

**SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER**[http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/visualart/87921\\_lipstick21q.shtml](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/visualart/87921_lipstick21q.shtml)**'Lipstick' traces the trail of anarchy***Saturday, September 21, 2002***By REGINA HACKETT**

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER ART CRITIC

"Lipstick Traces" is not about lipstick and certainly not about its traces. Smeared on a glass or pressed on a mirror, lipstick traces are signs of a romantic hangover, full of longing and inertia. When looking for their musical equivalent, most people think of Billie Holiday or Frank Sinatra, not Johnny Rotten.

Had Greil Marcus' book, "Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century," demonstrated a more conventional understanding of its signature image, it would have been a lot easier to stage. Although romance is never out of date, anarchy needs special historical moments to spawn its zealots and the dispossessed intellectuals who admire them.

Closing a four-night run tonight at On the Boards, a six-person theatrical company known as the Rude Mechs from Austin, Texas, accomplishes the nearly impossible task of turning Marcus' dense, heady text into 75 minutes of fast-paced and absorbing drama, produced by The Foundry Theatre in New York.

Lipstick in the Marcus sense has more to do with a wound than adornment, more about violence than sex appeal. The evening opens with the shock of headlights turned full force on the audience. Crouching in the shadows is John of Leyden (Darren Pettie), a heretical 16th-century monk who disapproves of work and endorses desire. Naturally, his times being what they were, he was plucked limb from limb and burned with pokers.

A lounge lizard in a shiny purple suit, Malcolm McLaren (Henry Stram), promoter of the Sex Pistols, strolls in to explain the similarities between Johnny Rotten and John Leyden. He praises his own efforts as "burying a critique of the purchase inside the product," which leads naturally to German dadaists between the world wars and the French Situationists in the 1970s, with theorist Guy Debord brilliantly played by Randolph Curtis Rand. Everybody smokes, Johnny Rotten (Jason Liebrecht) screams and the real Rotten is heard singing what Marcus calls his masterpiece, "Anarchy in the UK."

Who knew there was a theatrical experience lurking in Marcus' book? Certainly not Marcus. The credit goes to director Shawn Sides, play adapter Kirk Lynn and the actors, all fabulous. The one false note is a character called Dr. Narrator (Lana Lesley), who wastes that actor's considerable talents with unnecessary, shrill explication.

"I believe I know a tidbit or two," says Rotten, smirking at the audience. Yes he does, and while nobody could call this play a pleasure, seeing it is an enlarging, even heartening experience.

**PERFORMANCE REVIEW****LIPSTICK TRACES: A SECRET HISTORY OF THE 20TH CENTURY****WHERE:** On the Boards, 100 Roy St.**WHEN:** Through tonight**TICKETS:** \$25; 206-217-9888

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