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Those Days Are Gone Forever: Steely Dan's Grumpy Old White Guys' Blues

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ABSTRACT

Steely Dan has always been a grumpy old guy's band. In this essay, I listen to the ways in which Becker and Fagen turn their critical misandry on middle-aged American boomer generation males, adrift in vats of self-pity, marinating in melancholy and regret, and fermenting inexorably into elderly obsolescence. The duo masked their baleful assessment of white masculinist anxieties in music which blended jazz and rock sensibilities painstakingly polished to a smooth glossy aural sheen – all of which articulated an adultification of rock music culture in the 1970s.

Keywords

Middle-aged; jazz; white masculinity; nostalgia

> When men reach the age of forty or fifty, they tend to observe a curious change. They discover that most of the individuals with whom they grew up and maintained contact now behave in a disturbed manner. One may stop working so that his business fails; another may break his marriage, though the fault does not lie with his wife; and yet another may embezzle money. Even those individuals who show no such striking behavioral changes still show signs of degeneration. Conversation with them becomes shallow, threadbare, and boastful. Previously the aging individual found mental stimulus in others but now he feels that he is almost the only one to present objective interest. (Adorno, 2000, "Adorno, 2000" 240).

Steely Dan has always been a grumpy old guy's band. "Reelin' In the Years," the second single from the band's 1972 debut album, *Can't Buy A Thrill*, written when they were in their twenties, offered the world-weary perspective of someone far older, perhaps none the wiser but certainly more experienced. Time did not mellow them. If anything, Walter Becker and Donald Fagen only hardened Steely Dan's perspective as cynical white male boomer curmudgeons, putting to music Adorno's dour assessment of the middle-aged male bourgeoisie as described in the epigraph (with the duo replacing Adorno's still-vital "aging individual" observing his "shallow, threadbare" peers). In this essay, I listen to the ways in which Becker and Fagen turn their critical misandry on middle-aged American boomer generation males, adrift in vats of self-pity, marinating in melancholy and regret, and fermenting inexorably into elderly obsolescence. The duo masked their baleful assessment of white masculinist anxieties in music which blended jazz and rock sensibilities painstakingly polished to a smooth glossy aural sheen – all of which articulated an adultification of rock music culture in the 1970s.

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I focus on two figurations of white US American masculinity guitarist Walter Becker and keyboardist/vocalist Donald Fagen, the creative duo behind Steely Dan, used to address this issue of white masculinist anxieties: the white hood, or small-time mid-level criminal; and, the white middle-class male who fears slipping from his perch in the social order. I argue that these two representations of white US American masculinity – the hood, resigned but not yet beaten, and the middle-class male, fear fueling his rage – were sounded out through the band's fusion of jazz and rock, the musical articulation of their beatnik-*cum*-hippie esthetic sensibilities. We meet these middle-aged male characters in their struggles to come to terms with their alienation from bourgeois society, often accompanied by a lack of social and material capital. Most of all, however, these characters convey an underlying sense of having aged past their due date, foreclosing opportunities and alternatives to their predicament.[1] In songs depicting scenes from a midlife crisis or of random acts of violence, these two figures represent the crisis of meaning for white US American masculinity in the 1970s.

I turn first to consider the role of jazz in Steely Dan's music as a way of connecting Beat sensibilities to rock before considering the ways in which their particular approach to jazz freights the music with memory and nostalgia. Next, the small-time criminal allows us to consider the ways in which Becker and Fagen's youthful enthusiasm for Beat culture filtered into their rock music, connecting them to jazz through the figure of the white Outsider, or, more provocatively, the White Negro, whose life outside of polite society was realized through an engagement with jazz *as Black music* rather than as an upscale art music or sophisticated middlebrow esthetic, which some jazz styles had achieved by the 1960s (see Gendron; Lopes).[2] Finally, I turn to their work which focuses on the enraged white middle-class male, frustrated by his loss of social privilege amid the emergence of nonwhite, non-heteronormative competitors for economic and social capital.

Steely Dan entered the US popular music scene just as the country was experiencing an economic downturn, threatening the social stability produced, in part, by the steady economic growth of the post-WWII years (see Schulman). By contrast, the music industry was enjoying one of its most lucrative periods.[3] Along with rock's racialization as a white genre by the late 1960s, its dominance of the popular music market signaled a hardening of genre (read, racially coded music categories) and a correspondingly unequal distribution of pop music's material rewards, depending on whether a musician was slotted into a "white" (e.g. rock, country, folk) or "race-d" (e.g. R&B, soul, funk) musical genre (see Holt; Miller; Shulman). Accordingly, musical genre mixtures were fraught with the racial politics of the day (see Fellezs, *Birds*). Steely Dan, musical ciphers for a steam-driven talking dildo created out of the fevered dreams of Beat writer William Burroughs, provided the drive-by soundtrack to the anxieties of a Cold War US American white masculinity by strapping on the phallic replacement jazz, R&B, reggae, disco, and Latin rock – white rock's musical Others – represented to mainstream US audiences in the 1970s (see Brackett; Brennan).

Rockin' the East St. Louis Toodle-Oo

By their third recording, 1974's *Pretzel Logic*, Becker and Fagen's love of jazz was evident and pointed to an increasingly sophisticated musical approach. While cognizant of the relationship between their music and bebop jazz, as analyzed by music theorist Walter Everett in his study of the development of Steely Dan's "bop-rock," as he terms it, in which the duo's harmonic and other musical choices were derived from bebop, Becker and Fagen also revealed a deeper historical understanding and appreciation beyond bebop and openly expressed their love for earlier jazz styles. A faithful reproduction of Duke Ellington and Bubber Miley's "East St. Louis Toodle-Oo," first recorded by Ellington in 1926, with Becker's electric guitar simulating Miley's trumpet part drew a solid line under their move away from the overt rock gestures of the first two albums (Sweet 85). Consciously using the latest technology in order to recreate a sonic past, Becker and Fagen developed lyrical obsessions which echoed the concerns of middle-aged adults, both pedestrian and tragic, immersed in older, even outdated, tropes of hipness.

Fagen explained that the reason for recording "East St. Louis Toodle-Oo," beyond their admiration for Ellington, was that "without having a missionary attitude we still thought it would be interesting for the audience to realise . . . that in 1926 a trumpet player was doing with his lip what it takes a rather complicated set of electronics to do on an electric guitar" (Watts 87). This marriage of high-end audio technology and a nostalgic musical sensibility displays the inverted temporality with which the duo often played. In this case, modern methods and technologies are bent to reproduce older recordings and musical styles while their contemporary record is meant to educate contemporary listeners unaware of the skills once needed to perform older, neglected styles of popular music. In some ways defending the sepia-drenched dreamscape world of their protagonists, Becker and Fagen were reminding their audiences that the music of another time required skill to perform and a sophisticated esthetic orientation to appreciate. Their Ellington cover might also be heard as a cautionary tale of the fleeting nature of popular music trends and styles, forever relegating musicians to a struggle to maintain relevancy no matter how skillful or celebrated the music or the musician. Who, among Steely Dan fans, knew how to dance the toodle-oo? (For more on the "toodle-oo," see Tucker.)

Pretzel Logic also includes a composition titled "Parker's Band," an up-tempo blues-rock shuffle with lyrics celebrating bebop pioneer saxophonist Charlie Parker. Referencing Parker's composition "Relaxin' at Camarillo," Becker and Fagen gave a sly wink toward those fans who might share in their appreciation for jazz. As the song's one-chord vamp abruptly morphs into the bebop harmonies of the brief bridge section, lyrics referencing Dizzy Gillespie ("We will spend a dizzy weekend") and heroin ("smacked into a trance") provide even more emphatic connections to bebop. Steely Dan's music, in combination with the title and lyrics, demonstrated the growing sophistication of Becker and Fagen's blending of rock and jazz elements.[4]

The title track, "Pretzel Logic," is a blues shuffle taken at a pedestrian-friendly tempo. Its lyrics are filled with the past – the traveling minstrel show, Napoleon – and the disorientation of someone out of time: "They say the times are changing but I just don't know, these things are gone forever, over a long time ago." The melancholia conveyed by

the combination of despondent lyrics and bluesy musical texture lends the entire track a laconic ambience that articulates the laments of the song's resigned protagonist. Released in a time of second-wave feminism, a beleaguered if still-resonant Black Power movement, and a shrinking US economy, the song's lament for the "things gone forever" marks the waning force of white heteronormative masculinity in the face of these challenges to its social positioning.

Released to critical acclaim, "Pretzel Logic," Fagen claimed, was a tale of time travel, revealing in an interview that the lyrics, "I stepped up on the platform/The man gave me the news" was a "teleportation device. And there are other key lines like, 'I have never met Napoleon/But I plan to find the time.' What we're actually saying is that I plan to find the time that [Napoleon] lived in" (qtd. in Sweet 86).[5] While they may have been courting Top 40 pop music success, their music was itself a time machine, using jazz to register the past, invoking a history of Black jazz musicians offering unapologetic challenges to white supremacy even at their most "entertaining," echoing against a rock-ier 1970s present in which the racial status quo was being aggressively challenged by musicians of all stripes working in a variety of popular and vernacular genres (see Garofalo).

It is the "past-ness" of jazz, particularly as mediated through recordings, which forms a large part of the music's seductive charm for both Fagen and Becker. Interviewed at the time of their recording, *Katy Lied*, Fagen confessed, "I'm a jazz fan . . . I haven't heard anything really new at all since about 1965. I still like to listen to my old Blue Note and Prestige albums; the best records are the Fantasy re-releases of old stuff. You might say that both Walter and I have a rather narrow spectrum of taste when it comes to that sort of thing" (qtd. in Sweet 110). Even if we know better than to hold Fagen to a strict pre-1965 jazz listenership, he does not forward any current jazz artist or band or even name a specific subgenre (or two) of jazz, as is often the case with jazz fans. Instead, Fagen offers us a short list of record labels, suggesting that it is the labels, as purveyors of commodified recordings curated by knowledgeable fans (if openly partisan in terms of their tastes) as the important arbiters of musical value (Blue Note, et al., began as small, independent labels started by fans of various styles of jazz) (see Rasula). In any case, Becker and Fagen enjoy jazz as a music of the past and while they celebrate and promote their musical influences, it is jazz music's continued life as a commodity that has allowed for all those "Fantasy re-releases of old stuff," permitting listeners such as Fagen to push the pause button on the continuous movement of pop music styles and trends – to time travel, in other words, to a past that *might just be* the one he came from.

This issue of time passing and its corrosive effects on the white male protagonists of their songs mirrored this musical time traveling. As Fagen sings on "Any World (That I'm Welcome To)," the penultimate track of *Katy Lied*, if he "had his way, [he] would move to another lifetime." Unfortunately, the song's protagonist has no idea, or seeming preference, for this other lifetime. All he is certain of is that he has "this thing inside me that's got to find a place to hide me." The song's narrator places the blame for his sense of "this feeling [he] can't explain away" on his background – any world that would welcome him is "better than the one [he] come[s] from." The vagueness of the narrator's anomie accentuates his incoherence and incomprehension in the face of his circumstances. This is not a man railing at outside forces or institutional constraints on his individual liberty. This is, rather, the forlorn lament of a man caught in the self-induced amber of "this thing inside me," eating away at any sense of personal agency. The choice, it seems, has

been made for him – an inner urge to "find a place to hide" the "me" that has, in the end, failed him, leaving him bereft of choices, with only a gnawing sense of vague dissatisfaction.

You Were Very High

Becker and Fagen's enduring beatnik sensibilities anchor their take on the 1960s hippie counterculture they encountered at Bard and in their early years in New York City, similar to the way the jazz saxophone solo filigree colors their rock recordings. Theirs is a music born from jazzy childhood romances burnished by a coming of age in the chemically enhanced late 1960s counterculture. As Fagen confessed later,

> I should comment on Bard's strangely apolitical character. After all, this was the sixties. I could say that the sort of student Bard attracted in those days . . . tended to share that portion of the decade's ethos that was concerned with exploring inner space rather than the drive to interact with the world and effect change . . . most of us were just incredibly self-involved, happy as hell to be away from our [parents] and primed to leave the repressive fifties behind and make the leap in to the groovy, unbounded, sexualized Day-Glo future. (Fagen 77)

Becker and Fagen's music revisited their 1950s hipster roots though often with a sardonic post-hippie countercultural smirk. It is Becker and Fagen's mutual love of jazz *and* rock which provided the frisson for their sonic signifying on the blend of old and new, age and youth, heard, for instance, when they tempered their nominal rock songs with jazz's harmonic language. The band's oeuvre is preoccupied with the world of the middle-aged, reflecting a turn in rock music at the time from the teen-aged obsessions of the 1950s and early 1960s. Becker and Fagen's adoption of an artistic positionality and esthetic approach, which had its roots in the post-WWII US Beat scene with its view of jazz as a space of liberation distinct from the youthful orientation of rock music culture prior to the 1970s, is central to their contribution to an emerging adultification of rock esthetics.

Steely Dan's 1970s oeuvre is evidence of rock culture's steady transformation into an emerging adult culture, rather than simply another example, or extension, of youth culture. The band articulated this transition through the jazz affectations of their music with a narrative sensibility filtered through Becker and Fagen's interests in the Beat literary movement. In this sense, Steely Dan articulated an adult sensibility that mirrored the sober assessments of an aging cohort of countercultural youth. I use the term "adult" to differentiate it from "youth" not only to indicate chronological age but also to corral a range of concerns regarding sexuality (including marital status and parenthood), labor options and decisions, and, importantly for this essay, memory and its close correlation with nostalgia, self-reflection, and sense of identity as shaped by autobiographical narrative.

Along with thematic and musical signs of this adultification of rock was a corresponding fascination with audio reproduction technology. At the time, most people were uninterested in recording their own music nor could they conceive of making copies of the vinyl recordings they purchased given the limited technological horizon of possibilities for doing so at the time.[6] Rather, attention to recording reproduction values were of

vital concern to Steely Dan fans and the duo's obsessive attention to detail in the recording process demonstrated artists and audiences' shared appreciation for high-fidelity stereo (and, in the late 1970s, quadraphonic) audio equipment.

The important role of audio reproduction technology in the adultification of rock culture made possible the era of concept albums and LPs, or "long players," replacing the 45-r.p.m. "singles" of an earlier rock-and-roll era, in which the recordings and merchandise surrounding popular music was aimed at a young female audience, the major teen purchasers of popular music products since the 1950s (see Wald). The concept album has a long history of demarcating its musical contents as distinct from the assumed ephemerality of Top 10 pop music aimed at teenagers. Frank Sinatra's 1955 recording, *In the Wee Small Hours* (Capitol), can be heard as a prototype of the concept album. *In the Wee Small Hours* is a song cycle connected by theme, narrative, musical approach, and related artwork and album design. Crucially, Sinatra was using his adult-themed recordings of the 1950s to mark a sharp break from the teen idol "bobbysoxer" period of his pre-WWII career.

Steely Dan was not alone. Other rock styles were also "growing up," including the singer-songwriters of the era such as Joni Mitchell, Laura Nyro, and Carole King as well as the country- and folk- and country-oriented rock groups and artists such as Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, James Taylor, and the Eagles.[7] Unlike their contemporaries, however, whose no-longer-teen concerns put a mirror up to their young adult lives, Becker and Fagen wrote scenarios with characters who were slightly older and more cynical (less idealistic, certainly). As Becker related to Sylvie Simmons, "[Steely Dan] is not the Lovin' Spoonful" (qtd. in Simmons 114), the latter a band largely dismissed in the 1970s as a lightweight pop-rock band. In any case, Steely Dan's songs revolved around middle-aged men questioning their place in the world, their vitality, and facing the existential question, "*What now?*"

The discursive split between jazz and rock that Steely Dan so easily broached made visible just how fuzzy the lines were between age and popular culture, art and commercialism, authenticity and artifice, that were at the heart of their concerns with aging and its connection (or disconnection) with hipness. As Keir Keightley reveals in his history of the LP, age stratification in post-1945 US American popular music genres were designations created by the recording industry between "cultural formations that are usually posed as antithetical and antagonistic, such as adult pop [represented by artists such as Frank Sinatra] and youth rock" (376). However, by the late 1960s, the music industry facilitated rock's appropriation of "a number of the key institutions of the adult pop formation in the process of installing itself as the dominant force in the US recording industry by the 1970s" (376). Steely Dan is a paradigmatic example of rock musicians adultifying rock music culture as part of this larger set of programmatic moves Keightley analyzes.[8]

The band helped re-form youth rock culture by its turn to an adult pop/jazz cultural expression – to pitch rock toward a "jazz maturity" from its precocious younger R&B roots in ways that were unlike the progressive or "prog" rock turn toward the European concert tradition, another adult, read mature or evolved, style of rock music. Fagen and Becker were looking, instead, to jazz and older styles of pop music (Borshuk; Gendron), similar to the ways Latin rock artists used older forms of Spanish language Latin popular music genres and traditions to inflect their approaches to rock and R&B (I explore this at

more length, below). Just as importantly, Steely Dan measured this rapprochement in distinct ways from the jazz fusion movement contemporaneous with the band's emergence, which was more concerned with using rock and funk music to revitalize what young jazz musicians felt was a moribund jazz tradition (Fellezs, *Birds*; Pond). By contrast, Steely Dan were interested in developing rock into a more musically sophisticated form through an engagement with jazz, which had similarly matured from a dance music of the demimonde "black and tan" world of crossracial relations into an art music, celebrated as an example of American styled democracy and racial harmony (Lopes; Porter).

When All My Dime Dancin' Is Through, I Run to You

With the release of *Aja* in 1977, Becker and Fagen largely abandon the more overt rock music of Steely Dan's previous recordings. The cover features the profile of a presumptive female (or, an *onnagata*, the male kabuki actors who specialize in women's roles, perhaps?) face obscured by black hair melting into the otherwise largely black-colored cover, which is accentuated by the thin white and red sleeve hem of a black robe or kimono, creating the impression of a disembodied head floating in the darkness. With only the title in red stylized script suggestive of Asian calligraphy and the band's name in white block letters below it, the cover signaled this musical shift, losing the visceral body-oriented appeal of rock for the heady if abstract pleasures of jazz, particularly the smooth fusion favored by the studio-friendly duo behind Steely Dan.

Discarding the busy cover art of previous recordings that more easily conformed to rock's visual esthetics, the gatefold cover's sophisticated graphic design recalled the visual esthetic of producer Creed Taylor, particularly during his time at Verve, A&M, and as head of his own imprint, CTI (Creed Taylor Inc.), providing an integrated visual and sonic product meant to reinforce the connections between jazz and urbane, middle-class tastes and sensibilities (Carson). Similarly, the music on *Aja* was more polished and refined, the jazz references more fully integrated into their music, reflecting Becker and Fagen's maturation into a fully-fledged jazz-rock writing unit.[9] The list of session musicians included celebrated drummers Steve Gadd and Bernard Purdie, bassist Chuck Rainey, keyboardists Don Grolnick, Victor Feldman, and Joe Sample, saxophonists Wayne Shorter and Tom Scott, and guitarists Larry Carlton, Steve Khan, Jay Graydon, and Lee Ritenour – among the most sought-after session musicians whose combined credits cover most, if not all, jazz, rock, R&B, and pop music styles and settings.

Jazz music had long offered a romanticized notion of bohemian freedom to the duo. Fagen relates the story behind "Deacon Blues": "In the seventies, Walter and I wrote a tune, 'Deacon Blues,' that toyed with the cliché of the jazz musician as antihero. It was kind of a takeoff on that old essay by Norman Mailer, 'The White Negro,' not to mention our lives up to that point. I'm sure we thought it was hilarious: the alienated white suburban kid thinks that if he learns how to play bebop, he'll throw off the chains of repression and live the authentic life, unleash the wild steeds of art and passion and so on" (Fagen 132–33).

Becker and Fagen made such racial slippage their bread-and-butter routine throughout the period under consideration for reasons similar to their 1950s Beat forefathers turning to jazz, namely, as a flight to freedom from bourgeois convention and the white suburbs of their youth. As Becker once admitted, "I'd rather be Charlie Parker than anything" (Simmons 118), naming the pioneering Black American bebop saxophonist active during the rise of Beat culture in the immediate post-WWII period whose notoriety as a heroin addict nearly eclipsed his artistic contributions for a time though it was also heralded as part of Parker's social non-conformity.

In this context, Fagen's invocation of Norman Mailer's essay, "The White Negro," reinforces the logic behind Steely Dan's hipsterism. The essay's title explicitly announced the creation of Beat culture as the white appropriation of an imagined black culture: "So there was a new breed of adventurers, urban adventurers who drifted out at night looking for action with a black man's code to fit their facts. The hipster had absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro" (Mailer 3). James Campbell notes that the meaning of the word "beat" was transformed from a black "experience of no-money, sadness, rejection" by disillusioned whites into an apolitical outsider stance, which signaled "the black word beat [had] turned white" (Campbell 363).

Campbell elaborates on this connection between the older black meaning of Beat as signaling one's self-awareness of the oppression one faced in daily life and the new white bohemianism, citing writer Jack Kerouac's description of the postwar sense of "weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world . . . so I guess you might say we're a beat generation" (452). For Beats, jazz music formed the space from which whites accessed black culture as models for coping with conformist alienation but, significantly, without the accompanying fear of state violence and other forms of systemic subjugation blacks and other communities of color faced.

Amiri Baraka (as LeRoi Jones), writing six years later in 1963, recognized this transformation: "Bebopper jokes were as popular during the forties as the recent beatnik jokes, and usually when these jokes were repeated in the mainstream American society, they referred to white nonconformists . . . and not to Negroes" (Baraka, *Blues People* 190). Further, as Baraka recognized, the most significant consequence of this rhetorical move lay in the differential agency of white and Black hipsters. White Beats, in seeking out authentic modes of living, might reject conventional notions of belonging, including the nuclear family, and form highly mobile senses of community that, unlike their Black models, were often based more on individualist yearnings than collective values or necessities. However, Baraka argued, white hipsters could readily abandon their outsider bohemian ways, trading their berets and goatees for gray business suits, and melt back into the mainstream whereas Black hipsters' skin color forever marked them as external to mainstream American culture (Baraka, *Blues People* and *Black Music*).

But there were other colors mingling in the bohemian quarters, as well, with the Beat counterculture taking some of its cues from Asia. Michael Szalay's argument that "Beat culture committed to conjoining the elite and the popular in and through an appreciative embrace of the foreign" resonates here (368). Szalay connects Mailer's "white negroes" with Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac, writing, "So when bohemians like [Gary] Snyder and Kerouac turned in self-consciously hip fashion to Zen, they were completing a circle of sorts, returning to the modernism of the flagrant orientalism that Mailer had borrowed

in the name of avant-garde street life" (374). Szalay contrasts his "white Oriental" to Mailer's "white Negro," asserting, "The white Oriental appeared more meditative and nonviolent than his Negro-imitating counterpart, given to pastoral contemplation more than to late-night heroics" (374), reinforcing a stereotype of Asian spiritual asceticism (as well as Black primitivism), locked in an antiquarian, even mythic, past.

Writer and critic Anatole Broyard described this formulation of the Beat hipster as introverted and contemplative though he laid the blame on tea (marijuana) rather than Zen, writing in his 1948 essay, "A Portrait of a Hipster,"

> Whenever possible, he escaped into the richer world of tea, where . . . he could [be] floating or flying, "high" in spirits, dreamily dissociated, in contrast to the ceaseless pressure exerted on him in real life. Getting high was a form of artificially induced dream catharsis. It differed from *lush* (whisky) in that it didn't encourage aggression. It fostered, rather, the sentimental values so deeply lacking in the hipster's life. It became a *raison d'etre*, a calling, an experience shared with fellow believers, a respite, a heaven or haven." (726)

Fagen and Becker were pulling on both of these Black and Asian Beat threads. On one hand, there is Fagen's invocation of the White Negro, including their homage to Burroughs with the band's name, with all the problematic associations with white male privilege this conjures, as discerned by observers such as Baraka. On the other, however, as Fagen sings on "Aja," "Chinese music always sets me free." Similar to Szalay's white Oriental, Steely Dan's creative duo imagine an Asia unconcerned with the prosaic, a space of contemplation, tea, and, perhaps, even some sympathy. Asia remains an escape from the nettles of modernity with Western assumptions about Eastern spirituality, passivity, and quietude marking their cultures ripe for appropriation as both cross-cultural appreciation and exoticist exploitation (Chow; Iwabuchi). *Aja* signaled an acknowledgment of Becker and Fagen's own arrival at the doorstep of the very condition they had been seeking to either escape or denounce – the middle-aged middle-class life of the bored and aimless seeking relief in Otherness. Given the parallel aging of their audience, it may not be coincidental that *Aja* is Steely Dan's best-selling recording.[10] With their "angular banjos," perhaps China really is the place to sparkle.

She Thinks I'm Crazy but I'm Just Getting Old

Robert Palmer describes "Hey Nineteen" as the story of "a fellow roughly Fagen and Becker's age [33- and 30-year-olds at the time of the interview, respectively] who tries to pick up a nineteen-year-old in a rock'n'roll club and has trouble communicating with her . . . the music may be cleverly convoluted, but the lyric hits home with a directness that's surprising, considering Steely Dan's reputation for distanced cynicism and verbal hide-and-seek. Could Becker and Fagen be mellowing?" (139). Becker fends off any notion of easing up, replying to Palmer, "I would hope not. I think we've maintained a healthy level of misanthropy" (139).

"Hey Nineteen" puts an unromantic spin on the entanglements a "healthy level of misanthropy" entails for this aging Romeo. At the heart of this song is this confession: "She thinks I'm crazy but I'm just getting old." Steely Dan offers no salvation for this lonely, aging libertine. He has reached the age at which youth is its own charm, reducing the woman to a chronological age. One of the only other things we know about her is that

she's never heard of Aretha Franklin, deepening the yet-hopeful seducer's dismissiveness toward her. The emptiness of this ritual of seduction the aging debauchee feels compelled to play out despite a lukewarm reception from the young maiden marks this rake's progress from being "the dandy of Gamma Chi" to asking, "Where the hell am I?" He admits they "got nothing in common" other than, perhaps, a shared taste for tequila and fine Colombian weed.

This character's melancholic bewilderment at the emptiness at the center of the feeble melodrama spinning in his imagination, even as he strives to materialize it with "Nineteen," hoping a naivete blinds her to his own youth on "hard times befallen," highlights the bathetic posturing of our aging would-be seducer. Miss Nineteen offers a potentially redemptive path for him despite the fact that our middle-aged "soul survivor" has paved it with equal amounts of self-pity and self-aggrandizement. Memories, in other words, are insufficient solace to someone facing the loss of even the fleeting pleasures of the flesh.

In *Eminent Hipsters*, Fagen relates an anecdote about a tour date in 2012 when he was leading a band that included Michael McDonald and Boz Scaggs called the Dukes of September Rhythm Revue, which was devoted to performing old R&B and soul songs. The story is the inverse of "Hey Nineteen." Fagen is reacquainted with an old high school friend, Neil, and his wife, Hilary, when they attend a show at the Beacon Theater in Manhattan:

> I hadn't seen Hilary in forty-seven years. She was, hands down, the most beautiful girl at South Brunswick High. Of course, we end up looking like what we've been, which, in Hilary's case, was a suburban mom, about to be a grandmom. And yet, she was the same funny, mysterious creature I knew back then … A half century ago, she was a heart-stopping, mercurial blond with the kind of verbal acuity and humor that seemed to go along with being the victim of a certain sort of fucked-up childhood. (Fagen 137)

Continuing his reminiscing, Fagen describes a beach date the two shared but "lying there on a beach towel, with Hilary's pale teenage body three inches away, I was afraid I might pass out, the victim of some grievous cardiovascular event. We talked for a while, went in the ocean, brushed off the sand, and then she drove me home" (Fagen 138).

I bring up this incident to suggest that their music is not simply an exercise in irony. As much as they demur that their songs are anything but character studies, there is also a degree of wish-fulfillment, even fantasy, to much of their oeuvre. As white suburbanites, Becker and Fagen can live these sordid, if romanticized, lives vicariously through the fictions they weave in their music, shadowing, rather than emulating, the Beats' attempts to enter the "beat lives" of their black and Asian exemplars. It is difficult to imagine the hermitic Fagen and Becker, for instance, following William Burroughs' footsteps to Mexico or Tangier in search of exotic, dangerous escapades.

Both Becker and Fagen became wealthy from Steely Dan's chart successes that, along with their bookish reclusive personalities, accorded them the means to avoid many of the real-life consequences of the characters they celebrate in their music (granted, Becker had succumbed to heroin addiction though he would eventually overcome it following a move to Maui, Hawaii – hardly an option for street addicts). I raise this issue not to accuse them of any ethical breach – they set out to be rock stars, after all, not saints or social activists – but to move discussions of their music beyond assigning their ironic and

parodic stances as distancing techniques that are as calculated as their notoriously perfectionist studio recording process (Sweet). It is to think of their use of irony as an attempt to negotiate the near impossibility of recreating the cultural frisson for their music that their 1950s hipster models realized through Beat culture. It is their implicit acknowledgment, in other words, that those days are gone forever, over a long time ago.

Only a Fool Would Say That

As *New York Times* popular music critic Jon Pareles put it, Steely Dan "plays one basic identity game – impersonating louse after louse" (1). Pareles places the band's ability, "like most artists, [to be] professional liars, otherwise known as storytellers" (1), as generational: "The group's audience, *mostly boomer-age adults*, considers itself sophisticated enough to handle a few ironies and the concept of an unreliable narrator, and the music goes down so smoothly that it seems perfectly genteel" (1, added emphasis). Guitarist Vernon Reid, in a conversation with writer Greg Tate, drew a similar picture, though with more admiration for the band:

> Steely Dan is the ultimate jaded-hipster/post-beatnik clique whose songs are an oblique catalog of obsessions, twisted lives, the pleasures and dangers of underground economics. They probably have the most hit songs devoted to a life of crime outside of hip-hop in pop. They also chronicle a kind of noirish disillusionment with the romance of the American ideal: like Bogart playing Philip Marlowe, or Otis [Redding], "Sitting On the Dock of the Bay"; forever brokenhearted and forever haunted. (Tate and Reid 110)

Fagen and Becker's fascination with the illicit, similar to their Beat forbears, undergirds their romanticization of poverty, drug addiction, and the scrappy world of the small-scale hustler, the rank-and-file of the underground economy. In other words, it is not the (equally romantic) idea of criminality held by young artists on the make in the rap game, eager to prove their worth in terms consonant with a posture of hypermasculinist bravado and capitalist hyperconsumption, as Reid might assert. The duo's interest, rather, focuses on individuals such as the journeyman criminal of "Midnite Cruiser," no longer motivated by visions of excessive accumulation and consumption but kept in "the life" by the more colloquial necessity of sustaining an everyday living as other employment options fade or disappear entirely. We can hear the flipside to hyperconsumerism and American individualism with its eternal deferment of real satisfaction to the very desires it manufactures in the angry, disaffected white masculinity of "Don't Take Me Alive," discussed below.

Appearing on the band's 1972 debut recording, "Only a Fool Would Say That" helped establish the band's middle-aged perspective. Early tracks from the first two recordings, such as "Do It Again," "Midnite Cruiser," "Reelin' In the Years," "My Old School," and "The Boston Rag," also deal with middle-aged concerns centered around notions of memory, reminiscence, and regret – hardly the music of sock hops or protest marches.[11] Musically, these songs reflect the duo's attraction to rock, using it to infuse their songs with an energy that belied the lyrical disillusion. The faint touches of jazz that color the band's early recordings hint at their adult concerns, signifying on the social obligations of work and home as well as the social prestige and cultural capital jazz bestowed on its fans by the 1970s, more than a half century after its first recordings lodged its appeal into

middle-class American homes. The tensions underlying this juxtaposition of youthful music and aging sentiment signaled their songs' middle-aged protagonists' tabulation of the many compromises made in the name of stability and an accompanying loss of energy and ambition. The consequences of their youthful decisions were now playing out in their middle age, convincing them that no one escapes a fall from youthful ideals – indeed, only a fool would think otherwise.

The characters in Steely Dan songs are not heroes. The older lover of "Hey Nineteen" frets about his involvement with a younger woman despite his lascivious acknowledgment that "we got nothing in common, no, we can't talk at all." They have, he hints, or merely hopes for, other ways to connect. Our aging Lothario joins Steely Dan's extensive rogues' gallery, including the washed-up wannabe jazz musician of "Deacon Blues," the unrequited romantic of "My Old School," and the past his prime player of "Daddy Don't Live in That New York No More" – all of whom share a sense of missed or faded opportunities, lost or unattained glory. These are not the heroic individualists of American exceptionalism. In "Pretzel Logic," Fagen sings of this forlorn figure's recognition of white male privilege's unraveling in the waning years of Pax Americana: "I would love to tour the Southland in a traveling minstrel show [but] those days are gone forever, over a long time ago."

These individuals are simply middle-aged men who have been laid low by bad choices, worse luck, and the withering of the social worlds in which they were raised. Their fists no longer potent, their libidos flagging, they struggle to wield masculine virility in an ever-changing world in which they were never able to successfully integrate. In "Only A Fool Would Say That," the lyrics describe the naivete of the titular fool "talkin' 'bout a world, where all is free" against the grown-up realities of the daily grinding down of the nine-to-fiver dragging himself "home half alive."

Do It Again, Henry

The lyrics to "Only A Fool" are sung above a bouncy rhythm track, accentuated by the conga work of jazz pianist and percussionist Victor Feldman. Feldman's contributions here give the song a "Latin rock" groove similar to contemporary bands such as El Chicano, which is underlined by the Spanish spoken at the end of the track after the music ends as if the recording engineers had somehow forgotten to edit out some inadvertent studio chatter, which, given Becker and Fagen's obsession with studio perfection, serves to underscore the close but largely unrecognized relationship they invoke between mainstream US popular music and Latin music genres (see Washburne).

We should recall "Do It Again," the opening track on their debut album, begins with a Latin rhythm section establishing the pulse and rhythmic feel; in other words, Latin rock is the first hybrid link in their long signifying musical chain. Later in the song, when the sitar-timbred guitar solo layers itself on top of the Latin rock rhythm section, along with the deeply chorused Fender Rhodes comping (accompaniment), the song performs one of the best things about musicians' disrespect for border lines by displaying a willingness, often with a reckless abandon, to freely mix and (mis)match genres and traditions. More to the point, the track amply demonstrates Becker and Fagen's affinities for a set of bands and associated crossover hit songs which circulated at the time under the banner, "Latin

rock." Lastly, I want to remind readers of the significance of Steely Dan wielding their appraisal of white masculinity through the musical Other-ness of Black jazz and Latin rock.

There is a long, rich history of Latin musicians fusing their music to Anglophone popular music styles from Dizzy Gillespie's collaborations with conguero Chano Pozo and trumpet player Mario Bauza in the late 1940s to Mongo Santamaria's 1959 hit, "Afro Blue."[12] Santamaria's 1962 recording of Herbie Hancock's "Watermelon Man" was a pivotal song in the formation of the musical style that came to be known as "boogaloo," a popular Latin dance style of the 1960s, which mixed Latin music and R&B. Boogaloo artists such as Joe Cuba, Joe Bataan, and Pete Rodriguez enjoyed crossover success in mainstream pop at the time. In rock music, there is Mexican-American guitarist and singer Ritchie Valens with his 1958 hit "La Bamba," his rock-and-roll arrangement of a Mexican folk song.

Singing in Spanish granted an authenticity for some of these 1970s Latin rock bands, as well. In the 1970s, Santana, El Chicano, Malo, and War were enjoying Top 40 success with Spanish language lyrics such as Santana's "Oye Como Va," a cover of a Tito Puente song, reconnecting Latin music rhythms and sensibilities to mainstream US American popular musics. Throughout this period, so-called Latin rock blurred the borders between rock, R&B, and jazz exemplified by recordings such as El Chicano's 1970 hit cover of jazz composer Gerald Wilson's "Viva Tirado," Malo's 1971 salsa-inflected hit, "Suavecito," and the Latin funk group War's harmonica player Lee Oskar's jazz-influenced 1978 solo recording, *Before the Rain*, as well as the group Santana, especially in its fusion period from 1972's *Caravansary* through 1974's *Borboletta*.[13]

Steely Dan's hit single from *Pretzel Logic*, "Rikki Don't Lose That Number," opens with a short introduction featuring Feldman's flapamba before a bass line drawn from jazz pianist Horace Silver's composition, "Song For My Father," enters, audibly tracking the song's lineage from Africa and the Afro-Caribbean to jazz and rock, a multilayered intermeshing of Afrodiasporic music cultures and histories and a measure of the duo's open-eared sensibilities. Latin rock's affinities with jazz animates "Only A Fool" with a light rhythmic forward momentum assisted by the jazz voicings of the rhythm guitar parts, enhancing the song's buoyant quality as it rubs against the despondent outlook of the lyrics, a favored tactic of Becker and Fagen to juxtapose light music against dark lyrics. Steely Dan's borrowings from Latin rock underline the hybrid nature of the band's music, finding common ground between jazz and rock by pointing to the ways in which jazz, despite reflecting adult tastes, could be returned to some of its earlier incarnations as the "devil's music" and the youthful abandon it had invoked in the 1920s, as well as the ways in which rock might retain some of its streetwise grittiness and appeal, which was beginning to follow jazz down the gray path of respectability through such developments as prog rock.

Rock musicians, particularly in the wake of the Beatles' recordings, beginning with their 1965 release, *Rubber Soul*, were being touted as artists rather than commercial entertainers by popular music critics such as Paul Williams as well as observers such as art music composer and raconteur Ned Rorem. Rock musicians were being praised for transcending the genre's low origins and their aspirations were clearly evolving past a

concern beyond fame and commercial success. Incorporating jazz represented one strategy for rock musicians interested in moving rock beyond both teen-oriented lyrics and mercantilist concerns.

Forming bands such as Blood, Sweat, and Tears, Chicago (Transit Authority), Brand X, and Auracle, rock musicians began employing complex song forms beyond the blues-based riff songs of hard rock or early rock and roll, incorporating brass and woodwind ensembles into otherwise conventional rock groups (one or two guitarists, a bassist, and a drummer, with a lead vocalist who may or may not perform on a guitar or keyboard), and borrowing other devices from various styles of jazz to provide their rock music with the kind of musical sophistication and gravitas accorded to jazz, a genre which had similarly "grown up" since its arrival as merely one of many popular commercial dance musics in the early twentieth century (Becker; Lopes). Given Becker and Fagen's affection for jazz, particularly the highly valorized compositions and stylistic innovations of Duke Ellington ("East St. Louis Toodle-Oo") and Charlie Parker ("Parker's Band"), it may be surprising, then, that Fagen devotes a chapter to composer Henry Mancini in his memoirs, *Eminent Hipsters*.

Extolling his childhood delight with Mancini's musical theme for the late 1950s television show, *Peter Gunn*, which, he argues convincingly, was the perfect soundtrack to the show's noir-tinged gumshoe tales of sex and violence, Fagen makes the point that, "of course, these weren't authentic hipsters, Mailer's White Negroes or Kerouac's Beats. Gunn, Edie [Gunn's 'main squeeze'] and Jacoby [Gunn's policeman friend] were supposed to be more like pallies of Sinatra or James Bond, streetwise swingers; they were hip, but they could operate in the straight world with an existential efficiency" (Fagen 15). It is Mancini's ability to move between "the straight" and "the street" which propelled his best soundtrack work, inspiring Becker and Fagen to fuse jazz and rock in a similarly "streetwise swinger/rocker" mode. Most importantly, Mancini provided a template for realizing the smooth integration – and popular success – of jazz sophistication and non-jazz popular music. Mancini was not the "groovy Day-Glo" ancestor the boomer generation was openly embracing in the early 1970s, however, and Becker and Fagen had darker scenarios than *Peter Gunn* to track sonically.

Don't Take Me Alive Or, a Funny Thing Happened at Work Today . . .

While it's difficult to tell when they're being serious in their interviews – much like their lyrics, Becker and Fagen speak in riddles, inside jokes, and relish obscure references as a distancing technique in published interviews – their evasiveness speaks to their mix of misanthropy and sense of humor as the basis for rage, anger, fear. When Sylvie Simmons pointed out that their lyrics are "pretty cynical . . . and bitterly realistic," Brecker responded, "A lot of what you'd call bitter or cynical, we'd call funny. We may have a blacker sense of humour than your average person. I'm always surprised that divorces and things aren't [perceived as] funnier than they are. The American Dream? That's very funny too" (qtd. in Simmons 116). This inversion of cynicism and humor is catnip for their fans and wolfsbane for their critics but is key to the second of Steely Dan's white male figures with whom I will now spend some time – the downwardly mobile, angry,

and desperate white male, caught up in forces beyond his comprehension, determined to rectify things somehow, alone, without a single ally in sight, not even another white male.[14]

The figure's lessening of self-control and self-restraint is coupled to a growing sense of little left to lose. The agonized druggie, for instance, of "Through with Buzz," tries, unsuccessfully, to convince himself that he is getting clean. Buzz not only "gets all his money," he stole his girl, "drug her all around the world," as the narrator laments in a chorus which arrives about half-way through the track. In the chorus, the rhythm suddenly rigidifies into a 1920s-era stomp rhythm, accented by the strings, connecting the insistent piano riff that serves as the song's introduction to this older dance rhythm. But rather than the joyous music of a Fats Waller or James P. Johnson stride performance, the passion is angry rather than amorous, the intensity overbearing rather than charming. Mercifully, it is a brief interlude before the soft rock swing resumes. The underlying stomp rhythm enters periodically as a supporting figure in the recording's middle ground once it has been introduced, however, reminding listeners of the anger seething beneath the addict's pain.[15] But it's *funny*, right?

Underlining this point of view in some of the band's work, guitarist Vernon Reid offers, "Steely Dan is the manifestation of the white Negro made rock, made jazz, made pop. They embody the subversive idea of the Below Radar Against the Wall Outsider" (Tate and Reid 110). I want to stay with Reid's description, the "against the wall outsider," to consider this more malevolent figure in Steely Dan's songbook. This is no longer the aging Romeo or the grizzled bookie. On "Don't Take Me Alive," a tale of patricide from a "bookkeeper's son," Fagen sings, "I know what I've done, I know all at once who I am." This self-awareness makes for a shadowy humor, if, in fact, Becker and Fagen are laughing behind their masks. This is the tale of a man, cornered by authorities with a "case of dynamite" ready to "hold out here all night," reaching the end of a desultory road. It is yet another male caught out by circumstances brought on through bad decisions, another "below radar back against the wall outsider" as Reid put it, who warns us that "a man of my mind can do anything," a threat that contradicts his claim that "I don't want to shoot no one."

The song was motivated by the duo's view of an America beset by increasingly random violence. Fagen described urban America as a space of terrorism, years before the events of 11 September 2001, stating in 1994, "In Los Angeles [where they were residing at the time] and throughout the world in general, terrorism is a way of life, actually, for a lot of people. ['Don't Take Me Alive'] was inspired by a run of news items where people would barricade themselves inside an apartment house or a saloon with an arsenal of weapons. *It's about individual madness rather than political situations*" (qtd in Sweet 130–31, added emphasis). Divorcing personal narrative from broader social realities, these white male characters are unable, or unwilling, to understand the underlying structural reasons for a failing economy, their loss of job security, and, for many, a downward mobility unimaginable in their youth, fueling desperate acts of random violence.

Their song proved prescient. Over the following decade, during a time when Japan Inc.'s expansive economy grew to threaten a weakening US global economic hegemony, if largely unwilling to challenge the latter's global military and political power, the wave of violence Fagen describes as "individual madness" garnered the term "going postal" as workplaces became the sites of violent murders of bosses and coworkers, initially, as the

term denotes, in post offices.[16] The phenomenon of postal workers committing murders at their workplaces, most of which could be described as mass murders (defined as four or more murders in a single killing spree), reached an apex in public awareness with the release of the Michael Douglas film, *Falling Down* (1993), about a disaffected unemployed defense engineer whose frustration with his life spirals into ever-increasing acts of violence. In the end, he, too, manipulates events to avoid being "taken alive."

"Don't Take Me Alive," framed by a bluesy rock rhythm leavened by jazz harmonies in the verse's cadences and an accessible pop-oriented melodic line, particularly in the chorus, sounds out the connections between structural limitations on individual agency and the nihilism of these violent acts despite Fagen's lyrical disavowal. Sonically, the song's opening gesture – a distorted guitar arpeggiating the opening chord, followed by a short introductory solo – instantly places the song generically within rock though the short instrumental interlude before the final chorus is built on a series of extended harmonies borrowed from jazz. With neither Becker nor Fagen performing any of the instruments, they instructed guitarist Larry Carlton to be as "nasty and loud as possible" (Sweet 131). The overall musical texture adheres to this toughened esthetic informed by hard rock, underscoring this desperate tale of last chances and doomed outcomes. Nothing is going to save this man on the run – not the macho bravado driving much of hard rock nor the abstractions of post-bop jazz that might have saved him at another time – soundings from an era gone forever, over a long time ago.

Ian MacDonald, in his "Retrospective Review of *Gaucho*," readily embraced the group's cynical humor, writing, "Steely Dan always cruised little more than a block away from nihilism and, on this album, the corrosive irony is deeply encrusted. . . . [However,] Steely Dan's funniest album is also their most urbane. What redeems it all is the humour and the artistry. Lyrics exude class as well as underclass, while the music, whatever its guise or disguise, is immaculate" (126; quote slightly re-ordered for sense). For MacDonald, this juxtaposition of humorous, parodic, and/or ironic lyrics against the "immaculate" pop music serves to rescue the band's music from nihilism or plain vanilla hedonism through musical sophistication: "Cocaine was key to the mechanized drive of the disco beat that Fagen and Becker wished to emulate, partly as an emblem of the cultural deterioration they so enjoyed chronicling and partly because, when done creatively . . . the rhythmic precision of the discoid effect catered to the band's need for perfection" (MacDonald 123).

But their perfectionism could not absolve them. They remained too invested in musical craft to completely abandon themselves even in their musical improvisations – consider all the resources given to getting a guitar or sax solo *just right* in Brian Sweet's exhaustive account of their recording sessions (Sweet) – let alone to an entirely ironic distancing. They may hide behind their sardonic personas as a way to shield themselves from a public too ready to accept that the "real" Fagen and Becker lurk somewhere in Steely Dan's lyrics but their cryptic public personas and abstruse lyrics enabled them to comment on white male middle-class alienation while avoiding an uncomfortably direct indictment of the white boomers among their audience. But the correspondences between songwriter and song, however cleverly they had tried to keep at arm's length, were closing in on them.

Fagen suggests as much in a 1992 *Los Angeles Times* interview, confessing, "I had a lot of defenses that had been built into my personality, which became more of a disadvantage to me than serving any purpose. . . . I was escaping from myself" (qtd. in Cromelin). While Fagen relied on the psychological defenses he had cultivated as a young man, Becker succumbed to drug addiction, each taking separate if related routes out of their own subjective sense of anomie that (dis)animates much of their catalog. Deacon Blues, Dr. Wu, and the whole cast of miscreants that populate Steely Dan's music are ciphers for their own sense of endangered white masculinity, articulated at a time feminism and racialized groups were clamoring for equitable social relations, in part, by dissecting the role white male privilege played in their subordination (see Davis; hooks; Lorde).

As mentioned, at least at the beginning of their recording careers, there were overlapping rock music styles shedding the teen-aged concerns of earlier rock music, reshaping rock esthetics in a post-*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band/Are You Experienced* world.[17] By the end of the 1970s, however, those styles of rock that embraced Western art music, jazz, or folk musics from around the world were being challenged by a new cohort of musicians who found such attempts misdirected in esthetic terms and ineffectual as a political stance. Punk, in particular, announced its antipathies toward the major mainstream groups of the era – of which we can include Steely Dan – as out of touch, compliant to bourgeois norms, and, well, *old*. They certainly did not equate bands such as Steely Dan with the louche outsiders about whom Becker and Fagen rhapsodize. The former misfits were now cast as the ultimate insiders, the old guys at the back of the club, wondering where the time had gone.

Time Out of Mind

Steely Dan effectively broke up after *Gaucho* (1980) with both Becker and Fagen citing creative and personal burnout. It would be twenty years before Becker and Fagen would record their next studio effort, *Two Against Nature* (2000) under the Steely Dan moniker.

The pair never lost their edge, though. In 1991, Fagen spent time with Richard Cromelin of the *L.A. Times* to announce his return to music performance and recording nearly a decade after releasing his solo effort, *The Nightfly* (1982). In his article, Cromelin described Becker as a "baby-faced sadist who delighted in turning interviewers into whimpering wrecks" and mentioned the guitarist's struggles with drug addiction. Both musicians responded with letters to the editor, which were published. Becker responded in his characteristically acerbic way, congratulating Cromelin for "incisive coverage of the drugs-and-depression angle of the Steely Dan story" before sarcastically thanking the writer for "his generous offer to help in ghostwriting an autobiography of me, tentatively titled 'Down and Out With the Dan: Drug-Crazed Guitarist Tells All" (Cromelin). Fagen's note is worth quoting in full: "Because I know firsthand that my partner is the sweetest, kindest little old partner in the whole U.S.A., I can only surmise that Cromelin's characterization on Walter Becker as 'a baby-faced sadist' must be wishful thinking on his part. Your place next time, Dick. I'll bring the thumbscrews" (Cromelin).

In what would be his last interview with both Becker and Fagen in 2003, when their final recording, *Everything Must Go*, was released, journalist Barney Hoskyns asked them, "if it was ironic that some regarded Steely Dan as old farts when actually they were writing more trenchantly about the fucked-up virtual world of the early twenty-first

century than anyone else in rock music" (xxiv). Becker offered as a possible reason, "We've been able to combine high vulgarian stuff with low highbrow stuff" (xxiv) as a way to both keep their hands on the pulse of the contemporary moment as well as allowing for enough distance to provide an analytical perch, which is as good an explanation as any. I will only add that Steely Dan's mix of jazz and rock esthetics, forged in the crux of Beat and 1960s countercultural sensibilities, offers a keen critique of white US American boomer masculinity. Similar to the aging seducer in "Hey Nineteen," the struggles for continued dominance and relevance under late capitalism reveals white masculinity as ever more fragile and irrelevant, however unable and unwilling to cede power or accept others' social ascendancy. As Fagen sings on *Gaucho*'s "Time Out of Mind," the grumpy old guys at the back of the bar are still chasing the dragon, trying to turn water into cherry wine.[18]

Notes

1. To be clear, Steely Dan's oeuvre was not limited to these two character types. I am primarily concerned with these two figures for the reasons I give in the body of the text, namely, the band's conceptualization of a crisis of white masculinity at the time and a significant turn in 1970s rock culture I am calling adultification.
2. I would point to the use of jazz to convey a sophisticated, urbane sensibility in film and in commercial advertisements, on one hand, to express a middle-brow esthetic that aspires to high culture. As jazz became established in the university classroom and symphony hall, the music became an art music, highlighted by the establishment of the Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City with trumpeter Wynton Marsalis at its helm. Marsalis, a controversial figure when he first emerged as a so-called Neoconservative Young Lion, was also an active participant in both of these cultural moves as can be seen in his position as a "brand ambassador" of luxury watchmaker, Movado, in addition to his directorship of the prestigious Jazz at Lincoln Center.
3. For more detailed information, see the Record Industry of America Association's website: https://www.riaa.com/u-s-sales-database/.
4. I want to be clear: Steely Dan never became a jazz band unless you consider the group a fusion band. Rock/pop esthetics continued to dominate their music through their final recordings, *Two Against Nature* (2000) and *Everything Must Go* (2003), which I do not consider here.
5. Brian Sweet acknowledges, however, that "Fagen could easily have been making [the explanation] up as he went along" (86).
6. Prerecorded cassette, 8-track, and reel-to-reel tapes, were available from the late 1960s but few people were able to record high quality "dubs" of vinyl recordings until the late 1970s. This applies exclusively to cassettes as there were no blank 8-track tapes available for retail customers. The market for reel-to-reel enthusiasts was a niche upscale audiophile market with a small minority of home recording enthusiasts. In 1979, Teac unveiled their 144 Tascam Series 4-track cassette recording machine, which would revolutionize home recording, with similar recording units from Yamaha, Fostex, and others following soon after.
7. Paul Clements includes Led Zeppelin's flirtation with North African folk music, Emerson, Lake, and Palmer's use of European concert music, and Jethro Tull's interest in British folk song in his list of bands "pushing the aesthetic boundaries of rock music" (190). Clements ascribes Steely Dan's fusion of jazz and rock as a sign of the rise of the postmodern in 1970s popular music. See also, Kevin Fellezs, "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter: Joni Mitchell," in *Birds of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and the Creation of Fusion*.

8. An entire realignment of recordings from the 1970s and 1980s currently gathered beneath the term "yacht rock," an affectionate tongue-in-cheek jab of a name aimed at 1970s US rock acts such as Steely Dan, Kenny Loggins (as solo artist), Hall and Oates, and the Michael McDonald-era Doobie Brothers, among others. The term is meant to both criticize and applaud. The playful facetiousness of the term is enhanced by the fact that the term itself originated as a parody web series titled *Yacht Rock*, which debuted online in 2005, featuring fictional storylines involving those very bands and artists. The term, yacht rock, in other words, was never meant to describe an actual musical genre, period, or style.
9. There is not enough space to properly address this facet of the album design but there is a long history of orientalist imagery in the commercial music industrial complex. In jazz alone, there is Horace Silver's posing with two Asian models for the cover to his 1962 recording, *Tokyo Blues* (Blue Note; Fellezs, "Silence") and Yusef Lateef's *Eastern Sounds* (Moodsville, 1962), which contains an interesting Lateef-composed piece entitled "Chinq Miau." More conspicuously orientalist were the covers for much of what has become known as "exotica," particularly the ones marketed as so-called belly dancing recordings or of a vaguely ersatz "Middle Eastern" appeal. The cover to Wayne Shorter's 1966 recording, *Speak No Evil* (Blue Note), features the tenor saxophonist's first wife, Teruko Nakagami. Their married relationship alters the image's potential meanings and the intensely blue-and-black image refigures phenotypic difference as well as notions of an East-West binarism by literally displacing black-and-white-ness.
10. Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) database, available here (accessed 9 January 2021): https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab_active=default-award&se=Steely+Dan#search_section.
11. Steely Dan's first single, "Dallas" was backed with "Sail the Waterway," a song in which a young man contemplates his father, a man who taught him about sailing along with a sense of a sailor's freedom from the obligations and responsibilities of life on land. With a teen's keen eye, his realization that his father is merely a door-to-door salesman, a middle-aged would-be adventurer who seeks meaning and fulfillment aboard his boat as a weekend warrior, is, to put it mildly, disappointing. The song marks Becker and Fagen's early engagement with issues of individual freedom and autonomy and its relationship to aging and the responsibilities of adulthood. The music is fairly conventional pop-rock of the time with little to suggest the jazzier leanings of the duo. I would like to thank Michael Borshuk for pointing me to this single.
12. We can track this relationship back even earlier, of course, to the Latin dance styles that arrived on American dance floors from Latin America such as the tango, the rhumba, and the mambo, among others. Contemporary Latin music dance styles such as reggaeton continue to crossover and influence non-Latin U.S. American popular music.
13. Carlos Santana, the group's leader and guitarist, would continue with his more fusion-oriented interests in his solo career, including his duo with fusion guitarist John McLaughlin on *Love Devotion Surrender* (Columbia, 1973), as well as his own solo recordings, *Illuminations* (Columbia, 1974), *Oneness – Silver Dreams Golden Reality* (Columbia, 1979), and *Blues for Salvador* (CBS, 1987).
14. There are a number of songs one could choose for the lone male on the run, including a small corpus of cowboy/country and western-inspired songs such as "With a Gun" from *Pretzel Logic*.
15. The song foreshadowed a dark chapter in Becker's life, beginning in 1980 with his girlfriend Karen Stanley's death by drug overdose in his Upper West Side apartment (and subsequent lawsuit brought by Stanley's family, which was settled out of court), an accident involving a taxi in Central Park a month later, which resulted in a fractured right leg and confinement to a wheelchair for the completion of *Gaucho* (see McIver). Along with artistic burnout and other personal issues, these circumstances precipitated the end of Steely Dan a year later.

16. The phrase, "going postal," was published in the 17 December 1993 edition of the *St. Petersburg Times* but referenced a series of mass murders at postal offices dating from 1986. In that year, in Edmond, Oklahoma, U.S. Postal Service (USPS) worker Patrick Sherrill killed fourteen coworkers and wounded six others before killing himself.
17. The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and the Jimi Hendrix Experience's *Are You Experienced* recordings were released in 1967. Both recordings are widely recognized as transforming popular music and articulating a burgeoning sophistication, musically and lyrically, within rock music culture.

    There is no space to pursue the various moves – discursive, linguistic, semiotic, historical – signified by a writer's choice to use "rock 'n' roll" or "rock" to describe a musical recording, musician, or performance. Fortunately, there are a number of excellent books (excellent articles are too numerous to list) in which some facet of the rock 'n' roll-to-rock turn is discussed, including, among many others worth reading, Susan Fast's *Houses of the Holy*, Steve Waksman's *This Ain't the Summer of Love*, and Maureen Mahon's *Right to Rock*.
18. The phrase, chasing the dragon, refers to smoking opiates such as heroin or opium.

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