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Celebrity, Punk, Time, Nostalgia, and the Unpredictable Trajectories of Fame in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

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Abstract

The paper investigates the pursuit, the pitfalls and the unexpected trajectories of fame in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (2011). In the novel, celebrity, its pursuit and its loss are crucial in the main plot emerging from the thirteen interlinked storylines that delineate the countercultural context of the punk-rock scene from the 1970s to the present – most of which investigate the forms and meanings of celebrity in the transition towards the dematerializaton of experience with the advent of the new media.
What is the relation between art, fame, and real and virtual identities in the transition from the "world of objects and venues" to the iPod era? Can celebrity be part of a countercultural universe, or can it be only a vicarious accomplishment? How are the vestiges of the old celebrity world reshaped in the era of instant fame? To what extent can artistic/aesthetic value shift from its content to its circulation and dissemination?
The paper investigates celebrity and its corollaries at the turn of the millennium as depicted in Egan's novel: the craving for eternal youth and the immortalizing thriving of fame and its symbols; the relation between fame and the celebrity's body; the forms and fate of authenticity in the new mediascapes and systems of consumption.

"The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media."

(Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*)

1. The rock novel, counterculture, and postmodern aesthetics

The first unpredictable trajectories one has to face in *A Visit from the Good Squad* (2011) are those of the plot itself; the many storylines, narrators and points of view compose such a fragmented, de-centered narrative that the text has defied simple categorization since its publication, with definitions ranging from multifocal novel and short-story cycle to a literary transposition of both the concept album format and of the network system of social media. The attempt to encompass the plurality, the decentralization, the multivocality of the text and its

formal elusiveness is effectively encapsulated by the "heroic one-sentence try" written by the *New York Times* reviewer:

> The book starts with Sasha, a kleptomaniac, who works for Bennie, a record executive, who is a protégé of Lou who seduced Jocelyn who was loved by Scotty who played guitar for the Flaming Dildos, a San Francisco punk band for which Bennie once played bass guitar (none too well), before marrying Stephanie who is charged with trying to resurrect the career of the bloated rock legend Bosco who grants the sole rights for covering his farewell "suicide tour" to Stephanie's brother, Jules Jones, a celebrity journalist who attempted to rape the starlet Kitty Jackson, who one day will be forced to take a job from Stephanie's publicity mentor, La Doll, who is trying to soften the image of a genocidal tyrant because her career collapsed in spectacular fashion around the same time that Sasha in the years before going to work for Bennie was perhaps working as a prostitute in Naples where she was discovered by her Uncle Ted who was on holiday from a bad marriage, and while not much more will be heard from him, Sasha will come to New York and attend N.Y.U. and work for Bennie before disappearing into the desert to sculpture and raise a family with her college boyfriend, Drew, while Bennie, assisted by Alex, a former date of Sasha's from whom she lifted a wallet, soldiers on in New York, producing musicians (including the rediscovered guitarist Scotty) as the artistic world changes around him with the vertiginous speed of Moore's Law. (Blythe 2010, n.p.)

Punk and rock music, its industry and its transformation have imbued and given life to a distinct subgenre of the anglophone novel in the first decade of 2000s, that includes Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* (2003) to Michael Chabon's *Telegraph Avenue* (2012), and Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* (2010), named in 2013 by the critic Florence Dore as a "rock novel," an early 21st century phenomenon that finds in antecedents in Don DeLillo's *Great Jones Street* (1973), Bret Easton Ellis' *Less Than Zero* (1985), and Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* (1996). Music, its relation to the cultural and countercultural movements from the 1960s and 1970s, its impact on new generations, and its global reach are elements shared by these novels, together with the anxieties related to the passing of time, in a subgenre that, as Moorey points out, "has come of age while rock music itself has grown old" (Moorey 2014, 66). As David Hering notes,

> The contemporary rock novel […] emerges at the time when the babyboomer generation, so strongly associated with the music of the 1960s, begin to reach late middle age, with their own children entering adulthood. These novels occupy a position both adherent to and distant from the rock and roll era, and their work has a strong preoccupation with aging and obsolescence; the narratives, located in an era when aging boomers listen nostalgically to music from their youth and with the recording industry in an apparently terminal state of decline, embed music within broader frames of cultural finitude, dislocation, and intergenerational conflict. Accordingly, the novels often operate a doubled mode of temporality, with the length of the song itself being mapped onto historical or generational time. (Hering 2021, 246)

Rich in both tones and irony, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* has been primarily investigated for its metaliterary qualities, its articulated metafictionality and intermediality (Pignagnoli 2023;

Fladager 2020; Bruhn 2016; Cowart 2015; Hartmann 2015) and, in particular, for the ways it structurally appropriates the medialities the novel explores thematically. The form of the novel itself resembles that of a concept album, where the thirteen chapters correspond to thirteen interrelated tracks, connected by the same storyline, each with a different narrator or point of view: the first six chapters form the part/side A, and the remaining chapters the part/side B (the seventh significantly entitled "From A to B"). Particular emphasis has been given to the insight and investigation of the effect of the new mediascapes on music and on the cultural industry, by turning the former into structural expedients of the novel itself. It is precisely the focus on cultural industry – the music industry in particular – and the impact of social media on society that allows *A Visit from the Goon Squad* to go beyond the limits and definitions of a "generational" or "rock novel." Spanning a period from the late 1970s to the mid 2020s (and thus looking both backward and forward, in the gap between its publication and the present moment), the novel explores the multifaceted world of contemporary American music culture and counterculture, its relation to the market, technology and the media and, as a consequence, the forms and the fate of celebrity in the last fifty years.

2. Goons, punks, rebellion, and consumption

Given its metatextual and intermedial nature, it is not surprising that in *A Visit From the Goon Squad* several discourses of and on celebrity and its modalities are directly related to the literary world – whose limits and possibilities, according to some critics (Bruhn 2016, Hartmann 2015), are Egan's ultimate object of investigation. The literary and the musical world are often intertwined in the thirteen chapters, sometimes at the level of the plot, other times in a metatextual form, in a pervasive dialogue between cultural establishment (mostly represented by the literary world, and especially literary journalism) and counterculture (the punk and rock aesthetics) and their relation to music industry. Significantly, the imbrication of the literary and the music worlds is always related to fame and celebrity discourse, and to the way fame is constructed and disseminated.

One of the crucial characters related to the celebrity construction and the literary market is La Doll, a PR agent (with a loose connection to one of the main characters, Bennie), whose "plung[ing] from the heights of […] public relations clout to the depths of has-beenism" (Cowart 2015, 243) is the consequence of her attempt to rival the prestige and exclusivity of Truman Capote's "Black and White Ball," to celebrate celebrity itself. As Egan writes:

> The Party, it was called, or The List. As in: Is he on the list? A party to celebrate – what? In retrospect, Dolly wasn't sure; the fact that Americans had never been richer, despite the tumoil roiling the world? The party had nominal hosts, all famous, but the real hostess, as

> everyone knew, was La Doll, who had more connections and access and juju than all of these people combined. And La Doll had made a very human mistake […] She had thought that because she could do something very well (namely, get the best people in one room at one time), she could no other things well too. Like design. And La Doll had had a vision: broad, translucent trays of oil and water suspended beneath small brightly colored spotlights whose heat would make the opposing liquid twist and bubble and swirl. (2011, 162)

La Doll's mistake is to underestimate the heat of the spotlights that would eventually melt the trays, "sending scalding oil onto the heads of every glamorous person in the country and some other countries, too" (162). Accused of doing it on purpose, La Doll had to serve six months for criminal negligence, face a class-action suit that left her with nothing, and (even worse) endure that glamorous world's contempt. La Doll's parable is also dense with metatextual references to celebrity discourse in the aftermath of her fall: in her attempt to rise from her own ashes, she accepts the job of "softening" the image of a genocidal dictator by constructing a fake love relationship between the latter and a young American actress fallen into disgrace, Kitty Jackson, as recounted in Chapter 8 "Selling the General." This chapter thematizes the subgenres of narrative celebrity journalism and commercial public relations writing, together with the ethical issues related to fame and the attempt to achieve it at all costs.

Celebrity journalism, both as a discourse on celebrity and as an assessment of the writer's own fame, is also at the core of the following subplot, probably the most significant concerning the convergence of metatextuality and the thematization of fame. "Forty-Minute Lunch: Kitty Jackson Opens Up About Love, Fame and Nixon" recounts the interview with the abovementioned young actress conducted by the verbose and insecure journalist Jules Jones. The chapter is the long, hyper-conscious version of the events written by Jones in prison, after he is sentenced for having attempted to rape Kitty at the end of the interview. Thematically, the chapter parodies narrative celebrity journalism; however, as critics noted (e.g., Kreilkamp 2021; Lambert 2020; Churchwell 2011), its hyper-conscious, verbose and humorous form, together with the depiction of Jules Jones, constitute an implicit, metatextual reference – this time to the journalistic style and persona of David Foster Wallace, probably the last literary celebrity in 21st-century American literature.

Although the novel effectively incorporates various examples of stardom related to mainstream culture (a once-successful PR agent, an actress, and a trendy journalist) that allow Egan to investigate the extent to which literary discourses and networks prove crucial in the construction, sustenance and dissemination of fame, Egan's preferred context for the articulation of celebrity discourse is undoubtedly music and the music industry. Thus, the novel can be read as an investigation of how celebrity intersects, reshapes and is reshaped by countercultural movements and by new and social media in the rock and punk world.

The music world is evoked from the very title, the "visit from the goon squad," mentioned several times in the text in relation to the passing of time and the pitfalls or the vanishing of fame. "Goon" is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "a foolish or eccentric person," or "a thug, especially one employed to inflict violence on or intimidate others." Paul Friedlander underlines the semantic affinity of the word with rock music, quoting Frank Sinatra's claim, in the late 1950s, that rock 'n' roll music was written and performed "for the most part by cretinous goons" (Friedlander, qtd in Moling 2016, 52). The link between the word "goon" and the music world could be further strengthened, according to Kreilkamp, by Elvis Costello's song "Goon Squad," from his 1979 album *Armed Forces* – a song Egan probably knew: "Goon squad / They've come to look you over and they're giving you the eye / Goon squad / They want you to come out to play / You'd better say goodbye" (Costello, qtd in Kreilkamp 2021, 18-9).

The four most representative characters related to celebrity and its narratives cover nearly the whole spectrum of the celebrity industry:[1] two are producers, Lou and Bennie; and two are guitarists, Scotty and Bosco. Lou belongs to the previous generation, the "California-based golden age" of the music industry and makes his first appearance in the novel as the famous producer the punk band The Flaming Dildos (whose name recalls the most iconic band of English punk, the Sex Pistols) need to impress during their first (and only) concert at San Francisco's club The Mab. Lou's path intersected the Flaming Dildos' when he gives a ride to one of the band members, the beautiful (and underage) Jocelyn: "She was hitchhiking home from downtown and he pulled up in a red Mercedes and drove her to an apartment he uses on his trips to San Francisco. He unscrewed the bottom of a can of Right Guard, and a baggie of cocaine dropped out. Lou did some lines off Jocelyn's bare butt and they went all the way twice…" (Egan 2011, 50). Lou is the very personification of the seductions and dangers associated with the celebrity world. A restless fortyish ladies' man, wealthy, athletic and suntanned, with "shaggy blond hair" (57) and six children from three different partners, a collection of sports cars and a stunning villa in front of the ocean where women, musicians and other celebrities come and go and excess and tragedies unfold, Lou embodies a specific form of stardom – the (hyper)masculine type (Douglas and McDonnell 2019, 213), almost predatory, where self-affirmation and chauvinism dangerously collide.

While Lou represents the Californian "golden age" of music industry and the epitome of "celebrity as capital," that is, the neoliberal subject who is the creator of his own destiny, Bennie and Scotty, the founders of the Flaming Dildos, belong to the following generation, and to the

[1] "Celebrity culture today consists of four major building blocks: the celebrity, of course, the media, the public, and the celebrity production industry, which consists of managers, agents, promoters, and some elements of the media, from gossip magazines to Instagram. Celebrity itself has typically involved four elements: a person, some kind of achievement, subsequent publicity, and then what posterity has thought about them ever since" (Douglas and McDonnell 2019, 2).

punk movement of the late 70s. The intimidating, subversive and destructive elements intrinsic in the word "goon" fit perfectly with the anger of the Flaming Dildos during their rehearsals in Scotty's garage in San Francisco and the lyrics that prophesy the future of most of the band. As Rhea, a female member, recalls,

> Where we live, in the Sunset, the ocean is always just over your shoulder and the houses have Easter-egg colors. But the second Scotty lets the garage door slam down, we're suddenly enraged, all of us. Bennie's bass snickers to life, and pretty soon we're screaming out the songs, which have titles like "Pet Rock," and "Do the Math," and "Pass Me the Kool-Aid," but when we holler them aloud in Scotty's garage the lyrics might as well be: *fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck*.[…] Marty plugs in his violin and we launch into our best song, "What the Fuck": you said you were a fairy princess / you said you were a shooting star / You said we'd go to Bora Bora / Now look at where the fuck we are… (Egan 2011, 51)

The Flaming Dildos publicly appear as an all-male band. Rhea notes that "Jocelyn and I write all the lyrics and work out the tunes with Bennie and Scotty. We sing with them in the rehearsal, but we don't like being onstage" (48). In line with the aggressive, hypermasculine, self-destructive models of punk identity (at least in the first phase of the movement), their anger takes on a physical dimension during the punk concerts they attend, where below the stage people "tussle and push and get knocked down and pulled back up" (53), and most of all during their only performance, when the audience, after throwing garbage and drinks and slamdancing "hard, the kind of dancing that's basically fighting" (60), assault the stage, and the band members end up kicking them off.[2]

Since these attitudes and aesthetics originated in the attempt to resist the musical commercialism of the early '70s, and constituted a form of protest against the conformism and consumerism of the British and the American society, they may seem at first incompatible with the logic of celebrity, the latter being an essential feature of that same capitalism the punk movement tried to oppose.[3] However, that system could, and did, cannibalize the very tendencies meant to contrast it, including the self-destructive ones, and ended up transforming the anti-commercialism of punk into a reproducible, and thus marketable, element.

The first example of the music industry's capability of buying out is Bennie himself – once a rebellious, not very talented bass player of Latino origins, turned by Lou into a successful music producer. Although Lou is himself a Gatsby-esque figure (and so too is his villa, with its glamorous parties and tragedies), his mentorship of Bennie echoes in many ways the role played

[2] As Ryan Moore explains, "As hardcore accelerated the tempo of punk music, it provoked more physically confrontational forms of dancing and response among its audience. This new form of 'slamming' supplanted 'pogoing' at hardcore shows […] Hardcore shows thus became more male dominated and individualistic in the competitive displays of 'toughness' among audience members" (Moore 2009, 53-4).
[3] For the relation between celebrity culture and consumption-based economy, see Sternheimer 2015.

by Dan Cody and Wolfsheim in Jay Gatz/Gatsby's 'from rags to riches' parable. Like Cody and Wolfsheim, Lou takes his protegee under his wing after recognizing the young boy's potential; and like his literary predecessors, Lou's power and charm result from forms of exploitation (sexual and emotional, in addition to economic). In the case of Bennie, a *cholo*, his desire to become an accepted member of the 'old money' white élite (here located in Crandale, Upstate New York, where he moves with his son and wife Stephanie after his success), and his sexual liaison with the most prominent (married) *belle*, which will cause his divorce, are both reminiscent of Gatsby's economy of desire, where love, money and attempts to belong are deeply imbricated. The downfall in Bennie's private life parallels the professional one: when his company is bought out, he is given a payout – two facts that sanction his obsolescence and inability to adapt to the changes in the music industry.

The extent to which celebrity entails commodification – and the degree to which even the punk aesthetic can be turned into a commodity – is evident when, besides leather jackets, torn jeans, pin piercings, and Mohawk hairstyles, self-destructiveness itself becomes a product of consumption. The perfect example is Bosco's parable: the once famous guitarist of the most important band Bennie produced in the 80s, the Conduits, a guy "who had made Iggy Pop look indolent onstage" (Egan 2011, 143) is now an obese, and cancer-ridden forgotten has-been. Persuaded that he is going to die, he plans a *gran finale*, the "Suicide Tour," that would allow him to momentarily re-experience celebrity – by (predictably) dying onstage, something the journalist Jules Jones should document. Merging rock concert, reality show and extreme performance,

> Bosco here seems to play out, to a radical extreme, a logic of the contemporary art world: the artist, as part of the necessary process of self-commodifying for a marketplace, is eventually pushed to a more and more thorough "documentation," as audiences demand more and more "relics" and mementos of the artist and her art. One way out of this logic would be suicide, turning one's life and art into one final, conclusive "spectacle" that at once fully "satisfies" and "refuses" the market in a single paradoxical gesture. (Kreilkamp 2021, 51)

It is only by rejecting those self-destructive tendencies and the excesses of his rock star years that he can revert the commodification process (and, as a corollary, save his life) and fulfill what the journalist Jules Jones foretold his sister Stephanie after his first meeting with Bosco: "If you'd asked me this morning, I would have said we were finished. ... All of us, the whole country – the fucking world. But now I feel the opposite. [...] Sure, everything is ending ... but not yet" (Egan 2011, 151).

3. Between A and B: nostalgia and search for lost time

Deferring the end, fighting against decay: together with the cannibalizing potential of the music industry, Bosco's story reveals another crucial element in the dialectics among celebrity discourse, punk-rock aesthetic and the music industry, that is, the antagonistic relationship with time. In a novel that extends the pathos of aging from individuals to the whole punk/rock culture, time and its transiency are explicitly evoked from the very epigraphs of Egan's novel, extracts from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*.

Time is both a thematic and a structural element in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, and is crucial to the celebrity dynamics. Aligned with the punk aesthetic, the non-chronological order of the events is apparently meant to create chaos and deceive time: "cacophonous, transgressive, and resistant to conventional linear structural flow," according to Van de Velde, the time sequence "mobilizes the structural vocabulary of punk by imitating what Dick Hebdige has defined as the unifying principle of the subcultural movement: 'chaos cohered as a meaningful whole' punk structure of the text" (Van de Velde 2014, 125). The structural mimicking of a concept album also enforces this relation with time, and is specifically evident in Chapter 7, "A to B," a title that refers to the transition from one side of a vinyl record to the other. "A to B" is also the title of Bosco's new release and the synthesis of the divergence between his past and his present, his celebrity and his oblivion. It is Bosco himself who clarifies the meaning, when he tells Stephanie, Bennie's wife and his PR, "the album is called A to B, right? [...] And that's the question I want to hit straight on: how did I go from being a rock star to being a fat fuck no one cares about?" (Egan 2011, 145).

A similar question, and a similar struggle to come to terms with change in relation to celebrity, is asked by the former Flaming Dildos' guitarist Scotty, when, decades after their last meeting, he pays a visit to Bennie, the latter at the peak of his success as a producer, the former working as a janitor: "I came for this reason: I want to know what happened between A and B […] A is when we were both in the band, chasing the same girl. B is now" (115).

These same characters – Bosco, Bennie and Scotty – are those who identify the "goon" of the title with time: "Time's a goon, right?" Bosco asks when he wanders about his future, "Isn't that the expression?" (145). "Time's a goon, right? You gonna let that goon push you around?" (370). Bennie asks Scotty at the end of the novel, in the attempt to persuade his old band mate into performing in front of the audience assembled at Ground Zero. This equation between time and the enigmatic goon of the title implies, as Moorey stresses, that "receiving 'a visit from the goon squad' means to be subjected to the violence and cruelty of time and its passing" (Moorey 2014, 80). As will be argued, *being visited* and *visiting* in the novel reveal the characters' opposite relations with time and celebrity.

The (doomed) battle against time is the battle for immortality, chased by artists through the eternalizing power of the arts, with the hope of living on in the recordings that made them famous. This is a one-sided struggle, especially in the contemporary world, where celebrity, shrunk to Andy Warhol's predicted 15 minutes of fame, testifies to the accelerated decline and loss of value of individuals and art in the marketplace. Short-lived fame is a structural element in cultural industry and its market, particularly in the music industry, which not only "constantly produces more failures than successes" (Negus 1992, 152) but also relies on the built-in obsolescence of its products, and for which "five years is five hundred years" (Egan 2011, 39), as Sasha reminds Bennie.

Besides the mechanisms of the music industry and its structural short-lived fame, celebrity and punk/rock are caught in another conundrum – given by the latter's quality/value of capturing the moment, and the emotions related to it: "the deep thrill of these old songs lay, for Bennie, in the rapturous surges of sixteen-year-old-ness they induced" (26). The immediacy of the unmediated moment is at odds with the encapsulation of that same immediacy by the recording and the media, that allows its endless repetition (Reynolds 2010, xxxvi) – something especially valid (but not exclusively) for punk and rock music, as the anecdote about Bennie's attempt to sign up the cloistered nuns after hearing them sing attests.[4]

Within the novel, this apparently irreconcilable tension elicits responses not aligned with punk aesthetics, the main one being the nostalgia for an irretrievable past of unmediated freshness and authenticity. In the music industry however, nostalgia is synonymous with the end. As Bennie recalls when he himself is in his downward phase,

> He remembered his mentor, Lou Kline, telling him in the nineties that rock and roll had peaked at the Monterrey Pop. They had been in Lou's house in LA with its waterfalls, the pretty girls Lou always had, his car collection out front, and Bennie had looked into his idol's famous face and thought, You're finished. Nostalgia was the end. Everyone knew that. (Egan 2011, 42)

This awareness seems to fade away when Bennie starts suffering "memory spasms" (27). He is initially nostalgic for his success as a producer, lamenting the shift from analogue to digital as the reason for the decline of music industry: "The problem was precision, perfection; the problem was digitization, which sucked the life out of everything that got smeared through its microscopic mesh. Film, photography, music: dead. An aesthetic holocaust!" (26). Together with

[4] As Kreilkamp underlines, "The nuns' singing, 'waves of pure, ringing, spooky- sweet sound,' is so haunting partly in the context of their 'vows of silence.' Beyond its inherent beauty, the singing acquires particularly 'pure' resonances because the nuns' voices are normally 'cloistered,' even somewhat taboo. And this in turn makes Bennie's subsequent violation, when he 'lunges' to kiss the mother superior, especially noteworthy" (2021, 118).

the purported authenticity of analogue music,[5] Bennie misses another "unmediated freshness" – that is, his sexual drive, complicit in the end of his marriage, to the point that he ends up feeling "clobbered by a loss so severe that it took physical effort not to howl. He'd had it, he'd had it! But where had it gone?" (38). Even this nostalgia, and its (supposed) antidote, are related to the world of fame, through one of its most evident manifestations. In the attempt to recover his libido, Bennie resorts to "The 'Gold Cure,'" the (four-thousand dollars a month) gold flakes he adds to his coffee:

> He'd begun this regimen two months ago, after reading in a book on Aztec medicine that gold and coffee together were believed to ensure sexual potency. Bennie's goal was more basic than potency: sex drive, his own having mysteriously expired. He wasn't sure quite when or quite why this had happened: The divorce from Stephanie? The battle over Christopher? Having recently turned forty-four? The tender, circular burns on his left forearm, sustained at "The Party," a recent debacle engineered by none other than Stepanie's former boss, who was now doing jail time? (25)

What can't be found in music industry and in its accelerated obsolescence can apparently be found in gold: "Gold didn't tarnish, that was the thing. The flakes would look the same in five years as they did right now" (40). In order to escape the downfall of the present, Bennie literally feeds on the "substance of fame," precious for its immutability and resistance to time. As the reference to Aztec medicine suggests, gold (as well as fame) is in many ways related to the past, the ancient as well as the personal: it recalls Lou's shaggy blond hair and the framed gold albums on the walls of his apartment in San Francisco (50). Those same gold and platinum albums that cover the walls of Bosco's loft, mementoes of his past celebrity, together with the pre-Columbian artifacts he refuses to sell. Kreilkamp notes that

> as Bosco's framed albums suggest, in this music industry novel, gold also has a special symbolic meaning as a public marker of success and renown. 'Success' can be amorphous, subjective, fleeting, etc., but a framed gold album is a crystallization of success, a material symbolization that promises to freeze a peak moment in time. […] Gold operates to freeze time, to arrest entropy, to mark off a 'career' at a peak, before it must—for most—decline. (Kreilkamp 2021, 41)

Like Bennie's flakes, Bosco's albums, as well as the manufacturing of gold records themselves, are symptomatic of the ways these characters relate to time and fame. Since what is framed can be either a record entirely made of gold, or the original object gilded, the gold record can be both a metaphorical and metonymic representation of fame (Kreilkamp 2021, 42).

[5] Authenticity and the authentication of experience are key elements both in punk aesthetics and in Celebrity Studies, and as part of the post-postmodernist poetics related to the "New Sincerity." See Kreilkamp 2021; Alexander 2018; Bruhn 2016; Funk 2012; Moore 2009.

However, the peculiarity and ambivalence of Bennie's nostalgia is that it precedes his success: it first manifests itself when the band ends up at Lou's place in San Francisco, after the Flaming Dildos' only, disastrous, concert. Most members realize that the night is a turning point for their lives: Jocelyn feels that "something is ending, right at that minute" (Egan 2011, 62); while Bennie, alone in Lou's studio and finally aware of Alice's love for Scotty, starts "pouring music around us. A minute ago it was 'Don't let me down,' then it was Blondie's 'Heart of Glass,' and now it's Iggy Pop's 'The Passenger': *I am the passenger / and I ride and I ride / I ride through the city's backside / I see the stars come out of the sky*" (64). As Moling underlines (2016, 52), Iggy Pop's "The Passenger" (1977) is already nostalgic for a time gone, looking back at the origins of Pop's ex-band, The Stooges, only ten years before. Iggy Pop's lament of an era that has come to its end parallels Bennie's awareness that nothing will be the same after the band's encounter with Lou. Bennie's nostalgia is for the end of innocence and the uncompromising self-expression of a young punk band playing in a garage; it is the nostalgia for the dream, rather than for fame. Bennie's nostalgic attitude for a "moment" and an authenticity irretrievably lost, similar to his fetishizing of the supposed authenticity of pre-digital recordings, would suggest that authenticity and success are opposed and irreconcilable. Although this dichotomy is related, as far as Bennie is concerned, to the diverging paths of the dream and success (musician/producer), the very nature of that lost "purity" and "authenticity," inextricably related to fame and its forms, is problematized by Egan, together with the longed-for past that allegedly authenticates it.

4. Against nostalgia: gendered perspectives and the quest for meaning

> It's all still there: the pool with its blue and yellow tiles from Portugal, water laughing softly from down a black stone wall. All the house is the same, except quiet. The quiet makes no sense. Nerve gas? Overdoses? Mass arrests? I wonder as we follow a maid through a curve of carpeted rooms, the pool blinking at us past every window. What else could have stopped the unstoppable parties? But it's nothing like that. Twenty years have passed. (Egan 2011, 96)

Jocelyn and Rhea's visit to Lou on his deathbed, in his L.A. home, to the man who said he would never get old (64), is probably the most intense revelation of the passing of time and its effects – something Jocelyn, the narrator of this chapter, "You (Plural)," struggles hard to deal with. Tracked down by Bennie, who tries to round up the old friends to say goodbye to his mentor, Jocelyn recalls how she and Rhea

> stand there, quiet. My questions all seem wrong: How did you get so old? Was it all at once, in a day, or did you peter out, bit by bit? When did you stop having parties? Did everyone else get old too, or was it just you? Are other people still here, hiding in the palm trees or holding

> their breath underwater? […] Did you know this was coming and hide that you knew, or did it ambush you from behind? (97)

Jocelyn's disquiet is amplified by her own troubled story and tangential involvement in Lou's world of stardom and excesses: their relationship, more sexual exploitation than a love story; her drug addiction; the reciprocal attraction to Lou's son, Rolph, whose complicated, antagonistic relation with his father would lead the boy to commit suicide a few years later. Now in her forties, after "long, confusing detours" (98), Jocelyn has finally been clean for almost a year and lives with her mother, who helps her to get her B.A. and battle against depression. Jocelyn's disquiet triggers a sequence of memories and a sudden awareness: "So this is it – what cost me all that time. A man who turned out to be old, a house that turned out to be empty. I can't help it, I start to cry" (99). Realizing that her past has been "a punch line. It was all for no reason" (100), Jocelyn feels anger, rather than nostalgia, to the point that she even imagines dragging Lou into the pool and drowning him, because, as she tells him, "'you deserve to die.' […] He looks scared, but he smiles. The old smile, back again. 'Too late,' he says" (103).

Jocelyn and Rhea's visit to Lou reframes nostalgia and the longing for youth in gendered terms. While *A Visit from the Goon Squad* does feature female celebrities (the abovementioned La Doll and the actress Kitty Jackson), in the case of music, as has already been mentioned, visibility and the prospect of fame are prerogatives of the male world, despite women's contribution. Not only did women not reach the front stage, metaphorically and literally, but also that world of the past has turned out to be an illusion for them at best, or a fraud at worst, as Jocelyn realizes when she faces Lou for the last time: "Finally I can see him, the man who said *You're the best thing that ever happened to me,* and *We'll see the whole goddam world,* and *How come I need you so much*? and *Looking for a ride, kiddo?* Grinning in the hard sun, puddles of it on his bright, red car. *Just tell me where*" (103).

This gendered perspective is crucial in order to reframe the past, the 'purity' and the 'authenticity' it supposedly encapsulated – not only as far as the individual and her social context, but also the whole punk experience, as the third chapter "Ask me if I care" suggests. In a section whose title explicitly refers to forced female inaction and bitter resignation, Rhea's voice and point of view, like Jocelyn's, emphasize the discrepancy of gender experience, but, even more importantly, cast doubt on the authenticity of punk and its rebellious stance.

Like the other members of the Flaming Dildos, Rhea is also concerned about the signifiers of punk authenticity and with living the "real punk experience," something she questions even when she sneaks into the Mab with the rest of the band, where "our sweat is mixed with the real punks's sweat and our skin has touched their skin" (Egan 2011, 53). However, what is real, authentic, is almost impossible to determine: "When does a fake Mohawk become a real

Mohawk? Who decides? How do you know if it's happened?" (53), Rhea wonders observing the 'real punks' at the Mab. The irony is implicit: all punk Mohawks are a fake, even Bennie's, who "irons his hair in a Mohawk as shiny black as a virgin record" (48), since a 'real Mohawk' can only be the Native American one. Rhea's perspective suggests that even the origins of punk experience were tainted with a very ephemeral sense of authenticity. If, as Van De Velde (2014) argues, nostalgia is not all-pervasive (and definitely not Egan's), neither is the authenticity so longed for.[6]

Lou and Bennie's sense of authenticity, as well as their fame, is backward oriented and heavily relies on the subject's performativity, be it in their lives (Lou's hypermasculine attitude, his glamorous life) or in music ('the moment'). While their sense of authenticity is, in this regard, more vulnerable to the assaults of time, there can be forms of authenticity that can survive the transition from the past to the present, although long invisible to many. And this form of authenticity can be recognized only by those who are or have been kept at the margins of the world of stardom. The only character apparently free from the necessity of recognition is the only member of the Flaming Dildos Bennie is unable to track down for the farewell to the dying Lou: Scotty, the one "no computer can find" (97). Like Jocelyn, whom he loved unrequitedly, Scotty also had to face a traumatic family history, culminating in his mother's suicide. He tried to cope with this trauma through music, via punk and its anger, playing the electric guitar as the front man of the Dildos, or more introspectively, by playing his lap steel guitar during school breaks: "Scotty actually built this instrument: bent the wood, glued it, painted all the shellac. Everyone gathers around, there's no way not to when Scotty plays. […] Scotty is magnetic. And I say this as someone who does not love him" (Egan 2011, 47), Rhea recalls. Scotty's magnetism manifests itself both during these intimate performances and, more aggressively, during the Flaming Dildo's concert at the Mab. Reacting to the garbage throwers,

> the Scotty magnet is starting to work – people watch his bare muscles shining with sweat and beer. Then one of the garbage throwers tries to storm the stage, but Scotty kicks him in the chest with the flat of his boot – there is a kind of gasp from the crowd as the guy flies back. Scotty's smiling now, almost grinning like I almost never seen him grin, wolf teeth flashing, and I realize that, out of all of us, Scotty is the truly angry one. (60)

[6] "Immediacy – the punk attitude – is a myth, often a nostalgic myth, and in *Goon Squad* probably also a myth particularly cherished by men like Bennie who feel that their privileges and status are not as enduring and stable as they imagined them to be. It may be no coincidence, perhaps, that it is a female author who succeeds in taking the step beyond the (predominantly male) myths of the immediate authenticities of punk music and culture represented by Bennie; some of the real 'heroes' of the book is a teenage girl with a flair for PowerPoint expressivity and her mother, who expresses herself through 'found objects,' which is the ironic title of the first chapter of the novel" (Bruhn 2016, 118).

With his wolf-like grin (opposed to Lou's seductive smile) and his anger, Scotty is the only one who, besides embodying punk rage, defies the logic of commodification: he builds his own guitar, disappears from the radar, even turns down Bennie's first offer to be his producer, and gives Bennie's card away to a couple of homeless musicians.

Scotty's trajectory is an inverted parable, the opposite of the abovementioned characters. After his marriage with Alice – the Flaming Dildos upper-class, blond and beautiful girl – ends in divorce, Scotty leads an anonymous life in a small apartment on East Sixth Street, New York, working as a janitor, his only hobby, besides composing and playing for himself, is fishing in the East River. Scotty's naiveté is evident when he pays a visit to his former friend Bennie at the peak of success with his most recent catch, a bass fish, as a present. As he himself recalls in the sixth chapter "X's and O's," whose title refers to the way information is processed and shaped, Scotty is more interested in the meaning of experience than in exploiting his former friend. Scotty visits Bennie to make sense of "what happened between A and B," (115) between their common past and their very different present. Like Jocelyn in her last meeting with Lou, Scotty too imagines killing his antagonist Bennie for his unfriendly, formal detachment and their economic and social disparity. Unlike Jocelyn however, Scotty's meeting with Bennie results not in anger, but with Scotty's sense of lightness and power, the consequence of his inward, rather than outward, focus:

> All at once I felt strong, as if some balance had tipped in the room and all of Bennie's power – the desk, the view, the levitating chair – suddenly belonged to me […] I turned and walked toward the door, still grinning, I felt light, as if I were wearing Bennie's white shirt and light was pouring out from inside it." (118)

With a lightness and power coming from inside, rather than from what is owned or attributed by others, Scotty comes to represent an authenticity (and then an artistic fertility) where punk is the medium, and not the core; an experience characterized by change, rather than by being frozen in the past. His 'authenticity' does not fight against time, but is instead nurtured by it. Like Rhea and Jocelyn, Scotty is also a member of the "goon squad" – individuals at the margins who, aligned with time, pay a visit (rather than being visited by) to those, like Bennie and Lou, who surrender to nostalgia. Scotty's alignment with (rather than opposition to) time is further underlined by the temporal sequence in the text, with Scotty's story (unlike most others) recounted chronologically. As will be argued, the reconciliation between chronological time and the narrative sequence, that coalesce in the end, mirrors the reconciliation between the punk aesthetics, an inward quest, and a 'celebrity' authenticated rather than negated, by the transformation and scars left by time.

5. Written on the body

Related to (and often struggling against) time and its changes, the celebrity's body is pivotal in the construction, dissemination and narratives of stardom. As predictable, in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, all characters related in one way or another to celebrity are explored in their attempt to cope with the physical transformations brought on by age, drugs and illnesses; and the effects of these transformations on their descent from (or ascent to) fame.

Lou's suntanned body, blond hair, his self-satisfied smile (the only remnant of his former self when on his deathbed), his voracious sexual appetite and restlessness are constitutive elements of his charm and his success. His immobile and almost unrecognizable dying body as seen by Jocelyn, with "tubes up his nose" (Egan 2011, 96) is so far from the seductive, lustful man she remembered that she imagines the Lou of the present meeting the Lou of the past by the pool, an encounter ending with a fight: "How dare you? I've never had an old person in my house and I'm not starting now. Age, ugliness – they had no place. They would never get in from outside" (101). Maimed by two strokes, Lou becomes the alien presence in his own luxurious villa, where he is removed from sight, seen only by those closest to him. In Jocelyn's mind, Lou's marks of illness and age are opposed to his son Rolph's "mark [of] youth" (101) Jocelyn recalls when she thinks about the boy, her peer, and the time they first made love: "he looked inside my eyes, and I felt how normal it could still be. We were smooth, both of us" (101). Smoothness, the mark of youth, can only be found on those who escaped the changes of time – such as Rolph, by committing suicide.

Bennie and Bosco's physicality are deeply related to their fame as well: whether Bennie's success helps him to overcome his insecurities originating from his (too dark) hairy body, the mark of his *latino* origins, his body fails him when he undergoes the personal and professional fall. His lack of sexual drive exemplifies thus his inability to desire, that is, to look forward rather than backward. This impasse will be overcome only when, recognizing Scotty's potential, Bennie will be able to resuscitate his own career, not coincidentally with a second, much younger wife and their baby at his side.

In the case of Bosco, a once scrawny redhead with freckles, he is remembered for his electric performances, so physically intense that club owners feared he was having a seizure. Whereas in the past Bosco's body became an instrument of his art, animated by his music, a mix of rock and ska, now it is huge, with a "belly hoisting walk of a refrigerator on a hand truck" (143), devastated by cancer, depression treatment, and eating disorders. Nevertheless, it is his body which could grant him his last wish – not "to fade away; I want to *flame* away; I want my death to be an attraction, a spectacle, a mystery. A work of art" (148). The Suicide Tour would sanction, although in a destructive form, the centrality of the body in the celebrity world. While in the

past his body constituted the vehicle for his music, at the lowest point of his career Bosco's physicality would substitute music altogether as the magnet of attraction, with the paradox of a celebrity resurrection at the cost of the artist's death. Bosco's real resurrection can only take place disjoining his body from the (here) all-consuming fame: losing weight, keeping cancer at bay and defeating depression can only take place when Bosco exits the circuits of stardom and slip into an anonymous life, becoming a farmer.

Whereas for both Lou and Bosco fame and their aging/ill bodies are in antithesis, and Bennie's body and desire mirrors his oscillation between success and failure, in Scotty's case the scars of time are an essential part in his ascent to fame. Although the description of Scotty during his first meeting with Bennie already outlined the former's debt to life (his worn-out clothes, his missing teeth), it is just moments before he walks onstage at the Footprint that Scotty's distance from celebrity iconography is the most manifest, at least for Alex, the man who helped Bennie to promote the event:

> […] Alex had been about to move closer, to ask what the fuck Bennie thought he was trying to do: put this decrepit roadie on in Scotty Housmann's place? To impersonate him? A guy with gutted cheeks and hands so red and gnawed he looked like he'd have trouble playing a hand of poker, much less the strange, sensuous instrument clutched between his knees? But when Alex's eyes fell on the instrument, he suddenly knew, with an awful spasm in his gut: the decrepit roadie *was* Scotty Hausmann […] he had shoulder-length hair slicked away from his face and empty, blasted eyes, all of it amounting to a derelict impression despite his clean shave. All Alex recognized were his teeth: white and sparkling – embarrassed-looking, as if they knew there was only so much you could do with a wreck of a face. (369-370)

Scotty's body is also in stark contrast with the young generation's, who have rushed to hear him play at the Footprint in the 2020s, and who would ordain his success. A generation that, after fifteen years of war, is "clear," with "no piercings, tattoos or scarifications. All the kids were now. And who could blame them ... after watching three generations of flaccid tattoos droop like moth-eaten upholstery over poorly stuffed biceps and saggy asses?" (353). As used as he is to stardom iconography, Alex sees Scotty as somebody who "did not exist. He was a word casing in human form: a shell whose essence has vanished" (370) – and thus confuses the essence with the appearance.

Scotty's body records all the traumas the man has undergone, that have quite literally shaped his vision, beginning with his mother's abandonment when he was a kid, that led him to sit in the garden all day and stare at the sun. The permanent gray smudges left in his eyes and the "spotted vision" that are, according to Scotty, "a visual enhancement" (52), but above all a way to remember her. His wreck of a face is the testimony of a life lived without holding back to the very extreme.

The relation between body scars and celebrity creates a parallel between Scotty's and La Doll's trajectories, and contributes to the clarification of old and new forms of celebrity and their authentication. As already mentioned, La Doll's "Party of the Century," that should have been the epitome of celebrity, ended in a nightmarish hell, with celebrities who "shrieked and staggered and covered their heads, tore hot, soaked garments from their flesh and crawled over the floor like people in medieval altar paintings whose earthly luxuries have consigned them to hell" (163). However, since those maimed by burning drops were all part of the star system, some of those who were not invited to The Party, like Kitty Jackson, took to self-scarring in order to claim attendance – and thus the celebrity status. As Kreilkamp notices, "If gold albums can mark a 'high point' in a career that later declines, scars can, similarly, mark a low point or simply a point of intensity or eventfulness in a body's career through the world: 'proof' of a particular moment or event" (Kreilkamp 2021, 56). Whereas self-inflicted, faked scars are the proof of a celebrity validated externally (the Party, the media), Scotty's scars are a validation of an experience that authenticates itself first, before being validated by success and becoming representative of the malaise of the present/future he eventually gives voice to.

6. Media, marketing, and myth

Scotty's self-validated experience and its representativeness as a counter-cultural force culminates with his comeback concert at the Footprint, which is, structurally and thematically, the point of convergence of many elements already foregrounded in relation to fame such as time, authenticity, and the celebrity's body. They are all placed now in the context of a generational confrontation that unveils new forms and old functions of fame, and their short-circuits in the contemporary celebrity system.

The world imagined by Egan after fifteen years of war (presumably the consequence of 9/11 attacks) is characterized by the massive use of social media; they have paradoxically limited communication among people, who use coded, instant messaging even when they are facing each other. The music market too is under the aegis of the media: not only is reach more important than music (Egan 2011, 312), as Bennie laments, but after the baby boom that followed the war, toddlers have emerged as a vital demographic for the music industry, able as they are to download music by using a handset device designed especially for them. This change in the music industry forced all musicians and bands "to reinvent themselves for the preverbal" (347), and transform the original lyrics of their songs into catchy rhymes and sounds, whose original content can only be suggested through double meanings or allusions.

Although Scotty has long been at the margins of the networks and media structures, he apparently surrendered to this development for his tentative entrance into the new music

market, produced by Bennie. And it is that same data system and mediascape that promote the concert and pave Scotty's way to success. Advertised by Bennie through "parrots," people who have the power to influence others through their social media, Scotty's concert is an event made possible thanks to viral marketing, with the apparent paradox that the same media Scotty escaped from all his life are also the ones that guide and orchestrate his success. Although Scotty's success as a late bloomer apparently demonstrates the extent to which "celebrity is an acknowledgement of the public's power" (Douglas and McDonnell 2019, 21) and, even more, of the power of the media, his exhibition may become the antidote against the contaminating pervasiveness of the media and the alienation they induce.

The first antidote is the concert itself, a live event: "two generations of war and surveillance had left people craving the embodiment of their own unease in the form of a lone, unsteady man on a slide guitar" (Egan 2011, 373). Scotty's successful concert reveals both people's need for tangible (and not only visible) presence and connections and for a shared common experience through the authenticity and uniqueness of the moment, a generational symbolic 'event,' as it cyclically happens: "it may be that a crowd at a particular moment of history [that] creates the object to justify its gathering, as it did at the first Human Be-In and Monterey Pop and Woodstock" (373).

Besides the context, Scotty's resistance to reification takes place especially at the level of the content, and in particular in the re-signification of the concepts of authenticity and purity – the latter a key term and an ambiguous signifier after 9/11, as the title of the last chapter, "Pure Language," emphasizes.

In Egan's imagined near future (and our present), purity is a highly-prized value that manifests itself in generational terms: in the baby boom that followed the war and the centrality of these infants in the music market; in the young people with clean bodies, without piercings, tattoos or scarring that attend Scotty's concert; and their 'pure language' that abjures profanity. All these elements point to a purity that equates to erasure, where what is erased, besides the Twin Towers, is ultimately human connections and communication, as suggested by the gibberish lyrics and the ubiquitous media that are responsible for the degradation of language.

In a world where purity is equated to erasure and language has lost its communicative power, Scotty's pureness is not opposed to experience (that is rather its prerequisite), but to the reification operated by the market and the media, thanks also to the symbiotic relationship between the profile industry and celebrity culture.

Antagonistic to a depersonalization where the medium has phagocytized the message and where language is ultimately *the* "empty shell," deprived as it is of its communicative function both within and outside the musical context, the "baleful, male vocalist with a torqued, boinging slide guitar" (347) becomes the representative of a radically different purity, which he finally

cries out loud during the concert when he shifts from the catchy songs designed for babies to the original ones:

> Anyone who was there that day will tell you the concert really started when Scotty stood up. That's when he began singing the songs he'd been writing for years underground, songs no one had ever heard, or anything like them –"Eyes in My Head," "X's and O's," "Who's Watching Hardest" – ballads of paranoia and disconnection ripped from the chest of a man you knew just by looking had never had a page or a profile or a handle or a handset, who was part of no one's data, a guy who had lived in the cracks all these years, forgotten and full of rage, in a way that now registered as pure. Untouched. (374)

Like authenticity, purity too, as Bruhn argues (2016, 118), becomes a relational quality – whose relativity aims at deconstructing the "dreams of human immaculation" (Cowart 2015, 249), especially that immaculation appropriated and exploited by the market via profile industry. Scotty's concert becomes a "cultural talisman" (Kreilkamp 2021, 137) against political, economic, and linguistic erasures, an event so important everybody wants to claim attendance: "[…] it's hard to know anymore who was really at that first Scotty Hausmann concert – more people claim it than could possibly have fit into the space, capacious and mobbed though it was. Now that Scotty has entered the realm of myth, everyone wants to own him. And maybe they should. Doesn't a myth belong to everyone?" (Egan 2011, 374).

Besides establishing a parallel with LaDoll's (tragic) party of the century, this reference to myth points to the roots of celebrity – that is, the nature and origins of *fame* itself: something unsought, that "rested on distance" (Douglas and McDonnell 2019, 3), like gods and their universe. Even more importantly, it points to their nature and functions: cultural, discursive constructions that meet people's needs to give meaning to their world. In the novel's mythic subtext and in its references (Moling 2016, 71), Scotty represents the main intersection: he is related first to the Fisher King, as his present (the bass fish) during his visit at Bennie's headquarters suggests (Cowart 2015, 248). Although it is Scotty who will (apparently) be saved years later by the wasteland[7] near the East river he inhabits by Bennie and the concert at the Footprint, it is Scotty who turns out to be the 'savior,' since his success, unsought, will serve to resurrect Bennie's own. Crucially, Scotty's rise into the realm of myth signals the extent to which the concert becomes a key moment of re-signification for the younger generations. With his unchanged magnetism and charming power, and by channeling, "conduiting" the crowd's

[7] Allusions to T. S. Eliot abound in the text. As Cowan notes, "Scotty's Footprint concert takes place in the novel's last chapter, set 'more than twenty years' after the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001. […] the novel would seem to culminate in the year of the Waste Land centennial, 2022" (Cowart 2015, 249).

feelings and malaise, Scotty becomes "a modern Orpheus whose song and 'sensuous instrument' can set the 'bloodless ghosts' to weeping and 'shape the way we think and see'" (Kreilkamp 2021, 137-138). Scotty's "openness to appropriation" (Funk 2012, 54-55) indicates his restoration, albeit temporarily, of the social function of the art in its voicing the pervasive (and until that moment unaware) unrest of a generation who starts searching for the meaning of experience through the footprints left by the past in the real and symbolic Ground Zero its members inhabit.

It is Scotty's otherness, his distance from the present and his relation to the past, that contribute to his fame. His loneliness, unsteadiness, his rebellion against and refusal of consumer lifestyle – revamped as the most powerful acts of nonconformity, and as an alternative to a society where profile industry and the media are the main instruments in the commodification of both what is marketed and of the recipient of that marketing.

The constructed nature of myth and its functions are key elements not only in understanding Scotty's success, but also in the way he departs from the previous models of celebrity. Contrary to La Doll's party, more a satire of past modes of celebrity, Egan uses Scotty's concert to investigate alternative possibilities and contradictions of a fame freed of (or tangential to) the mechanisms of reification and consumption induced/governed by the media and the market, whose halo is generated by its power as counternarrative. Although Scotty's concert and success may represent another exploitation of antagonist forces by the market, it may also suggests counterculture's potential to infiltrate (albeit fleetingly) the system and voice a malaise that cannot be exploited by the market via the profile industry, but only experienced in the performativity of the artistic event.[8] However, a fame not phagocytized by the market and an authenticity not corroded by reification have statuses so liminal that significantly exist only in the suspended time of the novel's end (and before the release of *A Visit*'s sequel, *The Candy House* in 2022), in "the moment" frozen not by music, but by writing.

In her intergenerational journey into music and the music industry, into their cultural and countercultural shapes, and into the inevitable conundrums related to fame and the forces at play in its creation and dissemination, Egan investigates the precarious, fleeting nature of celebrity as the product of the market and social media systems and explores viable possibilities for alternative modalities that fuse the experience/memory of the past and the artistic potential of the future.

[8] Finding a parallelism between Scotty's concert and Egan's writer position, Funk writes: "Authenticity, *in A Visit from the Goon Squad*, does not refer to a misty nostalgia for pre-postmodern times, is not an indicator for those prelapsarian days when experience and representation, signifier and signified, were supposedly reconcilable. Authenticity, here, is quintessentially postmodern; it can only be witnessed as an artistic, maybe even artful, effect, an effect of literary reconstruction, both with regards to form and to content" (Funk 2012, 58).

Bionote

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