

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Tune In, Turn On, Go Punk: American Punk Counterculture, 1968-1985

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores areas of social and intellectual continuity within the American counterculture circa 1968-1985. It demonstrates that the punk counterculture of the 1970s had its roots in the hippie counterculture of the 1960s and was not a separate social phenomenon. The punk counterculture developed in three periods: 1968-1975, when punks and hippies shared bohemian neighbourhoods, like New York's East Village, and an ideology that rejected capitalism and middle-class lives; 1975-1980, when punk gained public notice and began to develop its own institutions like the night club, the fanzine, and the independent record label; and 1980-1985, as punk rediscovered the political critique made by dissenting groups of the 1960s, such as the New Left, with the emergence of hardcore punk. This thesis uses 298 letters printed in *Flipside* and *MaximumRock'n'Roll* magazines during the period of 1983-1985 to demonstrate the grass-roots concerns of punks as they evolved through these periods.

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"This is for me and everyone I know knows it"

- Blonde Redhead,

In an Expression of the Inexpressible, Touch & Go, 1997

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Chapter One

All Hopped Up and Ready to Go: The Birth of Punk¹

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Ramones' debut album, an album that according to a celebratory *Spin Magazine* article "inspired countless disenfranchised teens to start punk bands."² The Ramones' debut album has been described as a critical moment not just in the history of music, but in what many American historians refer to as the "counterculture." However, the term "counterculture" is often used in the plural, with each successive generation making its own revolt, be it Beat, Hippie or Punk, only to be overtaken by the next big thing. When punk first caught the public eye, it was seen as nihilistic and doomed to burn itself out in apocalyptic rage. Punk has not slipped quietly into the dustbin of history, though; 2001 marks its twenty-fifth anniversary as well as the Ramones'. Since the 1970s, however, it has grown and developed into an extensive cultural system that extends beyond music to offer critiques of American politics and economic policy, while being an advocate for feminist, minority, and environmental politics.³

Punk may have burst onto the musical scene in 1976, but its actual gestation extends back much further, for its development was continuous with

¹ Line from the Ramones' first single, and the first bonafide punk song, "Blitzkrieg Bop", from *Ramones*, Sire Records, 1976.

² Eric Weisbard, "25 Years of Punk", *Spin Magazine* (May 2001): 87.

that of the counterculture of the 1960s. Punk emerged out of many of the same urban neighbourhoods that nurtured the hippies throughout the 1960s. Thus, while many aspects of the punk and hippie countercultures were different and unique to themselves, they also shared many commonalities. The focus of this thesis will be on the similarities between these two cultures in order to link them socially and ideologically. Oral histories of the early punk scenes reveal that punks felt a strong connection with the hippie counterculture. Furthermore, as punk developed it rediscovered the economic, political, and social critiques of the 1960s. Through the study of amateur punk magazines in the early 1980s, this study will endeavor to add to the understanding of the role of non-musicians in forming punk culture. These magazines, known as fanzines, also demonstrate the connections that the counterculture made throughout the community, and the issues around which they rallied.

American historian Charles Kaiser has stated that “the” counterculture was born on January 14, 1967 at the Human Be-In, where Allen Ginsburg, Jerry Rubin, and Timothy Leary attempted to unite disparate elements of the various youth subcultures.⁴ However, this merely marked the day that the counterculture went above ground, much in the same way that the release of *Ramones* brought punk into mainstream consciousness.⁵ Kaiser, like many mainstream journalists and historians, ignored much activity that went on before 1967, highlighting the difficulty in reconstructing the history of a counterculture from a position within

³ While punk was not uniquely American, and is now a fairly international counterculture, I will be focusing exclusively on American punk.

⁴ Charles Kaiser, *1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture, and the Shaping of a Generation* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 204.

the dominant culture, where every new manifestation appeared to be something radical and new. One of the first authors to discuss the nature of the burgeoning counterculture was Theodore Roszak in his 1969 book, *The Making of a Counter Culture*.⁶ Roszak took a fairly large view of the counterculture, encompassing the Beat Generation, the flower children of the 1960s, anti-war politics and psychedelic drugs. While Roszak's identification of the Beats as part of the counterculture, and not forerunners, implied a longer gestation period than some writers would allow, many seem to share his definition of its composition.⁷

If punk is to be seen as a continuation of the 1960s counterculture, then it is necessary to define somehow what the counterculture of the 1960s was, in order to examine what aspects were maintained or expanded by punk. Like punk, the 1960s counterculture was not a cohesive monolithic block, for beneath its label many different subcultures vied, each with its own particular area of interest and emphasis. However, all of these disparate and sometimes conflicting subgroups shared a common ideological base. Thus "counterculture" is an umbrella term used to connect individuals and parties who collectively stressed personal liberty and fulfillment over economically-based social roles.

Roszak wrote that by the early 1960s America had developed into a technocratic society. By this he meant a "social form in which an industrial society reaches the peak of its organizational integration." This is the same type

⁵ And even then it really went nowhere; *Ramones* didn't even crack the Billboard Top 200.

⁶ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

of society advocated by late nineteenth century industrial reformers like Frederick W. Taylor.⁸ Roszak described the technocratic society as being:

the ideal men usually have in mind when they speak of modernizing, updating, rationalizing, planning . . . the technocracy works to knit together the anachronistic gaps and fissures of industrial society . . . in which entrepreneurial talent broadens its province to orchestrate the total human context which surrounds the industrial complex.⁹

Theodore Roszak defined the hippie counterculture in opposition to the technocratic society. It was against the dehumanizing of everyday life, and instead created "a culture so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks to many as a culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of barbaric intrusions."¹⁰ This definition, for Roszak, took precedence over all other activities of the counterculture. In fact, Roszak lumped together the anti-war movement, the civil rights movement, the psychedelic movement, and various components of the counterculture, but his main focus was on the hippie rejection of economics as the primary focus of society. Roszak did not have a problem with capitalism *per se*, but rather with the organization of society favoured by capitalism. Thus, he excluded Black Power as being part of a different (though compatible) struggle for racial equality *within* the technocratic society, since he felt that this movement would leave the overall

⁸ For a brief look at the thoughts of Taylor see his posthumously published *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1911).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

government structure intact. Roszak's counterculture was against a society that would allow the bomb but not a fully realized creative and expressive person. Simply wanting a place at the table or a change of leaders was not going to win effective changes. What the counterculture was striving for, Roszak argued, was a lifestyle that would reintegrate the irrational, emotional heritage of Western civilization, *a la* William Blake and the Romantic poets.

What the counter culture offers us, then, is a remarkable defection from the long-standing tradition of skeptical, secular intellectuality which has served as the prime vehicle for three hundred years of scientific and technical work in the West. Almost overnight (and astonishingly, with no great debate on the point) a significant portion of the younger generation has opted out of that tradition, rather as if to provide an emergency balance to the gross distortions of our technological society, often by occult aberrations just as gross. As often happens, one cultural exaggeration calls forth another, which can be its opposite, but equivalent.¹¹

Similarly, Charles A. Reich advocated the concept of the counterculture as an alternative lifestyle in his 1971 *The Greening of America*, except that this altered lifestyle was symbolic of an altered state of consciousness, "a total configuration of the individual, which makes up his whole perception of reality, his world view."¹² Reich took a more psycho-social perspective than Roszak, who saw the countercultural struggle ultimately as an economic and political struggle. For Reich, change was gradual and evolutionary, because "consciousness is formed by the underlying economic and social conditions Culture and

¹⁰ Ibid., 42.

¹¹ Ibid., 141-2.

government interact with consciousness; they are its products but they also help to form it."¹³

In *The Greening of America*, Reich presented the counterculture as having developed out of changes in American society. His three stages of consciousness each reflected particular moments in the economic transformation of the United States: Consciousness I in the late-nineteenth-century, Consciousness II during 1930-1950, and finally Consciousness III, which came into being during the 1960s. Consciousness I was formed during a time when the United States were primarily a rural-small town agricultural country, in which the threat of a tyrannical government still loomed. Consciousness I individuals, according to Reich, were independent, proponents of laissez-faire government policies.¹⁴ Consciousness II was born during the late-nineteenth-century industrial boom and the introduction of Frederick W. Taylor's scientific management of the workplace, which dehumanized industrial labour practices by putting individual work rhythms to a standard pace.¹⁵ With positivist thought sweeping through intellectual circles and the economy firmly in the hands of the corporations, Reich argued that this period saw the rise of the expert as policymaker.¹⁶ Consciousness II, cynical about human nature, favoured some form of institutional management of social problems and submission to the will of experts or authorities.¹⁷ Consciousness II, Theodore Roszak would say, was the technocratic society. Consciousness III, which Reich identified with the

¹² Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

counterculture, came of age during the period of mechanized industrialization which relied less and less on human labour power, a period of unsurpassed economic and technological growth. Consciousness III questioned the need to work and make sacrifices in the name of work at all.

In *The Greening of America*, Reich described the United States as being dominated by Consciousness II; corporations, whether businesses or schools, trained and indoctrinated individuals to make them fit into the corporate state.¹⁶ Menial jobs were dehumanizing and workers had no creative outlets. Reich lamented that these workers could be "Joan Baez or Bob Dylan, working in a bank or a filling station until their minds and bodies have forgotten that poetry was once in them."¹⁷ While Roszak felt that the counterculture reflected the development of a youth culture freed from sacrifice by a booming economy, Reich argued that the counterculture was not exclusively geared toward youth, but that it encompassed a set of ideals that could work equally well with mature people, provided they found a set of values to base around a non-material culture.¹⁸ Consciousness, Reich explained, contained the seeds of new types of social institutions and political possibilities, as it sought new ways to express its values.

The distinction between the 1960s and punk countercultures becomes clearer through the theoretical framework of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. According to Gramsci, once values start to manifest themselves as institutions

¹⁶ Ibid., 38.

¹⁷ Ibid., 67.

¹⁸ Ibid., 130.

¹⁹ Ibid. 151.

and cultural forms, they can form historical blocs, the stepping stone to his theory of hegemony. According to Gramsci, ideas come first and these govern how people organize our economic and social practices. Next, institutions are built to reinforce and normalize these practices. From here, they assume the pattern of everyday life, but at bottom lies an idea.²¹ Gramsci's emphasis on the cultural over the political was similar to the tactical differences between the punk and hippie countercultures and 1960s political groups of the New Left. Unlike the New Left, which struggled to achieve both immediate political and social changes, punk, in the 1970s, made no such effort. Instead, like the hippies, who by the late 1960s were perceived by leftists as apolitical, or at least insufficiently political, punks concentrated on creating an alternative cultural system that could one day challenge mainstream society.

Gramsci wrote that politics is the realm of the state, which is the governing institutions plus economic organizations.²² Any "revolutionary" party that participates in the usual political process (such as elections, parliamentary debates, etc.) can merely make minor changes, allowing the system to function more smoothly while appearing to demonstrate the system's ability to accommodate and handle dissent.²³ Gramsci called this the passive revolution. The passive revolution can be seen in punk as well, where corporate record labels were viewed as watering down and pacifying revolutionary music (such as

²⁰ Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 30-1; Reich, *The Greening of America*, 278.

²¹ Norberto Bobbio, "Gramsci and the Conception of Civil Society", Chantal Mouffe (ed.) *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 33.

²² Anne Showstack Sasson, "Hegemony, War of Position and Political Intervention", *Approaches to Gramsci* (London, England: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative Society LTD., 1982), 96.

²³ Sasson, *Approaches to Gramsci*, 113.

jazz, rock, punk, hip hop), while attempting to prove that the corporate recording industry was every bit as revolutionary as the independents. The practice of “dropping out” can be seen as the process by which the counterculture avoided co-optation and concentrated on the development of its own institutions.²⁴ The real political battle could only occur once there was an effective economic and social alternative practiced by the party’s own supporters, such as the development of independent labels capable of national distribution. The political battle, according to Gramsci, would be among the last of the battles to occur.²⁵

The political battle could only occur, he believed, once the cultural battle had been won. Gramsci acknowledged this in his discussions of hegemony and the role it played in gaining the consent of the governed. Hegemony occurred when a particular historical bloc, or social group, was able not only to articulate its own goals and values but also to convince other social groups that these goals and values were shared. The alliances of these social groups allowed them to form a cohesive bloc. Hegemony occurred when one:

[B]ecomes aware that one’s own corporate interests in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too. This is the most purely political phase, and marks the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures: it is the phase in which previously germinated ideologies become “party”, come into confrontation and conflict, until one of them, or at least a single combination of them,

²⁴ Anne Showstack Sasson, “Passive Revolution and the Politics of Reform”, *Approaches to Gramsci* (London, England: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative Society LTD., 1982), 142.

²⁵ Carl Boggs, *The Two Revolutions: Antonio Gramsci and the Dilemmas of Western Marxism* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 161.

tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society - bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a "universal" plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups.²⁶

Gramsci's ideas about the competition between social groups for hegemony help explain the role of the counterculture since the 1960s. According to Reich and Roszak, the hegemonic bloc that guided American society after WWII was composed of the corporate pro-capitalist forces, Roszak's technocratic society and Reich's Consciousness II. Hegemony involved the ability to diffuse ideological, race, gender, and class claims as universal values throughout all of society by controlling key institutions such as Congress, Church, courts, schools, and the media. It used these institutions not only to promote its ideas, but to further them.²⁷ For example, under a hegemonic capitalist system, the process of education mirrors the processes of industry and the desired result is not well-educated individuals, but skilled, competent workers.²⁸ Gramsci suggested that the liberal Western democracy was created by the expanding middle-classes who were looking for a way to safeguard their mastery of the economy.²⁹

Hegemony rests on consent. As disparate groups within the United States struggled to enact their visions of American society, the post-World War II

²⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Quentin Horare and Donald Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 181.

²⁷ Christine Buci-Glucksmann, "Hegemony and Consent: A Political Strategy", Anne Showstack Sasson (ed) *Approaches to Gramsci* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative Society LTD., 1982), 120.

²⁸ Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1980), 39.

consensus collapsed in the 1960s. Gramsci commented that hegemony could only occur with a broad coalition united behind a common ideological goal. The counterculture of the 1960s, with its links to the Civil Rights movement, the feminist movement, the anti-war movement, and leftist student politics, represented the first manifestation of the counterculture as a potential historical bloc. While this bloc agitated for social change, by 1968 the demands it made quickly outstripped how far other social blocs, such as those represented by the moderate Democratic and reactionary Republican parties, were willing to go. Much reform was achieved during the 1960s, but by the late 1960s, the reforms that the counterculture and the New Left urged made these successes seem limited. The riots at the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago demonstrated just how far apart these three sides were; the counterculture had moved past the possibility of a coalition with the moderates, thus creating the sense of political failure that punk would inherit. In the power vacuum that followed the collapse of consent in 1968, the counterculture was simply one competing historical bloc. This historical bloc continued to develop throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the form of the punk counterculture.

Confusion is Next: What is the Counterculture?³⁰

²⁹ Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 46-7.

³⁰ From Sonic Youth's debut album, "Confusion is Next", *Confusion Is Sex*, Geffen Records, 1983.

In order for the counterculture to be seen as a historical bloc, it must first be viewed as part of a historical continuum, and this begs the question, "What is the counterculture?" The "counterculture" was a nebulous construct that emerged during the post-World War II era. During this period of the "great consensus", few dissenting voices found a willing audience, but among those who did were the coterie of authors now known as the Beat Generation. Through their writing, literary figures such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs questioned social norms that prohibited behaviour like homosexuality and recreational drugs, and that favoured a routine, settled, suburban home-to-work-and-back-again lifestyle over an impulsive, expressive, nomadic one. These writers inspired a generation of youth to adopt such "hip" lifestyles. In many ways, the hippies, as they became known, represented a resurgence of the bohemian tradition within the United States, except that they followed in part, and absorbed, the social values of the civil rights movement as well as the critique of American politics offered by the New Left. According to many portrayals of the history of the counterculture, as the 1960s declined, so, in part, did the hippies, and there existed during the 1970s a countercultural lull until, from out of nowhere, punk exploded.³¹ This is simply not true.

The use of the term "counterculture" highlights problems of periodization within the study of American popular culture. The word "counterculture" often generates one of two images, the long-haired, beads and flower wearing, peace-sign flashing hippie or the leather and dog-collared, middle-finger waving, spiky

³¹ This is of course, the usual story, as exemplified by Greil Marcus in *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

haired punk. One counterculture or two? Then again, were the hippies the sole-representatives of the 1960's counterculture? Or, was everyone who bought a Blondie album a member of the punk counterculture? While to a certain extent cultural affiliations are fluid and overlapping, allowing individuals to identify with more than one group at any given time, the bonds within these groups are ideological. That is, cultural groups hold themselves together through the strength of the ideas and values that they share. At root, punks and hippies shared a common ideology.

Isolating a starting date for punk is problematic, since the Ramones were only one band out of many who explored similar musical themes at the time.³² George Gimarc opened his *Punk Diary* with the release of the Stooges' *Funhouse* in 1970. The British *Mojo Magazine*, while not undermining the importance of the Sex Pistols, nevertheless gave the New York Dolls a nod for their 1973 debut album, *New York Dolls*.³³ The more the starting points of countercultural periods are examined, however, the less incongruous supposed departures become, and the more consistency appears.

A myth has developed around punk that 1976 was year zero on the counterculture's calendar.³⁴ This was the year that the generation of American

³² For the record, this album is thirty-eight days older than I am, as I was born on the same day that the Runaways (featuring a young Joan Jett) released their own debut album, allowing American youths to choose between two flavours of "street rock" as it was called back then: the East Coast all boy-band bounce of the Ramones, or the West Coast girl grind of the Runaways.

³³ Danny Fields, "Night of the Living Trash," *Mojo: The Music Magazine* (February, 2001): 57. Also, New York Dolls, *New York Dolls*, Mercury Records, 1973. Their follow-up album prophetically described their relationship to pop fame, *Too Much Too Soon*, Mercury Records, 1974.

³⁴ Or 1977 if one reflects the British bias that the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the U.K." was the birth of punk. Or, further, 1975, when the Pistols first formed. Likewise, does one go back to 1974 for the Ramones? Regardless, the point here is that punk somehow marked a radical departure from the past.

youth who embraced what would become punk threw out their radios and turned their backs on mainstream American pop culture. A corollary to this myth is that punk not only marked the moment of this rejection, but that it also marked a break with the legacy of the 1960s counterculture, as represented most visibly by the hippies. This myth has been propagated by virtually every journalist, academic, and even most musicians involved in punk. It fundamentally misrepresents both American punk and the American counterculture, allowing both to be marginalized as youth trends.³⁵ As with all myths, the year zero concept holds some truth. Punk did start as a rejection of mainstream music, but it was a rejection of popular 1970s rock acts that punks viewed as bloated and irrelevant, like Fleetwood Mac; Emerson, Lake, and Palmer; Toto; and Boston.³⁶ Punks did not reject the questioning music of early Bob Dylan, the rebelliousness of the early Rolling Stones, or the late 1960s counterculture bands like the Doors, the Velvet Underground or the MC5. Yes, there were visible differences between punk and the hippies, most notably punk's slender denim and leather look versus the flowers and bellbottoms of the hippies, and the roar of the Ramones versus Dylan's early strident folk strumming. However, if we unwrap the brown-wrapped package that was the counterculture, aesthetics becomes merely one side, for there were also intellectual and social dimensions to the 1960s underground, such as the urge to rebel and the desire to experiment, that not only resurfaced, but also informed, the counterculture of the 1970s.

³⁵ Though the continuing growth and development of punk for over twenty-five years is making it increasingly difficult to dismiss as merely a fad.

³⁶ Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons, *The Boy Looked At Johnny* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), 23-25.

Liars Beware: Rethinking Punk³⁷

In an interview with Clinton Heylin, David Byrne of the Talking Heads explained that early punk was the most self-conscious form of popular music.³⁸ It was critically aware of how every pose, every lyric, informed the audience. Bands like the Talking Heads, the New York Dolls, and especially the British Sex Pistols, were skilled in projecting an image of how they wanted to be perceived. While this makes for titillating reading, it does not make for accurate history. The first two books written on punk set the stage for everything that would come next, and while occupying opposite ends of the readership spectrum, contained pretty much the same message: that punk was deadly, punk was new, and punk was here to destroy. They both, however, recited the images, myths, and fantasies that the early punks had constructed about punks' origins.³⁹

The first published academic work on punk was Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* in 1977, a study in semiotics that served to legitimize British punk dress and music as an authentic form of protest. Dick Hebdige's work focused on this sense of rejection and nihilism. Hebdige was groundbreaking in that he attempted to unravel the symbolic meanings associated with punk clothing and music. However, punk was, and is, filled with self-conscious, and often ironic, poses that Stephen Duncombe in his study of

³⁷ From Richard Hell, "Down at the Rock And Roll Club", *Blank Generation*, Sire Records, 1977.

³⁸ Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World* (London: Penguin, 1993), 215.

³⁹ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London and New York: Routledge, 1979), 18.

fanzines, *Notes From Underground*, described as one of the best defenses punk had against its expropriation by the mainstream.⁴⁰ These poses must be defused and questioned. Hebdige uncritically accepted the images, most notably the (mostly false) claims early punk made to being a working-class movement. According to Hebdige, subcultures are formed around values that cannot find their ordinary expression in the dominant culture.⁴¹ Punks portrayed themselves as degenerates to symbolize Britain's economic and geo-political decline.⁴² Lacking their own language, punks spoke through the everyday objects around them, investing them with new meanings through a process Hebdige called *bricolage*, or the inversion of meaning.⁴³ Punk represented the embodiment of "swear words" and social taboos that were meant to be broken or undermined.⁴⁴ Despite his predilection for taking punk's words at face value, Hebdige was nevertheless one of the first academics to find in punk something worthwhile, even if he could not find anything deeper than nihilism.

The second major interpretation of punk was written in 1978. *The Boy Looked at Johnny: The Obituary of Rock and Roll*, took its name from Patti Smith's 1974 song "Horses". It was an attempt by Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons to celebrate punk's renegade status, as well to urge punks to resist co-optation by academics and record company moguls.⁴⁵ While Hebdige discussed previous youth subcultures in Britain, such as the Teddy Boys and glam-rock, to

⁴⁰ Stephen Duncombe, *Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (London: Verso, 1997), 147.

⁴¹ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 86.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴³ On the supposed muteness of punk, see Hebdige, *Subculture*, 95, while for more on *bricolage*, see Hebdige, *Subculture*, 104.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

help justify how groups imbue everyday objects with new and potentially subversive values, punk was nevertheless portrayed as a complete departure from these groups. For Hebdige, the aesthetics of punk, which contained deconstructed rock 'n' roll and used everyday objects such as garbage bags and safety pins as fashion pieces, symbolized a reaction to the decline of British society. For Burchill and Parsons, punk was a shot in the arm (or kick in the ass) to the bloated corpse of mid-1970s rock and roll. Like Hebdige, they recognized that rock and roll played an important role in youth culture as a carrier of values, and worried that punk's submission to the more radio-friendly, less controversial, "new wave" style of music represented the submission of a once-defiant youth culture. Other than to demonstrate that punk vaguely railed against the status quo, neither work attempted to examine seriously the intellectual culture surrounding and informing punk.

Tricia Henry followed Dick Hebdige's academic footsteps and completed a Ph.D. dissertation on punk in 1986.⁴⁶ In "Punk as Performance: The Evolution of a Style", Henry concentrated on the performance aspect of punk, both British and American, exploring musical antecedents in the 1960s such as the Velvet Underground, a band based in New York City's East Village, that merged jazz and pop melodies with dark and taboo lyrics. Henry also helped to flesh out the formation of the New York punk scene around the CBGB nightclub, locating the members of such bands as Television, the Talking Heads, and Blondie, as newcomers to the East Village who arrived in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

⁴⁶ Burchill and Parsons, *The Boy Looked at Johnny*.

However, Henry missed out on the opportunity to explore the implications of this East Village migration. According to oral accounts of early punk scenes, such as those in Cleveland, San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, the majority of original punks migrated to former hippie neighbourhoods during 1968-1972.⁴⁷

In 1987, rock journalist turned guru Greil Marcus wrote what has been the most influential and popular work on punk to date. In *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, Marcus accomplished what every commentator on punk from academics like Hebdige and Henry, to journalists and participants such as Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren, had attempted: namely finding a way to link punk with all of the grand artistic rebellions of the 20th century.⁴⁸ The book was a literary triumph, and illustrated themes that punk shared with art movements like dada and futurism. Key to Marcus' argument was the link between punk and the Situationist International, a French avant-garde group headed by art philosopher Guy Debord.⁴⁹ The Situationists wanted to make art, not economics, the focus of modern life, and played an important role in the statements released by Sorbonne students during the Paris uprisings of 1968.

⁴⁶ Tricia Henry, "Punk Rock: The Evolution of a Style" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, April 1987), 329.

⁴⁷ The origins of the Cleveland scene are dealt with in more detail in Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*; San Diego and San Francisco in Peter Belsito and Bob Davis, *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (San Francisco: The Last Gasp of San Francisco, 1983), San Francisco gets solo treatment in James Stark, *Punk '77: An Inside Look at the San Francisco Rock n' Roll Scene, 1977* (San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 1999), and Los Angeles in Kim McKenna (ed.), *Forming: The Early Days of L.A. Punk* (Santa Monica, California: Smart Art Press, 1999) and Don Snowden (ed.), *Make the Music go Bang! The Early L.A. Scene* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997), while Washington is covered in Cynthia Connelly, *Banned in D.C.: Photos and Anecdotes from the D.C. Punk Underground (79-85)* (Washington D.C.: Sun Dog Propaganda, 1995).

⁴⁸ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*.

⁴⁹ The Situationists were connected to figures like surrealist artist Asger Jorn, communist historian Henri Lefebvre, and philosopher Raoul Vaniegeim, author of *The Revolution of Everyday*

According to Marcus, Malcolm McLaren and graphic arts designer Jamie Reid conceived of the Sex Pistols as the living embodiment of Situationism, incorporating Situationist artistic styles, like the cut-up and *detournement*, and spiking the band's lyrics with Situationist philosophy. The practice of *detournement* involved subtly altering established images to give them new meanings. The safety pin through the mouth of Queen Elizabeth on the Sex Pistols' "God Save the Queen" single is one example.⁵⁰ The practice of subvertisments, the swapping of brand names on corporate logos for messages like "Slave Labour" or "Enjoy AZT" (the AIDS treatment drug), instead of slogans for Nike and Coke, as found in the anti-consumption magazine *Adbusters*, owe their existence entirely to *detournement*. The cut-up is a form of collage that juxtaposes images from different sources to create new meanings. The album art for the West Coast hardcore punk band the Dead Kennedys, done by Winston Smith, offered numerous examples of this style. In punk fan magazines of the early 1980s, Ronald Reagan was often the victim of cut-ups portraying him as a Nazi, butcher, ghoul, or clown. One magazine, *Jet Lag*, even ran an ad that featured a still image originally from a western movie, but detoured in the Situationist student pamphlet of May 1968, *The Return of the Durutti Column*, with hand-written revolutionary text in comic strip dialog bubbles, replaced in the ad with commercial information on stock and location.⁵¹

Life (London: Practical Paradise Publications, 1975). The Situationists were also partly the inspiration for Abbie Hoffmann's *Steal this Book!* (no publishers, 1971).

⁵⁰ Sex Pistols, "God Save the Queen", EMI, 1977.

⁵¹ Oddly, this mirrors the oft-seen process of co-opting the underground. A popular low-brow image (the movie stills of cowboys) is given revolutionary or cult associations (in the *Return of the Durutti Column*) before its revolutionary cachet is commodified. For more on this see Thomas Frank's *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip*

Marcus continued the trend emphasizing the Sex Pistols and British punk over American punk and the New York scene. Since punk's predecessor in Britain was the backwards-looking, nostalgia-loving Teddy Boys, who were by no means a British version of the hippies, British punk has been able to portray itself as a unique moment in time, succinctly captured in Jon Savage's 1991 oral history *England's Dreaming*.⁵² This meant that while Marcus succeeded in demonstrating that punk did have historical precedents in the general stream of Western art history, he failed to connect American punk with the American counterculture of the 1960s. As revealed in both Clinton Heylin's 1993 *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History For A Post-Punk World*, and Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain's 1996 *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, American punk was coming from different roots than its British cousins.⁵³ American punk relied less on its knowledge of artistic traditions, than it did on developments within American rock 'n' roll. Heylin used interviews with members of "pre-punk" bands such as the Velvet Underground, the MC5, the Stooges, and the Modern Lovers, groups that performed during the interim period of 1968-72, to demonstrate the interactions among these bands, personally and musically, with the early punk bands of New York, such as the New York Dolls, Television, and the Ramones. McNeil, who came up with the term "punk" for the short-lived New York magazine *Punk*, and in so doing gave the genre its name, using interviews done for *Punk* and conversations McNeil recorded later, carried

Consumerism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). For the ad, see *Jet Lag* No.66 (June 1986), (Factsheet Five Archive, New York State Library - henceforth abbreviated as FS5-NYSL).

⁵² Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). For more on the Teddy Boys, see Hebdige, *Subculture*, 75.

Heylin's work further. McNeil focused on the bands of the New York scene, 1972-1979, and thereby revealed the affinity these musicians felt for the "pre-punk" bands. This continuity makes it difficult to claim that American punk was a radical break with the American counterculture of the 1960s. Following the success of *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*, and *Please Kill Me*, the mid-to-late 1990s saw regional presses issuing their memoir-histories, with the focus primarily on West Coast punk: *Punk '77* (San Diego), *Make the Music Go Bang!* (Los Angeles), *Forming: The Early Days of L.A. Punk* (Los Angeles), *Hardcore California* (San Diego and San Francisco). *Banned in D.C.* (Washington, D.C.) was the sole exception to the West Coast emphasis.⁵⁴

Back in Britain, music journalist Stewart Home was intent on disproving Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces*. In his 1995 book *Cranked Up Really High: Genre Theory and Punk Rock*, Home attempted to undermine Marcus' grandiose claims for punk rock by widening the scope of study.⁵⁵ Rather than concentrate primarily on the Sex Pistols as Marcus had done, Home looked at the majority of bands that recorded in what he called the "punk" genre. In fact, Home divided punk into three distinct categories: "punk rock" which was basically a continuation of the 1960s garage rock, like the Beach Boys; "PUNK" which was punk with left-leaning ideological overtones, as expressed by the Clash or Dead Kennedys; and finally "punk" which Home described as nonsense music on a par with

⁵³ Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*. Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove Press, 1996).

⁵⁴ San Diego and San Francisco in Belsito and Davis, *Hardcore California*; San Francisco gets solo treatment in Stark, *Punk '77*; and Los Angeles in McKenna (ed.), *Forming*; and Snowden (ed.), *Make the Music go Bang!*; while Washington is covered in Connelly, *Banned in D.C.*

⁵⁵ Stewart Home, *Cranked Up Really High: Genre Theory and Punk Rock* (Hove: Codex, 1995).

novelty songs.⁵⁶ Furthermore, not only were most punk songs just plain silly, but Home also demonstrated that the supposed connection between the Sex Pistols and the Situationists on which Marcus hinged his argument actually never occurred.⁵⁷ Marcus argued that while managing the New York Dolls, McLaren had been in correspondence with two Situationist groups active in New York and London: the Black Mask and King Mob.⁵⁸ Home, however, demonstrated that there was no supporting evidence for McLaren's story, going so far as to point out that both Black Mask and King Mob were officially denounced by the Situationist International, thus ending Marcus' dreams of continuity between the two isolated groups.⁵⁹

Borrowing from the field of anthropology, Craig Calhoun's categories of social relationships reveals the errors of Marcus and Home. According to Calhoun there are four types of social relationships, the first being primary face-to-face, person to person relationships. Secondary relationships involved interactions among individuals in their official capacities only; i.e. accountant versus bank manager. In a mediated culture - one that rests not on physical contact between individuals, but rather on the contact between an individual and an object, such as a pamphlet, poster, novel, film, recording, etc. -- knowledge of the mere existence of an individual, or idea, is enough to be inspired by it, through what Calhoun calls a tertiary relationship. The final quaternary relationship involved one-way covert relationships, via technology like spy

⁵⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁸ Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 30.

⁵⁹ Home, *Cranked Up Really High*, 26.

cameras. Marcus and Home were looking for the existence or non-existence of relationships between McLaren and the Situationists. However, they failed to realize that tertiary relationships are not reciprocal and do not need face-to-face contact between both parties. By focusing on intellectual elites (McLaren and the Situationists) they ignored the social dimension of cultural exchange. Once an idea is released into the public sphere it takes on a public dimension, capable of circulating from group to group, person to person, almost at random, leaving the question of influence yet to be determined.⁶⁰

A recent anthology of academic work in Britain, *Punk Rock: So What?*, collected by Roger Sabin attempted to broaden the base of the punk experience, moving away from the study of the Sex Pistols and other bands from the early era.⁶¹ Instead, Sabin *et al.*, have looked at punk's influence on literature, film, and comix, as well as punk constructions of gender, etiquette, and fashion, as experienced from an audience member "perspective".⁶² With Roger Ogersby's essay on the genealogy of the Ramones the sole exception, *Punk Rock: So What* avoids analysis of similar ideas within American punk.⁶³

Within the fields of sociology and anthropology there has been little work done on American punk. Jon Lewis and Bradford Scott Simon both provide snapshots of punk communities in their *Journal of Popular Culture* articles, but

⁶⁰ Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections* (London: Routledge, 1996), 95-97.

⁶¹ Roger Sabin (ed.) *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁶² The term "comix" as opposed to "comics" was first started in the 1960s to designate comic books that were not aimed at children. This is an underground convention that punk comix have continued. Guy Lawley, "I Like Hate and I Hate Everything Else: The Influence of Punk on Comics", in Sabin (ed.), *Punk Rock: So What?*, 100-119.

fail to provide any historical context for their work.⁶⁴ The most notable American study has been Craig O'Hara's 1994 MA thesis, *The Philosophy of Punk*, circulated almost since its completion by leading underground publishers AK Press.⁶⁵ Unfortunately for this study however, O'Hara focuses solely on punk from 1982-1992, with the bulk of his work coming from British punk for the 1982-1986 period, and then post-hardcore American punk for 1986-1992. Thus, while O'Hara provided a succinct picture of American punk as it entered the 1990s, he missed out on the battle for control of the punk identity that the hardcore era, 1980-1985, helped forge. In part, it is this gap that this thesis will help to fill.

First of all, the myths surrounding the origins of punk need to be cleared up. Using the oral histories of the early punk scenes, like *Please Kill Me* and *Forming: The Early Days of L.A. Punk*, the development of the punk counterculture out of the remnants of former urban hippie neighbourhoods will be demonstrated.⁶⁶ These interviews reveal that the attitudes of these early punks toward things like politics and everyday life, were not a radical departure from the counterculture of the 1960s. Whether they chose to acknowledge it or not, many punks offered the same social critique that the hippies and the New Left

⁶³ Ogersby mainly provides an overview of the history of garage rock in the 1960s, as well as quoting extensively from Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoid*. Bill Ogersby, "Chewing out a Rhythm on My Bubblegum", in Sabin (ed.) *Punk Rock: So What?*, 154-169.

⁶⁴ Jon Lewis, "Punks in L.A.: It's Kiss of Kill", *Journal of Popular Culture* (Fall 1988 No. 2, Vol. 22): 87-97; Bradford Scott Simon, "Entering the Pit: Slam-dancing and Modernity", *Journal of Popular Culture* (Summer 1997, No. 1, Vol. 31): 149-176.

⁶⁵ Craig O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk: More than Noise* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995).

⁶⁶ McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me*; McKenna, *Forming*.

articulated. Theodore Roszak felt these thoughts were best expressed in the writings of Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown.⁶⁷

While Herbert Marcuse did not divide society into rival hegemonic blocs, he felt that states were governed by a "reality principle" which in the case of American society was purely economic.⁶⁸ Marcuse felt that social control rested on a process of repressive desublimation, the limited instinctual gratification received through consumption, matched with the cost of increasing aggression through the frustration of the failure to achieve actual gratification.⁶⁹ In *Life After Death*, Norman O. Brown told readers that it was this repression that kept them unhappy and subservient to the state in daily life.⁷⁰ The first step toward rebellion and true happiness lay in finding activities that one enjoyed. Brown gave art a privileged place as it "struggle[d] against repressive reason and the reality principle in an effort to regain lost liberties."⁷¹ Under Roszak's technocratic society, the rationalization of work stripped labour to its barest efforts, and rendered people into a "homo economicus."⁷² Ideally for Brown, any future change would help to make work enjoyable to both the mind and the body.⁷³ Together, Marcuse and Brown defined the axis around which the hippie counterculture would turn.

⁶⁷ Roszak relies heavily on Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); and Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959); see also Herbert Marcuse *Eros and Civilization* (London: Penguin Press, 1969); and Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961).

⁶⁸ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 9.

⁶⁹ Shierry M. Weber, "Individuation as Praxis", Paul Bienes (ed.), *Critical Interruptions: New Left Perspectives on Herbert Marcuse* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 37.

⁷⁰ Brown, *Life Against Death*.

⁷¹ Ibid., 63.

⁷² Ibid., 238.

⁷³ Brown, *Life Against Death*, 158.

In discussions of the philosophical underpinnings of punk, neither Marcuse nor Brown are mentioned, nor are Reich or Roszak invoked. Instead, writers like Greil Marcus refer to French theorist Guy Debord, founder of the Situationist International, and author of *The Society of the Spectacle*, first published in 1961.⁷⁴ Debord felt that mass society, the world of pulp magazines, radio programmes, bulk tours, and kitsch fashion, was an ongoing spectacle that distracted ordinary citizens from the underlying politics and, for Debord, the struggle for personal fulfillment inherent in daily life under capitalism. Paul Breines, in his collection of essays on Herbert Marcuse, notes that the Situationist International played an integral role in making the student uprising of May 1968 express the ideas for personal liberation of Marcuse.⁷⁵ May '68 also served as inspiration for Abbie Hoffmann's Festival of Life in Chicago that same summer, both for the potential of youth to disrupt the political machinery of the Democratic National Convention as well as for ideological inspiration. The quote "Let the Machines Do It" included in the Yippie Programme was a piece of May'68 graffiti.⁷⁶

With *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord outlined what he considered to be "the spectacle" and its role in society, in terms remarkably similar to Gramsci's description of hegemony:

⁷⁴ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 19-22. Robert Garnett, "Too Low to be Low: Art Pop and the Sex Pistols", Roger Sabin (ed.), *Punk Rock: So What?*. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

⁷⁵ Paul Breines, "From Guru to Spectre," Paul Breines (ed.), *Critical Interruptions: New Left Perspectives on Herbert Marcuse* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 12.

⁷⁶ Abbie Hoffmann, *Revolution for the Hell of It* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), insert.

By means of the spectacle the ruling order discourses endlessly upon itself in an uninterrupted monologue of self-praise. The spectacle is the self-portrait of power in the age of power's totalitarian rule over the conditions of existence . . . the spectacle is by no means the inevitable outcome of a technical development perceived as *natural*; on the contrary, the society of the spectacle is a form that chooses its own technical content . . . it should be remembered that [the mass media] has nothing neutral about it, and that it answers precisely to the needs of the spectacle's internal dynamics.⁷⁷

With the formation of the mass media, newspapers, broadcasters, journalists and advertisers developed into intermediaries between producers and consumers. Companies initiated communication with potential consumers not through face to face contact, but through advertising campaigns. Politicians increasingly spoke to citizens through the press, a process which involved selecting, editing and assessing the importance of what was said by the media. The content of a particular media outlet represented what had been judged important by that particular establishment, not necessarily on the basis of its importance to readers, but importance to its own editors, writers, owners, and advertisers, whose ads help offset the media outlet's operating cost. More often than not, the media represent the interests of its owners and advertisers.⁷⁸ Corporate control of the media was taken for granted by hardcore punks, allowing punks with their independent and underground media outlets to

⁷⁷ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 19.

⁷⁸ A whole range of books have been written on this topic from the classic Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Random House, 1988), to James Winter's *Democracy's Oxygen* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1996), and the on-going editorials of Norman Solomon and Jeff Cohen, part of the media watch group FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) and authors of *Wizards of Media Oz* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1997), and *Through the Media Looking-Glass* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1999). There is

envision their world as one of polar opposites. However, the emphasis on the theories of Debord and not Roszak, Reich, Marcuse, or Brown, reflects the disjunction that occurs in many academic writings on American punk; that punk is somehow seen as separate from any previous American counterculture, or that British history can reveal more about American punk than American history.

Second, if the counterculture were to operate as an historical bloc that could challenge other groups for a position of dominance in post-1960s American society, it would require institutions and an ideology. The institutions that punk developed to help maintain its feelings of community, the club, the record label, and the fanzine, emerged slowly throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. The evolution of these institutions and the ideas that they allowed punks to express are best studied using the early punk oral histories as well as the fanzines published between 1980 and 1985, collected in the Factsheet Five Archive of the New York State Library. The larger fanzines with national distribution contained lengthy letters pages that allowed the expression and analysis of the ideas and concerns of punks who were unable to record their beliefs in vinyl.

Stepping Stone: An Outline⁷⁹

The next few chapters will outline the development of punk and the construction of a national punk identity. This punk identity helped to reunite the counterculture as a form of cultural protest with the political critique of dissenting

even a weekly email listserv dedicated to unearthing corporate influence on the news with Russell Mohikbar's Focus on the Corporation (corp-focus@venice.essential.org).

groups like the New Left. This was not a smooth and natural process, but one that was challenged and debated until the mid-1980s. Not only were there multiple punk identities competing for dominance, but there were also multiple punk moments, involving different social groups and generations of American youth. Chapter Two will explore the emergence of what came to be known as “punk” in New York City and Cleveland during the mid-1970s, and in places like Los Angeles and San Francisco between 1977 and 1979. It will also demonstrate how this early form of punk was a social continuation of the hippie counterculture, even while it was an aesthetic break with the past. Finally, it will also discuss the significance of the birth of hardcore punk.

Chapter Three will focus on the development of the institutions that allowed the formation of a national punk identity within the United States by 1986. The growth of independent punk record labels, punk fan magazines with national distribution, and musical tours of bands, all helped to create a national community of punk that held particular aesthetic and ideological beliefs. The letters from these pages can also help to reveal how, and to what extent, the ideology of the bands were shared by their listeners.

Finally, Chapter Four will touch on future issues of relevance within the study of both punk and the counterculture in general. More importantly however, Chapter Four will demonstrate how the struggles over punk’s identity and the continued evolution of punk institutions allowed the counterculture to emerge in 1986 with a comprehensive belief system that consistently challenged the Reagan-Bush politics of the 1980s and early 1990s, while championing the old

⁷⁹ Minor Threat, “Stepping Stone,” 1981: *The Year in Seven Inches*, Dischord, 1982.

causes of the 1960s counterculture: anti-consumerism, disarmament, equality for women and minorities, and environmental protection.

Chapter Two

Your Pretty Theories Are Going To Hell: Rethinking the Origins of Punk⁸⁰

Hippies and punks are often seen as contrasting subcultures: one the love child of the 1960s, the other a bastard of the 1970s. While the counterculture of the 1960s is often seen to have started its decline in 1968, the years until the “birth” of punk in 1976 were not devoid of activity. Within the declining hippie counterculture, 1968-1972 saw many older hippies move out of their inner-city neighbourhoods, while those who arrived after 1967 gradually began to develop their own cultural identity. By 1973-1976 areas like New York City's East Village had developed all of the characteristics that would be present within the early punk scenes. The initial wild, experimental stage of punk, 1976-1979, would quickly give way to the radically politicized hardcore punk of 1980-1985. The arc of the counterculture from 1968 to 1985, then, witnessed its devolution from a cohesive national counterculture to a local fragmented one, and back again.

Early American punk, during 1976-1979, represented a continuation of the musical and social legacy of the 1960s counterculture. Many of the bands that were part of the New York punk explosion of this time idolized or were intimate with underground bands of the 1960s like the Velvet Underground, the MC5, and

⁸⁰ With a nod to Iggy and the Stooges' “Your Pretty Face is Going to Hell”, *Raw Power*, Columbia Records, 1972.

the Stooges. Furthermore, in other cities that saw the formation of a punk community, these “scenes” often grew out of old hippie neighbourhoods. British punk celebrates 1976 as “year zero,” the start of a new counterculture. But for American punk, 1976 was a “revival,” the beginning of the resurfacing of a national counterculture. Says John Doe of the Los Angeles based punk band X, “So even though punk was nihilistic and railed against everything that had come before - like ‘kill the hippies,’ etc. - it was actually a continuation of the freedom of expression of the hippie and beat movements, a rejection of middle-class values, the hypocrisy, and the commercialism . . .”⁸¹

According to many commentators, 1968 marked a turning point for the counterculture of the 1960s. The failure to achieve sufficient political reform; the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Robert Kennedy; Altamont and the Democratic Convention; the inability to maintain a cohesive direction for the disparate elements within the New Left counterculture all undermined the optimism within the counterculture for reform, and the optimism for the potential of the counterculture from external sources like the mainstream media. Some members of the counterculture chose to join the rural exodus to communes or to continue political organizing in neighbourhoods and factories, while others increasingly turned to radical and violent tactics. The effects of the much publicized “Summer of Love” in 1967 brought many youths streaming to American cities like New York and San Francisco, wanting to enjoy the hippie

⁸¹ Quoted in *Forming: The Early Days of L.A. Punk*, Kim McKenna (ed.) (Santa Monica, California: Smart Art Press, 1999), 85.

bohemia.⁸² However, the sheer numbers of newcomers taxed the meagre resources of these areas. While the East Coast did not hold a monopoly on Hell's Angels bikers or militant Black Panther activists, Norman Mailer's description of the inner-city counterculture scene nevertheless captured the prevailing atmosphere:

So the Hippies collided with the slums, and were beaten and robbed, fleeced and lashed and buried and imprisoned, and here and there murdered, and here and there successful, for there was scattered liaison with bikers and Panthers and Puerto Ricans on the East Coast and Mexicans on the West. There came a point when, like most tribes, they divided. Some of the weakest and some of the least attached went back to the suburbs or moved up into commerce or communications; others sought gentler homes where the sun was kind and the flowers plentiful; others hardened, and like all pilgrims with their own vision of a promised land, began to learn how to work for it and finally, how to fight for it. So the Yippies came out of the Hippies, ex-Hippies, diggers, bikers, drop-outs from college, hipsters up from the South. They made a community of sorts, their principles were simple - everybody, obviously, must be allowed to do (no way around the next three words) his own thing, provided he hurt no one doing it.⁸³

Those already in hippie neighbourhoods like Haight-Ashbury or the East Village took a dim view of these new arrivals. In his study of the counterculture, *The Hippies and American Values*, Timothy Miller noted that the newcomers did not seem to "fit" in with the older members of the counterculture, and as a result,

⁸² Irwin Unger and Debi Unger, *Turning Point: 1968* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 415.

⁸³ Norman Mailer, "The Yippies", *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, 1968, no pages.

many of the old guard moved out of the old bohemian neighbourhoods.⁸⁴ However, it is important to note that many commentators, like Andy Warhol, pop-art guru and manager of the 1960s rock group the Velvet Underground, were warning that the scene of the beautiful people was turning ugly as early as 1968.⁸⁵ The radical community group the Diggers, to which Abbie Hoffman belonged at one time, held a solemn mock-funeral in the streets of San Francisco in 1967 to lament the death of "hip."⁸⁶ As the mass media focused more attention on hippie communities, many found themselves overwhelmed with newcomers who did not hold the feelings of universal love as dearly.⁸⁷ Historians Debi and Irwin Unger felt that the media portrayed hippies as losers, lowlifes, and drug addicts causing such people to flock to the bohemian communities.⁸⁸ Furthermore, many of those who did come as part of the peace and love program found themselves in a nightmare world where resources such as food, shelter, clothes, and drugs disappeared among the hordes of newcomers. The situation became bleak as the counterculture seemed to fissure along class lines. Ed Sanders, of the 1960s rock band The Fugs, described the problem:

[T]here developed a hostility within the counterculture itself, between those who had, like, the equivalent of a trust fund versus those who had to live by their wits. It's true, for instance, that blacks were somewhat resentful of the hippies by the Summer of Love, 1967, because their perception was that these kids were drawing

⁸⁴ Timothy Miller, *The 60s Commune: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 4.

⁸⁵ Unger and Unger, *Turning Point*, 417.

⁸⁶ Kenneth Cmiel, "The Politics of Civility," in *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, David Farber (ed.) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994), 272.

⁸⁷ Unger and Unger, *Turning Point*, 414.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 422.

paisley swirls on their San Francisco writing pads, burning incense, and taking acid, but those kids could get out of there any time they wanted to.

They could go back home. They could call their mom and say, "Get me outta here." Whereas someone who was raised in a project on Columbia Street and was hanging out on the edge of Tompkins Square Park can't escape. Those kids don't have anyplace to go. They can't go back to Great Neck, they can't go back to Connecticut. They can't go back to boarding school in Baltimore. They're trapped.

So there developed another kind of lumpen hippie, who really came from an abused childhood - from parents that hated them, from parents that threw them out. Maybe they came from a religious family that would call them sluts or say, "You had an abortion, get out of here" or "I found birth control pills in your purse, get out of here, go away." And those kids fermented into a kind of hostile street person. Punk types.⁸⁹

This would not be the last time that the counter-culture would be stressed along supposed class line. The emergence of hardcore punk in 1978, with its supposed suburban roots, would challenge the notion of punk as a working-class cultural expression.⁹⁰ Class has proven to be a troublesome issue to address within the counter-culture: both the hippies and punks felt that it was important for them to identify somehow with the working classes.⁹¹ Rather than class, the differences between the hippies who had been living in areas like Haight-Ashbury prior to 1968 and those who arrived later were ones of attitude and outlook. Much has been made of the negative attitude of punk, and its nihilistic tendencies are contrasted with the positive outlook of the hippies. This view has often been

⁸⁹ Interviewed in Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 21.

⁹⁰ Peter Belsito and Bob Davis argue that hardcore fans in L.A. came from the suburbs in their book *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (San Francisco: The Last Gasp of San Francisco, 1983), 74.

promoted by the punks themselves. Looking back on the early days of punk, Jeff Raphael of the Californian punk band The Nuns said:

A lot of people involved in punk were rejects anyway and were dissatisfied with things. The whole '60s thing was peace and love, and that didn't work. So this was more like frustration time and there was a lot of that. Whereas a lot of people created alienation out of that format, just kind of jumped on the band wagon or saw it as another fashion statement. These people didn't have to change that much, they were already alienated. They knew beforehand there was no way they were going to be straight people who were going to fit into society. For a lot of people the punk scene gave them a format.⁹²

During the 1967 Summer of Love, the countercultural programme for change offered visions for an end to racial discrimination, an end to the Vietnam war and the arms race, increased environmental protection, and the liberalization of laws governing sex, drugs, art, and expression. However, as the 1960s came to a close, the events at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago and the election of President Richard Nixon appeared to signal the futility of political action. By the early 1970s, very few countercultural objectives had been achieved, and those that had, like the Civil Rights Act, failed to satisfy the more radical elements of the counterculture, like the Black and White Panther Parties.⁹³ The Vietnam War continued until 1975. Rock 'n' roll critic Lester Bangs,

⁹¹ Both Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London and New York: Routledge, 1979) and Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons, *The Boy Looked At Johnny* (London: Pluto Press, 1978) felt that punk had working-class roots.

⁹² Interviewed in James Stark, *Punk'77: An Inside Look at the San Francisco Rock n' Roll Scene, 1977* (San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 1999), 31.

⁹³ Some, like Theodore Roszak, did not consider the Black Panthers a part of the counterculture since as a black radical group they were already on the outside of white American culture.

an early fan of two pre-punk 1960s bands, the Velvet Underground and the Stooges, captured the new mood of the 1970s when he wrote:

By the end of the decade it had become obvious that perhaps the one common constant of our variegated and strung-out peer groups was a pervasive sense of self-consciousness that sent us in grouchy packs to ugly festivals just to be *together* and dig ourselves and each other, as if all of this meant something greater than that we were kids who liked rock 'n' roll and came out to have a good time, as if our very styles and trappings and jargon could be in themselves political statements for any longer than about fifteen stoned seconds, even a threat to the Mother Country! So we loved and loved and doted on ourselves and our reflections in each other even as the whole thing got out of hand and turned into mud and disaster areas and downs and death. If we didn't go to the festivals, too timidly academic or whatever to root with the hogs for three days, we bought books with titles like *Free People*, or (with more patina of importance) *The Making of a Counter Culture*, or for the final Pop soda counter polemic, *The Greening of America*. These books told us that we were something more than what we might have thought, that our very existence and lifestyle was of vast crucial importance to America and maybe the survival of the planet. So we bought that bilge and started running off in all the directions that people are currently hurtling to Do Something, even if only to hide out in a commune in the northern woods to pretend you're a visionary who has transcended the problem.⁹⁴

The punks who hung on Bang's every word, and shared his taste in music, fled not to the northern woods, but to the inner cities where they discreetly went about their ways, doing their own thing. Like Bangs, they were perhaps slightly embarrassed about the grandiose claims made about rock and roll and their way of life. The sense of politics however, was still there, imbued in the everyday

However, the sympathetic White Panther Party, started by John Sinclair and the MC5, can be considered part of the counterculture. For more on the White Panther Party reaction, see John Sinclair, *Guitar Army* (Detroit: Trans-Love Enterprises, 1986).

moments of their lives and informing the actions of the early punks. This sense of politics did not, however, extend to participation in the political process which appeared bankrupt after the struggles of the 1960s. During the 1970s, punks would express their political ideals not through voting patterns but in actions understood mainly within their own community, such as the use of safety pins and garbage bags as items of clothing and jewelry to highlight their rejection of consumerism. Jeff Raphael of the San Francisco band the Nuns explained how the political sense of the early punks found its political expression:

At that time if you were wearing a black leather jacket it was different, not like now. Then it was like your skin might as well be blue or something. With people who were already into that little niche, a lot of things were taken for granted, like your politics, which may or may not have been very good. At that time you could kind of judge people by the way they looked. There was that kind of niche thing. There was us and them. It was that kind of alienation from the straight world that brought people together.⁹⁵

The collapse of "flower power" left the counterculture in search of a new style through which to identify itself. According to Hebdige:

Style in subculture is, then, pregnant with significance. Its transformations go "against nature", interrupting the process of "normalization". As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the "silent majority", which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Lester Bangs, "James Taylor Marked For Death", *Who Put the Bomp!* (Winter-Spring, 1971), no page.

⁹⁵ Stark, *Punk'77*, 14.

⁹⁶ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 18.

The mass marketing of the love beads and bellbottoms of the hippies watered down their revolutionary significance. The failure of the 1960s counterculture to achieve significant reforms further alienated this style.

It was at this juncture, between the decline of 1960s optimism and the emergence of new local countercultures, that many of the early members of future punk bands arrived on the scene. Richard Hell and Patti Smith both migrated to New York from Delaware and ended up in the East Village as aspiring folk artists in 1967.⁹⁷ Hell soon wrote to his childhood friend from reform school Tom Verlaine to join him.⁹⁸ Lydia Lunch, former lead singer of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, records that when she arrived in the East Village in 1972 she stayed with "an old hippie lady who sold pot to pay the rent."⁹⁹ Historians of the period also record that many of the individuals who moved in were, like Lydia Lunch, fleeing abusive or broken homes, while others, like Hell and Smith, were attracted by the artistic atmosphere cultivated by the hippies.¹⁰⁰

Most of the neighbourhoods occupied by hippies and punks tended to be older, well-developed districts that had in many cases been immigrant quarters. They featured high housing densities, close amenities such as grocery stores and coffee shops, and more public spaces like parks, unlike the spacious post-World War II suburbs where many hippies and punks had grown up. Unlike the

⁹⁷ Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World* (London: Penguin, 1993), 94.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Lydia Lunch, *Paradoxia: A Predator's Diary* (Creation Books, 1997), 11.

¹⁰⁰ David McBride, "On the Fault Line of Mass Culture and Counterculture: A Social History of the Hippie Counterculture in 1960s Los Angeles" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1998), 8. For Richard Hell and Patti Smith see Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*, 96. For Lydia Lunch see Lunch, *Paradoxia*, 7.

suburbs, which encouraged travel by automobile, these neighbourhoods allowed one to walk around on foot and meet neighbors more often. Punks and hippies established a feeling of togetherness and community more easily than they had in the suburbs, most likely because in areas like the East Village, they spent more time on the street together.

Whatever it was that was making us so unhappy pulled us toward the street. It was the only way out and it was completely open. The street was the place to meet kindred souls of every physical description, the place to score dope, the place to hang out and find out what was happening. It was dotted with shops and coffeehouses where you could find anything from a chess game to every conceivable assortment of sexual partner or partners. It was where we lived, learned, worked, played, taught, and survived; it was where you oriented yourself among it all. Naturally, it was the best place that anyone who wanted to could find and play and make and go to hear music.¹⁰¹

Punk and hippie communities overlapped and occupied the same neighbourhoods, especially in the 1970s. Lydia Lunch's landlord was a hippie, and Dr. Know reported that his band's t-shirt printing operation worked under the guidance of a hippie.¹⁰² While the media turned their focus away from the hippies, and significant numbers of hippies started leaving the bohemian areas in the 1970s, the influence of the hippies did not disappear, as many of these districts retained some of the vibrant character and spirit of tolerance of the 1960s.¹⁰³ The earlier punks gravitated to these neighbourhoods in part because

¹⁰¹ Ellen Sanders, *Trips: Rock Life in the Sixties* (New York: Scribners 1973), 9-10.

¹⁰² Dr. Know (pseud.) Letter to the Editor, *Flipside*, No.46 Los Angeles (Summer 1985), no page (Factsheet Five Archive, New York State Library - henceforth abbreviated as FS5-NYSL).

¹⁰³ McBride, "On the Fault Line of Mass Culture", 383.

of the inexpensive rent, but mainly owing to this bohemian character.¹⁰⁴ The yippies, as noted, played an integral role in many of the early scenes, setting up the first fanzines, and organizing the Rock Against Racism concerts that provided a venue for many punk bands to play.¹⁰⁵ Despite this, the antagonism between punks and hippies was very real, and deeply rooted. There could be countless reasons for this hatred, though it must be stated that it is not entirely certain that this relationship was two-way. Other than expressing concern and distrust of the 1968 arrivals, very few comments from hippies regarding punks can be found, while punks were often very vocal about their feelings toward hippies. Thus, perhaps the simplest reason for the resentment of the hippies by punks is that they represented an older more established social group within the same area, a group that probably monopolized public spaces and venues, which could explain why so many early punk clubs were located on the margins of these neighbourhoods.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, while the disparate elements of the 1960s counterculture agreed on what they rejected, namely the rational, capitalist orientation of American society, they were by no means unanimous about what should replace it, or the best way to achieve their utopias. Political differences manifested themselves in aesthetic differences. For example, the more militant factions of the New Left, such as the Weathermen, donned paramilitary outfit, while the

¹⁰⁴ Tricia Henry, "Punk Rock: The Evolution of a Style" (PhD., diss. New York University, 1987), 180.

¹⁰⁵ For yippie involvement in early fanzines, see Henry Wild Dog (pseud.) "Proto-Punx", *Punx*, No. 2, Houston (1986), 12 (FS5-NYSL). For more on the yippies organizing the Rock Against Racism concerts, see *Flipside*, No.46 (Summer 1985), (FS5-NYSL).

peace-loving hippies adorned themselves with flowers and peace symbols. These aesthetic differences often became points of contention themselves, much in the same manner that radical American artists of the 1930s debated whether one could paint as a realist and still be revolutionary.¹⁰⁷ It is no stretch of the imagination, then, to suppose that the image of the hippie became as much a bane to the punk mindset as did the actual hippies. As the 1970s progressed, and the inability of the 1960s to create fundamental political change became evident, the social and political meanings with which the punks imbued the hippie aesthetic were associated with failure. Punks regarded the rhetoric of the hippies as empty and their dreams of change idle. Punk rock journalist Legs McNeil worked at a hippie film co-op before leaving to write for *Punk Magazine*. His feelings explained the general punk attitude towards hippies: "This was 1975, and the idea of taking acid and dropping out was just so lame - like ten years too late. And the hippie film commune was just as lame. I hated hippies."¹⁰⁸

Down At The Rock And Roll Club: Punk Institutions¹⁰⁹

On the whole, for the counterculture, the 1970s were a period of retraction. After years of trying to convince others to "Tune In, Turn On, and Drop Out" and "Do Your Own Thing," the counterculture finally followed its own advice

¹⁰⁶ For a more in-depth description of the local clubs see Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*; McKenna, *Forming*; Stark, *Punk'77*; Belsito, and Davis, *Hardcore California*; Don Snowden, *Make the Music Go Bang! The Early L.A. Scene* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997).

¹⁰⁷ For more on this debate see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* (London: Verso, 1996).

¹⁰⁸ By "lame" McNeil means that these activities seemed no longer daring nor transgressive. McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 203.

¹⁰⁹ From Richard Hell, "Down at the Rock And Roll Club", *Blank Generation*, Sire Records, 1977.

and slowly withdrew from interaction with mainstream society. During the mid-1970s, areas like the East Village or L.A.'s Sunset Strip became countercultural enclaves. If punks were a community, however, they had very few institutions they could call their own. The punk world was limited to the local rock 'n' roll club and the emerging punk underground press, the world of fanzines.

Throughout the 1960s, underground newspapers played an important role within the counterculture. They informed, agitated, organized, and connected members across the country. Mimeograph machines and wire services allowed urban countercultural communities to develop local papers, sustaining themselves with advertising revenue from local businesses frequented by the hippies themselves. However, in the early 1970s, as the majority of hippies began to move on, taking their client base with them, the advertising revenue dried up, and the newspapers closed down.¹¹⁰ The legacy of local shops and newspapers would be resurrected by the punks as they created their own underground newspapers, in the form of fanzines, and organized their own co-operative business endeavours. Some businesses, like *Bomp! Magazine*, made the switch from one group to another. *Bomp!* had initially started covering the Southern California garage rock scene, occasionally putting out compilations of local talent. By 1982 it evolved into Bomp! Records, issuing hardcore punk compilations.¹¹¹ The Bomp! print/vinyl marriage also proved to be the inspiration for the Los Angeles-based underground punk weekly *Slash!*.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ McBride, *On the Fault of Mass Culture*, 383.

¹¹¹ On the origins of Bomp!'s magazine see Bill Osgerby, "Chewing out a Rhythm on my Bubble-Gum: The Teenage Aesthetic and Genealogies of American Punk", Roger Sabin (ed.) *Punk*

The first “fanzine” was more a magazine proper than what later came to be known as a “zine,” which was merely a home-made photocopied pamphlet of a few pages. Nevertheless, fanzines occupied a pivotal place in punk history, and the association between the fanzines and the music gave the counterculture its name. In 1976 John Holmstrom and Legs McNeil founded *Punk*.¹¹³ It was meant to be a small circulation magazine, aimed at shocking and titillating newsstand audiences, designed in the tradition of *Mad Magazine*, whose founder taught Holmstrom at art school.¹¹⁴ Unlike later fanzines, *Punk* was intended to occupy a niche in the market left vacant by the glossy national entertainment magazines, by focusing exclusively on local New York City underground rock acts, thus earning it the title of “fan magazine” or fanzine.¹¹⁵ Also, unlike many of the later fanzines, such as *Lowlife*, *Church of the Latter Day Punks*, or *Smarm*, *Punk* appeared to be a more professional, if juvenile, endeavor.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, unlike the majority of fanzines, *Punk* sold roughly 20,000 copies, with many sold in Britain under the distribution of Rough Trade, a record shop that specialized in importing American singles and records. It is most likely due to the actual “magazine” style and nature of *Punk* that the punk underground press became known as ‘zines and not newspapers.

Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 165. For the Bomp! compilation see Various Artists, *American Youth Report*, Bomp! Records, 1982.

¹¹² Belsito and Davis, *Hardcore California*, 15.

¹¹³ *Punk*, 1-18, New York (1976-1979).

¹¹⁴ Henry, “Punk Rock,” 217.

¹¹⁵ Heylin, *From the Velvet to the Voidoids*, 243.

¹¹⁶ *Church of the Latter Day Punks*, Nos. 1-4, New Jersey (March 1982-1983), (FS5-NYSL), *Lowlife*, Atlanta, GA (November/December, 1985), (FS5-NYSL), *Smarm*, Mt. Pleasant, MI (February, 1980), (FS5-NYSL).

Punk magazine was not about “punk rock.” It was about being punk as a state of mind, like “beat” or “hip”. It featured a wide range of articles, interviews, and satire aimed at representing the lifestyle that came to be known as punk. The themes of boredom, comics, fantasy, and music in *Punk*, highlighted the interests of the new counterculture. Before *Punk*, the music industry was struggling to come up with terms like “Streetrock” to label the primitive guitar sound coming out of places like the East Village.¹¹⁷ *Punk* was about a small group of people living in New York and centred around the CBGB nightclub. While *Punk* was keen to blur the boundaries between those who created the magazine and those who appeared in it, it nevertheless distanced itself from its audience. It talked to its audience, as many underground newspapers did, treating the readers as if they were a part of the community, and in on the joke. But fundamentally, *Punk* was very confident about its status as literature and its readers’ potentially old-fashioned position of audience. Tricia Henry noted that the key difference between *Punk* and early British punk ‘zines it inspired, like *Sniffin’ Glue*, was that *Punk* was interested in engaging with the world around it, but *Sniffin’ Glue* was concerned with building an insular one.¹¹⁸ However, the key point that Henry ignored was that *Punk*, while a part of a wider world, celebrated only its small New York corner of it. *Sniffin’ Glue*, on the other hand, deliberately cut itself off from the outside so that it could develop a programme to combat that other world, by constantly referring British punk bands, like the Clash, back to British politics.

¹¹⁷ McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 27.

¹¹⁸ Henry, “Punk Rock,” 329. *Sniffin’ Glue*, 1-12, London (July 1976-August 1977).

In other cities, the creators of the first punk fanzines came out of the 1960s counterculture. Tim Yohananen of *MaximumRocknRoll* was a community organizer in Berkeley during the 1960s, as was Mike Gunderloy of *Factsheet Five*.¹¹⁹ According to a retrospective written in *Punx*, a Houston-based 'zine, the first Houston fanzine was started by yippies, and the editor himself claimed to have "hippie roots" but also saw punk rock as a continuation of the 1960s:

My fanzine, Wild Dog, was the first to appear locally In Wild Dog #1 I celebrated the reemergence of garage rock on the local scene. Revealing my hippie roots, I described the new music as "Blue Cheer - MC5 style" rock and roll. My naive comparisons hinted that there was a link between classic rock and the new sounds, but in succeeding years the link between 60's garage rock/psychedelia and the "new wave" [meaning punk] has become more obvious. Although Lenny Kaye, rock critic and guitarist for the Patti Smith group, coined the word "punk" in 1974 in an attempt to describe 60's garage rock, only recently has it become fashionable to use the word in that sense. This usage has been popularized by 60'2 [sic] reissues series such as Pebbles [by Bomp! Records], which uses the byline "original punk rock from the 60's."¹²⁰

We tend to think of punk in terms of "punk rock" not as a musical expression, but that is only because that is where punk's most immediate and most lasting contributions to mass culture have been felt. Commentators such as Griel Marcus, and others, in Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York, have all repeated that music was only one aspect of punk, that more importantly, the early punk scenes of 1974-79 were characterized by an openness to

¹¹⁹ For Tim Yohannan, see "The Sound and the Fury", *San Francisco Weekly*, April 11, 1990, 11. On Mike Gunderloy, see Stephen Duncombe, *Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (London: Verso, 1997), 158.

experimentation.¹²¹ Vale, the editor of the Californian fanzine *Search & Destroy* asserted that:

In the early days at the Mahubay [in San Francisco], people never thought of themselves as "punks", nor did they call each other by that term. To reduce a comprehensive cultural revolt to "punk rock" is a typical technique (reductionism, oversimplification) historically used by the power structure media to belittle any kind of threatening change. Here's [sic] society's machinery of cooptation again showed its infinite capacity to assimilate all rebellious spirit and impulses. Just to reduce it to *music*, music was just a part of it. I mean, when punk rock started in San Francisco, it was like your whole life changed.¹²²

Furthermore, even punk bands that were supposedly apolitical, like the Ramones, wrote songs in which the characters participated in lives where the politics of the 1960s had been normalized. For example, in the Ramones' song, "Judy is a Punk," the Ramones sing "Judy is a runt/Jackie is a punk/ Both went down to 'Frisco and joined the SLA."¹²³ While the band dismissed any politics in the song in an interview with Donny the Punk, Donny gleefully suggested that:

Judy is a "runt" and Jackie is the "punk" but both went down to 'Frisco and "joined the SLA" presumably the Symbionese Liberation Army, a radical guerilla organization involved in the Patti Hearst affair. If Judy and Jackie are the first "punks" in the Ramones-inspired movement, then it can be said to have been involved in radical politics from the very beginning.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Henry Wild Dog (pseud.), "Proto-Punx", *Punx*, No.2, Houston (1986), 12 (FS5-NYSL).

¹²¹ Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 36.

¹²² Quoted in Stark, *Punk'77*, 25.

¹²³ Ramones, "Judy is a Punk," *Ramones*, Sire Records, 1976.

¹²⁴ Donny the Punk, "Ramone, Joey" *Flipside* No.47 (Summer 1985), no page (FS5-NYSL).

One of the key aspects of punk was that it reflected the everyday life of the people who listened to it, and who participated in it's creation. The chief criticism of rock 'n' roll in the 1970s, said Peter Laughner of Rocket from the Tombs, was that it was out of touch:

Rock & roll used to be able to get you to do things. It used to get you to think about what you were doing, but now all it does is sort of lull you into a state of complacency, the major concern being strictly to have a good time. Entertainment is fine, but there has to be something beyond that. It may sound pretentious to talk about making art statements, but it is possible to make an art statement with music.¹²⁵

During the 1970s, as a result of the tremendous revenues made by rock acts in the 1960s, rock and roll became big business, and corporations like Warner Brothers focused on turning artists into profit-making machines, while skyrocketing incomes isolated once-street-savvy artists, like Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones, from the concerns of the street.¹²⁶ Part of the attraction of punk, according to Richard Hell, was that it re-humanized rock and roll.

Music had just become so bloated. It was all these leftover sixties guys playing stadiums, you know, being treated like they were very important people, and acting like they were very important people. It wasn't rock & roll, it was like some kind of stage act. It was all

¹²⁵ Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*, 145.

¹²⁶ Quoted in Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 43.

about the lights and the poses. With the [New York] Dolls, it was just like the street put onstage, you know? That was another cool thing about them, they were exactly the same offstage as they were on.¹²⁷

It was not until the corporate record labels signed punk bands at the end of the 1970s that the floors of major punk clubs were divided between the audience and entertainers. At the lesser clubs, the division remained breached; performers and spectators mingled freely. Photographs in books written on the early punk scenes of San Francisco and Washington, D.C., picture performance artists next to musicians, next to photographers, and individuals who left no other indelible imprint on punk culture. British studies of punk have highlighted the role played by audience members and fans in constructing the punk "scene."¹²⁸ Chief among these were the members of the so-called Bromley contingent, named after the neighbourhood where they lived, such as the "Catwoman", who styled her hair and facial make-up to resemble Catwoman of Batman comic fame, and in a different rock and roll setting would no doubt be written off as a mere groupie. But in punk, where groupies started their own bands, and the emphasis was on "the scene" and not on specific individuals, anonymous characters like the Catwoman played an important role in the day-to-day life of punks. Furthermore, it was not until punk crystallized as a style and a genre that it became synonymous with music.

Each punk scene had its own club. Usually this was a less-established or new venue that was looking to increase or diversify its clientele. New York had

¹²⁷ McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 119.

Hilly Crystal's reconstituted biker bar turned Country, Bluesgrass, and Blues Club (CBGB's) located in the Bowery, where the band Television played a series of weekly shows to a half-empty house.¹²⁹ It also had Max's Cafe, Andy Warhol's favourite hang-out, which booked up-and-coming bands in order to round out its weekly lineup.¹³⁰ In Los Angeles, the Whiskey A-Go-Go provided space for punks after the crash of disco, while in San Francisco the Mahubay, a Filipino dinner theatre looking for mid-week action, made fast friends with young punk bands looking for a place to play.¹³¹ These local clubs booked local talent, helping to foster a sense of immediate community.

Punk rock shows, with their emphasis on performance over talent, attempted to break down barriers between audience and performer. The sacredness of the stage was repeatedly violated by stage-divers, or by band interactions with the audience, such as jumping out into the crowd, or physically assaulting members of the audience, as Henry Rollins recounted doing on several occasions upon the arrival of skinheads.¹³² Punk "artists" did not hang out backstage, hidden between performances, but circulated among the audience, and a person in the mosh pit or serving drinks at the bar could be the same person taking the stage as the next act. David Byrne described New York's CBGB's as "the kind of place where you'd sit at the bar and when your time came you'd just casually walk over and get onstage. When you were done you'd walk off and maybe wipe the sweat off your head, then walk back to the bar and have a

¹²⁸ Paul Cobley, "Leave the Capitol," Sabin (ed). *Punk Rock: So What?*.

¹²⁹ Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*, 119.

¹³⁰ McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 92.

beer.”¹³³ Nor were the performers visibly different from members of the audience in terms of costume. The most famous punk costumes were the blue jeans and leather jackets worn by the Ramones, hardly an original choice but miles removed from the elaborate outfits of Alice Cooper or KISS. Standard dress for a punk rock show was usually whatever was normally worn, until British punk fashion and advertising exploded with the Sex Pistols in November of 1975. Even then, the development of a uniform look among punks was a hotly contested issue throughout the 1980s.¹³⁴ Punk continued the hippie tradition of tailoring clothes to make political statements, and punks adjusted their everyday clothes by ripping, pinning, cutting, or otherwise marking them up with badges or markers, but these were not “special” clothes reserved only for wear to punk concerts. Also favoured were clothing that advertised other punk bands or record labels. The wearing of band t-shirts served to reaffirm the notion of punks as a distinct community, and t-shirts featuring defunct bands functioned as nostalgia, historicizing the punk community and maintaining continuity with its (albeit brief) past. However, sales of punk t-shirts also had the function of raising money for fledgling record companies, while simultaneously acting to commodify punk to more passive or less experienced participants.

Punk concerts were an important venue for the selling and exchange of t-shirts, records, and fanzines. Since the costs of putting on a punk show were low (especially if held in a basement, warehouse, or loft), the cost of renting space to

¹³¹ For the Whiskey Au-Go-Go see McKenna, *Forming*, 2, for the Mahubay, see Stark, *Punk '77*, 16.

¹³² Henry Rollins, *Get In the Van*, 2.13.61/Touch & Go Records, 1993.

¹³³ Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*, 183.

“vendors” was also low. Concerts were vital in providing independent punk bands without record labels the support to promote themselves, and vendors often turned out to be members of the performing bands selling their own albums.¹³⁵

Besides the few punk bands signed to major labels, such as the Ramones or Blondie, or British bands like the Clash and the Buzzcocks, there was little national or international cohesion in punk. The “do your own thing” mentality that punk had inherited from the 1960s did little to create an agreed-upon definition of punk. The New Left counterculture of the 1960s was linked through national political and social organizations like SDS and SNCC, knitted together via a nationwide underground newswire service, and given prominent media exposure, all of which combined to help form a national identity. These elements were notably absent from the punk scenes before 1979. The majority of scenes remained steadfastly local, as the hippie counterculture before them had been. Communication between cities was hampered by the lack of contact points and lack of persons or institutions to act as go-betweens. The lack of inter-scene communication limited the opportunities for touring and delayed the formation of a national punk identity. The largest punk scenes, therefore, were concentrated in the largest urban areas, in New York and Los Angeles, where concentrations of population and media allowed bands to develop enough of a reputation to put together small-scale regional tours.

¹³⁴ The idea of the image of punk makes up a significant portion of reader responses in the letter pages of *Flipside* magazine, and will be discussed more in the next chapter.

¹³⁵ One of the early roles of letters to fanzines was to alert other punks of upcoming tours. This will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three.

Full Speed Ahead: Changes in Punk¹³⁶

The real split in the counterculture came not with the so-called "birth of punk" but with the emergence of hardcore punk. The early punk bands were all familiar with groups from the 1960s such as the Velvet Underground, the MC5, and the Stooges. In fact, the members of these bands often socialized with the members of the early punk scene. Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground and Iggy Pop of the Stooges were among the first people interviewed by *Punk Magazine*. Wayne Kramer of the MC5 teamed up with Richard Hell of Television and the Voidoids in a band called Gang War, while fellow MC5 member Fred Smith married punk-poet Patti Lee. Debbie Harry of Blondie got her start in a doo-wop group called the Stilettoes, and the Ramones idolized the work of Phil Spector with the all-women groups of the 1960s, like the Ronettes and the Supremes. During the hardcore era of 1979 - 1985, a much younger generation of punks would idolize these early punk bands in much the same way the early punks had idolized bands of the 1960s. The younger generation saw themselves as part of a punk tradition rather than identifying with the tradition of the avant-garde rock bands of the 1960s.

The punks rejected the rock music of the 1970s, claiming that it no longer had any meaning or relevance to American youth. It would have been unthinkable however, for punk to have placed this demand on rock and roll had it not been for the close connection that rock acts like Bob Dylan, Buffalo Springfield, the Doors, Jimi Hendrix, and others had forged between rock, youth,

¹³⁶ Youth Brigade, "Full Speed Ahead," *Welcome EP*, Dischord, 1981.

and the counterculture throughout the 1960s. According to historian of the 1960s David McBride, remarkably few bands of the 1960s were overtly political. Instead, most focused on performance as a transgressive act, and political stances evolved out of these deviant actions.¹³⁷ While McBride does not distinguish between commercial acts, countercultural acts, or even countercultural acts with record contracts, transgression was nevertheless an important element of countercultural performances in general. John Sinclair, manager of the MC5, considered any action political “that brought about political retribution.”¹³⁸ Sinclair was referring to the police harassment the MC5 received for their song “Kick Out the Jams,” which was about sex and rock and roll, not Vietnam or civil rights. Lyrically, the song was just as euphemistic about sex as any other, but it was the coupling of loud guitars, feedback, long hair, and the opening line of “Kick out the jams, motherfuckers!” that succeeded in earning the band the dogged attention of police and that got it blacklisted by promoters. The countercultural songs of the 1960s were not protest/political, McBride argued, but astonishingly mundane and trivial. But matched with music that incorporated feedback, distortion, and borrowed as much from avant-garde jazz concepts as from the blues, it signaled a radical departure from the well-constructed world of Top 40 pop staples.¹³⁹ According to British punk critic Stewart Home, this was also the case for the majority of punk songs, which he felt should be properly

¹³⁷ McBride, “On the Fault Line of Mass Culture”, 143.

¹³⁸ Michael D. Cary, “The Rise and Fall of the MC5: Rock Music and Counterculture Politics in the Sixties” (Ph.D. diss., Lehigh University, 1985): 77, and MC5, *Kick Out The Jams*, Elektra, 1969.

¹³⁹ McBride, “On the Fault Line of Mass Culture”, 143.

classified as “novelty recordings”, that is songs that are short on substance, but long on style.¹⁴⁰

In Theodore Roszak’s vision of a world dominated by experts and professionals, however, the trivial nature of rock in the 1960s or of punk music later was beside the point if it did not emerge from the technocracy.¹⁴¹ Charles Reich also felt that it was important for people to add poetry to their lives. Richard Hell echoed Roszak, saying that by writing mundane songs about everyday life, people could wrestle control of music away from corporate music stars and songwriter consortiums.

The idea of inventing yourself is creating the most ideal image you could imagine That is the ultimate message of the New Wave: if you just amass the courage that is necessary, you can completely invent yourself. You can be your own hero, and once everybody is their own hero, then everybody is gonna be able to communicate with each other on a real basis rather than a hand-me-down set of societal standards.¹⁴²

The musicianship, seriousness, or artistic merit of the music was also beside the point. The lure of punk, particularly as punk rock, was that it promised the freedom to act as one wanted. As one member of Beat Rodeo explained, “There was a need to get up on a stage and just make as big a noise as was humanly

¹⁴⁰ Stewart Home, *Cranked Up Really High: Genre Theory and Punk Rock* (Hove: Codex, 1995), 24.

¹⁴¹ Reich, *The Greening of America*, 151.

¹⁴² Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*, 118.

possible.”¹⁴³ Keith Morris, an early member of Black Flag, concurred. “We were going to make as large a racket, piss as many people off, go apeshit as we could, and we had no choice but to play to please ourselves and a handful of friends.”¹⁴⁴ The Ramones encouraged other bands to get onstage, ready or not. “You don’t have to get better, just get out there, you’re as good as you are. Don’t wait till you’re better, how are you ever gonna know? Just go out there and do it.”¹⁴⁵ Even Malcolm McLaren, the manager of the Sex Pistols, declared that insofar as punk had a programme for change it was “to create a situation where kids would be less interested in buying records than in speaking for themselves.”¹⁴⁶

Just as punk was not solely about rock and roll, the making and selling of albums in “punk rock” was not as important as the thrill of performance. In fact, few of the early punk albums were able to live up to the excitement of seeing the bands live. The MC5 recorded a live album out of fear that they would not be able to capture the energy of their performance in the studio, a fear that was proven correct with their later albums. Likewise, early New York Dolls recordings were considered horrible and Robert Christgau felt that the band had to be seen live to be appreciated.¹⁴⁷ The Modern Lovers, according to Charles Heylin, have been given short shrift in the annals of rock and roll, because none of the material they ever recorded could match the brilliance of their initial line-ups and

¹⁴³ Tina and Bruce, “What’s Up With Beat Rodeo”, *Non-stop Banter*, No.4 (Winter 1985): 13 (FS5-NYSL).

¹⁴⁴ Keith Morris, “Bring on the Guinea Pigs”, Don Snowden (ed), *Make the Music Go Bang! The Early L.A. Scene* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997), 50.

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 231.

¹⁴⁶ Malcolm McLaren, quoted in Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 437.

performances.¹⁴⁸ Both Television and the Weirdos recorded material only after the bands had reached their creative peaks. Richard Hell, despite being a founding member of Television, the Heartbreakers, the Voidoids, and, according to Tricia Henry, the inspiration for Malcolm McLaren's image of the Sex Pistols, was one of the last of the early New York scene to record an album.¹⁴⁹ For many of these individuals the emphasis was on being in a band and experiencing an escape from the rational economic determinism of everyday life.

Punk as a culture allowed individuals to re-create themselves and follow their own dreams. As Legs McNeil said:

[I]t was about advocating kids to not wait to be told what to do, but make life up for themselves, it was about trying to get people to use their imaginations again, it was about not being perfect, it was about saying it was okay to be amateurish and funny, that real creativity came out of making a mess, it was about working with what you got in front of you and turning everything embarrassing, awful, and stupid in your life to your advantage.¹⁵⁰

Early punk was thus a continuation of the hippie mantra to "do your own thing", but a return to the politics of the 1960s would not occur until the birth of hardcore, which appealed to an entirely different demographic group. A December 22, 1979 marathon concert featuring many Los Angeles punk bands

¹⁴⁷ Robert Christgau, "New York Dolls", in Greil Marcus (ed.), *Stranded: Rock and Roll for a Desert Island* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 133.

¹⁴⁸ Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*, 49.

¹⁴⁹ Henry, "Punk Rock", 211.

proved to be the defining moment in the immediate future of punk. The audience was comprised of the older, late twenties and early thirties, members of the punk scene, and the newer younger suburban fans. The young fans of the fast-paced no-nonsense Germs rushed the stage, pushing their way past the older more experimentally-inclined members of the audience. The argument over whether punk would continue as a dadaesque subculture was ended as the angry mob refused to let the other bands play.¹⁵¹ The new punks had neither the time nor the place for the more tolerant older punks. The hardcore punk would be a zealous punk.

Get In The Van: The Emergence of Hardcore Punk¹⁵²

In 1983 Henry Garfield left Washington, D.C. and joined a band. He was twenty-two. Punk history is full of other such men and women, boys and girls, who did the same. What made Garfield different from the others, however, was that he was not some unknown youth at the time. He had already established a local reputation for himself with his band State of Alert, who recorded their first album for Dischord Records in 1981.¹⁵³ Dischord Records was run in part by Garfield's friend Ian MacKaye, whose band Minor Threat coined the phrase "straight-edge," a social movement within punk that renounced drugs, alcohol,

¹⁵⁰ McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 334.

¹⁵¹ Brenden Mullen, "Nightmare in Punk Alley", Kim McKenna (ed.), *Forming: The Early Days of L.A. Punk* (Santa Monica, California: Smart Art Press, 1999), 80.

¹⁵² from Rollins' tour diary, *Get in the Van*, 2.13.61/Touch & Go Records, 1993

¹⁵³ The EP contained ten songs. State of Alert, *No Policy*, Dischord, 1981.

and sex.¹⁵⁴ As Garfield got in the van and headed west, he closed the door on the era of east-coast dominated punk.

The band for which Garfield was leaving State of Alert was no fledgling entity either. Garfield, rechristened Henry Rollins, was joining Black Flag. Black Flag was part of the hardcore explosion that occurred along the California coast, a form of punk music that stripped songs of all artistic embellishment while increasing the tempo and adding politicized lyrics.¹⁵⁵ They had already recorded six ep's, short albums of four to six songs, between 1978 and 1982 on their own record label Solid State Technology (SST).¹⁵⁶ Black Flag was also one of the few exceptions among punk bands: they mounted cross-country tours, and succeeded primarily through the sacrifices made by the band members. Rollins' tour diary, *Get In the Van*, recalls the hardships endured by the band: lack of money, food, shelter; days spent sleeping in the van in shifts while driving; and playing almost every night. Bill Stevenson, who later went on to form the Descendents, said in an interview with *Jet Lag* that the typical Black Flag tour consisted of forty-two shows in almost as many nights.¹⁵⁷

The birth of hardcore is difficult to pin down. Bad Brains' 1980 single "Pay to Cum" is sometimes viewed as the first hardcore song, though the Germs were

¹⁵⁴ Straight-edge punks did not mention whether they meant pre-marital sex or all forms of sex, most likely because marriage itself was a topic generally not discussed. For more details on straight-edge punk see the next chapter.

¹⁵⁵ The politics of hardcore punk will be discussed in Chapter Three.

¹⁵⁶ EP stands for extended play and generally has three to four songs. The 1983 Black Flag compilation *The First Four Years* contains 23 songs from this period. Black Flag, *The First Four Years*, SST Records, 1983.

¹⁵⁷ Rene Spencer, *Jet Lag* (September 1984), 6 (FS5-NYSL).

noted as having switched to hardcore punk by 1978.¹⁵⁸ Black Flag was also seen as one of the first hardcore bands with their 1978 single "Nervous Breakdown", the breakdown heard around the world. The Dead Kennedys released their debut album *Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables* in 1980, an opening salvo in punk's political attack on mainstream America, while that same year Orange County-based band Bad Religion offered songs like "Murder the Government" and "How Could Hell Get Any Worse".¹⁵⁹ *Bomp!* Magazine, formerly devoted to garage rock and surf music (think Beach Boys), issued a compilation of American hardcore punk in 1981 saying:

Things are bad. America is falling apart; the economy is collapsing; Reagan is a puppet of the rich and the Pentagon is going to blow life as we know it into fragments. We must react. American culture desperately needs to confront American problems I like Hardcore. I like the rush and I like the attitude. Fuck Authority. I hate war and I hate big business and I'm glad that other people feel the same way. Isn't it great that not *all* teenagers are sucking bongs on the way to play Pac-Man at some sick zoo of a shopping mall? RISE ABOVE.¹⁶⁰

The fans of the early punk bands tended to be much younger than the original bands themselves. A *Melody Maker* reporter noted that the average age of the New York bands was twentysomething while a *Flipside* reader survey poll in 1984 revealed that the average American punk was fifteen.¹⁶¹ While a significant number of members of early punk bands in L.A. and New York had

¹⁵⁸ Bad Brains, "Pay to Cum", Bad Brains Records, 1980. On the Germs see Brenden Mullen, "Nightmare in Punk Alley," *Make the Music Go Bang!*, 80.

¹⁵⁹ Now available on the Bad Religion compilation 80-85, Epitaph Records, 1986.

¹⁶⁰ Bruce Pavitt, liner notes, *American Youth Report*, Bomp! Records, 1982, 1991.

community college or art school backgrounds, hardcore punks did not. Bands like Television, the Talking Heads, and even to an extent, the Germs, were able to infuse a certain level of artistic philosophy in their work, that hardcore bands, owing to their extreme youth and inexperience simply could not match. Instead, hardcore punk bands played simpler and faster than their predecessors. Not only were they younger, but they were also perceived by the older punks as being from the suburbs.¹⁶² Thus, almost all of the chronicles of the early punk scenes end with the arrival of hardcore, because this symbolized the end of punk as an urban inner-city bohemian subculture. The suburban focus of hardcore might also explain its romantic belief that punk could change the world. According to Legs McNeil, the prevailing belief in the early punk scenes was in punk as a catalyst for individual change, not as a global force:

Punk was like, this is new, this is now, the apotheosis, powerful. But it wasn't political. I mean, maybe that is political. I mean the great thing about punk was that it had no political agenda. It was about real freedom, personal freedom. Just being as offensive as possible. Which seemed delightful, just euphoric. Be the real people we are. You know? I just loved it.¹⁶³

Hardcore bands, because of the age of their members, were often unable to play in bars or clubs because of liquor license controls. These bands had to find alternative venues like warehouses, where they could host marathon concerts featuring five or more bands for a very small cover charge. However,

¹⁶¹ On early punk scenes see Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*, 245. For the ages of hardcore punks see "Polls", *Flipside* No.42 (Winter 1984), (FS5-NYSL).

¹⁶² Belsito, *Hardcore California*, 74.

problems at these concerts, such as over-crowding, rumored underage drinking, noise violations, and lack of proper documentation, meant that police were a prominent feature of hardcore shows. The frequent appearance of police, the forced cancellation of hardcore punk shows, and cases of alleged and very real police brutality, quickly radicalized and politicized the West Coast punk scene.¹⁶⁴

Hardcore punk took many of its cues from British punk, from fashion and musical styles, to subjects and song topics. Almost from its very start, British punk pursued an anti-Thatcherite political agenda. With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, American punks had found their own Margaret Thatcher. The Dead Kennedys had penned "California Uber Alles" as a satire of the election dreams of Californian Governor Jerry Brown in 1980, and then re-wrote it as "We've Got a Bigger Problem Now" in honour of Reagan in 1982.¹⁶⁵ Others, like Black Flag, had written songs critical of the police.¹⁶⁶ Still, few bands until 1980 had attacked national politics. Almost overnight the defaced image of Reagan appeared in punk fanzines like *Church of the Latter Day Punks* and *Sick Teen*.¹⁶⁷ A further look at anti-Reagan sentiment in punk, as well as the political issues raised, follows in Chapter Three.

The willingness of hardcore punk to engage in political commentary, usually of a leftist or anarchist sympathy, combined with its extreme musical aesthetic, put it beyond the pale of commercial radio. During the 1960s, Frank

¹⁶³ McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 299.

¹⁶⁴ Rollins, *Get in the Van*.

¹⁶⁵ Dead Kennedys, "California Uber Alles", *Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables*, Alternative Tentacles, 1980 and Dead Kennedys, "We've Got a Bigger Problem Now", *In God We Trust, INC.*, Alternative Tentacles Records, 1982.

¹⁶⁶ Black Flag's song about L.A. police is captured live in Penelope Spheeris' movie *The Decline of Western Civilization* (Los Angeles: Huron Communication, 1980).

Zappa and groups like the Velvet Underground recorded their own music before signing with a corporate record company in order to maintain artistic control over their work. However, not only were many punk bands prevented from getting record contracts because of the style and content of their music, but many more made political decisions to avoid corporate record companies. Early bands like the Ramones, Blondie, and the Talking Heads all signed to major labels. The next wave of punk bands like Minor Threat, Bad Religion, and Black Flag, all started their own. Hardcore punk envisioned itself as a guerilla assault on mainstream society, and the record companies were perceived as part of the vast capitalist apparatus that kept the economic machine of domination in power. Independent record companies were seen as an integral part of that struggle. Fanzines enabled mail-order distribution and allowed punk labels to reach a larger customer base than they could through local record shops. Furthermore, advertising in regional fanzines like *Flipside* and *MaximumRocknRoll* made it possible for these small companies to coordinate and promote tours across larger and larger areas.

While there were enough similarities between punk and hardcore punk that the two remained identified in the same genre, there were also some very real differences. First of all, not only was hardcore punk simpler, and its participants younger, but it was also more intolerant, not only of outside groups, but of different types of punk as well. The early punk scenes thrived on difference and innovation, but hardcore punk projected an image of what it meant to be punk. Those who deviated were cut from the herd. Furthermore, with the

¹⁶⁷ Church of the Latter Day Punk, Nos. 1-2 (1982); Sick Teen (no dates provided), (FS5-NYSL).

beginnings of a cohesive identity, punks started to feel secure enough to take on the outside world. Thus at a time when punk bands were moving out of their local neighbourhoods and crossing the country, they also began confronting groups and organizations with which they disagreed. Chapter Three will explore this new punk identity and the ways in which it reflected the political concerns of the counterculture of the 1960s.

Chapter Three

Teenage Riot: The Politics of Hardcore Punk¹⁶⁸

If anyone was predisposed toward enthusing about punk's revolutionary potential, it was rock critic Lester Bangs. During the early 1970s, Bangs had written a piece on punk godfather Iggy Pop, entitled "Of Pop and Pies and Fun: A Program for Mass Liberation in the Form of a Stooges Review, or Who's the Fool?".¹⁶⁹ Bangs argued that Iggy Pop's unrehearsed and uninhibited performance ought to guide everyday life. However, Bangs' enthusiasm for punk quickly waned as he began feeling that the nihilism and inner-orientation of the early punk scenes, like the hippies before them, led nowhere but burn-out and death.¹⁷⁰ He was rejuvenated in 1977 when he went on tour in Britain with the Clash, the British forerunners of American hardcore punk. Bangs felt that the Clash's mixture of personal politics and punk music represented the next step for the counterculture:

The politics of rock 'n' roll in England or America or anywhere else, is that a whole lot of kids want to be fried out of their skins by the

¹⁶⁸ Sonic Youth, "Teenage Riot", *Daydream Nation*, Geffen Records, 1988. Sonic Youth were part of "no-wave" punk, a branch that continued the musical experimentation of early punk. However, the video for their song "Teenage Riot" from their landmark album *Daydream Nation*, was a montage, primarily of hardcore concert footage featuring early 1980s bands like Minor Threat and Black Flag. "Teenage Riot" seemed to express the optimism the late 1980s counterculture had that punk could create social change, and the video appeared as an homage to those who helped form the counterculture.

¹⁶⁹ Lester Bangs, "Of Pop and Pies and Fun: A Program for Mass Liberation in the Form of a Stooges Review, or Who's the Fool?" *Creem* (November and December 1970) no pages.

¹⁷⁰ The full extent of Bangs' despair can be felt in his eulogy for Peter Laughner of Cleveland punk band Pere Ubu, who died of a drug overdose. Lester Bangs, "Peter Laughner," *New York Rocker* (September October 1977), no pages.

most scalding propulsion they can find, for a night they can pretend is the rest of their lives, and whether the next day they go back to work in shops or boredom on the dole or American TV doldrums in Mom 'n' Daddy's living room nothing can cancel the reality of that night in the revivifying flames when for once if only then in your life you were blasted outside of yourself and the monotony which defines most life anywhere at any time, when you supped on lightning and nothing else in the realms of the living or dead mattered at all.¹⁷¹

Like the hippies, punks began to ask why they could not have experiential highs every day. They outlined their thoughts in personal editorials in fanzines. These fanzines were sold or given away at record and coffee shops, traded at punk shows, or mailed to penpals throughout in the United States. They helped to construct a national punk identity and connected punks to one another. Many of the smaller 'zines, like *Church of the Latter Day Punks*, or *Riding the Blinds*, were only a few 8.5" x 11" pages long, containing interviews with local bands, reviews of albums by more prominent groups, and editorials on topics like school, work, peer groups, family dynamics or religion.¹⁷² Larger fanzines, like *Flipside* or *MaximumRock'n'Roll*, could run up to thirty pages or more of magazine-style newsprint. These 'zines printed articles on topics similar to the smaller journals: school, work, or religion, but often in a more abstract manner, putting these issues into an ideological framework. The San Diego-based *Daily Impulse*, for

¹⁷¹ Lester Bangs, "The Clash", *New Musical Express*, London (10 December 1977), no pages.

¹⁷² *Church of the Latter Day Punk*, 1-4, New Jersey (March 1982-1983), (Factsheet Five Archive, New York State Library - henceforth abbreviated as FS5-NYSL); *Riding the Blinds*, 3-4, Cambridge, MA (1983), (FS5-NYSL).

example, presented religion and family as institutions of domination that hindered its anarchic visions.¹⁷³

The only extensive scholarship on punk explores its major artists. Very little has been written about punk as a way of life. The vast majority of punks never signed a record contract or even left a sizable vinyl legacy. In order to reconstruct the social and cultural history of punk as a popular movement it is important to uncover the print documents punks left behind. Unlike many of the later punk bands, and especially hardcore bands, many of the early New York and British punk bands, like the Ramones, Blondie, the Talking Heads, the Sex Pistols, and the Clash, signed major label record contracts. This meant that through the commodification of punk many smaller towns throughout the United States had a punk "scene", or fan base, however miniscule. Punks in these communities communicated with each other and to outside "scenes" through fanzines. Mitzi Waltz, the editor of *Incoherent*, explained that 'zines offered a means of establishing and introducing non-musicians to the punk community: "How else could I get up the courage to talk to people at [punk] shows? 'Wanta buy a zine?' isn't much as opening lines go, but it's the best this congenitally shy gal can do."¹⁷⁴

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the transformation of West Coast California hardcore punk from a regional offshoot to a national counterculture could not have been possible without the help of nationally distributed fanzines like *Flipside* and *MaximumRock'n'Roll*. While both *Flipside* and *MRR* kept the focus of their

¹⁷³ *Daily Impulse*, San Diego Anarchist Collective, Vol. 1 No. 1 (April May 1984), (FS5-NYSL).

scene reports on West Coast bands, they also kept one eye on their roles as the only national forum for punks. Since there were no nationally syndicated radio or television talk shows for punks to tune into, nor were there any glossy punk magazines, only *Flipside* and *MRR* had access to a national audience. They therefore dedicated significant space in their respective 'zines to letters from readers. These reader response sections allowed punks from across the country to communicate with one another and opened up "membership" into the national punk community for those who were not in bands. The majority of scholarship on punk so far has tended to focus on the music and the musicians of punk.¹⁷⁵ Letters to the editors of *Flipside* and *MaximumRock'nRoll*, however, allow us to see how the consumers of this music perceived their own culture.

Both *Flipside* and *MRR* came from Southern California. *Flipside* was published in Los Angeles by Al and Hudley.¹⁷⁶ *MaximumRock'n'Roll*, meanwhile was published in Berkely by ex-New Left political organizer Tim Yohannan.¹⁷⁷ Of his switch from the world of politics to the world of 'zines, Yohannan said:

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in Stephen Duncombe, *Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (London: Verso, 1997), 17.

¹⁷⁵ Most specifically the early scene reports, since they are often interviews done between the social elites of the punk scenes. *Forming: The Early Days of L.A. Punk* Kim McKenna (ed.) (Santa Monica, California: Smart Art Press, 1999); Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove Press, 1996); Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World* (London: Penguin, 1993); Peter Belsito and Bob Davis, *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (San Francisco: The Last Gasp of San Francisco, 1983); James Stark, *Punk '77: An Inside Look at the San Francisco Rock n' Roll Scene, 1977* (San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 1999); Don Snowden (ed.), *Make the Music go Bang! The Early L.A. Scene* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997); Cynthia Connelly, *Banned in D.C.: Photos and Anecdotes from the D.C. Punk Underground (79-85)* (Washington D.C.: Sun Dog Propaganda, 1995).

¹⁷⁶ *Flipside*, Los Angeles, CA (1983), (FS5-NYSL).

¹⁷⁷ *MaximumRock'n'Roll*, Berkeley, CA (1983), (FS5-NYSL).

Straight political organizing is pretty important stuff , but it's pretty boring. It takes a certain attitude and patience that I really didn't have. When the "new counterculture" of punk started, I found myself much more comfortable with the mix of political radicalism and cultural radicalism.¹⁷⁸

To date, Stephen Duncombe has written the only serious study of the world of fanzines. His study, which covers the origins of the genre dating back to science-fiction fanzines in the 1950s, extends past the punk era and ends with the explosion of 'zines in mid-1990s. However, he acknowledged that the punk era saw the creation of fanzines as we know them today. For his study on fanzines, Duncombe used the Factsheet Five archive at the New York State Library. This archive was donated to the library by Mike Gunderloy, former editor of the *Factsheet Five* fanzine, the sole purpose of which was to review other fanzines. Like Yohannan, Gunderloy was a former community organizer and saw *Factsheet Five* as a way of connecting the isolated punk communities with non-punk communities:

There were the political people, the emerging gay press, the feminist press, some of the alternative spiritual press. [But] gradually I began to conceptualize this much wider, finding [that] a community of people doing comics, and the literary people, and even wrestling fans have something you can't distinguish in their minds as political consciousness, but certainly the very act of taking over the entertainment portion of their life and dictating here's how it is and here's how it should be is inherently opposed to being fed your stuff by the mass media.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Interviewed in "The Sound and the Fury", *San Francisco Weekly* (April 11, 1990), 11 (FS5-NYSL, MaximumRock'n'Roll folder).

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Duncombe, *Notes From Underground*, 159.

For his section on punk, Duncombe relied heavily on *MaximumRock'n'Roll*, which only starts to appear in the Factsheet Five archive in the mid-1980s, but continues through the run of the archive into the mid-1990s. In his study of punk, *The Philosophy of Punk*, Craig O'Hara also made good use of fanzines, notably *MRR*, *Flipside*, *Profane Existence*, and *Forced Exposure*. These last two did not appear in the Factsheet Five archive until the late 1980s and so fall outside the scope of this study, but the archive did contain significant numbers of *Flipside* dating from the early 1980s. The archive also contained numerous fanzines with only a few issues. While these limited 'zines, like *Sick Teen*, *Church of the Latter Day Punks*, and *Offense*, inform my survey, the letters section from *Flipside* and *MaximumRocknRoll* proved particularly useful. Spanning eight issues from late 1983 to early 1986, with thirty-seven from *MRR* and 261 from *Flipside*, these 298 letters were analyzed for content and theme, and by gender.

The key difference between fanzines and regular music magazines was their layout. Many of the early American fanzines owe more to the chaotic spread of *Sniffin' Glue* than they do to the neat and orderly layout of *Punk*.¹⁸⁰ *Punk* magazine (1976-1979), pushed boundaries with its merging of comic book forms and text crossing borders, but it was formatted, or laid-out, in a traditional style. The overall effect, however, was one of order and playfulness. *Sniffin' Glue* (1976-1977) featured long columns of type-written text interspersed with black and white photos, sometimes clipped and pasted into a collage, sometimes

¹⁸⁰ *Punk*, 1-18, New York (1976-1979); *Sniffin' Glue*, 1-12, London (July 1976-August 1977).

featured as the locus of a graffiti attack. The impression was of amateurishness. The lines of text wobbled, and the pictures were off-center. *Punk* was sufficiently organized to give the impression that its creators knew what they were doing even if the reader didn't. *Sniffin' Glue* looked like it was assembled somewhere in a one-room shack and hung to dry on the walls next to personal political manifestos and conspiracy theories.

Although *Punk* and *Sniffin' Glue* were stylistically different, they were both worlds apart from professional magazines. The formal order and precision of magazines like *Time* or even *Rolling Stone* were light years removed from the irreverent cartoon style of *Punk* or the sheer shoddiness-cum-urgency of *Sniffin' Glue*, where neatness and composition took second place to the desire to get the magazine out into the public. Like the music of the Ramones or the Sex Pistols, the impact of these magazines came not just from what they said, but from how they said it. When the fanzine *Sick Teen* was criticized for not being neat enough, the editors replied:

A punkzine laid out neat and tidy is like a punk show with reserved seating. Complaining about not being able to read them is like asking the band to stop playing so you can hear what lyrics the vocalist is singing That is not what punk is about. Not tidy layouts, not slow and carefully enunciated lyrics A phrase like "a good and tidy punkzine" is self-contradictory. It can be good, it can be tidy, but not both. As you must have noted, *Sick Teen* is considered the ideal among most punkzine editors.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Duncombe, *Notes From Underground*, 33.

In her dissertation, "The Evolution of a Style", Tricia Henry read the amateur style of fanzines and their authors' frequent apologies for shoddiness differently.

The punk mind set presents us with a paradox. It combines a hatred of apathy and a sense of urgency concerning everything related to punk culture, with an acute awareness of socio-political impotence, a belief that actions were inconsequential, that improvement either of self or society was at best elusive and at worst utterly futile. Self-effacement is a constant theme in the fanzines. It is expressed through a self-mockery that arises from the feelings of inner frustration so many punks speak of. Not only are they angry at society and the political structure around them, the punks seem to be angry at themselves. Finally, and most significantly, the fanzines bear witness to the sense of community shared by punks.¹⁸²

This self-effacement is perhaps best seen, not as inner frustration, but rather as a buffer against accusations of professionalism. By constantly putting down the merit of their work, punks were reaffirming their amateur status. The dangers of professionalism and the idea of the professional holding "expertise" were highlighted as the objects of 1960s rebellion by Theodore Roszak in *The Making of a Counter Culture*:

Expertise . . . has become the prestigious mystogogy [sic] of the technocratic society. Its principle purpose in the hands of ruling elites is to mystify the popular mind by creating illusions of omnipotence and omniscience - in much the same way that the pharaohs and priesthood of ancient Egypt used their monopoly of the calendar to command the awed docility of ignorant subjects . . . largely under the influence of logicians and technicians, and with the supposed purpose of de-hexing our thinking, we have produced the

¹⁸²Tricia Henry, "Punk Rock: The Evolution of a Style" (Ph.D diss. New York University, April 1987), 331.

scientized jargon which currently dominates official parlance and the social sciences . . . we have a vocabulary filled with nebulous quantities of things that have every appearance of precise calibration, and decorated with vaguely mechanistic-mathematical terms like "parameters," "structures," "variables," "inputs and outputs," "correlations," "inventories," "maximizations," and "optimizations." The terminology derives from involuted statistical procedures and methodological mysteries to which only graduate education gives access The vocabulary and the methodology mask the root ethical assumptions of policy or neatly transcribe them into a depersonalized rhetoric which provides a gloss of military or political necessity. To think and talk in such terms becomes the sure sign of being a certified realist, a "hard research" man.¹⁸³

These sentiments, that the creators of fanzines were "experts", somehow removed from or superior to the people for whom they wrote, did not sit well with a culture that assumed Johnny Rotten's comment: "There should be no difference between who's on stage and who's in the audience."¹⁸⁴ Thus, fanzine authors, like punk musicians, either hid formal training, or put down the merits of their own work so as not to appear "professional."

Punk failed in July of 1979 because it could not make a profit. However, it was quickly replaced on local shelves by a legion of other fanzines, more inspired by the sensibilities and outlook of *Sniffin' Glue* than by the community-wide focus of *Punk*. The fanzines of this period, 1980-1982, tended to be very small run publications, dedicated to punk music, reviewing major punk albums, local concerts, and interviewing local bands, while reprinting occasional articles from other fanzines. Few of these 'zines survived long enough to make it into the Factsheet Five archive, but the feeling one gets from reading those that did,

¹⁸³ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 142-3.

'zines like *Sick Teen*, *Church of the Latter Day Punk*, *Smarm*, and *Offense*, is of small communities only loosely connected. These fanzines were generally written by a single person, had letter pages that ran only a few entries, rarely from far away, and were unavoidably local in their emphasis.¹⁸⁵

The early fanzines nevertheless set the standard that the larger 'zines like *Flipside* would formalize. Every issue contained several basic elements: the editorial, followed by a brief letters section, interviews with bands and reviews of concerts or albums. The inclusion of ads was often dependant on the size of the fanzine. Most ads were paid for in trade, either reciprocal ads for other 'zines, free services or shelf space in record and bookstores.¹⁸⁶ Advertisements from record companies in fanzines played an important role in allowing fledgling punk bands to reach a wider audience. According to Cliff from the L.A. band the Wierdos:

There were lots of independent labels There wasn't any distribution. It was mail order. If you happened to get a magazine with an ad you could send for it. It was all like that. People would press up to a thousand records and we wouldn't even get paid for them or anything. The whole point was just to get our record out.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Johnny Rotten, *Punk Special Edition* (New York: Trans-High Corporation, 1981), 51.

¹⁸⁵ *Sick Teen*, Nos. 1-3 (FS5-NYSL), *Church of the Latter Day Punk*, 1-4, New Jersey (March 1982 - 1983), (FS5-NYSL), *Smarm*, 1, Mt. Pleasant, MI (February 1980), (FS5-NYSL), and *Offense*, Columbus, OH (October 28, 1983), (FS5-NYSL).

¹⁸⁶ In a letter found in the Factsheet Five archive, Mike Gunderloy attempted to negotiate such a reciprocal arrangement. Mike Gunderloy, personal correspondence, no date (FS5-NYSL).

¹⁸⁷ Cliff, *Ink Disease*, No. 11, Los Angeles, CA (1986), (FS5-NYSL), no pages.

Punks were also aware of the dangers of mail order, and routinely warned each other of companies that failed to make good on orders.¹⁸⁸

As individual fanzines expanded, the editorials shrank, making room for an expanded letters section where, in the case of *Flipside* and *MaximumRock'n'Roll*, the editors devoted more space to printing responses to readers. As more and more letters appeared in these larger fanzines, an increasing number of letters were dedicated to informing other readers of the existence of a punk scene in the writer's hometown. Amy of Norfolk, Virginia, closed her short letter "We really do have a decent scene, so bands please play in Norfolk."¹⁸⁹ Or some gave news about their own band:

To all the people who wrote to Agent Orange and did not get a reply let me explain. The band was playing in Las Vegas and I thought this would be a good time to answer their letters as we always do. Unfortunately during the confusion of playing on the road we left a shopping bag of fan mail in our hotel room . . .¹⁹⁰

Eventually, as particular writers started to send in regular updates about local bands, these writers became *de facto* "correspondents," and both *Flipside* and *MaximumRock'n'Roll* established "Scene Reports" sections. Initially these scene reports only provided coverage of the local areas of southern California, helping to give privileged positions to bands from such areas as Riverside and Orange County.

¹⁸⁸ Among all complaints about activities mentioned in *Factsheet Five* letters, mail ordering goods was mentioned three times, while the most common complaint, fighting, was mentioned ten.

¹⁸⁹ Amy, "Voice of the Reader," *Flipside*, No. 41 (January, 1984), (FS5-NYSL).

¹⁹⁰ Steve Levesque, *ibid.*

The following is just one of the endless reasons why my town is one of the most fun places to be in the world . . . Social and technological advances are running rampant through Riverside like **The Plague** . . . A Rhino Records shop has opened on Hole St. They are ready for business . . . But! The most swinging thing to happen to Riverside is the De Anza Theater! Once a very popular movie Theater, now a very happening club. The first few shows were local battles of the bands. Then there were **Mod** gigs including: **The Muts** (one of the best I've seen in a long time), **The Three O'clock**, **The Targets** and **The Jetz**. Finally once again new wave in my town. Big names like: **Circle Jerks**, **CH3**, **Agent Orange**, **JFA**, **White Flag**, **Zany Guys**, **LOve** [sic] **Canal** . . . **Black Flag** is rumoured to play here . . . The third record of **White Flag** record entitled "When the Going Gets Tough, Quit" is going to be out soon . . . Once again **White Flag** is out of a bass player. Donnie Bubonic auditioned but changed his mind about playing with them. He says they are glunkins. A member of **Sin 34** filled the space for awhile but for some reason he is no longer with the flag that is not white . . . **Toxic Toys** went into the studio and recorded a demo tape . . . **Toy Razor** did not break up. R.M.S. magazine issue #1 is out and it is great.¹⁹¹

Since their activities were presented to a national punk audience, these southern California bands found it easier to mount national tours, and to a certain extent, it was the southern California punk sound, with its unique vocal stylings patterned after the band NoFX combined with the harmonies of Bad Religion, that became normative by the 1990s.¹⁹² By 1986, the scene reports in *Flipside* and *MRR* had grown to cover many areas across the United States, and even featured occasional dispatches from Europe.

¹⁹¹ Allan Wrench, "Riverside", *Flipside*, No. 43 (Fall, 1984), 34.

¹⁹² By the late 1980s, NoFX and Bad Religion were the two most popular Southern California punk bands, and helped create the style of SoCal punk through signing similar sounding bands to their respective labels, Fat Music and Epitaph.

Like most magazines, the chief role of the fanzines was to keep readers informed of what was going in the world of punk, through interviews with punk artists and reviews of new music or books. Even though punk had supposedly dissolved the line between performers and audience members, interviews allowed readers to get up close with the more famous members of the punk community. Record reviews allowed critics to celebrate local successes, such as L.A.-based *Slash!*'s review of the L.A. band X: "Everything has been said. Everything is true. They are the greatest, the best, the baddest, the whole L.A. enchilada by themselves. Every note, every riff, every wail is a microcosm of everything we've ever believed in, danced to and prayed for."¹⁹³ Reviews also allowed critics to delineate what was considered punk, and what was not:

Miles Davis, "Decoy." Yeah, I know, Miles needs a review in *Flipside* like Howard Hughes needed double coupons, but here's a cat who literally defines "hardcore" for me. Always moving regardless of trends, in fact, setting most of them in the process. One never knows what to expect from him with each successive release.¹⁹⁴

Aside from interviews, reviews, and letters, few fanzines were considered complete without the inclusion of some form of artwork. This mostly consisted of a few crudely-drawn pictures, valued for their lack of sophistication, photos cut and pasted from elsewhere, short comics, or small pieces of poetry and fiction. A few fanzines also ran news articles, usually clipped and photocopied from some

¹⁹³ *Slash!* (August, 19, 1981), (FS5-NYSL), no pages.

other source, such as a local newspaper or another fanzine. These articles were often directly copied from their original sources, and the mismatched typefaces contributed to the overwhelmingly amateur look of the fanzines. Popular topics included reports on American involvement in Central America, feminism, and animal rights. While they were active, the Meese Commission and Tipper Gore's Parents' Music Resource Center's attempt to ban or censor punk figured prominently in the fanzines.

Punk as Fuck: Punk as Transgression.

In his essay, "The Politics of Civility", Kenneth Cmiel explored the social construction of the notion of civility in the 1960s. Civility, he argued, rested on commonly accepted shared prescriptions for proper public behaviour. During the 1960s, these assumptions were challenged by various counterculture groups for a variety of reasons. Civil rights groups claimed that "civility" in the South supported white supremacy. Anti-war demonstrators argued it gave tacit submission to the military-industrial complex and the Vietnam War. Hippies felt civility was yet another symptom of the oppressive characteristic of middle-class morality.¹⁹⁵ Throughout the early 1970s, the early punk scenes continued to turn the rejection of middle-class values into an explosion of difference. One of the

¹⁹⁴ This review of Miles Davis was also one of the first instances of "hardcore" being thought of as an attitude that crossed genres, rather than a genre itself. *Flipside*, No. 43 (Fall 1984), (FS5-NYSL), no pages.

¹⁹⁵ Kenneth Cmiel, "The Politics of Civility", David Farber (ed.), *The Sixties: From Memory to History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994), 263.

key performance aspects of punk was transgression, and this made early punk especially receptive to actions that carried shock value.

In his essay, "I Won't Let That Dago By': Rethinking Punk and Racism.", Roger Sabin attempted to uncover traces of racism in punk, notably through its use of racist terms and images, such as the swastika, which emerged in British and American punk circa 1977-78.¹⁹⁶ While punk had an uneasy relationship with a resurgent skinhead movement in Britain, and with rising nationalism in the United States during the early 1980s, many punk bands like Minor Threat, Dead Kennedys, and Black Flag were avowedly anti-racist, as demonstrated by the Rock Against Racism concerts. These concerts started in Britain and featured punk and reggae bands, and were quickly imported to the United States by the yippies.¹⁹⁷ Of the nearly 300 letters printed in *Flipside* during 1983-86, only one contained racist language, and only one complained about the RAR concerts.¹⁹⁸ However, if punk cannot be seen as racist, then how does one account for the use of racist imagery in punk?

Part of the problem lay in punk's use of irony and sarcasm. For example, Sabin pointed out that Black Flag's song "White Pride" could be seen as an example of latent racism in punk.¹⁹⁹ But Sabin ignored that Black Flag's singer at the time, Dez Incandenza, was Hispanic.²⁰⁰ Likewise, Sabin also cited Adam Ant's frequent stage phrase "Light a beacon with a Puerto Rican" (in reference to

¹⁹⁶ Roger Sabin, "I Won't Let That Dago By': Rethinking Punk and Racism.", Sabin (ed.) *Punk Rock: So What?*.

¹⁹⁷ The RAR concerts started sometime in the early 1980s, but very little coverage was given them, making it hard to assess their impact.

¹⁹⁸ This complaint had more to do with the yippies using the proceeds to fight for marijuana legalization, rather combat racism. See Table 1.

¹⁹⁹ Sabin, *Punk Rock: So What?*, 208.

greasy hairstyles), but it is unlikely that Adam Ant's Puerto Rican drummer would have allowed this phrase to have been used with racist intent.²⁰¹ Instead, punks attempted to make everyday racist attitudes apparent by putting them on stage and lampooning them.²⁰²

During the late 1970s, the early punk scene remained open to multiple meanings and multiple definitions of punk. Punk's attraction to taboo images like the swastika lay in the perceived ability to manipulate the meanings of everyday objects. Tommy Gear of the L.A. band The Weirdos, explained this:

At that time the use of the swastika had a different significance than it has today, as far as its application by youth is concerned. It is an interesting transformation. I think that then the whole motivation was the rejection of icons and their meanings. We wanted to subvert or transform the meanings or appropriate them for other purposes. You could call it a master discourse, which says that certain things have certain meanings, certain behaviours go this way. We were, I think, in appropriating the swastika, not trying to be neo-nazis, but trying to be provocative, challenging this discourse which gave that icon a particular place and meaning in cultural sensibility. When you take these things out of context in a different historical period, say now, someone would look at this picture and say this person is a neo-Nazi, one of those skinhead types. That whole skinhead connotation happened much later than this. Challenging the status quo and personal expression were the big motivations.²⁰³

By the early 1980s, hardcore punks like Jello Biafra of the Dead Kennedys argued that the swastika and other images had fixed meanings.²⁰⁴ Biafra's

²⁰⁰ Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 146.

²⁰¹ Sabin, *Punk Rock: So What?*, 207.

²⁰² Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 146.

²⁰³ Stark, *Punk '77*, 36-7.

²⁰⁴ Belsito and Davis, *Hardcore California*, 110.

attitude was in keeping with hardcore's tendency to insist on its own definition of punk, and this period saw the gradual decreasing of such "playful" uses of racism. However, hardcore also continued the tradition of fighting alienation by alienating others, and took shock-value transgressions to new levels.²⁰⁵ Consider the following editorial from the fanzine *Coldcocked*:

It has recently come to my attention that some folks - brittle hamster hearted ART STUDENTS (girls mostly) think that we at Coldcocked have it out for the opposite sex. What rubbish! Now, isn't that just like a BROAD to sit and nit-pick about some imagined slight? I mean we'd cut down Men too, but with the exception of our mighty staff (s), none have been spotted in the area in years. What I can't figure out, is whether these pansies are FASCISTS (people who worship the erect penis) or COMMIES (people who worship the flaccid penis) or ANARCHISTS (people with nothing to worship, if you catch my drift).

We've also been accused of sophomorically trying to shock THE BOURGEOISIE. Well the bourgeoisie can blow us. Besides, the bourgeoisie like to be shocked. Shocking the bourgeoisie is like horse-whipping a shriveled up old FAG. Sure, they whine and moan about it, but you know they like it. We have no time for such repugnant nonsense.²⁰⁶

Dick Hebdige suggested that early British punk fashion illustrated punks' belief that they represented the visual image of swear words.²⁰⁷ The adoption of taboo behaviour as normal in the early stages of punk had, under hardcore punk, become normative. In hardcore punks' attempt to define itself and maintain its integrity in the face of an ever-encroaching mainstream, it reached further and further for images that would repulse squeamish middle-class interlopers. In his

²⁰⁵ Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 82.

²⁰⁶ Editorial, *Coldcocked*, No. 4 (no date) (FS5-NYSL), no pages.

²⁰⁷ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 114.

study of punk, Craig O'Hara said that by 1986 it seemed as if almost every hardcore punk album cover featured a starved or mutilated Third World body or tortured animal. This reflected the formation within punk of a specific hardcore iconography concerned with politics. O'Hara felt that these images were chosen in an attempt to "shock listeners into action", a tactic that mimics the SDS strategy to radicalize the public through controversial activities designed to raise awareness.²⁰⁸

A Whole Nation Full of Weirdos: Letters to *Flipside*²⁰⁹

While it is unlikely that larger fanzines like *Flipside*, or *MaximumRock'n'Roll*, printed all the letters they received, the published letters contained a large cross-section of interests. Initially, readers wrote in to fanzines giving their addresses and asking to trade 'zines with other punks while others asked for penpals.²¹⁰ It was in part to connect these disparate elements that Mike Gunderloy started *Factsheet Five*, a fanzine dedicated to reviewing fanzines and publishing their mailing addresses.²¹¹ Many punks wrote to their favourite fanzine to complain about events in their local punk community, while others raved about their favourite bands.

Besides printing these letters, the editors of *Flipside* conducted annual reader survey polls. While most of the questions ran to "Best Record/Worst

²⁰⁸ Craig O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk: More than Noise* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995), 79.

²⁰⁹ This was the title of the first Weirdos album, the cover of which was reprinted for the inaugural issue of *Vox Magazine*. Weirdos, *A Whole Nation Full of Weirdos*, Slash! Records, 1983. *Vox Magazine*, No. 1, Calgary, AB (September, 1983), 1.

Record", "Best Band/Worst Band", "Best Club/Worst Club," the survey did occasionally ask revealing questions. For example, in 1984, while many punks were complaining about gang fights at punk rock shows, 58 percent of *Flipside* readers felt that gangs were a problem, though only 8 percent were actually in a gang.²¹² The 1984 survey also revealed that 60 percent of respondents claimed to be "straight-edge", though the number of straight-edge punks dwindled to 41 percent in 1985.²¹³ However, the 1985 survey also revealed that 26 percent of respondents had become vegetarians.²¹⁴ While *Flipside* did not reveal the number of entries it received for its surveys, a look at the composition of the letters published in *Flipside* during 1984-1986 indicates that of the 298 letters, at least forty-seven, or 19.3 percent, were written by females, and 197, or 80.7 percent, by males, indicating the culture of hardcore was overwhelmingly male (see Table 2).

The 1983 survey asked for favourite political slogans and published a lengthy list that included many pro-peace statements such as "Fight War Not Wars", "US Out of Central America NOW", "We Will Overcome", "Do to Others as You Wish Done You", and "One Nuclear Bomb Can Ruin Your Whole Day." Anti-Reagan slogans were also very popular: "Reagan Der Fuher, We Need Someone Newer", "I Shot Reagan", "Reagan Sucks", "Reagan Dies", and "Fuck Ronnie Let's Listen to Johnny".²¹⁵ Other slogans included "Eat Shit and Bark at

²¹⁰ Duncombe, *Notes From Underground*, 45.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

²¹² "Polls", *Flipside* No. 45, Winter 1985 (FS5-NYSL), no page.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ "Reader Response Survey," *Flipside* No. 48, Winter 1986 (FS5-NYSL), no page.

²¹⁵ Possibly meaning Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols. "Reader Survey Poll 1985", *Flipside*, No. 48 (January 1986), (FS5-NYSL).

the Moon,” “Hippies in Black Leather Jackets,” and the 1960s holdover “Do What You Will Shall Be the Whole of the Law - Alister Crowley.” The 1985 survey also showed punks reaching back to previous moments in the counterculture when it revealed that respondents’ favourite books read by punks were 1984, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *Catcher in the Rye*. This literary sampling from the Beat and hippie countercultures suggests that by the mid-1980s punks were beginning to acknowledge a countercultural heritage. The 1985 survey also established that the vast majority of punks were between the ages of sixteen and nineteen with a significant number between twenty-two and twenty-four.²¹⁶

For the period of 1982-1985 the Factsheet Five Archive contains the most copies of *Flipside*, which Gunderloy started receiving in 1983. The *Flipside* collection extends well past 1985, but there are eight issues that fall within the requisite time frame. The letter pages from these issues, together with the one issue of *MaximumRock’n’Roll* for this period, combine to yield 298 letters, creating a reading audience that spanned both U.S. coasts, Britain, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.²¹⁷ Most letters with printed addresses came from California (45.6 percent) where both *Flipside* and *MRR*, were published, but the rest of the letters were evenly spread out among the remaining states with a significant number coming from Idaho (6.3 percent), Maine (3.9 percent), Texas (3.0 percent), and Canada (3.9 percent) (see Table 3).

Letters from the pages of *Flipside* were rife with arguments over what was “the” punk identity, with fully a third talking either directly about the nature of

²¹⁶ Ibid.

punk, or else of the dynamics of their local scenes. There were many different definitions of what punk was, ranging from anarchist punks (7.6 percent), Christian punks (2.1 percent), peace punks (0.7 percent), to thrash punks (.7 percent).²¹⁸ Several punks (10.3 percent) defined themselves in opposition to other things, like being anti-Christian (1.4 percent), anti-New Wave (0.7 percent), or anti-Skinhead (4.2 percent). The majority of punks, however, defined themselves as hardcore punks (15.3 percent), individuals (14.7 percent), or simply as "punk" (34.0 percent). The proliferation of labels within the punk counterculture, suggests that while many punks wanted to be seen as part of the punk community, they also had very specific ideas about their individual identities (see Table 4). While female punks were just as likely to be specific in their labeling of themselves, none chose hardcore or straight-edge as a self-description, preferring instead to see themselves as individuals (10.6 percent), or simply "punks" (27.7 percent) (see Table 5).

The immediacy of what punk was and was not, and how punk was best expressed at a particular time and place occurred at a time in punk history when it was expanding into the mainstream at a tremendous rate. Punk was starting to get mainstream media coverage and to be portrayed in newspapers and TV shows like *Quincy* as violent and mindless. At the far end of the musical spectrum, punk rock and heavy metal were starting to blend together and bands like Black Flag were attracting cross-over audiences. Many punk letters therefore expressed concern that the something was wrong with the popular image of

²¹⁷ *MaximumRock'n'Roll* was included as it played an important roll in Duncombe's analysis of fanzines, albeit for a later period.

punk. The image of punk as a working-class movement was questioned at the very beginning. Pete Price, editor of *Heat* wrote in 1977:

One subject I've been thinking about for some time and arguin' about too is this "punk" elitism thing All the crap about being unemployed, unable to play, ignorant, cliché, stuff like that.

How did it all begin? Why are people hiding their social backgrounds pretending they're from poor families almost ashamed of their education, qualifications "only true punks are unemployed" is a typical one I hear - -how can you have a job as well as be a punk rocker, well if I didn't have a job, -- and didn't have any money -- I wouldn't be able to buy any punk records, now would I, and what would the supposed "dole-queue rockers" like the Pistols and the Clash do then, if their audience was so poor; their audience couldn't afford to buy their records, eh? It's a well known fact -- by now, that there are no true-blue punk bands. The idea stereotype punk exists only in people's minds. All the people I know who are into punk-rock are ordinary. It's their very ordinariness (hope I spelt that right) of them, and their lives, that makes them want punk. It gives them -- and me -- something reactionary -- something to brighten up our bleak little lives. I want this in big letters: IT'S HARD TO BE MIDDLE-CLASS AND BE A PUNK it's a contradiction -- right? Wrong. Being in my position, like most of my friends, it's really tough trying to explain to people -- morons -- that being middle-class; just ordinary salt-of-the-earth sort, and being, into punk-rock as well, is not a contradiction, it's a reaction against this middle-class ordinary life I lead. It's being different from the general morass of people, it's sooo hard to get this simple message across though: I mean, if I were poor, homeless and unemployed, sleeping in hovels & begging to survive, would I be a better "punk" then?²¹⁹

Price's point was that ideas of punk identity were contrary images of what it meant to be middle-class. The idea of the middle-class was tied up with notions of professionalism, careerism, and passive consumerism. The punk experience was supposed to be a visceral one, and so rejected the middle-class lifestyle as

²¹⁸ Thrash punk was, unbelievably, even faster than hardcore and popular among skateboarders.

²¹⁹ Pete Price, *Heat*, No. 2 (October November 1977).

inherently boring. A supposedly leisured middle-class life raised the spectre that somehow one's participation in the punk community was not as honest as that of someone who worked all day at physical labour, or had to forage all day for money and food. Further, the idea that the middle class was the class that could forge a career out of cultural endeavors (as songwriters, performers, etc.) meant that a middle-class punk might be a wolf in sheep's clothing, using the punk experience to build a commercial repertoire. Since the emphasis of punk was on the immediate experience and not the reproducible commodity, the idea that it could be used as a commercial stepping stone was heresy. In part this represents the central tension in the counterculture, both during the 1960s and in punk, that it quite literally was "hard to be middle-class and be a punk". Roszak and Reich both asserted that the counterculture was the product of an affluent middle class. However, reconciling this privileged position with the counterculture's disdain for the middle-class lifestyle without seeming hypocritical remained a sensitive issue.

However, a broad definition of punk as anti-middle class does not address the specific identity constructed by those who considered themselves to be "straight-edge" punks. Early punk deliberately endorsed all social activities frowned upon by straight society, especially hard drugs like heroin and excessive consumption of alcohol. However, by 1979 drug overdoses had taken a significant toll on the punk population, most noticeably through the deaths of Sid and Nancy of Sex Pistols fame, Peter Laughner of Pere Ubu, and the public addiction problems of Richard Hell, Dee Dee Ramone, Iggy Pop, and Lou Reed.

Straight Edge, inspired by a Minor Threat song, was the first real, coherent punk ideology, and was in part a reaction to the prevalence of drugs within the punk community.²²⁰ Like Black Flag on the West Coast, Minor Threat was instrumental in the formation of hardcore punk along the East Coast. In "Straight Edge" Minor Threat sang:

I'm a person just like you
 But I've got better things to do
 Than sit around and fuck my head
 Hang out with the living dead
 Snort white shit up my nose
 Pass out at the shows
 I don't even think about speed
 That's something I just don't need
 I've got the straight-edge.

I'm a person just like you
 But I've got better things to do
 Than sit around and smoke dope
 'Cause I know I can cope
 Laugh at the thought of eating ludes
 Laugh at the thought of sniffing glue
 Always gonna keep in touch
 Never want to use a crutch.²²¹

Not only did "Straight Edge" give young punks the ability to "say no" to drugs, but the lines "But I've got better things to do" and "Always gonna keep in touch/never want to use a crutch," meant to listeners that punk was more than just music and needed a programme. The members of Minor Threat were not only musicians; they were politically aware and used their record label

²²⁰ A D.C. band voted one of the Best Bands in each *Flipside* survey from 1983 – 1985.

Dischord²²² to promote their beliefs. Straight Edge was not only a reaction against the prevalence of drugs in the punk community, but also against the images of adolescence that punks felt were portrayed in the media. Punk's impression of the expectations for youth held by parents, schools, and media, was presented in the Dead Kennedy's hardcore song "Terminal Preppie":

I go to college
That makes me so cool
I live in a dorm
And show off by the pool

I join the right clubs
Just to build an impression
I block out thinking
It won't get me ahead

My ambition in life
Is to look good on paper
All I want is a slot
In some big corporation

...
No I'm not here to learn
I just want to get drunk
And major in business
And be taught how to fuck

Win! Win!
I always play to win
Wanna fit in like a clog
In the faceless machine²²³

²²¹ Minor Threat, "Straight-Edge", *Minor Threat*, Dischord, 1981.

²²² Voted best label by a landslide in *Flipside's* 1985 survey.

²²³ Dead Kennedys, "Terminal Preppie," *Plastic Surgery Disasters*, Alternative Tentacles Records, 1981.

Straight-edge punks rejected alcohol, drugs, and later pre-marital sex and eating meat, since these were things that distracted punks from what increasingly came to resemble the political crusades of the 1960s counterculture. Straight Edge explored the links among alcohol, drugs, and big corporations, claiming that these companies "kill people, pollute the earth, do animal testing, make sexist ads, ruin families, cause drunk driving, alcoholism, and are responsible for child abuse, rape, and murder because people were under the influence, etc."²²⁴ This critique ultimately merged with criticism of corporations, carried by non-straight-edge West Coast bands like Bad Religion and the Dead Kennedys, that many of the leading industrial companies were involved in arms manufacturing. Furthermore, straight edge's insistence on purity and its stance on cruelty to animals led it to investigate the preparation of meat and encouraged the adoption of vegetarianism.²²⁵

Straight-edge punk was the most zealous of all punk subcultures, and did the most to direct the movement of hardcore punk, and thus punk itself, throughout the 1980s. However, as the decade progressed, straight-edge punks began to distance themselves from non-straight-edge punks, even openly criticizing non-straight-edge types in the pages of fanzines like *MaximumRocknRoll*, which was increasingly being viewed as a straight-edge organ. According to Craig O'Hara, straight edge had become so restrictive by the mid-1980s that many of the early straight-edge bands like Minor Threat and 7

²²⁴ letter, *MaximumRocknRoll*, No. 103 (Dec. 1991), (F5-NYSL).

²²⁵ O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk*, 113.

Seconds no longer publicly associated themselves with it.²²⁶ By the end of the 1980s, a significant number of straight-edge punks followed in the steps of their hippie predecessors and joined the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, adopting the teachings of Swami A. C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada.²²⁷

Hippies in Black Leather Jackets: Dissent, Commodification and Punk Style

Punk succeeded in replicating itself for twenty-five years because it was able to do what the hippies could not; i.e. outlive the youth of the generation that spawned it. On the surface, the hippies were optimistic that society could change for the better, hence their emphasis on the future harmony, peace and love that this utopia would offer. Inwardly, however, many hippies expressed regret that the system would not, or could not change, at least not soon enough. As times progressed and it became evident that the promised revolution of the 1960s was not going to happen, few converts found it easy to believe in the optimism espoused by the hippies. Punk, on the other hand, was outwardly pessimistic about the possibility of change and advocated leaving society altogether. Yes, punk had a philosophy that was ultimately optimistic, but this optimism was not on the surface and was not a major cause for attraction. Nobody ever became a punk because they were happy. Instead, punk's pessimism became a warm embrace for troubled teenagers. Since punk was not just a phenomenon and a

²²⁶ Ibid., 123-4.

²²⁷ Ibid., 125.

way of life, but also a commodity bought and sold on the market, teens could latch onto punk as a sign of their displeasure, as many in the sixties latched onto the hippies as a sign of their optimism. Both punk and hippie countercultural commodities symbolized a rejection of mainstream culture. Like readers who used their romance novels as a release for their pent up sexual tensions and personal problems, the products of punk could be used as forms of surrogate rebellion, leaving punks, like romance readers, to live vicariously through their products.²²⁸ Once the alienation, ennui, or despair of adolescence passed, those for whom punk was merely a commodity could let it go and rejoin society. However, punk was also a philosophy. Many became entranced by its ideological views and moved from punk as commodity to punk as ideology.

The mood of punk was inherently one of pessimism, a pessimism created by the promises and failures of the 1960s. The hippies were a revolt that failed to turn into a revolution and the stylistic elements associated with them had been dismissed, just as some later turned a derisive eye towards those who still maintain the more extreme form of punk fashions dating from the 1977-82 period, such as mohawks, studded collars, and safety pins. The failure of these eras to make the changes they promised has not hurt the overall ideological sentiment behind those movements, but has caused the aesthetic associated with them to fall permanently out of favour, mostly likely as styles became perpetual reminders of that failure. William Partridge in his anthropological study of a hippie ghetto in Florida, felt that the hippie outfit of second-hand thrift store clothes did

²²⁸ Janice A. Radway, "The Act of Reading the Romance: Escape and Instruction", Juliet B. Schor, and Douglas B. Holt (eds.) *The Consumer Society Reader* (New York: New Press, 2000),

not become a uniform of eccentricity until the late 1960s.²²⁹ This period coincided with the mainstreaming of the counterculture, and represented the efforts of disenfranchised youth attempting to demonstrate their allegiance to the new rebellion by buying the look of dissent. A similar moment happened in punk during 1977, the Summer of Hate, as the Sex Pistols made waves across the Atlantic and the extreme tattoos and hair styles of British punks threatened to become *the* look of American punk. Questions of style, however, masked a deeper problem for the counterculture. Since the only definition of punk that is widely accepted is that punk equals individuality, this individuality became hard to square with the need of many punks to feel part of a community and a group as represented outwardly by a homogenous appearance (uniform). The problem became how to reconcile a uniform style with the need for individual expression.²³⁰

The need for a punk "image" or "uniform" was debated in the letters printed in the pages of *Flipside*. Many writers, such as SMK, felt that wearing punk clothes or hairstyles portrayed in the media as "punk", like the mohawk or studded collar, was detrimental to the counterculture.²³¹ These punks felt that acting or dressing in an expected manner was contrary to the idea of punk as individual expression and spontaneous. However, those in smaller towns generally felt the need to endorse a punk uniform so as to give punk a visible

170.

²²⁹ William L. Partridge, *The Hippie Ghetto: The Natural History of a Subculture* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1973).

²³⁰ Duncombe, *Notes From Underground*, 62-3.

²³¹ SMK, letter, *Flipside*, No. 43 (Fall 1984), no page (FS5-NYSL).

image that other people in their town could identify. Trish P., from Long Beach, explained:

One point about punk is to rebel against this so called society, to rebel you can't be a puss and look like this society wants you too [sic] look. You have to look how you feel or how in the hell would any dumbshit off the street know your opinions about the system . . . Yeah, punks are anti-fashion, we have our own way of dressing. If you dress like everyone else then you shouldn't be considered a helping part of the scene.²³²

Like music, clothing became the way one pledged allegiance to the counterculture, and it played an important symbolic role. According to David McBride the hippie look was meant to startle, to strike an awareness of other possibilities.²³³ Furthermore, Miller noted that the unkempt second-hand look of the 1960s was meant to reflect the hippie belief that contemporary society was "dirty".²³⁴ In his study of British punk fashion, Dick Hebdige made similar statements, saying that the punk look was designed to raise an awareness of the artificiality of all looks, bringing one back to idea that "normal" and "civility" are social constructions.²³⁵ In rejecting middle-class values, punks rejected middle-class appearances and chose clothing that would highlight their rejection. Thus, Richard Hell wore ripped dress shirts, punk fans wrote slogans on their clothes, while safety pins and dog collars became jewelry. Once all of this

²³² Trish P., letter, *Flipside*, No. 41 (Winter 1984), no page (FS5-NYSL).

²³³ David McBride, "On the Fault Line of Mass Culture and Counterculture: A social History of the Hippie Counterculture in 1960s Los Angeles" (Los Angeles: University of California at Los Angeles, 1998), 144.

²³⁴ Timothy, Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 118.

threatened to become acceptable “trendy” middle-class fashion accessories, punks wore garbage bags.²³⁶

It is important to remember, though, that in 1969 a UCLA psychiatric team estimated that only 5,000 of 55,000 hippies were “full-time” hippies, meaning that they had given themselves over to the counterculture lifestyle.²³⁷ While Partridge did not reveal what the survey considered a “full hippie” it does suggest that not all “hippies” participated in the counterculture to the same extent. The 50,000 part-time hippies were those who were sympathetic to the cause, wanted to belong, but for whatever reason could not, and so bought the symbols of belonging much as one buys sportswear to demonstrate allegiance to one’s favourite team. Also, Partridge noted that one did not immediately become a hippie, but rather there was a period of transition, where worlds overlapped.²³⁸ This, too, happened in punk, where 60 percent were only concerned with the music, and accusations of being a weekend punk, or a tourist, became the ultimate insult.²³⁹ It is possible therefore to suggest that commodified versions of the counterculture were relied upon by initiates who had yet fully to cross the threshold. There existed then, a spectrum of countercultural identity, that ranged from consuming particular counterculture commodities, such as clothes or music, to identifying with its politics, to finally adopting the lifestyle and consciousness of the counterculture.

²³⁵ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 95.

²³⁶ See for instance Debbie Harry’s garbage bag clothes for Blondie’s video “Atomic”, Chrysalis Records, 1980.

²³⁷ McBride, “On the Fault Line on Mass Culture”, 93.

²³⁸ Partridge, *The Hippie Ghetto*, 21.

²³⁹ “Reader Response Survey”, *Flipside*, No. 45, Winter 1985 (FS5-NYSL), no pages.

In his study of fanzines, Duncombe approached this dilemma by offering the example of Roy SanFilippo, who started off listening to the Clash and was inspired by their song "Bored by the USA" to learn more about American history through reading Howard's Zinn's *People's History of the United States*.²⁴⁰ SanFilippo soon joined Amnesty International, then CISPES, the El Salvadoran solidarity group. Duncombe argued that this is the stepping stone theory of deviance at work, where one product, event, etc. leads further down the path to deviance. Of course, this happens in all things, and punk held no monopoly on the process. It was part of the SDS theory of public confrontation to radicalize viewers at home. It was the heart and soul of Abbie Hoffmann's notion that yippies are hippies who have been clubbed by a cop. Punk rock, particularly shock groups like the Sex Pistols and the Dead Kennedys, was like the revealing of a great big lie, shouting that the world was not alright, and that there were problems to be addressed. Armed with this vague confirmation that the problem was not with them, but with society, punks went out to investigate what was wrong with their world and ended up rediscovering the critique of America offered in the 1960s.²⁴¹

The counterculture could not replicate itself in the ways that other cultures can, or rather, the punk counterculture is too young to determine whether this is true. The children conceived during the Summer of Love, even in the most favourable circumstances, would have only been old enough to started listening to punk in 1982. The offspring of members of the punk counterculture would only

²⁴⁰ Duncombe, *Notes From Underground*, 180-182.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 180-1.

have started participating meaningfully, or noticeably, in the last few years. Rather than reproducing itself biologically, then, the punk counterculture won new converts through the use of personal catharsis and cultural artifacts. The ahistorical nature of commodities under capitalism, an economy of the “now” where old products are repackaged and reissued, and this has allowed many of the products of countercultures to retain much of their charm and accessibility. The novels of the Beats are still in print, a small industry has developed around Woodstock and the mystique of the 1960s, while even the most conservative rock record shops stock the albums of bigger punk bands like the Ramones and the Clash. Guy Debord mused that under capitalism, the nature, or purpose, of a particular commodity is irrelevant.²⁴² Whether a commodity encouraged further participation in capitalism, or advocated its overthrow, did not matter so long as it was something that could be bought and sold. The marketplace treats albums by the Dead Kennedys and Michael Jackson the same. For individuals, however, these items could be a defining moment of personal realization, drawing them into deeper contact with the counterculture.

No War, No KKK, No Fascist USA: The Politics of Hardcore Punk²⁴³

Since *Flipside* was a fanzine dedicated to punk music, it should be no surprise that after agonizing over the perennial question of “What was punk?”, 24.2 percent of all letters were actually about music, bands, record labels, or the

²⁴² Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 23.

magazine itself. However 20.5 percent were also predominantly political, talking about topics as diverse as racism, feminism, homosexuality, animal rights, and peace (see Table 1). Of all 298 letters published from January 1983 to January 1986, 43.6 percent mentioned politics at some point. The majority of these letters were also very specific in their discussions of politics, focusing on single issues, allowing the letters section of *Flipside* to cover a wide range political spectrum, that ranged from left of center liberal to radical (see Table 6). During the 1984 election the Libertarian Party was mentioned in two letters, only to be rebuked by three others specifically anti-Libertarians and four more in favour of anarchism. Six letters were also explicitly anti-Ronald Reagan, and another four anti-Liberal.²⁴⁴ In general however, the letter pages were more about raising awareness than they were about campaigning; hence, the appearance of letters discussing animal rights (4.8 percent), the threat of fascism in the United States (3.2 percent), one letter on the military regime of Brazil, and another on the actions of the Parents Music Resource Center, as well as on the perils of the arms race (6.4 percent).

However, punks were also not afraid to take issue with problems they perceived in their own community, and thus several letters discussed dealing with abusive parents (3.2 percent), local manifestations of racism (4.8 percent), and two letters encouraged punks to adopt vegetarianism. While female punks were no more likely to single out any specific issue than male punks, by 1985 sexism within punk was an issue. Sexism was mentioned in 10.6 percent of all

²⁴³ "Reader Response Survey", *Flipside*, No. 45 (January, 1984), (FS5-NYSL).

letters published between 1984-1986. Sexism was tackled by both female and male punks. In part the increase of sexism had to do with the aggressiveness of hardcore punk and its dominance within the counterculture. While hardcore was one of the three biggest identities chosen by punks for themselves, no female punk described herself as hardcore. The implications of this will be addressed in Chapter Four.

Most punks, however, seemed content to listen to the music they deemed punk. For these punks (48.4 percent) the counterculture was about individualism and non-conformity. As revealed in the *Flipside* Reader Surveys of 1983-1985, the favourite bands were 7 Seconds, Minor Threat, Dead Kennedys, Husker Du and Suicidal Tendencies.²⁴⁵ Minor Threat and 7 Seconds were East Coast straight-edge bands, while the Dead Kennedys and Suicidal Tendencies were hardcore bands from the West Coast. Since fanzines operated as networks for publicity, the majority of readers who wrote in to talk about bands used the opportunity to inform others about their own bands. However, among those who talked about other bands, the most frequently mentioned by far was Black Flag, followed by other Californian hardcore bands: Social Distortion, Suicidal Tendencies, and Killroy. Table 10 not only shows the popularity of particular bands, but also demonstrates the shift in band names that occurred with hardcore punk. Hardcore bands tended to choose names that had political overtones, such as Black Flag, Dead Kennedys, or Millions of Dead Cops.

²⁴⁴ It cannot be said though, whether by anti-Liberal these punks meant anti-Democratic Party. For more see Table 6.

²⁴⁵ Reader Survey Polls, *Flipside*, Nos. 41, 45, 49 (Winter 1984, Winter 1985, Winter 1986), no pages (FS5-NYSL).

The popularity of these bands demonstrates the position of dominance hardcore enjoyed within punk by 1985. Even bands that did not consider themselves “hardcore” were labeled hardcore. Despite paving the way for the poppier, more accessible and listener-friendly, post-hardcore genre of powerpunk, Husker Du, to their surprise, were labeled a hardcore band by Californian fanzines.²⁴⁶ Hardcore punk had increased the tempo of the music while stripping it of pop hooks and chord progressions, making it easier for more and more young people without musical training to get involved in punk. As hardcore bands proliferated, older punk musicians, either from boredom, or to distinguish themselves from newer bands, looked for a different sound. In the latter half of the 1980s, powerpunk emerged, keeping the same driving beat, but reintroducing pop elements like harmonies and guitar solos.

Art to Choke Hearts: The Role of Art in Fanzines²⁴⁷

One of the things that both Theodore Roszak and Charles Reich identified as a trait of the counterculture was the decline of rationalism. Writing was viewed as a tool of rationalism and objectivity, so punk magazines and artists sought other avenues of expression more in tune with expressing a personalized subjective outlook. Toward this end, art, particularly psychedelic art, began to take pride of place as a method of communication. *Punk* was created with the images of the underground newspapers of the 1960s, *Mad Magazine*, and the

²⁴⁶ Jim Barber, “Something to Du”, *Riding the Blinds*, No. 4 (February, 1984), (FS5-NYSL).

²⁴⁷ Henry Rollins, *Art to Choke Hearts* (Los Angeles: 2.13.61. Press), 1992.

cartoons of Robert Crumb in mind. As John Holmstrom, the artistic editor of *Punk Magazine* explained:

The hand lettering [of *Punk*] was done in order to save on typesetting costs, but it also gave the magazine the look of a comic book. That was important because we wanted to appeal to the kids who were familiar with comics, but also to shake up their sensibilities – to get them to look at seemingly mundane things in a new light.²⁴⁸

Artwork and comic strips, then, were a major component of many fanzines. A lot of the non-comic artwork was a transgressive, degenerate mixture of science fiction and horror. Throughout the early 1980s, as hardcore punk flirted with skinhead brutality, the image of the punk-as-ghoul proliferated. Punk comic strips, or comix as they became known (the “x” an attempt to disassociate themselves from the more childish comics), were less occasions for humour, than for pointing out hypocrisy.

While the majority of artwork and comic strips were undoubtedly local or amateur, since works by particular artists often appeared only once, there was one comic strip that nevertheless managed to be syndicated throughout the major fanzines, “Baboon Dooley: Rock Critic”. Not only was Baboon Dooley a staple in the pages of *Flipside* and *Jet Lag*, but smaller-run fanzines also printed episodes, though whether they simply clipped the comic from the larger ‘zines, is unknown.

²⁴⁸ Henry, “Evolution of a Style”, 217.

Baboon Dooley was drawn by John Crawford, in a thin hesitant style of drawing that eschewed confident crisp lines, known as the so-called “ratty line”, and was popular among early punk illustrators such as Matt Groening of *Simpsons* fame.²⁴⁹ The “ratty line” style evolved out of the work of 1960s artists like Robert Crumb, who contributed drawings to *Punk* magazine, and who said of John Crawford, “You are an astute clever fellow tuned into our time most keenly.”²⁵⁰ Robert Crumb was later associated with the creator of *Hate*, Peter Bagge, who took over Crumb’s *Weird Magazine* in 1984.²⁵¹ In the early 1990s, Bagge’s *Hate* would become the unofficial comic book of the Seattle grunge music explosion.²⁵²

To a certain extent, the character of Baboon Dooley was a cynical depiction of the counterculture. Dooley was at once hero and villain, expressing disgust with authority figures such as school principals and business leaders, while at the same time holding contempt for members of the counterculture. For example, in an early Dooley strip, a young punk girl, Cleo van der Crahhp, is threatened with expulsion for dressing like a punk. *En route* to the principal’s office, she encounters Dooley who warns her “You must conform and unless you do so your life will be spent as a useless leech on society. It’s the way of the

²⁴⁹ Guy Lawley, “I Like Hate and I Hate Everything Else: The Influence of Punk on Comics”, Roger Sabin (ed.), *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 106.

²⁵⁰ For Crumb in *Punk*, see *ibid.*, 104. For Crumb quote on Crawford, see Robert Crumb, *Jet Lag* 56 (July 1985), (FS5-NYSL).

²⁵¹ Lawley, “I Like Hate,” 114.

²⁵² *Hate* was tuned into the wider slacker subculture of the 1990s, but its hero (or anti-hero) happened to wear flannel shirts, happened to be in a band, and happened, like Bagge, to live in Seattle.

world and you can't do anything about it."²⁵³ In his role of rock critic, Dooley alternated between hope for a better future and despair, encouraging punks not to conform but agonizing that they all expressed their non-conformity in the same way.²⁵⁴ Isolated Crawford strips can be found in *Church of the Latter Day Punk* as early as 1982, and appeared regularly in *Flipside* in 1986. Of the thirty-seven fanzines in the Factsheet Five Archive covering 1980-1985, eleven carried the work of John Crawford. Of the major 'zines, only *MaximumRock'n'Roll* did not carry it.

Invisible Republic: Fanzines as Community

If the larger fanzines like *Flipside* helped to establish a national punk community, smaller fanzines cemented their local communities. San Diego's *Daily Impulse*, for example, was less a music magazine than it was a community newsletter.²⁵⁵ In fact, *Daily Impulse* was more of a magazine for a community of punks than it was a magazine about punk. Published in the mid-1980s, it featured coverage of local events, local restaurant reviews, ads for local shops, and carried phone numbers and meetings dates of community organizations.

Daily Impulse was an ideological magazine and ran a series of articles of anarchism, spotlighting the writings of Mikhail Bakunin and Emma Goldman, as well as editorials on Leninism. The magazine championed atheism in its

²⁵³ J. Crawford, "Baboon Dooley: Rock Critic", *Church of the Latter Day Punk*, No. 2 (1982), (FS5-NYSL).

²⁵⁴ J. Crawford, "Baboon Dooley: Rock Critic", *Jet Lag* No. 55, St. Louis (May 1985), (FS5-NYSL).

extended series "There is No God." *Daily Impulse* dedicated itself to direct action and featured stories on the civil rights movements of the 1960s. In 1988, it even included an article on resisting the (non-existent) draft.²⁵⁶ It also offered a three-part series entitled "Living With Family" in which it attempted to offer advice and coping strategies to its younger readers.²⁵⁷

Punk entered the 1980s with a deliberate sense of nihilism, that everything, starting with pop culture and ending with politics, must be overturned. By the mid-1980s, it had traced its refutation of mass entertainment to corporate complicity in the arms race, and to the political system that supported it. The emergence of community newsletters like *Daily Impulse* demonstrated that punk was transforming itself from a musical subculture to a full-fledged counterculture, by aligning itself with other dissident groups like Greenpeace, with which it shared a fund-raising event.²⁵⁸ At least 59 percent of *Flipside* readers in 1985 expressed a sense of politics different from that of hardcore punk, which rejected both middle-class life and capitalism. Those who endorsed hardcore politics, however, were among the influential minority. Punk, as a counterculture, encouraged the audience to participate, to become actors. The more involved individuals became, the more likely they were to share the anti-corporate ideology that rejected careerism, capitalism, militarism, and nationalism. Bands that were either hardcore or straight-edge often saw punk as part of a larger

²⁵⁵ *Daily Impulse*, San Diego Anarchist Collective, Vol. 1 No. 1, San Diego (April May 1984), (FS5-NYSL).

²⁵⁶ "Resiting the Draft", *Daily Impulse*, Vol.1 No.6, San Diego (February March, 1985), 1 (FS5-NYSL).

²⁵⁷ "Living With Family Life", *Daily Impulse*, Vol. 2 No. 1, San Diego (March April, 1986) 1 (FS5-NYSL).

²⁵⁸ Ad, *ibid.*, 5 (FS5-NYSL).

challenge to mainstream society and created institutions like co-op record labels to support their efforts. The editors of fanzines, such as *Flipside*, *MaximumRocknRoll*, and *Daily Impulse*, tended to share the same beliefs.

By 1986, hardcore punk as a musical genre had pretty much run its course. On the one side it was being absorbed by heavy metal, and on the other, it was evolving more elaborate musical structures that had once been its antithesis. By 1986 a new musical genre had emerged, powerpunk, a poppier, more radio-friendly version of punk. Milo, lead singer of the powerpunk band The Descendents, like many other powerpunkers, had gone through the ranks of hardcore punk bands, and attempted to retain its outlook:

I think of hardcore in different terms. Hardcore means to me, very, very, energy-directed and very go-for-the-gusto type thing. We're very hardcore the way we tour. We're a hardcore touring band. Regardless of what hardcore means to some skinhead dude and mohawk dude. Hardcore means to me just gritting our teeth and taking it by the fucking balls.²⁵⁹

On the West Coast, hardcore punk became politicized through its encounters with police and its questioning of corporate media. East Coast straight-edge punks arrived at the same conclusions through their anti-drug stance. As punks on both coasts of the United States investigated their beliefs, they began a process of further radicalization. Said Ian MacKeye of Minor Threat:

²⁵⁹ Steve Pick, "New New Wave of Post-Hardcore Pop Music" *Jet Lag* No. 64, St. Louis (April 1986), 14 (FS5-NYSL).

I realized that the only reason I rejected the vegetarian [sic] thing was out of convenience. Because everywhere you go they serve meat. Because everybody else was eating it. I stayed with the Crass people when I was in England and other people and I just said what the fuck am I doing. It is just so simple. It was the same thing as alcohol I realized, and it's such a logical step for straight edge - it's such a logical step for my thing I took my own shit from myself and I stopped. I knew it was so wrong but I listened to people's little petty excuses and I believed them out of convenience.²⁶⁰

Later in the same interview, MacKeye described his beliefs on punk as deeper than just music: "This is our lives, this isn't just like something we're doing as a hobby - this has been 6 years of my life and everyday I put everything I've got into it. I am what I am. The punk thing from morning to night, the band, the label, this is my life."²⁶¹

The political baggage accumulated through hardcore and straight-edge had turned punk from a musical genre to a way of life. Guy Piccichioto of the Rites of Spring echoed MacKeye's sentiments, saying it was:

. . . not time to fuck around anymore. We've come to realize that this is real, and it matters. This is what makes it different from any other form of music - or any movement that has come before. We've had the 60s and the 70s and the drug thing and everything else and its been done. And this separates us from everything that's gone before - total utter commitment and belief People react differently to it too. They are pulling out too and it comes to shows where the feelings between the two, audience and band are total communication and emotion It's frustrating times for people in general, and it's a constant friction between what you see and what you want to achieve and the things that you know are right. That rub is what creates the pain and emotion and then there's the hope that maybe you can overcome it. Make it happen.

²⁶⁰ Al, "Dischord" *Flipside*, No. 47 (Fall 1985), (FS5-NYSL).

²⁶¹ Ibid.

It's the same politically and personally - to me it's all one issue because the same problems keep coming up over and over again - lack of commitment, lack of caring I mean political, personal, to me the problems always come up in the same form and to attack them it takes time, and it takes energy and it takes care.²⁶²

Not everyone involved in the punk scene shared the sentiments of Piccichioto and MacKeye. As the 1980s progressed, certain artists edged ever closer to mainstream acceptance, just as there were particular magazines that slowly restricted their coverage of the counterculture until it represented the underground solely in terms of music. Likewise, punk continued to attract suburban youths for whom it was an experiment in rebellion, but after 1985, this element was increasingly drawn toward the punk/metal hybrid which was quickly becoming its own independent creature, as exemplified by the Tulsa-based 'zine *Silent Scream*.²⁶³ These punk/metal bands, like Slayer and Metallica, tended to keep the aggressive themes and music, but dropped the political awareness. However, for the "hardcore" that remained, punk was no longer simply a rejection of commercial music. The intense debates over the nature of the punk identity in the pages of fanzines such as *Flipside*, had allowed punk to develop a world view that extrapolated political conclusions from personal aesthetic choices. After successfully defending itself against corporate encroachment that had threatened to swallow it whole, and surviving police and political oppression that radicalized many of its members, punk's renewed confidence in itself was reflected in the fact that the new punk music of the late 1980s no longer felt the need to be as

²⁶² Guy Piccichioto interviewed by AI, "Rites of Spring", *Flipside*, No. 47 (Fall 1985), (FS5-NYSL).

confrontational or shocking. Its position and its politics were understood among the community that listened to it.

²⁶³ *Silent Scream* made no distinction between punk bands like Black Flag and heavy metal bands like Iron Maiden and Slayer. *Silent Scream*, 1, Tulsa, OK (1985), (FS5-NYSL).

Chapter Four

I Was A Hippie: Punk and an Evolving Counterculture

In their 1979 song "Wasted", Black Flag gave West Coast punks a genealogy of rebellion singing: "I was a hippie/ I was a burnout/ I was a dropout/ I was out of my head/ I was a surfer/ I had a skateboard/ I was so heavy man I lived on the Strand".²⁶⁹ The early manifestations of punk had deliberately refused to be connected to the counterculture of the 1960s, but punks on the West Coast of the United States seemed more inclined to identify with it by the mid-1980s. After hardcore punk, the punk counterculture saw itself not as a *punk* counterculture, but as *the* counterculture of the United States with roots in the previous countercultures of the Beats and the hippies.

According to Theodore Roszak and Charles Reich, writing at the close of the 1960s, the key themes of the counterculture centered around a desire to explore individual identity, and rejected all forms of social bondage that prevented this, such as oppressive corporate workplaces, obligatory military service, racist and sexual stereotypes, as well as laws and social norms governing private behaviour. Hardcore punk fanzines of the early 1980s found punks concerned with the same issues.²⁷⁰ What had started as a celebration of

²⁶⁹ Black Flag, "Wasted", *The First Four Years*, SST, 1982.

²⁷⁰ See Chapter Three.

experimentation and a rejection of contemporary popular culture, had come full circle ten years later to encompass the political beliefs of an earlier era.

The counterculture started in the years following the Second World War as American society attempted to put the hardships of the Depression and the war behind them. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Beat Generation writers such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs pushed at the boundaries of accepted public behaviour. Theirs was a personal rebellion that simmered until it found a larger audience in the 1960s. Concurrently, the civil rights movement was active questioning racism in the United States. These two movements would become the twin driving forces behind what became known in the 1960s as the "counterculture." Many dissenting groups latched onto either the political or cultural critiques that the 1950s offered, and brought these tensions to national attention. The unification of these two strands occurred briefly during 1968-1972, as the politics of various New Left groups and the counterculture converged.²⁶⁶ A similar reunification of the cultural underground and the political left would occur with hardcore punk.

The Influence of Punk

Punk was many things to many people, most of which were contradictory. Fundamentally, it was an expression of individuality in the face of conformity. Punk was a paradox. In one sense it represented the end of the 1960s

²⁶⁶ Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1991), 15.

counterculture. In another, it nourished the rebirth of the ideals that the hippies and civil rights activists both held dear. There were, in effect, two punk moments: the first reached its highwater mark in 1977, and for all intents and purposes ceased being a driving force by 1980; the second reached its apex in 1984, and by 1986 had created an integrated counterculture. During the 1970s, punk was wild and experimental, involving an older crowd of twentynothings and thirtysomethings. These individuals were drawn to urban neighbourhoods by the media's promise of a bohemian Summer of Love in 1967. It was in places like New York's East Village that they felt they could find a caring community to nurture their creativity.

As many of these individuals formed and reformed bands that created a new type of musical aesthetic, they inspired a younger generation of youth to follow in their steps. Often barely into their teens, these were the punks who had missed out on the 1960s completely, and who were to rediscover its legacy in the early 1980s. Punk therefore involved two different demographics, one representing the tail-end of the idealistic 1960s, and the other the beginnings of Generation X.²⁶⁷

Weaned on the apocalyptic images and fascist nightmare of British punk under Margaret Thatcher, U.S. punk soon found its own bogeyman in the image of Ronald Reagan. As the prospect of nuclear war and a return of the draft threatened, hardcore and straight-edge punks adopted the anti-war arguments of

²⁶⁷ Bear in mind that the Generation X of 1990s advertising is not the same generation as depicted in Douglas Coupland's *Generation X*. Coupland's novel described a generation that came of age in the 1980s, whereas marketing strategies involving Generation X took aim at the

their countercultural predecessors, the hippies. Furthermore, as these punks recognized the complicity of big business in the war effort, they strengthened their anti-corporate, and anti-capitalist, stance. Punk had always had an arms-length relationship with capitalism, first through its uneasy dealings with the major recording companies, who were often seen as intruding and corrupting the artistic process in favour of making particular bands marketable. By 1982, with the emergence of New Wave music on commercial FM, this relationship turned completely sour as many punks saw New Wave as a watered-down mainstream version of punk, a “cash cow” for corporations. While many punk bands were forming their own labels as a means to get started, more chose these fledgling independents for moral reasons as the links between arms manufacturers and companies such as Decca and EMI became apparent.²⁶⁸

Just as the 1960s were a cathartic experience for many who became hippies, punk had a profound influence on some, though not all, who passed through its cultural milieu. Associated as it was with adolescence, it is not inconceivable that many youths experienced punk as a temporary experiment in self-identity, flirting with the politics and music as a means of rebellion against parents and a form of self-expression. However, for a significant number of individuals, punk was an important crucible that helped to forge a permanent outlook and frame of reference.

The so-called “alternative culture” of the 1990s that saw a revitalization of the rock music industry, a revival of the environmental movement, the Battle of

youth of the 1990s. Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

Seattle in 1999, and the numerous protests against the WTO, were all continuous with the various oppositional politics that had started in the 1960s and resurfaced with hardcore punk. This post-hardcore culture merged the openness and experimentalism of early punk with the ideological commitment of hardcore. Less doctrinaire, it welcomed cross-cultural interactions with various non-governmental organizations and community groups, making punk bands like Fugazi and punk singers like Jello Biafra, a staple at many anti-Gulf War, anti-racism, and anti-WTO demonstrations.²⁶⁹

There are several ways to trace the importance of hardcore punk on the successive development of the counterculture. The first is to work back from the current cultural products to see who is still active and in what capacity. Many of the major independent record companies such as Dischord, SST, Alternative Tentacles, and Epitaph, were started by early hardcore bands.²⁷⁰ Fanzines allow us to track the development of particular individuals, *Flipside* and *MaximumRock'n'Roll* were awash with stories involving Ian MacKey and Guy Piccichioto, as they wound their ways through a succession of minor bands before forming Fugazi, perhaps one the most influential bands of the 1990s. Fanzines not only document the history of punk bands, but also chart the changing values and ideas within the counterculture. Fanzines were the area wherein non-musicians contributed and "ordinary" punks defined their world. Fanzines often marked the first act of creativity or sharing for many, like Mark

²⁶⁸ Craig O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995), 133.

²⁶⁹ Fugazi's performance at a Washington D.C. anti-Gulf War demonstration is captured on Jem Cohen's Fugazi documentary *Instrument*, LAL/Gravity Hill, 1999. Jello Biafra performed with the No-WTO Combo as recorded live on *The New Feudalism*, Alternative Tentacles, 2000.

Eitzel, another prolific 1990s alterna-pop star who started corresponding with fanzines in 1985, long before he started recording music.²⁷¹ In general, a more in-depth study of fanzine letters promises to reveal a much fuller picture of punk attitudes and beliefs.

Hardcore punk did not cease to exist as a genre in 1986. Instead, it was merely supplanted as the driving force within the counterculture by the poppier, more radio-friendly powerpunk. Hardcore continued to develop throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, although in the more limited role and not the leading one it had enjoyed previously. Further exploration of hardcore punk as a distinct subculture within the counterculture has potential to be treated as a study of liminality. During 1980-1985, when hardcore first emerged and then declined, many of those who started as hardcore punks in 1980 as teenagers, found themselves embracing powerpunk by their early twenties. Their early twenties also found key individuals, like Ian MacKey of Minor Threat and Bill Stevenson of Black Flag, abandoning the black and white world view of hardcore. Since hardcore was, and continues to be, the entry point into the counterculture for many young people, hardcore punk operated as a liminal stage. The constant decisions that hardcore punks made between what was punk and what was not, helped to define the boundaries of what were acceptable and desirable behaviours and thoughts. During this period, wherein initiates developed a new countercultural identity, the extremism of hardcore represented the complete

²⁷⁰ Minor Threat started Dischord; Black Flag formed SST; Bad Religion, Epitaph; and Dead Kennedys, Alternative Tentacles.

rejection of mainstream culture. This same extremism, however, prevented hardcore punk from working within a larger context with other non-punk dissenting groups, the same groups with which non-hardcore punks would ally themselves in the late 1980s.

A Riot of One's Own: Punk and Feminism

Much has been written on punk's supposed stance toward sex and sexism. Gone were the wonders of free love. Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols called it "fifteen seconds of squelching noise". The Denver fanzine *Arche-type Morality's* advocated "asexuality," or celibacy.²⁷² In part, this could be due to the libido inhibiting effects of drugs like speed and heroin, though Legs McNeil certainly chronicles enough bedroom antics in *Please Kill Me* to dispel these claims.²⁷³ Furthermore, while it was rarely mentioned, the seeming taboo placed on casual sex by straight-edge punks could also represent a growing awareness of the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS. However, for the most part, unlike contemporary 1970s rock acts like KISS, early punk consciously rejected the "rock equals sex" equation. Women, particularly in the initial 1975-1979 period, were clearly visible fronting bands within the punk scene. Some of

²⁷¹ "Alterna-pop" was a term used to describe artists like Eitzel who's music did not appear overtly political but nevertheless identified themselves with the counterculture. Mark Eitzel, Letter to the Editor, *Offense*, Columbia Ohio, (October 23, 1983), (FS5-NYSL).

²⁷² For Johnny Rotten quote see Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality", Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds.), *On Record: Rock, Pop, & the Written Word* (London: Routledge, 1990), 374. "Asexuality: So What the Fuck?" *Arche-Type Morality*, Denver, CO (no date), (FS5-NYSL).

the major punk performers were women, like Exene Cervenka of X, Lydia Lunch of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, or Debbie Harry of Blondie, as well as all-woman groups like The Slits, The Runaways, and the Go-Gos. The freedom of expression and experimentalism of this new era encouraged women to explore new roles and identities without apologies. However, as with many other things, the emergence of hardcore punk changed the position of women in punk.

It was not that hardcore in its early stages was consciously sexist, nor that women disappeared altogether. Many women involved in punk prior to 1980 remained in the scene. Hudley, co-founder of *Flipside*, entered the punk scene at this point and remained well into the 1990s. Furthermore, asexual advocates, like straight-edge punk, in their rejection of casual sex, helped combat the image of woman-as-sex-object, that the so-called "cock rock" bands like KISS, Thin Lizzy, and the Rolling Stones had made dominant in mainstream rock. That women entered the counterculture in fewer numbers reflects the fact that hardcore punk increasingly appealed less and less to women, and they made up fewer of the new converts to punk. The problem was that the issues raised by hardcore punk bands were framed from a male perspective. Female fans identified with ideas like animal rights, nuclear disarmament, and police brutality, but as hardcore became increasingly aggressive and masculine circa 1983-85, the music appealed to women less and less. As the visibility of women decreased and hardcore became seen as a realm for "testosterone-filled angst-ridden boys from the suburbs," references to women as objects returned and further alienated

²⁷³ Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons, *The Boy Looked At Johnny* (London: Pluto Press, 1978). Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New

female punks.²⁷⁴ While some of these songs may have been ironic, such as the Descendents' "Sour Grapes", with its portrayal of a mainstream boy trying to hit on a new wave girl saying "All I want is her cherry", bands like the Descendents also reintroduced heartfelt love songs, like "Wendy", which only reinforced the idea that women existed only as sexual creatures.²⁷⁵

By 1985, letters to the editors of *Flipside* began to question the limited role for women in hardcore punk. As Camille Caprioglio wrote to *Flipside*:

I am so goddamned [sic] tired of being stereotyped. Many male punks are hypocrites of the worst kind. They hate to be stereotyped and discriminated against. Yet they turn around and stereotype and discriminate against female punks! They think of us as either sleazy, diseased, fat, ugly, or dumb, or all of the above. I am very much into punk, and to a point, I dress the part, but I am not fat, not extremely ugly, and NOT dumb. (I have a 3.6 grade point average).²⁷⁶

Below Camille's letter ran this one:

I'm writing about the girl (Julie) with Social Distortion - what happened to her? She used to be Dereks [sic] girlfriend. I go to a lot of their gigs and don't see her, she made them look a lot better than they do now. She added class to the [sic] punk rock scene. . . print this letter so maybe she'll go to gigs. We need a punk sex bomb like her. Derek you dumb shit. It's your loss.²⁷⁷

York: Grove Press, 1996).

²⁷⁴ Brendan Mullen, "Nightmare in Punk Alley", in Don Snowden (ed), *Make the Music go Bang! The Early L.A. Scene* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997), 82.

²⁷⁵ These attitudes are particularly noticeable on the Descendents' live album *Liveage*, SST, 1988, which contains both "Sour Grapes" and "Wendy".

²⁷⁶ Camille Caprioglio, letter, *Flipside* No. 41 (January 1984), no page, (FS5-NYSL).

²⁷⁷ Afan of the blonde bomb shell, letter, *ibid*.

Women like Camille and Julie, however, remained a distinct minority until the early 1990s when the all-woman band Bikini Kill helped to launch the Riot Grrl movement within punk. Riot Grrl marked an aggressive and confrontational evolution in feminism, dominated by women under the age of twenty. Riot Grrl concerts were often exclusively organized and attended by young women. Bands like Bikini Kill reflected on the idea that punk music was supposed to reflect daily lives, and pointed out that the music of all-male groups like the Descendents barely involved women's issues at all. The significance of Riot Grrl as an aspect of the feminist movement is only now beginning to be evaluated and its roots in hardcore punk have yet to be fully explored. However the development of Riot Grrl parallels the emergence of the Women's Movement within the New Left and the counterculture of the 1960s.

Similarly, hardcore punks' anti-racist stance encouraged many young men of minority backgrounds to participate in punk. The Hispanic band from East L.A., Los Lobos, frequently played on the same bills as punk groups, while the African American band Bad Brains was one of the first D.C. hardcore bands. Punk's identity as a voice of protest not only provided a space for these performers, but also allowed them to address racial issues in their music. As with Riot Grrl, hardcore punk provided a springboard for adolescents to become involved in larger political movements for racial equality.

Rise Above: Punk Post-Hardcore

Antonio Gramsci warned potential radicals of the danger of the passive revolution, of being invited to the arenas of debate where others would control the frame and focus of that debate, effectively rendering revolutionary energies useless, trapped within the rules and structures of the very system it set out to overthrow. However, a thriving counterculture could make use of capitalism's very ambivalence to the nature of its products, allowing the counterculture to send its own commodities to market as emissaries from a foreign land. The media reports on slam-dancing invited many suburban teens to punk rock shows in California during the early 1980s, but once there, it was police oppression that caused some of them to adopt punk's more overtly political ideology.²⁸³ In the 1990s, many punk bands were aware of the possibility of using mainstream exposure to heighten awareness of other aspects of the counterculture, such as Nirvana wearing Bad Brains t-shirts in their video for "Lithium", or the Sonic Youth homage to early punk bands in their video for "Teenage Riot."²⁸⁴ Likewise, many punks in fanzines interviews also name-dropped earlier artists or authors.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Peter Belsito, and Bob Davis, *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (San Francisco: The Last Gasp of San Francisco, 1983), 97.

²⁸⁴ Nirvana, "Lithium", Geffen Records, 1993. Sonic Youth, "Teenage Riot", Geffen Records, 1988.

²⁸⁵ One example of this is *Suburban Relapse's* printing of old Cramps interview in which the Cramps talk about Iggy Pop, "Cramps' 77: Rock 'n' Roll Mongoloids on the Loose", *Suburban Relapse*, No.13, July 1985. Or of the Bangles performing under the moniker of Carrie Nation from Russ Meyer's film *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*.

Antonio Gramsci felt that personal change occurred through catharsis, or sudden personal realization. The trends in the counterculture towards existentialism, absurdism, consciousness raising, etc., were all geared towards creating a cathartic experience. By 1985, the more radio-friendly, and more accommodating punk counterculture was using its increased access to media to raise awareness of itself, and present itself as part of a larger tradition. This historical consciousness, according to Gramsci, was important:

[S]tructure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to himself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethical-political form, and into a source of new initiative.²⁸⁶

Charles Reich, in describing the impact of a total conversion to his Consciousness III (the consciousness of the counterculture), felt that the revolution would "originate with the individual and with culture, and it will change the political structure only as its final act."²⁸⁷ Punk as a culture, allowed individuals to re-create themselves and follow their own dreams, as Legs McNeil said:

. . . it was about advocating kids to not wait to be told what to do, but make life up for themselves, it was about trying to get people to use their imaginations again, it was about not being perfect, it was about saying it was okay to be amateurish and funny, that real creativity came out of making a mess, it was about working with

²⁸⁶ Norberto Bobbio, "Gramsci and the Conception of Civil Society", in Chantal Mouffe (ed.) *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 34.

²⁸⁷ Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), 4.

what you got in front of you and turning everything embarrassing, awful, and stupid in your life to your advantage.²⁸⁸

By attempting to position itself historically, punk was demonstrating to newcomers that new punks were not the only ones to yearn for a different way of life that rejected the boredom and monotony of middle-class life. Debord wrote that:

Consciousness of desire and the desire for consciousness together and indissolubly constitute that project which in its negative form has as its goal the abolition of classes and the direct possession by the workers of every aspect of their activity. The opposite of this project is the society of the spectacle, where the commodity contemplates itself in a world of its own making.²⁸⁹

Middle-class life was predicated on the sacrifice of dreams to economic reality and the finding of fulfillment through the consumption of commodities. Punk told youth that not only was it okay to have desires, but more importantly, it was important to act on these desires rather than give them up in the pursuit of a "real job". Malcolm McLaren said that the whole point of the Sex Pistols was to "create a situation where kids would be less interested in buying records than in speaking for themselves."²⁹⁰

In order for a hegemonic system to become dominant it must change values and life-styles, changing the content of common sense. The

²⁸⁸ McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 334.

²⁸⁹ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 34.

²⁹⁰ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 437.

counterculture as it developed from the 1960s through to the early 1980s developed a network of culture (comix, fanzines, music, movies, and novels) that normalized its own values within the counterculture.²⁹¹ The punk counterculture may not have been overtly concerned with overthrowing the political institutions of society, as the counterculture had been in the 1960s, but rather focused on creating an alternative society that one day might be able to rival and challenge the dominant culture on its own terms. As Charles Reich wrote: "The revolution must be cultural. For culture controls the economic and political machine. Not vice versa."²⁹²

Punk rock was not an isolated cultural outburst that came out of nowhere in 1976. Instead it was the result of the evolution within the counterculture of the 1960s in response to changes in American society throughout the 1970s. While it is incorrect to state that punks and hippies were the same, since the two groups were separated by a vast gulf of aesthetic differences, they nevertheless shared a common ideological basis, and punk owed a huge, and relatively unacknowledged debt to its countercultural predecessors. By 1985 punk had succeeded in uniting both the political and cultural protests of the 1960s, in a culture that saw both struggles as originating at a common source: the capitalist orientation of American daily life. In the late 1980s, the independent record labels, the expanding radio network of college and community stations, a national network of fanzine distribution, as well as the creation of informal punk districts in many major urban centres, located around clubs, cafes, shops, and media

²⁹¹ Carl Boggs, *The Two Revolutions: Antonio Gramsci and the Dilemmas of Western Marxism* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 161.

outlets, all contributed to the invisible republic that the counterculture longed to create.

²⁸² Reich, *The Greening of America*, 306.

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Appendix A

Letters to *Flipside* and *MaximumRocknRoll*

Table 1: Themes

Theme	Frequency	Percent
Band	45	15.1
Drugs	2	0.7
Identity	45	15.1
Label	2	0.7
Magazine	25	8.4
Military	6	2.0
Parents	5	1.7
Personal ²⁸⁸	5	1.7
Philosophy	2	0.7
Police ²⁸⁹	1	0.3
Politics	61	20.5
Religion	13	4.4
Scene	64	21.4
School	4	1.3
Violence	8	2.7
Other ²⁹⁰	10	3.3
Total	298	100.0

Source: *Flipside*, Nos. 41-8, Los Angeles (January 1984 - January 1986); *MaximumRocknRoll*, No. 41, Berkeley (1984).

Table 2: Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Female	47	19.3
Male	197	80.7
Total	244	100.0
Missing Letters	54	

Source: *Flipside*, Nos. 41-8, Los Angeles (January 1984 - January 1986); *MaximumRocknRoll*, No. 41, Berkeley (1984).

²⁸⁸ This section includes appeals for penpals, information on missing individuals, and replies to previous letters.

²⁸⁹ While only one letter dealt solely with the police, they often crop up as elements within the politics or violence section.

²⁹⁰ This section involves items mentioned only once, such as gangs, movies, ordering information, and work.

Table 3: Location of Letter Writers

Location	Frequency	Percent
Arkansas	1	0.5
Arizona	1	0.5
California	90	45.6
Colorado	4	1.9
Connecticut	4	1.9
D.C.	5	2.5
Florida	2	1.0
Georgia	1	0.5
Hawaii	1	0.5
Idaho	13	6.3
Illinois	4	1.9
Indiana	1	0.5
Kentucky	2	1.0
Louisiana	2	1.0
Maine	8	3.9
Maryland	2	1.0
Michigan	1	0.5
Minnesota	4	1.9
Montana	1	1.0
North Carolina	3	1.5
New Hampshire	2	1.0
New Jersey	4	1.9
Nevada	3	1.5
New York	5	2.5
Ohio	4	1.9
Oregon	1	0.5
Pennsylvania	4	1.9
Texas	6	3.0
Virginia	3	1.5
Vermont	2	1.0
Washington	4	1.9
Wisconsin	1	0.5
Canada	9	3.9
Finland	1	0.5
Ireland	1	0.5
Poland	1	0.5
United Kingdom	5	2.5
Total	197	100.0
Missing Letters	101	

Source: *Flipside*, Nos. 41-8, Los Angeles (January 1984 - January 1986); *MaximumRocknRoll*, No. 41, Berkeley (1984).

Table 4: Identity²⁹⁶

Identity	Frequency	Percent
Anarchist	11	7.6
Anti-Christian	2	1.4
Anti-Hardcore/Straightedge	1	0.7
Anti-Hippie	1	0.7
Anti-Metal ²⁹⁷	1	0.7
Anti-New Wave ²⁹⁸	1	0.7
Anti-Skin Head	6	4.2
Christian ²⁹⁹	3	2.1
Country & Western Music	1	0.7
Hardcore	22	15.3
Individual	21	14.7
Libertarian	2	1.4
Local ³⁰⁰	2	1.4
Metal	1	0.7
No-nonsense ³⁰¹	1	0.7
Non-Hardcore	1	0.7
Non-Skinhead	2	1.4
Peace Punk	2	1.4
Positive Punk ³⁰²	1	0.7
Prog-Metal ³⁰³	3	2.1
Psychedelic	1	0.7
"Punk" ³⁰⁴	49	34.0
Rocker	1	0.7
Satan-worshipper ³⁰⁵	1	0.7
Skinhead	3	2.1
Straight-edge	3	2.1
Thrash ³⁰⁶	1	0.7
Total	144	100.0
Missing Letters	154	

Source: *Flipside*, Nos. 41-8, Los Angeles (January 1984 - January 1986); *MaximumRocknRoll*, No. 41, Berkeley (1984).

²⁹⁶ These are lists of the attitudes or identities explicitly used by the writers of each letter, not inferred or deduced.

²⁹⁷ Metal, as in Heavy Metal.

²⁹⁸ New Wave was the commercial form of punk which quickly became more electronically oriented by the mid-1980s.

²⁹⁹ Christian punks, believe it.

³⁰⁰ These were attitudes locally rooted.

³⁰¹ As in "punk is a no-nonsense response to bullshit."

³⁰² Believing that punk was about having a positive attitude in one's self.

³⁰³ Prog-metal takes its name from progressive rock, a form of art rock, and is kind of like really slow, heavy metal with jazz concepts. Black Flag circa 1986 is a good example.

³⁰⁴ People who simply said "I am punk."

³⁰⁵ This could have been a legitimate expression, or irony meant to scare away Christian punks.

³⁰⁶ Thrash was really fast hardcore punk, different somehow from speed metal.

Table 5: Identity by Sex

Identity	Unknown	Unknown Percent	Female	Female Percent	Male	Male Percent
Anarchist	2	1.4	2	1.4	7	4.9
Anti-Christian	0	0	0	0	2	0.7
Anti-Hardcore	1	0.7	0	0	0	
Anti-Hippie	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Anti-Metal	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Anti-New Wave	0	0	1	0.7	0	0
Anti-Skin Head	1	0.7	0	0	5	3.5
Christian	0	0	1	0.7	2	1.4
C & W Music	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Hardcore	3	2.1	0	0	19	13.2
Individual	4	2.8	5	3.5	12	8.3
Libertarian	0	0	0	0	2	1.4
Local	1	0.7	0	0	1	0.7
Metal	1	0.7	0	0	0	0
No-nonsense	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Non-Hardcore	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Non-Skinhead	0	0	0	0	2	1.4
Peace Punk	0	0	0	0	2	1.4
Positive Punk	0	0	1	0.7	0	0
Prog-Metal	0	0	0	0	3	2.1
Psychedelic	1	0.7	0	0	0	0
"Punk"	11	7.6	13	9.0	25	17.4
Rocker	1	0.7	0	0	0	0
Satan Worshipper	1	0.7	0	0	0	0
Skinhead	0	0	2	1.4	1	0.7
Straight-Edge	1	0.7	0	0	2	1.4
Thrash	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Total	28	19.4	25	17.4	92	63.2
Missing	153					

Source: *Flipside*, Nos. 41-8, Los Angeles (January 1984 - January 1986); *MaximumRocknRoll*, No. 41, Berkeley (1984).

Table 6: Political Issues

Political Issues	Frequency	Percent
Age ³⁰⁷	2	1.6
Anarchism	4	3.2
Animal Rights	6	4.8
Anti-Corporate	3	2.4
Anti-Fascist	4	3.2
Anti-Government	2	1.6
Anti-Liberal	4	0.8
Anti-Libertarian	3	2.4
Anti-Militarism	7	5.6
Anti-RAR ³⁰⁸	1	0.8
Anti-Reagan	6	4.8
Brazil ³⁰⁹	1	0.8
"Change" ³¹⁰	1	0.8
Corporate Awareness ³¹¹	1	0.8
Defense ³¹²	1	0.8
Feminism	9	7.2
Gangs	1	0.8
Homosexuality	2	1.6
"Leftist" ³¹³	17	14.0
Libertarian	2	1.6
Nationalism	3	2.4
Pacifism	1	0.8
Parents ³¹⁴	4	3.2
Peace ³¹⁵	6	4.8
Pentagon ³¹⁶	1	0.8
PMRC	1	0.8
Police	11	9.0
Pornography	1	0.8
Racism	6	4.8
Racist	1	0.8
Reactionary	4	3.2

³⁰⁷ These letters specifically identified children under 18 as having "no rights".

³⁰⁸ Anti-Rock Against Racism, only because it accused the Yuppies of using the money to try and legalize marijuana.

³⁰⁹ Informative letter on Brazil's political regime.

³¹⁰ Vague letter on the need for "change".

³¹¹ Letter highlighting the role of corporations in political-decision making processes, but did not take sides.

³¹² Not explicitly in favour of arms build-up but for domestic defense.

³¹³ Letters that offer vague support for more than one political issue, such as pro-animal rights, and anti-militarism, or anti-Reagan and anti-racist, without citing specific reasons, were termed "leftist".

³¹⁴ Parents were viewed as oppressive dictators.

³¹⁵ Urged global peace, but did not link to pacifism or anti-militarism.

³¹⁶ Informative letter on the role of the Pentagon.

Table 6: Political Issues Continued	Frequency	Percent
Religion	5	4.0
Sexism	2	1.6
Vegetarianism	2	1.6
Violence	3	2.4
Voting	1	0.8
Total	130	100.0
Missing Letters	168	

Source: *Flipside*, Nos. 41-8, Los Angeles (January 1984 - January 1986); *MaximumRocknRoll*, No. 41, Berkeley (1984).

Table 7: Activities Mentioned in Letters

Activity	Frequency	Percent
Abusive Parents	5	3.6
Dating	1	0.7
Direct Action/Protesting	6	4.3
Dress/Fashion	10	7.2
Drugs	6	4.3
D.J.ing	1	0.7
Fighting	12	8.6
Fanzines	3	2.1
Gangs	2	1.4
Gigs	62	44.2
Ordering Goods	8	5.7
Partying	3	2.1
Penpals	4	2.8
Reading	2	1.4
Rock Against Racism	1	0.7
School	1	0.7
Skateboarding	8	5.7
Taping	1	0.7
TV	1	0.7
Unity	1	0.7
Voting	1	0.7
Weightlifting	1	0.7
Total	140	100.0
Missing Letters	158	

Source: *Flipside*, Nos. 41-8, Los Angeles (January 1984 - January 1986); *MaximumRocknRoll*, No. 41, Berkeley (1984).

Table 8: Themes by Sex

Theme	Unknown	Unknown Percent	Female	Female Percent	Male	Male Percent
Band	5	1.7	3	1.0	37	12.4
Drugs	0	0	0	0	2	0.7
Identity	9	3.0	11	3.7	25	8.4
Label	0	0	0	0	2	0.7
Magazine	7	2.4	2	0.7	16	5.4
Military	1	0.3	1	0.3	4	1.4
Parents	0	0	2	0.7	3	1.0
Personal	0	0	3	1.0	2	0.7
Philosophy	1	0.3	1	0.3	0	0
Police	0	0	0	0	1	0.3
Politics	8	2.8	14	4.7	39	13.1
Religion	3	1.0	4	1.4	6	2.0
Scene	13	4.3	4	1.4	47	15.8
School	1	0.	0	0	3	1.0
Violence	1	0.	1	0.3	6	2.0
Other	5	1.7	1	0.3	3	1.0
	54	18.1	47	15.8	197	66.1
Total	298					

Source: *Flipside*, Nos. 41-8, Los Angeles (January 1984 - January 1986); *MaximumRocknRoll*, No. 41, Berkeley (1984).

Table 9: Political Issues Mentioned by Sex

Political Issue	Unknown	Unknown Percent	Female	Female Percent	Male	Male Percent
Age	2	1.4	0	0	0	0
Anarchism	0	0	1	0.7	3	2.1
Animal Rights	3	2.1	1	0.7	2	1.4
Anti-Corporate	1	0.7	0	0	2	1.4
Anti-Fascist	1	0.7	1	0.7	2	1.4
Anti-Government	0	0	0	0	2	1.4
Anti-Liberal	1	0.7	0	0	3	2.1
Anti-Libertarian	3	2.1	0	0	0	0
Anti-Militarism	1	0.7	3	2.1	3	2.1
Anti-RAR	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Anti-Reagan	0	0	2	1.4	4	2.8
Brazil	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
"Change"	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Corporate Awareness	1	0.7	0	0	0	0
Defense	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Feminism	4	2.8	3	2.1	2	1.4
Gangs	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Homosexuality	1	0.7	0	0	1	0.7
"Leftist"	1	0.7	5	3.5	11	7.7
Libertarian	0	0	0	0	2	1.4
Nationalism	0	0	1	0.7	2	1.4
Pacifism	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Parents	1	0.7	0	0	3	2.1
Peace	1	0.7	0	0	5	3.5
Pentagon	0	0	1	0.7	0	0
PMRC	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Police	3	2.1	1	0.7	7	4.9
Pornography	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Racism	1	0.7	0	0	5	3.5
Racist	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Reactionary	0	0	2	1.4	2	1.4
Religion	1	0.7	2	1.4	2	1.4
Sexism	0	0	2	1.4	0	0
Vegetarianism	0	0	0		2	1.4
Violence	1	0.7	0		2	1.4
Voting	0	0	1	0.7	0	0
Total	27	20.8	27	20.8	76	58.8
Missing	168					

Source: *Flipside*, Nos. 41-8, Los Angeles (January 1984 - January 1986); *MaximumRocknRoll*, No. 41, Berkeley (1984).

Table 10: Bands Mentioned³¹⁷

Band	Frequency	Percent
Accused	1	0.6
Amebix	2	1.2
American Dream	1	0.6
Angry Samoans	1	0.6
Anti-Scrunti Faction	1	0.6
Autistics	1	0.6
B-52's	1	0.6
Bad Yodelers	1	0.6
Basic Math	3	1.9
Black Flag	8	5.0
Butt Acne	1	0.6
Christian Death	1	0.6
Christ on Parade	1	0.6
Circle Jerks	4	2.5
Circle One	1	0.6
Corrupted Quaker Boys	1	0.6
Crass	2	1.2
Danzig	2	1.2
Dead Hippie	1	0.6
Dead Kennedys	5	3.1
Decry	1	0.6
Descendents	1	0.6
Desert Folks	1	0.6
Detonators	1	0.6
Devo	1	0.6
Dezerters	1	0.6
DI	3	1.9
Dischord	1	0.6
Dickies	1	0.6
Doggy Style	2	1.2
Dream Syndicate	1	0.6
DYS	2	1.2
Exploited	3	1.9
F-Troop	1	0.6
Faction	2	1.2
Fear	2	1.2
Free the Five	1	0.6
Frogmen	1	0.6
G.G. Allin	1	0.6

³¹⁷ A lot of these bands are mentioned only once which speaks to two things: first, there were a tremendous number of punk bands, many times more than we have records of, and second, that even though we can speak of there being a "national" punk scene at this time, the primary focus for individuals remained local.

Table 10: Band Names continued	Frequency	Percent
GBH	3	1.9
Hawaii's Hardcore	1	0.6
Heart Attack	1	0.6
Hesse	1	0.6
Holy Dolls	1	0.6
Iconoclast	1	0.6
Insolents	1	0.6
Jerry's Kids	3	1.9
Killroy	5	3.1
Kryzzys	1	0.6
Lads	1	0.6
Limited Potential	1	0.6
Mad Parade	2	1.2
MDC	1	0.6
Meat Puppets	1	0.6
Meatmen	1	0.6
Membrane	1	0.6
MIA	2	1.2
Mike Muir	1	0.6
Misfits	1	0.6
Mystic	1	0.6
Naked Raygun	2	1.2
Necros	1	0.6
New York Dolls	1	0.6
Nowhere League	1	0.6
No Bullshit	1	0.6
No Identity	1	0.6
No Mercy	1	0.6
Patriots	1	0.6
Peace Corps	1	0.6
Public Image Limited	1	0.6
Poop	1	0.6
Psychic TV	1	0.6
Ramones	1	0.6
Raw Power	1	0.6
R.E.M.	1	0.6
Rizby	1	0.6
Rotten Virgins	1	0.6
Saccharine	1	0.6
Sado Nation	1	0.6
Seizure	1	0.6
7 Seconds	1	0.6
Sewage	1	0.6
Sex Pistols	2	1.2

Table 10: Band Names Continued	Frequency	Percent
Shades of Grey	1	0.6
Shattered Faith	1	0.6
Skrewdriver	1	0.6
SNFU	1	0.6
Social Distortion	6	3.8
Social Slugs	1	0.6
The Sound of Laughter	4	2.5
Stalag 13	2	1.2
Suicidal Tendencies	7	0.6
Terminal Choice	1	0.6
Undercover	1	0.6
Uniform Choice	1	0.6
United Effort	1	0.6
Upstart	1	0.6
Vandals	5	3.1
Weirdos	1	0.6
X	1	0.6
Youth Brigade	1	0.6
Zeitgeist	1	0.6
Zombies	1	0.6
Total	161	100.0

Source: *Flipside*, Nos. 41-8, Los Angeles (January 1984 - January 1986); *MaximumRocknRoll*, No. 41, Berkeley (1984).