

Punk and the Making of Self Assignment — Zine Page 3: Cause and Effect

1. Choose a piece of music, any piece, and listen to it several times. As you do so, keep careful track of its emotional, energetic, and image-producing effects on you. Write them down in detail (but don't hand them in).

Some prompts might include

- How do you feel?
- Where do you imagine the song to occur?
- Who is invited to participate in it?
- When does it ostensibly take place?

Then listen through a second time and take notes on the specific elements of the song. Things to listen for here include

- What instruments does the song use and how?
- What is its rhythm like? Fast? Slow? Syncopated? Relaxed? Tense?
- Is the harmony lush or spare? Consistent or changing?
- Is the melody high or low, fast or slow, easy or hard to sing?
- What are the words about? What sort of language does it use?
- If there is a voice, is it strained or relaxed? Soft or loud?

Get as specific as you can, and if you don't have the right language to describe what you're hearing, make up terms if you need to. (Again, this part is pre-writing.)

2. Once you've done that preliminary step, look over your notes and then please type a page or so of prose that describes your experience hearing the piece in terms of musical cause and effect: musical facts cause experiences (effects). This doesn't have to be a formal essay at all; use whatever writing style you're most comfortable with for now. But do try to connect specific musical events (e.g. the entrance of the bass in the second verse) with their effects (e.g. "This is really the point in the song when I feel most like dancing. The low frequencies are almost tactile.")

Grading will be out of 5 points: 2 for depth of observation both of oneself and the song, 2 for specificity of writing, and 1 for interpretive acumen.