The weekend after your death, everyone converges at your apartment. I get the call, but wait a day to catch my bearings before catching a flight from Chicago to New York. A cab through the Village to your building where your doorman doesn’t stop us and we walk right in. When the elevator hits your floor, the familiar sound of a party pouring through the opening doors and into the empty space beside us where you used to be. I don’t know why it surprised me that it would be a party. Even though, or maybe because it belonged to your employer, your apartment was our party’s headquarters. It was something you stole back to give to those who didn’t have a home. Now, in the wake of your death, every room is full of people who are full with the loss of you. Someone puts a drink in my hand. This is just the first of an endless string of parties.

Our party was the formation of a new communist party. The party: an organic entity, a living, breathing being, a gathering together of the multiple in the one, an obscure order, a whole which is not one, a many that is singular, a kind of provisional “we” at difference with itself from the inside out. The party, writes Fred Moten, “could be called the house party but don’t let that mislead you into thinking that house implies ownership; this house party is of and for the dispossessed, the ones who disavow possession, the ones who, in having been possessed of the spirit of dispossession, disrupt themselves.” The party is as much a site of refuge as it is the site of revolutionary planning, but “even though the party is, and takes place in, and takes place as, a kind of refuge, refuge still indicates that those who take it are refugees and people tend not to want to have to live like that.” The party, as refuge, is a place to catch one’s breath when you can’t breathe. It is a way of staying alive and of keeping each other alive. In your case, it was a way of sustaining your life after
your death. And it was akin to what you called the punk rock commons or the “commons of the incommensurate.”

Our parties go on for days, for years. They would begin around ten a.m., when the hangover was starting to wear off and we’d roll from one gathering to the next: cocktails, a memorial, breakfast with drinks, lunch with drinks, a family dinner, an impromptu gathering at someone’s house, a joint on the balcony, a talk in the hallway. Repeat. After your first memorial, we pick up drinks to take to a friend’s apartment and converge with an endless flood of smiling faces smiling sometimes. They verge, fall, pull toward and apart from each other. All the wars are briefly suspended and for a few flickering moments, as Wallace Stevens might have said, “We collect ourselves, out of all the indifferences, into one thing.” Though we were collected out of indifference by the shock of your death, we remain in difference from each other, which is to say that we’re not quite one thing but instead a singular being made up of the many, or what Jean-Luc Nancy calls being-singular-plural: “Being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and as the with of this singularly plural coexistence.” So rather than the coercive “we” that dominated the communist parties of historical communism, we became a “we” in difference from itself, gathered together in the wake of your death.

I’ll be honest, I was kind of devastated. After your death I spent a lot of time trying to find you in the places you used to hide and especially the songs you used to listen to. The first thing I put on was the Germs (you loved Darby Crash) but that didn’t last long. I never shared your attachment to punk. Being manifestly uncool, my relationship to punk was pretty much Siouxsie Sioux, to whom I cathected around the age of twelve. There was something about her rejection of the domestic, suburban, and normal that made sense to teenage me—a queer black, brown, and blue boy adrift and alone in Northern Colorado. I don’t think you had strong feelings for Siouxsie one way or the other, but there is more than a passing resemblance between my teenage attachment to Siouxsie and yours to Crash.

Both began as bad objects in their scenes: Crash in Los Angeles and Siouxsie in London. They were unlikely figures for two queer of color kids to identify with, least of all because both attempted (and failed) to appropriate (ironically or otherwise) the symbols of white supremacy by
employing the swastika in their early acts. The swastika was something Siouxsie tried to atone for and that Crash refused to atone for and didn't have time to do anyway because he, like you, died too young. Siouxsie's name was itself an appropriation of the tribal name of the Sioux people, another chapter in the ongoing dispossession of the already dispossessed. We shouldn't forget these transgressions, their unnerving entanglements with the violence of whiteness and white supremacy, but something about them nonetheless helped us sustain life in spite of the odds stacked against us. And the odds are stacked against queer teenagers of color in these United States.

Darby's and Siouxsie's performances became the stage for what you described as the punk rock commons, “a being with, in which various disaffected, antisocial actants found networks of affiliation and belonging that allowed them to think and act otherwise, together, in a social field that was mostly interested in dismantling their desire for different relations within the social.”

In this punk essay, you cited Tavia Nyong'o, who argues that the word “punk” owes a debt to blackness, queerness, and the violent measures through which a phobic world responds to both. Siouxsie acknowledged a part of that debt when describing the queerness of the parties that gave birth to London's early punk scene: “It was a club for misfits, almost. Anyone that didn't conform. There was male gays, female gays, bisexuals, non-sexuals, everything. No-one was criticized for their sexual preferences. The only thing that was looked down on was being plain boring, that reminded them of suburbia.”

Notice here how Siouxsie's party resonates with the one described by Moten: “This is the party of the ones who are not self-possessed, the non-self-possessive anindividuals. This is the party of the ones in whom the trace of having been possessed keeps turning into this obsessive compulsive drive for the total disorder that is continually given in continually giving themselves away.” Which is a way of saying that our party owes a debt to the black radical tradition as much as to the radical tradition of black and brown queer house parties on Chicago's South and West sides.

Unlike Crash, Siouxsie survived the early 1980s and with her survival came the emergence of a new sound characterized by thick, textured melodies, lush orchestration, and heavily processed vocals. Some people described it as post-punk and others described it as goth, but
everyone seemed to agree that it lingered in the darkness—perhaps an unacknowledged way of acknowledging her debt to blackness. Like blackness, Siouxsie’s darkness wasn’t merely negative space. Her darkness was from the underside, the B-Side, the upside-down world of the normative, retrenched, dystopian, suburban, white, neoliberal hell that took hold in Thatcher’s Britain and Reagan’s United States. Siouxsie’s darkness was a pharmakon to the annihilating “light” cast by the shining city on the hill. It was dense, dark negation as the negation of the negation. Darkness, for the members of Siouxsie’s party, was a place where the freaks could gather, take cover, and keep each other alive as the “light” tried to burn them out of their holes and snuff them out of existence.

If their party was increasingly imperiled by the normative regimes of social comportment demanded by Thatcher and Reagan, the 1986 song “Party’s Fall” tells the story of the breakdown and falling apart as a condition of possibility. In the song, the collapse of each party becomes the condition for the emergence of something new the next night:

Your parties fall around you
Another night beckons to you
Your parties fall around you
Another night beckons to you

That the party falls apart only to come back another night is why, following Moten, “the party I’m announcing is serially announced.” In “Party’s Fall” the present is always returning to itself, as Siouxsie points us toward a future in which the very thing that has fallen apart (the party) reconstitutes itself. Which is a good thing, it turns out, because the party is the one thing standing between the subject of her address and annihilating loneliness.

About a year after your death, a friend and I are talking about you in a bar. He looks at his drink and says, “I used to be alone. And then I met him and I wasn’t alone. Now he’s gone and I’m alone again.” The party is a way of ameliorating loneliness, and the endlessly renewable capacity to throw another party becomes Siouxsie’s condition for a practice of being with in which the misfit’s loneliness becomes the conditions for a relation of being together in difference and discord with other misfits
that are lonely and (un)like her. I suspect that this is why we threw so many parties after you died. They were a way of bringing you back to us, of making us a little less alone again. Ours was not a political party, like The Communist Party. Political parties endure, but they often endure through coercion, violence, and force. Instead, I mean our communist party as a name for what Siouxsie describes as the endlessly renewable chain of events performed into being by a plurality of broken people who are trying to keep each other alive.

For you, Crash’s performances were an antidote to (but not a denial of) loneliness. Loneliness is common, and it is often crushing for queers and trans people of color. But it can also be a condition for the emergence of queer sociality and the undercommons. While it would be easy to assume that your punk essays are about the white boys in them (Crash in particular), it would be more accurate to say that they are about the work to which queers of color put these performances while struggling to stay alive, get free, and open up other ways of being (and surviving) in the world together. “Through my deep friendships with other disaffected Cuban queer teens who rejected both Cuban exile culture and local mainstream gringo popular culture,” you wrote in Cruising Utopia, “and through what I call the utopia critique function of punk rock, I was able to imagine a time and a place that was not yet there, a place where I tried to live.” Today, we place an emphasis on “tried.”

Near the end of Siouxsie’s song, she utters the phrase “maybe you’re alone,” breathlessly as if it were an aside. But this is the kind of aside that matters so she repeats it again, supporting the voice with the fullness of a wail. As she sings this bridge to nowhere, you would have noticed that the lyrics reach melodic resolution, which has been otherwise absent in a song that lingers in the minor key. Siouxsie’s wail stretches across the lyric, her voice breaking on the word “happiness”: “My happiness depends on knowing / this friend is never alone / on your own.” I can’t help but imagine that as she begs her friend not to cry, applying her signature wail to the lyric and promising “a party on our own,” that she’s singing to a much younger version of you or me or some other teenage queer and trans black and brown boy and girl perched on the precipice of self-obliteration. Her wanting for a commons (to be with and take care of a friend in need) is Siouxsie’s precondition for a life in happiness. It was yours as well.
If I follow you, Siouxsie, and Moten in suggesting that the party has some kind of relationship to the making of the (under)commons, I am also following Nancy when he writes that it is death that gives birth to community. After all, our communist party was formed in the wake of your death. “It is death—but if one is permitted to say so it is not a tragic death, or else, if it is more accurate to say it this way, it is not mythic death, or death followed by a resurrection, or the death that plunges into a pure abyss: it is death as sharing and as exposure,” he writes, “it is death as the unworking that unites us.”¹⁵ Our party was born from your death. So in the wake of your death we threw parties to resurrect you. Though yours was a death without resurrection, performance and parties were a way of sustaining you, bringing you back, and keeping you alive.

Your death was tragic, brutal in its suddenness. But in spite of what people might think, there was nothing mythic about it. It was mundane. You were another gay brown man dead before fifty. To say that queer and trans of color death is mundane is not to diminish their horror, but on the contrary to name the shocking fact of this kind of death's everydayness. Trans and queer of color life is lived in constant and close proximity to death. “In any major North American city,” writes Rinaldo Walcott, “the numerous ‘missing’ black women (presumed murdered), the many ‘missing’ and murdered trans-women, the violent verbal and physical conditions of black life often leading to the deaths of gay men, lesbian women, and trans people remain a significant component of how black life is lived in the constant intimacy of violence on the road to death. Death is not ahead of blackness as a future shared with others; death is our life, lived in the present.”¹⁶ For similar reasons Christina Sharpe describes black life thus: “I want . . . to declare that we are Black peoples in the wake with no state or nation to protect us, with no citizenship bound to be respected, and to position us in the modalities of Black life lived in, as, under, despite Black death.”¹⁷

If I think of your death in relation to the forms of black life and death named by Walcott and Sharpe, it is not to suggest that they are commensurable. This would distract us from the way the history of black death in the Americas from the Middle Passage forward produces a present in which, as Walcott insists, “Black people die differently.”¹⁸ But what I could see clearly in the wake of your departure is that black and brown queer and trans death, like the deaths of women of color, produced by
different yet overlapping histories of colonialism, capital accumulation, white supremacy, and cis-heteropatriarchy, share something with each other not in spite of but because of their difference. I want to suggest that black and brown people’s emancipation from these conditions are mutually implicated, not in spite of but in relation to our incommensurability. What we share is that under such conditions, which are far beyond our ability to control them, survival can be hard. So, if I call your death mundane, it’s not to underplay the importance of your life. It’s only meant to serve as a bitter acknowledgment of the ubiquitous and disproportionate distribution of death toward queers, women, and trans people of color. Dying for different reasons, often dying before really living, but dying nonetheless.

It can be as hard to survive as it is to live on in the wake of those who didn’t. But you taught me that performance is imbued with a weak power of resurrection, or at least the power to sustain some fragment of lost life in the presence of a collective present. Performance, you wrote, is what allows minoritarian subjects to “take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—and in our names.” And performance is also a way of drawing people together. Throwing parties was a way of resurrecting you and keeping you alive. Being with each other was a way of being with you. In the wake of your death we became common to each other. We became communists.

In the months after you died there was a proliferation of memorials. One friend joked that we were trapped in the Memorial Industrial Complex. After one of them, a group of us stole away late in the afternoon, collecting ourselves in the basement of a West Village nightclub, (Le) Poisson Rouge. The event recalled the kind of queer happenings that used to occur in places like SqueezeBox!, Club 57, or in the basement of the Fez, but no doubt sadder and muter. There was a bar against the wall of a cramped, black, downstairs room and a platform set up at the front, before which people huddled on the floor, or stood wherever they could find a spot. Carmelita Tropicana emceed a host of performances for and inspired by you: Guinevere Turner read a concrete poem composed of your better voicemails, Matmos reperformed Darby Crash’s signature circle burn (burning a circle into the skin with a cigarette), and Nao Bustamante arrived as a grieving punk widow, draped in a fur coat with billowing black veils shrouding her face. The costume, an ostentatious
bid for the role of prime griever, materialized what she would later describe as her performance’s “aesthetics of grief.” Before grieving, however, the awkward tedium of the live.

Accompanied by a guitarist dressed in a horse mask, Jason Martin, Nao began assembling the stage. It took some time—too much time—and at one point Carmelita, who was working hard to fill the air, teased, “You know, I think they’re just going to do this and they’re not doing anything. It’s going to be a durational performance.” But soon enough, the performance began. Nao stood at the front of the space, dropping the coat, exposing her body to the room, with a skinny bikini-esque bottom and top, high-heeled boots, and the lengthy veil reaching down to her midsection. She danced enthusiastically to a vintage Spanish-language beach song before setting the record to a slower, sultrier number. Laying on the platform, torquing her body in a host of directions and pulling a microphone to her face, she sang, but instead of singing she was screaming. Something between a Darby Crash or Alice Bag rendition of “Somewhere My Love” and the howl of indescribable grief.

After I got the call that you were dead, I sat in the middle of the street for a few minutes, early morning Chicago traffic driving around me, before calmly walking back home and through the front door, where I began to howl. A few years later I sit in Nao’s Los Angeles studio and ask her about that performance. “All performance is an expression of pain,” she told me. “It’s kind of like a primal scream.” As she screamed the song her voice was frayed, shredding at its outermost limit and shrieking the lyrics into the broken air: “Someday we’ll meet again my love.” A lie, perhaps, but the truth was harder to bear, and as if to help her carry the burden, some people in the audience began to shriek along with her. She was bringing them together. Performance “is like hosting a party,” she says.

The naked vulnerability of Bustamante’s screaming body reminded me of your description of her 1992 performance, Rosa Does Joan, in which “exhibitionism is a mode of comportment that insists on a certain decibel of emotion, one that like many aspects of Latino culture are considered too loud or unharmonious by normative ears . . . [and] scrambles the public/private dictates of normative desire.” You called her a “vulnerability artist,” transforming her body into a conduit for “ugly feelings” and affective excess, while revaluing and revealing both to be queer, brown ways of creatively negotiating and living in a limiting world.
It is a lot for one body to bear this kind of burden, but in performance the burden is shared out amongst the many. While she screamed into the microphone, one could catch shades of her character in America the Beautiful, who you described as “an individual in need of public feelings, a character representing a raw need for public emotion and recognition.”25 In that piece, Bustamante’s character (a brown woman) reaches to attain (and fails spectacularly to realize) the impossible, self-negating ideal of whiteness. The screaming mourner before us, however, stubbornly clings to the darkness and to the black and brown recesses of queer of color grief and rage. But she is no more likely to be successful since she was reaching for someone who could not come back.

Martin’s guitar goes wild and Bustamante’s screaming stops as she slowly rolls her body off the platform and into the audience. They part, making way for her, as she swims through them like a body surfer floating on (or, rather, wriggling through) a mosh pit. The act was entirely improvised. “I didn’t have a plan for after. After the screaming, I didn’t
have a plan,” she told me. “How do you get out of that kind of performance?” Then, as she made her way around the room, something happened: People started to reach out to touch her. At first to help her move, lifting and prodding her body through the packed space. But then it was something else, as if they were taking care of her. “It wasn’t rehearsed,” she said; “the whole point of the piece was to lose it.” In losing it, she became common to us and we become common with her.

Touched by her breakdown, we reached out to touch her, sometimes literally, as if responding to and sharing her “raw need for public emotion and recognition.” “It was healing,” she surmised, “not that anyone can heal that quickly.” And then the performance didn’t end so much as she crawled up next to the bar, where she stood up and ordered a drink. She was “not letting it end by never ending it.” Which is maybe another way of saying that the end was just the beginning of a new durational performance: life in the time after your death.

There is something communist about the way a performance can draw a room together, allowing radically different people to share life (and death) as they try to take care of each other. Each person touching Bustamante’s body had a different proximity to you, to her, or to the scream, and it was that difference that constituted the grounds of our being together. Whatever our relation of being together was, it was founded in difference, rather than a relation of equivalence. In the “Critique of the Gotha Program,” Marx describes communism as a system of redistribution founded on relations of nonequivalence: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” Communism was necessary, Marx argued, because the capitalist mode of production takes things that are “distinct, possess different properties, are measured in different units, are incommensurable” and reduces them to “a numerical relationship” in which they are measured by way of a general equivalent, thereby “mak[ing] them commensurable.” In order to foster a world of boundless exchangeability, capitalism flattens difference into equivalence, making singularity into commensurability. In the place of capital’s commons of equivalence, communism calls for a commons of incommensurability: a sphere of relation structured less by the flat social fictions of possession, equality, and equivalence, than by a mode of sharing out, just redistribution, and being together in racial and sexual particularity.
You located the communism of incommensurability in the work of, and relationship between, Eve Sedgwick and Gary Fisher:

I use the term “communism” to help us think a certain communing of incommensurable singularities that can be enacted through even impersonal sex. But I also mean just plain communism. But let me be more exact, by “just plain communism” I do not mean to invoke the communism of a mythical society of equals, but, instead, the communism of living within a sense of the commons, a living in common. . . . Communism is first and foremost about the precondition for emancipation. But emancipation from what, we might ask? Here we come to understand emancipation as freedom from historical forces that dull or diminish our sense of the world. Nancy points out that Marx himself argued that the commune was the antithesis of empire. Communism would therefore be antithetical to our inner and outer colonialism, those blockages that disallow our arrival at an actual sense of the world, which is the world as a plurality of senses.\(^\text{32}\)

By placing decolonial praxis and minoritarian emancipation at the center of your conceptualization of communism, this conception of the communism of incommensurability calls for a form of “being-with, in difference and discord” where racial and sexual differences are not extinguished, but shared out with each other: “This commons, this experience of being-in-common-in-difference, offers [us] a map of life where singularities flow into the common, enacting a necessary communism.”\(^\text{33}\) Communism being necessary, here, because it labors to sustain freedom and More Life for queer and trans people of color. Minoritarian performance can be, as it was for those few flickering moments of Bustamante’s scream, the means through which this “necessary communism” shifts from mere ideality to (albeit ephemeral) reality.

Performance, like communism, like the party, is an ephemeral, temporary happening in which singular beings crash into each other for a time to become a being singular plural. But then the dawn breaks, the performance ends, the party comes undone, and they slip away from each other, falling back into the void. The party is the communism of incommensurability where, as Siouxsie described it, an “aura of sadness abounds [in] you” but gives way to being-with and being together-in-difference, where the past isn’t lost, the future isn’t foreclosed, and the
present is the presence of infinite, boundless, and renewable life. For Nancy, this is “the condition of the ever-renewed present.” And for you, it was, and was akin to, performance: “This potentiality is always in the horizon and, like performance, never completely disappears, but instead, lingers and serves as a conduit for knowing and feeling other people.” What allows the party, or a performance, to serve the will toward freedom and More Life is that another night beckons and that it can happen again. And again. And again.

At first, after you died, I couldn’t find you. I wandered the halls looking for you. I screamed out your name but you did not come. And then you started to return: in the songs that you used to listen to, the things you wrote, the books you read, art you adored, sometimes in dreams, and most of all in the company of the people you loved. Throwing parties was a way of performing your resurrection, even if, like a performance, your return was always ephemeral or impermanent. You took a part of us with you when you died. Like the parties we threw, I wrote this to bring you back.

This book is about minoritarian subjects who keep each other alive, mobilizing performance to open up the possibility for new worlds and new ways of being in the world together. I wrote it for the other ones who are lost, left behind, and living in the breakdown, but it is addressed to you, in particular, because in spite of the mundanity and ubiquity of queer and trans of color death, each of those deaths remains singular, particular, and personal for those of us who live in the wake of them. We can never forget that. To write a book about minoritarian death, survival, and freedom (which was also to write a book about queer of color grief, life, and insurgency) is always to write about the particular, singular people (like you) whom we have loved and lost. I wrote this book for you. And I wrote it to keep some part of you alive and with me (with us) in order to take you with us to the various battles that we will wage in your name—and in our own.