. Mastodon are certainly ahead of the curve among metal acts, and *Leviathan*'s density and complexity is hardly the result of a band playing only to what is safe. But the album does conform to safe assumption from fans about what they can expect from a Mastodon release. It holds to Mastodon's creative tradition, making quite dissimilar to *Lulu*, which deviates dramatically from anything either Metallica or Reed had done to this point. *Leviathan* holds closer to traditional metal forms, even while pushing those boundaries, than *Lulu* does, and therein is the difference.