

# Punk's Afterlife in Cantina Time

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Music keeps time just as a music's tempo imagines spatiality. Spatialities are imagined through music that moves through and configures them. The analyses of relationships between music and space have informed questions related to sound and architecture, the formation of musical communities, and the political tensions over public space. Music functions as a temporal register: it houses memories and nostalgia in recollections of songs and performances and as sonic archives that construct chronologies that are integrated into cinematic, literary, and audio narrative productions. Music is capable of demonstrating the various ways that space, place, and time inform and constitute one another, and it allows the listener to define and challenge the limits of existing spatial and temporal borders. For example, rhythmic tempo, lyrical melody, and instrumental sound can speed up time. Simultaneously, musical sound can also expand spatial dimensions of place as symbolized through configurations of release and liberation, thereby delimiting normative spatial and temporal registers.

This essay argues that an afterlife of punk exists in the spatiotemporality of the Tejas cantina, or working-class bar.<sup>1</sup> I define afterlife as that which is not a distinction between past and present or the notion of life and an end to life. Rather, in the spirit of Jodi Kim's call to be attentive to urgent projects of writing histories of the future, I define afterlives of punk, in this exploration, by the simultaneous imaginings of "what was," "what could have been," and "what is," in order to posit the ways the soundings of Tejas punk may imagine "what could be."<sup>2</sup> The punk afterlife I consider here is what I refer to as a "*puro pedo*" temporality—that is, a musical imaginary of "what could be" that refuses to break with the past as marker of what one needs to advance, progress, and move beyond. A

*puro pedo* punk temporality fails at moving Tejana and Tejano subjectivities along normative temporalities of growth, progress, and promise.<sup>3</sup> Instead the *puro pedo* tempo sounds an afterlife of punk through a cacophonous tempo that bends the heteronormative temporality of the Tejas cantina and that forges a later-on composed of refusal and contradiction rather than compliance.

The Tejas punk sound of the band Piñata Protest is a sonic manifestation of *puro pedo*. *Puro pedo*, or the general *pedo*, is a Spanish-language term that has a range of meanings, translations, and utility based on when, who, and how one deploys it.<sup>4</sup> In general, *puro pedo* is understood to mean talk with no action, bullshit, “no worries,” or other significations of insouciance. When used in a confrontation, it can be used to accuse someone of being all talk but no action. *Puro pedo* can also be deployed to censure a person or institution for deception. For example, it could be used when a plumber quotes a price for a repair that you know very well is *puro pedo* because it shouldn’t cost that much to make the fix. *Puro pedo* is also a way to describe what may be happening at an event, such as silliness and quotidian actions that display a disregard for normative productive time. One may also refer generally to a *pedo* when referring to a big scene, fuss, drama, or scandalous event (as in, “I heard there was a huge *pedo* at the family reunion”). I describe Piñata Protest’s punk as *puro pedo* because their music often exemplifies themes of nonproductivity, foolishness, and double-dealing. For example, their song “No que sí” is a nonsensical play on the colloquial phrase “No que no,” which generally means “I thought you said no” or “I thought it was no.” “No que sí” or “I thought you said yes” scrambles the meaning of “no que no” by representing “no” and “yes” not as opposites of one another but rather as a space of liminality and a commitment to indecisiveness. In the song, the character and his romantic interest float between commitment and noncommitment.

no que sí? no que no?	I thought it was yes? I thought it was no?
yo me quedo, ya me fue	I will stay, I already left
no que sí? no que no?	I thought it was yes? I thought it was no?
para mi o para ti? <sup>5</sup>	For me or for you?

In struggling to follow through along normative stages toward commitment, the song’s protagonist fails to fulfill the representation of adulthood or maturity, and thus remains stifled in his attempt to achieve a committed coupled relationship. In fact, in his own indecisiveness to commit, he is eventually left to play the role of mere friend, which he finds to be a bunch of *pedo*.

quiero, puedo, no te creo	I want to, I can, I don’t believe you
amigero y que pedo <sup>6</sup>	Friend, now that’s some bullshit

*Pedo* is a reference to time, and it also encompasses space—the here, the there, and thus the spatial dimension of the happening. It is similar to English-language slang phrases such as “I know what time it is” or “you know what time it is” that state a claim to an important reality, an urgency to address a crisis or significant goal, which is never disconnected to the spatiality of an occasion or instance. *Puro pedo* temporally affirms one’s presence—as in, “don’t waste my time”—as well as serves to enact a tactic of refusing to be productive with one’s time. I consider *puro pedo*, or simply *pedo*, as a temporal term that signifies people’s negotiations within spaces that liberate or confine their realities and punctuates their way of narrating the quotidian happenings of their lives in order to mark their presence and genealogy. By extension, *pedo*, in this essay, serves to recalculate the space-time dimensions of an afterlife of punk music through the working-class Tejas cultural imaginary of the cantina. I consider punk not as a musical form or genre but rather as fleeting traces of incommensurate, racialized, working-class genders that persistently refuse to conform. Moreover, the cantina references those abject spaces of tenacity for existence that often are reduced in discourses of regional (versus global) musical practices and vernacular as signifying “provincial” genders and communities. One might say cantinas are temporal testaments of *pedo*. As such, Tejas bands like Girl in a Coma and Piñata Protest churn out *puro pedo* punk to invent pasts as afterlives of punk.

The spatiotemporal configuration of the cantina figures uniquely to signal a Tejas afterlife of punk. Bands based in San Antonio, such as Girl in a Coma and, more recently, Piñata Protest, bring together what would seem to be two unique sonic sets of musical sound: slower tempo Tex-Mex music—and, by extension, Tejas vernacular—and the rapid tempo of punk. Yet, I argue, these musical sounds are not as distinct as one might imagine if one were to merely consider them through their seemingly opposite audible tempos. In fact, punk’s raucous musical force combined with Tex-Mex’s slower tempo of polkas and *cumbias* (what I call in this essay “cantina time”) trace persistent modes of alterity, namely, abject public displays of *lo sucio* or class-disparaging vernacular for “dirty,” “filthy” aesthetics and resistance to abiding by normative distinctions between “work” and “play.” Girl in a Coma and Piñata Protest are known for crafting their unique musical sound and performance by grafting Tex-Mex music and cultural vernacular with the sonic tempos we may recognize as punk music. I consider the spatiotemporality of the cantina and how these bands effect a grafting of a punk afterlife. Fast tempo and slow time are not simply polarities but possibly extensions or dimensions of a unique temporality. Thus, for instance, the musical force of fast-paced punk music set in motion through cantina space cultivates a unique inertia that is defined as the tendency to do nothing or remain unchanged, as resistance to maturity.

Girl in a Coma is a three-member band made up of two sisters, Nina Diaz (vocals) and Phanie Diaz (drums), and longtime friend Jenn Alva (bass). They staged their first music video, of their 2007 hit song “Clumsy Sky,” in Lerma’s Nite Club, one of the oldest cantinas in South Texas. One of the first songs produced by Piñata Protest, a band consisting of lead singer and accordionist Álvaro Del Norte, as well as Matt Cazares, JJ Martínez, and Marcus Cazares, was “Cantina.” I argue that both groups’ punk musical projections through cantina space-time—usually associated with stagnant, economically underdeveloped barrios, working-class masculinities, and indecent women—produce an afterlife of punk, a *puro pedo* punk temporality. *Puro pedo*, in other words, is a spatiotemporal dimension of Tejas punk. Piñata Protest establishes a space-time of punk’s afterlife through Tejas cultural vernacular and iconography, such as the cantina.

### **Chanclas, Peleatos, Pelados y Puro Pedo**

Rudolfo Anaya once wrote of Mexico as a place where the past seems to infuse the present, where “one sees on brown wrinkled faces the presence of the past.”<sup>7</sup> One is never completely lost in Mexico, Anaya has written, because all streets lead to a good cantina, and all good stories start in a cantina.<sup>8</sup> The cantina lives deep in the cultural register of Tejas narratives and is a central referent in musical lyrics, historiography, and literary texts.<sup>9</sup> It is, by mere mention, a spatial icon that accentuates “the when” and “the what” of brown subaltern everyday life in Tejas. Following Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope, I consider the cantina as a chronotope of Tejas cultural imaginaries, one shaped not so much by events as by quotidian doings that repeat themselves in different, dynamic ways. According to Bakhtin: “[In some chronotopes] a locality is the trace of an event, a trace of what had shaped it. Such is the logic of all local myths and legends that attempt, through history, to make sense out of space.”<sup>10</sup> In other chronotopes, “the contingency that covers events is inseparably tied up with space, measured primarily by distance on the one hand and by proximity on the other.”<sup>11</sup>

Chronotopes are matrices where time events and spatial elements are equally valid and coconstituted. As M. Folch-Serra notes, neither space nor time is privileged in Bakhtin’s chronotope; they are at the intersection of temporal and spatial sequences.<sup>12</sup> Folch-Serra, in a discussion of the temporal dimensions of spatial movement, asserts that “individual’s actions are reduced to movement through space or to a change in spatial location, such as migration, residential location, spatial distribution.”<sup>13</sup> Time in the cantina advances toward no historical telos; it follows the unique pattern of the way Tejas dance moves bodies in a counterclockwise circle, symbolically moving backward, refusing a cyclical forward motion. The markers

of time in the space of the cantina keep the pasts ongoing: in the furniture that is never replaced but held together by electrical tape, in the stage space that is never remodeled, in the acoustic technology that is never updated. Time drags in the cantina space. When considering the centrality of the cantina in the Tejas punk of both *Girl in a Coma* and *Piñata Protest*, I am reminded of Folch-Serra's assertions about chronotopes: "The representational importance of a chronotope makes time become palpable and visible. The time of human life and historical time occur within well-delineated spatial areas. It is this fact that makes it possible to structure a representation of events in the chronotope, and around the chronotope." In this way, according to Folch-Serra, "the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a centre for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to an entire narrative—whether a novel, an ethnography, or the analysis of a region."<sup>14</sup> In the case of *puro pedo* punk, the cantina's *mas antes* (earlier time) discursively represents a bending of musical time, the bending of a punk *pedo* or happening, scene, or event that finds an afterlife in the chronotype of cantina space-time.

Tejas cultural poetics are often symbolized as much by places and language as by time. The slowing down of time and tempo is characteristic of what José Limón has called a South Texas cultural poetics.<sup>15</sup> Music scholars have noted that one of the first transformations made to Tex-Mex polkas that set them apart from their German counterparts was the slowing down of the tempo.<sup>16</sup> The term *taquachito* (little possum) is frequently used to refer to the slow-paced dance style of Tejas, in which dancers slide their feet slow and low to the dance floor. "You drag your feet a little bit and people got the impression that it looks like a *taquachito*," Arnoldo De León explains. "One story suggests that the term was coined in San Antonio. Others say that it was here in the Rio Grande Valley."<sup>17</sup> There are a variety of reasons given for why Tejanas and Tejanos dance slow and low to the ground, but one of the most popular is that, due to the intense heat of the region, any physical exertion is preferred at low speed in order to prevent exhaustion and conserve energy. The slow shifting of feet around the dance floor can be understood as symbolic of what Robin D. G. Kelly refers to as "shiftless" behavior, that is, the strategies used, at times, by working-class people of color to resist oppressive conditions of eroding physical labor by slowing down the pace.<sup>18</sup> Space is manipulated by time in Tex-Mex *taquachito* dance, an intentional pace that signifies ways racialized working-class people reconfigure spatiotemporal dimensions in order to survive everyday structural conditions that can be described as stealing years from one's life.

Cantinas are shaped as much by space as by time. Cantinas keep time, through doings, happenings, and the *puro pedo* of its clientele. Simultaneously, the cantina represents a space of congregation for its many customers

who largely exist outside of normative time. Cantinas are where you go after you've done your time; they are the spaces organized by bodily topographies of nonnormative sexualities or those wandering women who know exactly "what time it is." The cantina is where you'll find working-class laborers spending their down time when they are off the grid of production time and where folks seek to break outside of family time. Cantina time is spatialized by *chanclas*—hitting your shoes to dance floor party—time and by the rushed movement of bodies across the dance floor to get in line for "last call." The cantina, I propose, is a Tejas chronotope, a space-time dawdling at a pace distinct from normative temporality, one that forges other spatial dimensions of possibility, potential, and promise.<sup>19</sup>

### Tejas Cantina Time: *Ay te wacho*

San Antonio-based punk band *Girl in a Coma* has been a central musical force in creating a punk sound that often moves through iconographic Tejas cultural codes and places to initiate an afterlife of punk. The dance spaces and music that circulated around the members of the band while they were growing up is not clearly distinct from the punk music they now hear and produce. As drummer Phanie Diaz notes, in explaining the band's decision to cover Selena's "Si una vez," the band "felt the original version [of the] song already had a hidden punk quality"—pointing to the pliability between punk's rapid chaotic tempo and the rhythmic beats of *cumbia*.<sup>20</sup> Bassist Jenn Alva also commented that it is obvious to her that "Si una vez" is sung by Selena with "an angry passion, kinda like punk."<sup>21</sup> One may argue then that Nina Diaz's vocals on "Si una vez" offer not so much a punk version of the song but an afterlife of punk hidden within the raspy declarations of Selena's pleas. Much of what I refer to as a Tejas punk sound by *Girl in a Coma* moves figuratively and literally through spatial imaginaries and iconographies of past Tex-Mex musical times.

When *Girl in a Coma* made their first music video, which was directed by independent filmmaker Jim Mendiola, the band and Mendiola could think of no more appropriate site for the video than *Lerma's Nite Club*.<sup>22</sup> Located in San Antonio's working-class Westside barrio, *Lerma's* is a cantina institution; it is one of San Antonio's most iconographic spaces for Tex-Mex conjunto music.

The cantina is generally defined as a musical space of neighborhood sociality. In South Tejas, the cantina is often associated with working-class patrons, a space tucked within residential and commercial venues, a place that is disregarded but whose location everyone knows. The cantina is emblematic of low-life musical venues that, in conjunction with certain musical styles, especially conjunto, register working-class blight, or culture *de abajo* (from below). For example, Manuel Peña often writes of



Figure 1. Screenshot from the music video “Clumsy Sky” by Girl in a Coma.  
Courtesy Jim Mendiola and Girl in a Coma

the cantina as the quintessential venue for conjunto music and describes the ways Tex-Mex conjunto music is sometimes considered music *de más antes* (of yesteryear), thereby signifying a past that one leaves behind or progresses from.<sup>23</sup> Peña recalls an interview with Armando Marroquin in which Marroquin claimed that conjunto has always had an intertwined relationship with cantina space, often referred to as “rat-traps.”<sup>24</sup> Guadalupe San Miguel similarly states that the (conjunto) accordion has been generally “associated with cantina music, with backwardness, irrelevance, low class status,” along with notions such as “cantina trash.”<sup>25</sup> Juan Tejada states that conjunto music has been much maligned, and usually dismissed as “cantina music” or *musica del rancho, de la gente pobre* (country or rural music, music of the poor).<sup>26</sup>

The notion of conjunto music as backward or country has thus never been disconnected from what the cantina space conjures up in terms of class sensibilities, stagnant mobility, and, therefore, the symbolism of success or progress represented by spaces that one leaves behind.<sup>27</sup> The cantina, according to such references, is the haven that gives relief from harsh toil, providing escape, through dance, to break the monotony of the daily grind awaiting outside its walls.<sup>28</sup> It thereby represents a unique space of working-class homosociality, albeit one reified by heterosexual couplings.<sup>29</sup>

Lerma’s is a prototypical Tex-Mex conjunto cantina: a family-owned working-class bar nestled within a neighborhood area, surrounded by homes as well as by places of daily activity, such as grocery and liquor stores. The cantina is that working-class dive where music bounces off mismatched furniture, across a worn-out dance floor and stage, and through

bad acoustics and wiring. It is the kind of place that serves only two kinds of canned beer, where the bar's background mirror is filled with taped-up pictures of relatives, and where the smells of generations of dancers, hook-ups, and *pleatos* (brawls) still linger. It is a space that, because of a poorly constructed foundation, allows the surrounding neighborhood to hear and imagine the bodily movements and physical transactions taking place on the dance floor. The cantina is a space-time locus of Tejas cultural poetics.

As I have noted elsewhere, the music video of "Clumsy Sky" shot in Lerma's Nite Club plays constantly with shifts in time through the representations of iconic cultural images of the past, such as Jesus Helguera's 1950s image of the Aztec princess Ixtacihuatl and her lover Popocatepetl, titled *Grandeza Azteca*, now the staple image on most Mexican bakery calendars.<sup>30</sup> The video also integrates pictures of well-known Tex-Mex conjunto accordionists, while also capturing men socializing at a bar table. In "Clumsy Sky," the cantina space doesn't merely hold the pasts of heroic Aztecs, "the greats" in Tex-Mex music, or the coveted homosocial time of men; it also holds an afterlife of punk, a sound aged through a here and now configured through cantina bygones. In fact, at the same time that the video of "Clumsy Sky" was being filmed in Lerma's, there was an active campaign to save the cantina from being demolished. In one of the increasingly popular moves by some city governments to rid themselves, in the name of progress, of community spaces and businesses considered eyesores, Lerma's had been cited with various code violations; an evacuation was imminent unless extensive renovations were undertaken by the owners. Girl in a Coma's "Clumsy Sky" sounds an afterlife of punk that is on a cantina time on the verge of being a past. Its disappearance is indicative of normative temporalities of race and class progress that often mark such places as failures in betterment. Girl in a Coma's punk music—sounded within a spatiotemporality of Lerma's cantina past—cannot be merely reduced to a romanticized nod toward a nostalgic Tex-Mex time that was, nor simply the surrendering of Lerma's space to a contemporary generation's punk music, therefore symbolizing a "now" as distinct from "before." Rather, I assert, "Clumsy Sky" represents an afterlife of punk on cantina time, because its dissenting sound finds regeneration within a spatiality whose past has been assembled by subjectivities represented as failing, stagnating, and malfunctioning, as stuck in time. By extension, the cantina is queerly abject, following Kathryn Bond Stockton's understanding of the abject as "what disturbs identity, system, order."<sup>31</sup> In other words, the expeditious tempo and raucous punk sound of Girl in a Coma's "Clumsy Sky" annoyingly persists in recultivating the sonic spatialities of cantinas through uncoupled dance scenes, same-sex hand holding, and irreverent femininities. The music video of "Clumsy Sky" in Lerma's reorients the time and space of the cantina through punk's disorderly conduct, produc-

ing a *pedo* that will forever replay as a testimony against developing into appropriate and suitable Tejas citizen subjects.

In scholarly as well as popular perceptions, the cantina space is where heteronormative masculinity is reduced to registers of rigid normative gender and sexuality, commonly represented through the patronage of single men and heterosexual coupling. The cantina is therefore a social space often romanticized in heteronormative narratives as the place “sin viejas,” a Chicano cultural vernacular sometimes disparagingly referencing places where men find retreat from wives or girlfriends. Thus, while the cantina has certainly often been the source of economic abjection to a neighborhood’s perspective of itself as a family *barrio*, it has also been framed as a site of gender/sexual abjection often violently policed by parameters of gender and sexual normativity. Nevertheless, such gender and sexual restrictions are also what at times make such social spaces libidinally enticing by those forbidden to enter. For example, one can argue that such mechanisms of gender and sexual oppression in cantinas are what become reimagined in Tejas working-class lesbian bars, which seem to convey cantina clandestine spatial aesthetics. By extension, I argue that *Girl in a Coma*’s strident “Clumsy Sky” boisterously fast-forwards alternative cantina pasts where the regulatory practices of female bodies and feminine genders are unsettled from normative constraint. *Girl in a Coma*’s performance in Lerma’s cantina gestures to arguably the most central yet unauthorized feminine figure who has always persisted in the hushed corners of cantina spatial imaginaries: the *cantinera*, that female figure of abject feminine sexuality.

The *cantinera* is the woman who sits alone at the edge of the bar but doesn’t leave alone, the one who can occupy an entire table by herself without question, the one who operates through a system of nonverbal codes and hushed gestures, waiting for the right consequence to come along.<sup>32</sup> The *cantinera*’s presence is the embodiment of nonnormative temporality, the failed womanhood ceasing to evolve into the elderly matriarch, as a figure often herself the center of some *pedo* soon to occur, or as the central protagonist in a tale that forestalls tomorrow. Moreover, I contend that, in fact, the *cantinera* should be understood as a central witness and storyteller of countless narratives of *pedo*. In this way, the *cantinera* can be understood as what keeps cantinas on time, through her elongated gestures, by being the climactic moment, and by avoiding resolution of her waywardness. Cantina time constructs memories of pasts and projections of the hereafter through the irreconcilability of the *cantinera* and the assurance that there will be *pedo*.

In Tex-Mex vernacular there are numerous phrases that capture the spirit of marking a presence and a testimony to claim a future beyond the present. *Ay te watcho* is a Spanglish version of *ay nos vemos* or “until we see

each other again,” and it is a typical phrase one will hear in cantina space. *Ay te watcho* can also mean “see you later,” “I’ll be seeing you,” or “see you soon.” I contend that the phrase *ay te watcho* constructs a connection between those subjects exchanging a moment of farewell that is based on an affirmation that there will be a tomorrow, a later on, and even a future that their reunion will confirm. *Ay te watcho* is a cultural gesture that bears witness to one’s presence—I see you and you see me—and a communal agreement to acknowledge one’s presence within the quotidian negotiations of institutional structures that continually strive to make subaltern brown bodies disappear. *Ay te watcho* exchanges occur in cantinas, on street corners, at the end of work days, and during countless other mundane social encounters that mark time, not merely by the presence of now, but with the promise of the later on.

The centrality of the cantina as the representational venue of Girl in a Coma’s punk performance is, I argue, an *ay te watcho* exchange with punk’s past and a symbolic gesture to punk’s afterlife in Tejas. In the music video of “Clumsy Sky,” the *vato loco* (crazy guy) representing marginal masculinity, the lesbian couple clasping each other’s hands, the uncoupled dancing bodies moving against the temporal flow of the Tex-Mex counterclockwise circle, all represent an iconography of nonconforming genders and sexualities often more associated with punk sound than the music that anchors the space-time of the cantina.

### **Piñata Protest: *Ay que pelados***

Piñata Protest describe their music as “mojado punk,” accordion power punk rock, conjunto punk—a genre that is a mix of Tex-Mex accordion music and punk rock, as well as Irish and alternative music.<sup>33</sup> Repurposing a reference to grandmother’s cooking, they like to say their music is “punk rock like abuela (grandmother) used to make.” While it is not completely clear how the name of the group originated, members of the band have claimed that several words were thrown into a hat and the two that were randomly chosen were the ones that became the band’s name. When Álvaro Del Norte could not find an accordion player who liked to play punk or a front man to perform his punk songs in Spanish, he taught himself to play the accordion. Bringing the old crowd (i.e., conjunto enthusiasts) together with the younger generation of more avid listeners of punk has been described by Marcus Cazares as pure chaos.

The button accordion is what gives Piñata Protest its unique sound. The sound of this instrument is also what most often characterizes music such as “Tex-Mex” and is what instructs the feet to stay on *taquachito* time. Piñata Protest takes gushy romantic narratives, usually the themes that *boleros* are made from, and transforms them into witty, cynical love songs



Figure 2. Piñata Protest. From left: Matt Cazares, Álvaro Del Norte, Marcus Cazares, and JJ Martínez. Photo by John Huskin. Courtesy Piñata Protest

such as “Cold Fries” or “Love Taco.” The Spanglish lyrics represent a political poetics that bear witness to the racialized legacy of language and power for the Mexican-descended. Piñata Protest disregards musical genre conventions by merging dissimilar musical traditions. The playful lyrics of endearment and put-downs, moving between Spanglish (the sound of the racialized other) and English (not the dominant language in Tex-Mex conjunto music), in fact represent what *pelados* and *peladas* (lower-class Chicanos and Chicanas) do best, as poets of the quotidian.

The performative masculine genders performed make Piñata Protest *una bola de pelados* (a group of disobedient, déclassé, bad-behaving men). José Limón, in his book on South Texas masculinity and cultural poetics, following the definition of Samuel Ramos, notes: “[The] *pelado* or lower-class man belongs to a most vile category of social fauna . . . a form of human rubbish. . . . Life from every quarter has been horrible to him and his reaction has been resentment.”<sup>34</sup> Limón, referencing Ramos, notes that verbal retaliations following themes of self-affirmation are launched in crude and suggestive language: “He has created a dialect of his own, a

diction which abounds in ordinary words, but he gives these words a new meaning.”<sup>35</sup> While Ramos suggests that the pelado’s actions can at times be ferocious and aggressive, I am more interested in the figure of the pelado in relation to Piñata Protest’s punk music for the ways it represents a working cultural code of a distinct South Tejas punk temporality or what I refer to as *puro pedo* punk. These punk pelados are committed to a music that is riddled with musical discordance, from the bastardized Spanglish lyrical vocabulary to a pride in shiftlessness and foolishness.

In 2010 Piñata Protest released their first full-length CD, *Plethora*, on Saustex Records, and described the release as “amphetamine norteño,” “ranchero punk,” and “*puro pedo* (no bullshit) punk rock.”<sup>36</sup> The influence of Spanish-language music is not romanticized by its band members as cultural heritage but rather integrated ambivalently, having a complicated relationship to their musical project. Asked to describe their style of music, band member JJ Martínez stated that Spanish-language music is what they grew up on because it’s what their parents listened to.<sup>37</sup> Martínez even described hating the kind of music that he associated with an uncle getting drunk. JJ expressed his annoyance with the Spanish-language music of their parents and grandparents as “overplayed at all the debuts and weddings.”<sup>38</sup> For Piñata Protest, integrating Spanish and Spanglish into their punk music is not related to representing themselves through notions of Mexican cultural authenticity but rather as a means to engage the past through language circuits where memories and events are flawed and imprecise, rather than as linear historical trajectories.

Álvaro Del Norte writes most of the song lyrics, while the compositions are arranged mostly by what feels good to him. Del Norte states that the lyrics and themes are decided by how the music informs him and by whatever is important to him, which is exemplified in the way he describes why he writes and chooses titles for the band’s songs: “When we finish each song, the music that is, I put lyrics or themes to them. I’ll hear a song and think, this one should be about drinking, or this one should be about whatever subject.”<sup>39</sup> The song “Campesino,” for instance, was partly influenced by the fact that, for a portion of his life, Álvaro and his family were *campesinos* (farm workers) in Washington State. Lyrics such as “ayi lo miro en el campo con cortadas en la piel . . . dolor en la espalda y en su boca tiene sed” (“I see him in the fields with cuts on his skin . . . pain in his back and thirst in his mouth”) capture the sobering, harsh working conditions set against the grating rapid fire of Del Norte’s accordion. The repetitive verse “olvidado, sin destino . . . pa’que otros coman bien” (“forgotten, without destiny . . . so that others can eat well”) is roared forcefully by Del Norte in a polka-based rhythm. Here, as well, “Campesino” represents the labor exploitation of farm worker or field worker while simultaneously setting such descriptions to a crazed thunderous beat.

Piñata Protest's song "Cantina," with Spanglish-infused lyrics, centers on the theme of a bar brawl that ensues after a failed masculine conquest of a *mamacita* (good-looking woman).

Cantina

con cerveza en la mano todos estamos happy,  
mis chavos y yo gusta decir  
vamos todos a cantina a tomarnos gasolina,  
tequila, y lonestars for me please

y yo no se! lo que tome, pero traime otra copa pues  
y yo no se! lo que tome, pero chica ques tu nombre pues?

so i ask this mamacita if i could please dance with her  
bailamos to that cumbia beat  
and well then here comes her novio que me dice: "hey man off her!"  
y le digo: "you smell like pee"

y yo no se! si si le pege, pero duro con chingasos fue  
y yo no se! si el sabe, that i dont have a health insurance plan

y luego nos tiraron con todos mis hermanos de la cantina, yeah we had to  
leave  
"y ni traten de regresar o a la migra los echaran" y nos fuimos muy unhappy

y yo no se! si yo llore, por la cantina o esa chuca pues  
y yo no se! me desmaye, pues mañana chavos otra ves

Piñata Protest's "Cantina" is filled with gestures indicative of *pelados*, or guys behaving mischievously or inappropriately, which predictably begins with the high consumption of alcohol and the eventual *chingasos* or fist-fight. The Spanglish song lyrics also typify a blatant offense against the formal rules of English and Spanish, thereby signaling the undisciplined lower-class status of the protagonist recalling the tale. "Cantina" is also a space-time of failed Chicano heteromascularity, the standard representation of masculinity associated with cantinas in literature, music, and visual culture. It is a failure most evident when the protagonist attempts to dance *cumbia* with the *mamacita* and is confronted by her *novio* (boyfriend) and told to step away. Rather than an assertive reply to the boyfriend that would attempt to stake a claim for the woman, the protagonist responds with a silly, foolish put-down: "you smell like pee." The protagonist then comments that, although he knows there were *chingasos*, he is not sure if he even landed a punch on the boyfriend. The next lyric describes how the protagonist is not so much concerned at the moment with whether he is winning the fight, much less the woman, as he is with the fact that he has no health-insurance plan. In this cantina space-time, punk's *puro pedo* temporality is one that works against the normative

heteromascuine temporality of bars: the entrance of the heterosexual man with the objectifying gaze upon feminine objects of desire, the defeat of masculine competition, and the eventual victory over both the weaker masculine and feminine genders.

### **Punk's Afterlife in the Cantina's *mas antes* (earlier time)**

Piñata Protest and *Girl in a Coma* reconfigure an afterlife of punk music through the time-space of the cantina. They propel punk music's *puro pedo* temporality through the Tejas cantina, *chanclas*, *ay te watcho* futures, and quotidian actions of its *pelados* and *peladas*. Moreover, punk music's sonic movement through the cantina chronotope releases the fixity of the cantina in a provincial, unsophisticated *mas antes* time. Piñata Protest's "Cantina" pushes cantina time into warp speed, in other words, a fast rate of covering distance. According to the principle of gravitational time dilation, time passes at different rates because time is relative and local and not absolute. Gravitation is known to warp space-time because time slows down according to the presence of gravitational potential. Thus, time, or in this case, the fast-paced musical tempo of punk, is never disconnected from space. The closer an object is to a gravitational potential, the slower will time be for it. Drawing an analogy from this principle of physics in order to comprehend the rapid tempo of punk sound in relation to cantina's space-time, I contend that Piñata Protest's rapid and clamorous punk rhythm should not be understood in opposition to the lag-time and slow time representative of Tejas cantina time or the notions of *taquachito* time. Rather, principles of physics allow us to consider how time is capable of conceiving different spatialities when we also understand the varied ways it changes according to varied spatial dimensions.

According to gravitational rules of physics, when one moves to another space coordinate, one automatically causes her position on the time coordinate to change, thereby causing time to elapse differently. One travels through time, but, when such travels move through different configurations of space, this allows for a possible decrease in travel time. *Puro pedo* is sounded through the familiar, fast musical tempos of punk, but also the engagement and integration of Tejas cultural codes, Spanglish terms, and iconic representations of cantinas, thereby bending space-time. In other words, the song "Cantina" is not simply a musical fusion, where past (Tex-Mex) meets present (punk) or where an earlier time (Tex-Mex conjunto) is given future time (through a punk rendition); it is rather an afterlife of punk. Through a bending of punk tempo in cantina time, different dimensions of here and there, of past and future emerge. The *puro pedo* punk of Tejas is a past touching futurity where two seemingly distinct

musical tempos pass fleetingly. The Tejas cantina is where both *taquachito* time meets up with punk's *peladas* and *pelados* who are persistently never on time.

One trace of punk's afterlife is in cantina time. In Tejas punk, the cantina chronotope marks a punk afterlife through the sonic bending of rapid tempo with dissonant scramblings of Tejas vernacular, which create possible moments of disassembling contemporary globalization structures that collapse time-space upon the bodies and mundane joys of disenfranchised people. *Puro pedo* punk temporality also draws out and extends the *mas antes* of the cantina's presence—often the not-so-subtle provincial symbolisms attributed to “regional” cultures—and their reductions to symbols of stagnation and stunted progress. Rather, these contemporary performances of Tejas punk endorse the *puro pedo* events and exchanges cultivated in the cantina, a space-time in which generations of brown, labored bodies, tragic memories, and sweaty sensualities refuse to be a *mas antes* repaired by progress and evolved, sexual cultures. Moreover, Piñata Protest's “Cantina” and Girl in a Coma's cantina infused “Clumsy Sky” exemplify Bakhtin's assertion that chorontopes are not timeless or master symbols; instead, the cantina is a space-time that bends and flexes.<sup>40</sup> The cantina operates as a spatiotemporal chronotope in these examples that, following Judith Butler's assertions, can be considered abject traces of Tejas's “provincial” culture, an abject “provinciality” that unabashedly refuses to expire.<sup>41</sup> In this way, the musical production of Tejas punk by Piñata Protest and Girl in a Coma cannot be simply engaged as yet another example of the amalgamations of ever-evolving punk that would simply reduce their music to a contemporary generation's nostalgic reflection on their Tex-Mex musical past. Rather, this musical rendering of cantinas is a heretofore of punk, a musical assemblage that sounds its tempo backward to graze cantina time. As such, Tejas punk sounds *ay te watcho* as an afterlife; it blares a *puro pedo* punk temporality that bends the space-time of here and now toward inspirations for when and where.

## Notes

1. I use the Spanish term *Tejas* in lieu of *Texas* in order to denote the geopolitical, cultural imaginary of peoples of Mexican descent. *Tejas* acknowledges what historians and sociologists have referred to as Mexican “South Texas,” which is much more than a geographic region but is a geopolitical, cultural imaginary always in process, one that is composed of contested and contradictory histories of Mexican presence through multiple nation-making projects, a unique language and cultural vernacular, and cultural sensibilities persistently on alternative temporalities.

2. Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critiques and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 241.

3. Judith Halberstam refers to two modes of heteronormative time: “time of reproduction” and “time of inheritance.” See Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time*

- and Place: *Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 3.
4. The term *pedo* literally translates as “fart,” although this is a very different meaning from what is understood by the term *puro pedo* that circulates as Tejas vernacular and is the focus of this analysis.
  5. Piñata Protest, “No que si,” *Plethora*, Saustex Media, 2012. Song written by Piñata Protest.
  6. *Ibid.*
  7. Rudolfo A. Anaya, *The Man Who Could Fly and Other Stories* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 88.
  8. Rudolfo A. Anaya and Antonio Márquez, *Cuentos Chicanos: A Short Story Anthology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 2.
  9. See, for example, *Las Peleonerías* (lithograph) by Carmen Lomas Garza; Arnaldo De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas: A Brief History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Manuel Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).
  10. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 189.
  11. *Ibid.*, 99.
  12. M. Folch-Serra, “Place, Voice, Space: Mikhail Bakhtin’s Dialogical-Landscape,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 8 (1990): 262.
  13. *Ibid.*, 262.
  14. *Ibid.* See also Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 177: “Carnival place becomes the time for working out, in a concretely sensuous half-real and half-playacted form, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful hierarchy relationships of non-carnival life.”
  15. The notion of “cultural poetics” is drawn from José Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).
  16. Manuel Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).
  17. De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas*, 58.
  18. Robin D. G. Kelly, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 17–19.
  19. Scholarship on queer temporalities includes Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Freeman, “Special Issue: Queer Temporalities,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, nos. 2–3 (2007); Kara Keeling, *The Witch’s Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*.
  20. Phanie Diaz, online chat interview by the author, 17 September 2010.
  21. Jenn Alva, online chat interview by the author, 17 September 2010.
  22. Jim Mendiola, interview by the author, 15 May 2011.
  23. Manuel Peña, *Musica Tejana* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1999), 110.
  24. *Ibid.* Peña often describes the audience and listening public of conjunto music as “working class.”
  25. Guadalupe San Miguel, *Tejano Proud: Tex-Mex Music in the Twentieth Century* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1999), 97.
  26. Juan Tejeda and Alverado Valdez, eds., *Puro Conjunto, an Album in Words*

and Pictures: Writings, Posters, and Photographs from the Tejano Conjunto Festival en San Antonio, 1982–1998 (Austin: Center of Mexican American Studies, University of Texas, 2001), 369.

27. Ibid.; Manuel Peña, *The Mexican American Orquesta: Music, Culture, and the Dialectic of Conflict* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 1.

28. Tejeda and Valdez, *Puro Conjunto*, 21.

29. Tejeda and Valdez, *Puro Conjunto*, and Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto*.

30. Deborah R. Vargas, *Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of La Onda* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 222–24.

31. Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer”* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 13.

32. The *cantinera* figure, yet to be fully analyzed in Chicano studies, can arguably be traced back to the spaces of fandango dance and music in the nineteenth-century Southwest. Arnoldo De León notes that the “fandango was identified with lewd passions and lascivious señoritas described as sensuous.” Arnoldo De León, *The Tejano Community, 1836–1900* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1982), 172–73.

33. “Live Review: Girl in a Coma @ The Independent, SF 5/1/12,” *Owl Mag*, 4 May 2012, [www.theowlmag.com/tag/pinata-protest](http://www.theowlmag.com/tag/pinata-protest).

34. Limón, *Dancing with the Devil*, 123.

35. Ibid.

36. Quotation can be found on Piñata Protest’s Myspace page, [www.myspace.com/pinataprotest](http://www.myspace.com/pinataprotest) (accessed 10 September 2012).

37. As quoted in Ian Morales, “Interview: The Puro Peto Punk Rock of Piñata Protest,” *Austin Vida: Latino Lifestyle and Culture Magazine*, 9 March 2009, [austinvida.com/music/2009/puro-peto-punk-rock-pinata-protest](http://austinvida.com/music/2009/puro-peto-punk-rock-pinata-protest).

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. See also Dana Luciano’s discussion of “chronobiopolitical” where she explains Foucault’s notion of biopower as a spatiotemporal phenomenon, incorporating “the production of ‘life’ according to a number of temporalities,” in her book *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 10–12.

41. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

