33 1/3

RAMONES

by

Nicholas Rombes

continuum

Ramones

Praise for the series:

Passionate, obsessive, and smart—*Nylon*

Religious tracts for the rock'n'roll faithful—*Boldtype*

Each volume has a distinct, almost militantly personal take on a beloved long-player ... the books that have resulted are like the albums themselves—filled with moments of shimmering beauty, forgivable flaws, and stubborn eccentricity—*Tracks Magazine*

At their best, these books make rich, thought-provoking arguments for the song collections at hand—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

Reading about rock isn't quite the same as listening to it, but this series comes pretty damn close—*Neon NYC*

The sort of great idea you can't believe hasn't been done before—*Boston Phoenix*

For reviews of individual titles in the series, please visit our website at www.continuumbooks.com

Nicholas Rombes

Ramones

2011

Continuum International Publishing Group
80 Maiden Lane, Suite 704, New York NY 10038
The Tower Building, 11 York Road, London SE1 7NX

www.continuumbooks.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Rombes, Nicholas.
Ramones / Nicholas Rombes.
p. cm.—(33 1/3)
Includes bibliographical references.
eISBN-13: 978-1-4411-8327-9
1. Ramones (Musical Group). Ramones. I. Title. II. Series.
ML 421.R32R65 2005
782.42166’092’2—dc22
2004024081

Printed and bound in the United States of America

Contents

Dusty in Memphis, by Warren Zanes
Forever Changes, by Andrew Hultkrans
Harvest, by Sam Inglis
The Kinks Are The Village Green Preservation Society, by Andy Miller
Meat Is Murder, by Joe Pernice
The Piper at the Gates of Dawn, by John Cavanagh
Abba Gold, by Elisabeth Vincentelli
Electric Lady land, by John Perry
Unknown Pleasures, by Chris Ott
Sign 'O' the Times, by Michaelangelo Matos
The Velvet Underground and Nico, by Joe Harvard
Let It Be, by Steve Matteo
Live at the Apollo, by Douglas Wolk
Aqualung, by Allan Moore
OK Computer, by Dai Griffiths
Let It Be, by Colin Meloy
Led Zeppelin IV, by Erik Davis
Armed Forces, by Franklin Bruno
Exile on Main Street, by Bill Janovitz
Grace, by Daphne Brooks
Loveless, by Mike McGonigal
Murmur, by J. Niimi
Pet Sounds, by Jim Fusilli

Forthcoming in this series:

Born in the USA, by Geoff Himes
Endtroducing..., by Eliot Wilder
In the Aeroplane over the Sea, by Kim Cooper
London Calling, by David Ulin
Low, by Hugo Wilcken

Kick out the Jams, by Don McLeese
The Notorious Byrd Brothers, by Ric Menck

Also available in this series:

I would like to thank the staff of both the University of Michigan's Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library and the Music Library for help in tracking down materials from the mid-1970s. In many ways, punk remains outside the official history often archived in libraries, so I am especially thankful to the many private collectors who shared their material with me.

Many thanks to Craig Leon for taking the time out of his schedule to answer my questions about the album's production, and to Fredric Shore, Maggie Carson, and Juliusz Kossakowski, whose film *Punking Out* provides invaluable footage of key bands, including the Ramones, at CBGB as the punk scene was emerging.

I am thankful to my teachers over the years who have taught me that no cultural text can be studied without tuning in to its material history, especially James
Berta and Carla Mulford. I have also enjoyed conversations about punk with Stephen Manning over the years.

Thanks to David Barker at Continuum for his support and goodwill.

My love and thanks to my mother and father, Nicholas and Diane, for a wonderful childhood and home, a place where I was encouraged to create. This book took me back to 1975, and to memories of my sister, Kori.

Finally, my deepest love to Niko and Maddy, who tolerated dad's musical obsessions during the writing of this book. And

to my wife Lisa, my endless love, gratitude, and respect. This book is for you, for everything.

Acknowledgments

You even shatter the sensations of time and space into split seconds and instant replays.

—Max, in Network

After hearing *[Ramones],* everything else sounded impossibly slow.

—Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming*
[1]

The Outsider is a man who has awakened to chaos.

—Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*
[2]

No subculture has sought with more grim determination than punks to detach itself from the taken-for-granted landscape of normalized forms, nor to bring down upon itself such vehement disapproval.

—Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*
[3]

Ramones is either the last great modern record, or the first great postmodern one. Fully aware of its status as pop culture, it nonetheless has unironic aspirations toward art. The Ramones themselves—maintaining an unchanging image for nearly thirty years in a culture that values nothing so much as change—were too serious and enduring to be dismissed as cartoonish, yet too fun to be embraced as "serious."

As other bands self-destructed, seduced by their own madness or by the trappings of fame, the Ramones remained troubadours of punk, and, for the better part of their career as a group, generated an unchanging sound in the face of rapidly evolving trends. They were
deeply aware of the Dark Side of longevity—the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and The Who all provided templates of the path not to be taken, as the early reckless power of their work gradually gave way to self-perpetuating indulgence and excess, signaled by long, dramatic concept songs and albums whose virtuosity practically demanded worship.

The quality that insured the Ramones' first album would become one of the most important records in modern rock was the same quality that guaranteed they would never have mainstream success in their time: a unified vision, the force of a single idea. There is a purity to *Ramones* that is almost overwhelming and frightening. Basically, the Ramones are the only punk group from the 1970s to have maintained their vision for so long, without compromise—a vision fully and completely expressed on their very first album. In America, there is a skepticism and wariness about any artistic or cultural form that doesn't evolve, that doesn't grow. There is no more damning critique than the charge of repeating

yourself. And yet punk was precisely about repetition; its art lay in the rejection of elaboration. And nowhere is this more evident than on the Ramones' first album, whose unforgiving and fearful symmetry announced the arrival of a sound so pure it did not require change.

It's one of those interesting twists of history that *Ramones* was released in 1976, America's bicentennial
year, the year of remembering Declarations of Independence. While punk—especially in its 1980s and 90s incarnations—is often associated with anarchist dissent and alienation from the mainstream, there is also a very homespun, nostalgic dimension to the original punk movement, especially its American version. After all, the do-it-yourself philosophy is part of the American tradition, stretching from the Revolutionary War era to Ralph Waldo Emerson's call for self-reliance. Of course, you don't need to know or even care about these things to like the music, and in a way it goes against the whole spirit of punk to read too much into its sources and traditions. But part of the appeal of punk as embodied by the Ramones arose from how it managed to tap into this American tradition of independence and resistance that pits the little fellow against the forces of the big, while at the same time rejecting tradition.

Details of the album's production have passed into legend: it was recorded in seventeen days in February 1976 for roughly $6,400. At first, the process sounds like the ultimate do-it-yourself, amateur, reckless ethic that is associated with punk. In truth, however, the Ramones approached the recording process with a high degree of preparedness and professionalism. They had already been playing together for roughly two years—including at least seventy live

shows—and had fully developed their defining sound. They had produced their
own demo, had written enough material for several albums, and had given much consideration to the sound they wanted to achieve on the first album.

Before considering the details of the album's production, its songs, and its eventual reception and influence, it is important to reconsider the context from which the Ramones, and punk itself, arose. For the term "punk" today carries a much different meaning than it did in the early to mid-1970s. If today the term has passed into a recognizable and perfectly acceptable commodity form, thirty years ago "punk" was wildly unstable; attached to it were all sorts of meanings and signs expressed in the magazines, newspapers, fanzines, and documentaries that covered what was then coming to be known as "punk rock."

Punk was a stance that embodied rejection. Where progressive rock, as a withered stepchild of the 1960s, was still deep down about affirmation and saying yes, punk offered negation and a resounding no. In *Punking Out* (1977), probably the best documentary of the 1970s CBGB scene (and among the few to use live sound as opposed to post-synch), a fan was asked: "What's a blank generation?" to which she replied: "I'm blank. There's nothing coming in. There's nothing going out." The Ramones imbued this nothingness and rejection with a fierce humor that transported nihilism into the realm of pop culture. The emergence of punk and its uneasy
mix of nihilism and humor, especially as embodied by the Ramones, cannot be separated from writing about punk in magazines, newspapers, and fanzines in America and the UK,

including *Crawdaddy, Soho Weekly News, New York Rocker, Trouser Press, Village Voice, Melody Maker, Creem, Hit Parader, Sounds, Zigzag, Punk,* and others. Indeed, punk emerged at precisely the moment when music writing and editing was at its most intelligent and experimental—especially in the hands of John Holmstrom, Lester Bangs, Richard Meltzer, Nick Kent, Alan Betrock, James Wolcott, Robert Christgau, Nick Tosches, Mary Harron, Greil Marcus, and others—a fact that is crucial to an understanding of punk's creation and subsequent mythical status. The Ramones, whose unified image and sound were central to the early articulation of punk aesthetics, were often singled out, especially in coverage of CBGB's 1975 summer festival of unsigned bands. In "Down and Out at the Bowery," *Melody Maker's* Steve Lake provided this early impression of the Ramones:

The Ramones, meanwhile, are being heavily touted by the rock columns of the local press as "potentially the greatest singles band since the Velvet Underground," and they recently made rock history with a phenomenally tight set at CBGB that crammed six songs into a 13-minute performance. Their image is pre-flower power Seeds with Sky Saxon/Early Byrds
pudding bowl haircuts and biker outfits of leather and denim. Determined punks all.
[4]

Indeed, the CBGB festival in 1975 provided an opportunity for writers to offer some sort of coherent vision of punk; the festival and the publicity it generated constituted both an opening up and a closing down of the disparate channels of what was beginning to be called "punk" in the press. James

Wolcott, writing in August 1975 about the CBGB festival, said that "there is original vision there, and what the place itself is doing is quite extraordinary: putting on bands as if the stage were a cable television station. Public access rock."
[5] The festival also attracted the attention of national, larger-circulation magazines such as *Rolling Stone,* which, as Clinton Heylin notes, had heretofore largely ignored the emerging scene. In October 1975, Ed McCormack of *Rolling Stone* offered this assessment of the festival and the Ramones:

Right now the Ramones are where the New York Dolls were back in the early seventies, when they were playing at the Mercer Arts Center for practically nothing and using taxicabs as equipment vans. While a recording contract has thus far eluded the Ramones, their machine-gun paced, hot singles sound and their cutesy-poo Beaver-Badass image have made them cult favorites of groupies. They come on in patched jeans and Popeye T-shirts, plant themselves in place and play nonstop. And while their cult followers liken them to a "hip new version of the Osmonds," one cannot help but wonder if they are bragging or complaining.
[6]

In the months surrounding their signing with Sire records in January 1976, although the Ramones were treated as harbingers of the new music scene that was developing in New York, they were more likely to be called underground than punk. In July 1975, *The Village Voice* noted that unlike "most of New York's underground groups, they're not neo-Velvets, so they're not coolly insulated from the fire they create" and that their songs were played "with a chopping freneticism."

7 And in the *SoHo Weekly News* in 1975, Alan Betrock (founder of *New York Rocker)* wrote that "on stage the band emits a 1975 sound not unlike a streamlined, yet still vehemently compact, mixture of early Velvet Underground, Shadows of the Knight, and the Stooges. It's rock & roll the way it was meant to be played, not with boogie or pretense, but just straight freshness and intense energy. Sort of out of the garages and onto the stages again."
8 Around the same time, in a blurb about CBGB buried in his column "The Pop Life," John Rockwell in the *New York Times* in September 1975 noted that the "efflorescence of the New York underground rock scene at the C.B.G.B. club will live on past the present moment. A group of SoHo video artists who call themselves Me
tropolis Video have been documenting the bands every weekend. The shows can be seen Saturday nights at midnight on Manhattan Cable's Channel D."
9 The preferred term to describe the emerging scene in 1974 and 1975, in both the mainstream and underground press, was indeed "underground" rather than "punk."

While it's true that debates about the origins of the term "punk" to describe the scene can quickly devolve into triviality, the confusion surrounding the term is central to punk's anarchic spirit, a confusion that is important to maintain, rather than resolve. Originally, "punck" was used to describe a prostitute or harlot; in 1596—the first known appearance of the word in print—the writer Thomas Lodge used the word like this: "He hath a Punck (as the pleasant Singer cals her)."
10 Over the centuries, the meaning of the word has evolved, variously used to describe something worthless or foolish,

empty talk, nonsense, a homosexual, or a person of no account.

More recently, in the decades prior to the emergence of the punk music scene, the word punk can be found scattered throughout novels and stories by the likes of Ernest Hemingway, William S. Burroughs, and others. In Hemingway's story "The Mother of a Queen" from his collection *Winner Take Nothing* (1933), the narrator says "this fellow was just a punk, you understand, a nobody he'd ever seen before... "
11 Dashiell Hammett's
novel *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) features a scene where Sam Spade tells Gutman "we've absolutely got to give them a victim. There's no way out of it. Let's give them the punk."
12 In Burroughs's first novel *Junky* (1953), the narrator observes as two "young punks got off a train carrying a lush between them."
13 And Thomas Pynchon uses the term in *V.* (1963) like this: "There was nothing so special about the gang, punks are punks."
14

The word punk in relation to music is both trickier and easier to trace; while pretty much everyone now knows punk when they hear it, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the term had not yet taken on the coded weight of meaning that it carries today. In his first nationally published work—for *Rolling Stone* in 1969—Lester Bangs reviewed the MC5's album *Kick out the Jams,* and wrote, "never mind that they came on like a bunch of sixteen-year-old punks on a meth power trip."
15 In May 1971 Dave Marsh, writing in *Creem,* used the phrase "punk rock," and the following month in the same

magazine in his essay "Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung," Bangs, writing about the influence of the Yardbirds, said that "then punk bands started cropping up who were writing their own songs but taking the Yardbirds' sound and reducing it to this kind of goony fuzztone clatter."
16 Punk, as associated with rock and roll, gradually gained currency, so that by 1974, the word could even be found in the rarefied
pages of none other than *The New Yorker*. Reviewing a New York Dolls concert at the Bottom Line in May 1974, Ellen Willis wrote, in reference to opening act Suzi Quatro, "I was getting a naive kick out of watching a woman play rock-and-roll punk."
17 And writing in the *Village Voice* in November 1975, just a little over a month after the Ramones had signed with Sire, Greil Marcus, in reviewing Patti Smith's debut album *Horses,* wrote that "the concepts that lie behind behind Smith's performance—her version of rock and roll fave raves, the New York avant-garde, surrealist imagery and aesthetic strategy, the beatnik hipster pose, the dark side of the street punk soul—emerge more clearly with each playing, until they turn into schtick."
18

Yet even this coupling of "punk" and "rock" didn't yet capture the meanings we associate with punk rock today. It wasn't until 1976, and the founding of the magazine *Punk* by John Holmstrom and Legs McNeil, that the term adapted once again to capture and give name to the emerging scene. As Legs McNeil tells it, "Holmstrom wanted the magazine to be a combination of everything we were into—television reruns, drinking beer, getting laid, cheeseburgers, comics, grade-B movies, and this weird rock & roll that nobody but us seemed

to like: the Velvets, the Stooges, the New York Dolls, and now the Dictators."
19 In fact, the group The Dictators and their 1975 album *The Dictators Go Girl Crazy!*
were a direct inspiration for the magazine's title. Not only did they use the word punk in the song "Weekend" ("oh weekend / Bobby is a local punk / cutting school and getting drunk / eating at McDonalds for lunch"), but an inside sleeve picture of them dressed in black leather jackets eating at White Castle led McNeil to suggest *Punk* as the title: "The word 'punk' seemed to sum up the thread that connected everything we liked—drunk, obnoxious, smart but not pretentious, absurd, funny, ironic, and things that appealed to the darker side."
20

One of the best discussions of the punk ethos appeared in the very first issue of *Punk* in January 1976 in the essay "Marlon Brando: The Original Punk." Suggesting that punk is above all a sensibility, a way of carrying yourself in the world, the piece suggests that Brando's films *Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *The Wild One* (1953), and *On the Waterfront* (1954) "provided media recognition for an inarticulate, rebellious character type, til then ignored by the popular media. ... Brando was cool without oppressing the audience with too much sharpness. He was powerful without having to be invulnerable. ... Vulnerability in a leather jacket. Brando prowled, not as a predator, but as a formidable victim."
21 The Ramones, especially, embodied this cool style that reversed the governing codes of 1970s macho rock embodied by the figure of the swaggering lead
singer. Joey Ramone was the punk underdog, the impossibly skinny guy who hid beneath his hair and behind his sunglasses. In that same issue of *Punk,* in her two-page spread

on the Ramones, Mary Harron was hesitant to use the word punk to describe the band (preferring instead "punk-type"), and when she did use it, she did so to describe a visual style and attitude, not a sound: "OK," Harron asked, "why do you affect leather jackets and kind of a punk-type attitude on stage?" Tommy replied: "It keeps us warm, y'know? And the black leather absorbs more heat."

In fact, groups like Alice Cooper, Kiss, and even AC/DC were written about as part of the mix of the punk and new wave scene. If today not many people would consider AC/DC an element of the new wave that included art bands like Talking Heads, in the early-to-mid 1970s the categories of punk, new wave, hard rock, heavy metal, and pop were still blurred. As well see later, this was due in part to the fact that record companies, promoters, and radio stations, which depended upon the fairly strict maintenance of generic classifications, had not yet absorbed the "new wave" into a commodity form. Writing about AC/DC in *New York Rocker,* which was devoted almost exclusively to covering the punk and new wave scene, Howie Klein noted that "AC/DC doesn't use safety pins, never went to art school, and they sure don't limit themselves to 2 or 3 chords, but
if new wave is a reaffirmation of rock 'n' roll's traditional values, this band is an important part of it."
22 The Ramones themselves, although cautious of labels like punk, were variously touted as punk, new wave, hard rock, pop, pop-punk, and others. In a full-page 1977 ad in *New York Rocker* from their record company Sire, the Ramones were described as the "world's foremost exponents of pure punk-rock and New York's pioneer New Wave band."

The Ramones, as was true of most bands of that moment, preferred to demonstrate the premise of their music rather than talk about it. When asked in 1977 about their feelings regarding the punk label, Johnny responded: "Whaddya gonna do? We don't care if they wanna call us dat. It doesn't matter one way or the other."
23 But very often the bands and their fans either rejected or simply ignored the label "punk." In the documentary *Punking Out,* one fan at CBGB in 1977 answers, when asked about punk, "[if] you want to talk about punk and underground it's bullshit. You call 'em punk because you got nothing else to say about 'em, no other way to link 'em. But it's like the heartbeat that links 'em." In an interview with Mary Harron in *Punk,* when asked if he had a name to describe the music, Johnny Rotten said that "punk rock's a silly thing to call it" and "it means, like—American sixties rip-off bands."
24 And asked about whether he and the Ramones thought of the album that they were recording in 1976 as punk, Craig Leon, who produced *Ramones,* responded that "if my memory serves me well, we never used this term at all. Seymour Stein nicked the term 'New Wave' from the 50s French film guys to describe the music but no one used 'punk' other than the title of John Holmstrom and Legs McNeil's magazine of lower NY at that time."
25

One of the dimensions of punk that was nearly eclipsed as the more hardcore punk bands of the 80s and 90s gained ascendancy was the humor and the sense of sheer absurdity and fun that characterized the emerging scene. *Punk* magazine was very close to *Mad* in this regard, its pages filled with self-deprecating spoofs, such as "Lester Bangs versus Handsome Dick Manitoba," a spread from issue #4 that

pictures Bangs and Manitoba (of The Dictators) fighting while spouting—in cartoon-like bubbles—highly theoretical sentiments such as "The fall of a culture puts us in the same archetypal cesspool" and "Violence is directly associated with threats to identity as occur in periods of rapid transition!" The Ramones, who were regularly featured in *Punk,* were central to punk's early identity as more fun than dangerous. In "The Rise of Punk Rock" from the *Village Voice* in 1976 James Wolcott wrote:

Punk humor, a healthy parody of rock machismo, can be found in the music of the Dictators (who sing:
"The best part of growing up/Is when I'm sick and throwing up/It's the dues you got to pay/For eating burgers every day.... ") and the leather-jacketed Ramones, in the Daffy Duckery of Patti Smith, in magazines like *Punk* and *Creem,* and in television heroes like Fonzie and Eddie Haskell. It's a style of humor which reverses banality, thrives upon it, and enjoys juxtaposing it with high culture references in order to create a comically surreal effect.
26

The rise and fall of the Sex Pistols in England and the Dead Boys in the US in some ways put an end to punk's first, naive phase. It may seem strange to call early punk innocent—and a reading of *Please Kill Me* suggests just the opposite—yet despite the hedonism that is typical of any rock movement, the Ramones and other related groups offered a vision that rejected the excesses of the hippie counterculture and instead drew, often ironically, on the supposed innocence of the 1950s. While Tom Carson may have been exaggerating when he wrote in the *New York Rocker* that the Ramones' third album *Rocket to Russia* demonstrated "what some of us have

suspected for a long time—that these guys are really straight old-fashioned pop moralists under the skin,"
[27] there is an element of truth in his claim. If the Ramones were innocent, this innocence lay in their elevation of limitation to the level of art, and in their hop-scotching backward over the hippies directly to the promise of the early Beatles, kiln-fired down to a hardcore sound
at which previous bands could only hint. For in punk's rejection and nihilism there was a larger violence that for the Ramones remained a path not taken, at least for their first several albums. The violence, outrage, and shock—what Clinton Heylin called "the more brutal aspects of the punk sound"
[28]—that groups like Dead Boys and Laughing Dogs brought to the scene were latent in punk from the beginning, and in some ways represent the logical conclusion of the punk movement. The Ramones remained ambivalent about this strain of punk. In a 2001 interview, Johnny noted, "when punk started getting this bad reputation here, we started getting lumped in with the stuff and being excluded."
[29]

After the Sex Pistols said the F-word on British television, punk became even more associated with a level of violence and rebellion that, as the Ramones have suggested, worked against any possibility of widespread radio play in the US. As Keith Negus has noted, "[t]he formatted radio system decisively demarcates and defines the market for popular music in the United States."
[30] The associations that were beginning to be attached to the word "punk" are evident in a press release by EMI in December 1976, two months after the Sex Pistols had signed with them and shortly after their notorious TV spot. Entitled

“Comment on Content of Records,” by Sir John Read, Chairman of EMI, the press release read, in part:

Sex Pistols is a pop group devoted to a new form of music known as “punk rock.”

It was contracted for recording purposes by EMI Records Limited in October 1976—an unknown group offering some promise, in the view of our recording executives, like many other pop groups of different kinds that we have signed. In this context, it must be remembered that the recording industry has signed many pop groups, initially controversial, who have in the fulness of time become wholly acceptable and contributed greatly to the development of modern music. ...

Sex Pistols is the only “punk rock” group that EMI Records currently has under direct recording contract and whether EMI does in fact release any more of their records will have to be very carefully considered. I need hardly add that we shall do everything we can to restrain their public behaviour, although this is a matter over which we have no real control.
31

The hope that the Sex Pistols would eventually become acceptable of course proved futile, as they were dropped by EMI early the following year. The strangeness of the language here, as Sir John Read carefully hopes that punk might soon become domesticated, shows how punk as a commodity simply could not happen, at least not in 1976. In this sense, punk’s image created the very climate that introduced it to the mainstream and that simultaneously assured it would be frozen out of the mainstream. As Danny

Fields has suggested, the "whole thing [punk] just got out of control and whatever chance
the Ramones had to get on the radio based on the merit of the music was then wiped out by the Sex Pistols because it became too hot to handle. American radio, then as now, doesn't like to participate in anything that is dangerous or revolutionary or radical."
32

To be sure, there was an unmistakable violence, at least rhetorically, in the Sex Pistols, but there was also a deep sense of humor and recognition of the fundamental absurdity of life. In America, this punk humor was directly rooted in the rejection of what was perceived as hippie sincerity. Any attempt to account for the rise and appeal of punk must take into account its rejection of the progressive rock establishment and its unironic embrace of "feelings" and "relationships" and pseudo-macho posturing. By the mid-1970s the country was in recession, the promises of the Great Society were an increasingly unrealizable dream, the creative possibilities suggested by the counter-culture movement had withered into self-absorption and a sideshow of perpetual new age self-help movements, and the once-radical alternative lifestyle promises had transformed into cardboard sitcom scenarios (remember, *The Love Boat* had its debut in 1976). The tremendous idealism and promise of harmony of the 1960s had been steadily eroded by assassinations, burning cities, white flight, busing violence, a disgraced president, and a lost war.

If disco was in some ways a grotesque magnification of the latent hedonism of the 1960s, then punk, with its minimalism and its implicit violence, was an about-face on the 1960s that

constituted a symbolic rejection. In describing the emergence of punk, Mary Harron has noted that "punk, like Warhol, embraced everything that cultured people, and hippies, detested: plastic, junk-food, B-movies, advertising, making money—although no one ever did. You got so sick of people being so nice, mouthing an enforced attitude of goodness and health."
33 In America, *Punk* magazine was instrumental in articulating a sensibility that mocked the grandiose social commentary that characterized flower-power music. Issue #1 included a "Do It Yourself Sixties Protest Song" that replaced "serious" lines with ones like "watching Adam 12" and "munch my Wheaties" and other references to everyday life. In issue #3 from April 1976, Dee Dee Ramone talked about how, when in school in the late 1960s, "they used to have those peace demonstrations and stuff. I used to heckle the demonstrators." And in that same year, Lou Reed said, "Nixon was beautiful. If he had bombed Montana and gotten away with it, I would've loved him."
34

Often, there is a savage kind of beauty in disintegration and in the articulation of that disintegration through art. And certainly mid-70s America presented
a moment of exhausted optimism and a great lowering of expectations. The Watergate fiasco began in 1972 with the apprehension of men breaking into and attempting to wiretap Democratic party offices. By 1973 televised congressional hearings dominated the airwaves, and in August 1974 Nixon resigned in disgrace (his Vice President, Spiro Agnew, had resigned the previous year in a non-Watergate related tax scandal). In October 1973 OPEC declared its oil embargo, driving high fuel prices ever higher. In a gesture symbolic of

what Jimmy Carter would later call the nation's "malaise," the national Christmas tree was not lit in December 1973. America's involvement in the Vietnam War officially ended in barely-controlled chaos atop the American embassy in Saigon in April 1975 with the last helicopter leaving as the North Vietnamese took the city.

At the center of this crisis of confidence, both literally and symbolically, was New York City, which was headed into bankruptcy in 1975. Against the backdrop of the looming 1976 presidential election, President Ford was "making hay of the New York crisis as a symbol of the bankruptcy of liberalism and of the Democratic Party."
35 The city's $1.5 billion deficit was brought under control through a series of measures that severely impacted the work force, as roughly 60,000 workers were laid off over a three-year period. This was the era of "planned
shrinkage," an idea famously articulated by Roger Starr (New York City Administrator of Housing and Urban Development from 1974–76) in a 1976 *New York Times* essay in which he declared "planned shrinkage is the recognition that the golden door to full participation in American life and the American economy is no longer to be found in New York." Planned shrinkage "called for the systematic withdrawal of basic services—including police, fire, health, sanitation, and transportation—from poor neighborhoods to make them unlivable and thus drive the poor out of the city."
36 During 1975, headlines in New York daily announced the city's crumbling economy. "[Mayor] Beame Submits New Cuts Requiring added Layoffs Running into Thousands," ran a frontpage headline in the *New York Times* in October 1975, followed by "Mayor is Bitter." The article is typical of the sort of news New Yorkers were reading every day: "The

exact layoff total will be decided in the next week, and unofficial estimates circulating among city administrators who coursed fretfully through City Hall was that the dismissals might total up to 8,000 beyond the 21,000 workers laid off thus far in the fiscal crisis. Police officials said up to 900 policemen would be laid off, and school officials predicted 'several thousand' teachers and school workers would have to be let go."
[37]

Despite the downbeat scene in America in the mid-1970s, American punk from that era did not resonate
with the same aggressive political edge that characterized British punk. England was in the throes of a deep recession, with unemployment reaching 6.4 percent in June 1976, the highest since 1940.
[38] To make matters worse, the summer of 1976—a period when the emerging punk movement was beginning to attract press in publications such as *New Musical Express*—in England was characterized by a sweltering heat wave. By August a drought was declared (a Minister of Drought was appointed), and the Notting Hill Carnival, which in past years had been a peaceful celebration of Caribbean culture, was marred by violence and rioting that sent over 100 policemen to the hospital.
[39] This isn't to suggest that the punk movement was simply a response to mid-1970s malaise, but that, rather, it embodied the very anxieties that characterized the era. As Hebdige has suggested, the "punks appropriated the rhetoric of crisis which had filled the airwaves and the editorials throughout the period and translated it into tangible (and visible) terms."
[40]

The fundamental difference between British and American punk was in the Americans' basic optimism. While it's true that both British and American punk traded in nihilism and destruction, in American punk this tendency was fractured and less pronounced than in the British version. As Legs McNeil recounts, punk "was about real freedom, personal freedom. ... I remember
my favorite nights were just getting drunk and walking around the East Village kicking over garbage cans. Just the night. Just the night. Just that it would be the night again. And you could go out, you know? It just seemed glorious. And you'd be humming these great songs and anything could happen, and it was usually pretty good."
41 Punk music's great strength—especially the music of the Ramones—was its ability to convey this sense of explosive joy while at the same time hinting at some larger idea that you could never really be sure was there.

If details and stories like this are important to remember, it is because punk responded with its own stories and its own stance, the stance of the underdog. On March 30, 1974, the Ramones played their debut gig (as a trio) at the Performance Studio in Manhattan. That same night, New York City's WPIX-TV played the 1958 American International Pictures cult horror film *How to Make a Monster* as part of their "Chiller Theatre" series. To those who might perchance have seen both the performance and the movie, it would have been a natural double feature. A little over two years later, in the spring of the bicentennial year, the Ramones' first album debuted, without even one song approaching the three-minute mark.

How do you define a band without a tradition? Rejecting the blues-oriented inflection that had for twenty-five years characterized both American and British rock, the Ramones didn't plug into any recognizable past. Of course there were influences, which many rock historians and writers over the years have noted, including the Detroit pre-punk scene of the MC5 and Iggy and the Stooges, the glam-rock scene of T. Rex, David Bowie, and the New York Dolls, the glam-metal scene of Alice Cooper, and of course the early Beatles and The Who. But these exist only as fragments in the Ramones, only as sonic glimpses, barely even enough to be counted as influences. Now is probably a good a time as any to directly address the question: *Who was the first punk band?* Or, more narrowly: *Were the Ramones the first punk band?* The problem with this question is that it assumes a total break with the past and with influence that no band—no matter how original—can achieve. Also, in the end it comes down to individual taste and interpretation: if you hear punk in the Stooges, then you hear punk in the Stooges. If you don't, you don't. On the other hand, if such questions prompt a deeper appreciation of important bands that might otherwise be neglected, then it's not such a bad idea to ask them. While many people have written about punk's prehistory, the most sustained discussion is found in Clinton Heylin's book *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World.* At the risk of simplifying his argument, he divides American punk into the following categories:

Precursors:

The Velvet Underground

The Stooges

MC5

Alice Cooper

The Modern Lovers

The New York Dolls

The First Wave:

Television

Patti Smith

Blondie

The Ramones

The Second Wave:

Talking Heads

The Dead Boys

The Heartbreakers

Richard Hell and the Voidoids

The Dictators

Suicide

The Cleveland Bands:

Cinderella Backstreet

Mirrors

The Electric Eels

Rocket from the Tombs

The Styrenes

Pere Ubu

Peter Laughner

Devo
42

Now, right away you can see how a taxonomy like this might provoke argument (and perhaps even the throwing of a beer bottle or other object). Why, for instance, is Suicide considered second wave when, as Heylin himself notes, they were performing as early as 1970 at a venue
called the Punk Best? But despite objections to Heylin's punk canon, his meticulous book remains the most complex and nuanced history of the roots and emergence of punk music in the US, in the same way that Jon Savage's book *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond* remains the best book on the emergence of UK punk.

Once you start tracing influences, where do you stop? Other writers have proposed other influences. Jim Bess-man notes

that “punk encompassed everyone from Elvis Presley to the Beatles,”
43 while Joe Harrington writes that punk includes “garage-Rock pioneers like the Stan-dells and Chocolate Watch Band to protometalloids like Dust and Black Sabbath.”
44 Others have cited Phil Spector-produced groups such as the Crystals and the Ronettes, as well as groups ranging from Herman’s Hermits to ? and the Mysterians. I have a friend in New York City who is says that “true” punk didn’t really begin until the California hardcore bands like Black Flag and the Dead Kennedys emerged in the late 1970s.

Though disputes about firsts always end up devolving into justifying our personal tastes, their value lies in their ability to prod us into a more historical appreciation of the music we take for granted. My own sense is that punk was the product of a specific and unique set of artistic, cultural, and economic forces at work in the US in general and New York City in particular in the
early to mid-1970s, and that no matter how far back we reach to look for punk antecedents, it is only in the 1970s that the movement became fully articulated in music, comics, and the underground—and eventually mainstream—press. It is to those who wrote about punk—and to punk writers—that we should now turn.

There was a moment in the 1970s, who knows precisely when, when rock criticism aspired to greatness, adopting a combative, skeptical stance that embodied the music it covered. This was an era when some of the musicians themselves, like Patti Smith or Richard Hell, wrote about music. Or perhaps it’s more accurate to say that in the 1970s, writing about music and culture in underground and

mainstream newspapers and magazines perfected a style and tone worthy of the music being created at the time. Academia responded with "cultural studies" in an attempt to treat popular culture seriously, but for the most part, academic cultural studies approaches were dead on arrival, written in a pallid prose style that defanged and fossilized the raw energy of culture itself.

There is no doubt it's easy to hate rock critics, if for nothing else than because when it comes to music that we genuinely love, we like to think that it's only us and maybe a small clique of others who really "get it." Rock critics never appreciate our bands or music scenes enough. Their writing doesn't capture whatever it is
about the music that we love. We don't like to see our deep experience with the music reduced to a 500-words-or-less review that pretends a greater familiarity with the music than we suspect the reviewer actually has. Besides, who needs to read about music when it is right there for the listening?

But while these charges and others can be leveled against the 1970s rock-crit writers, what they brought to their reviews and essays was something unheard of in writing about pop music up to that time: a sense of theory, of distance, of danger, of critique—a broader sense of the place of popular music in culture. And most importantly, the writing style was at times unexpected and unpredictable; it went beyond the typical "here is a description of the music" or the fan club approach that asked you to worship every crumb that fell from the mouth of said Rock Star. Writing of this sort had been percolating for some time: it can be found in the prose of film critic Pauline Kael, who was among the first to praise "trash" films and to rebel against the safe, art-house

sensibility of many of the major publications of the 1960s. It's also there in Hunter S. Thompson, whose brand of gonzo journalism challenged with furious humor the lie that news reporting could ever be "objective." In fact, this sort of writing haunts American culture in the 1950s and 60s: it is there in Thomas
Wolfe, in William S. Burroughs, in Charles Bukowski, in Susan Sontag.

By the 1970s, rock criticism was at the height of its influence and had not yet taken the turn toward the less reflective, star-gushing territory that it would in the 1980s. Despite the fact that there were and are deep and often bitter disputes and divisions, not worth chronicling here, among writers like Robert Christgau, Nick Kent, Richard Meltzer, Lester Bangs, Nick Tosches, Greil Marcus, and others, what united them was a sense that rock—and punk specifically—was worth writing about in ways that actively challenged readers. For some, such as Meltzer (author of the 1970 classic *The Aesthetics of Rock),* this took the form of a slangy, almost stream-of-consciousness style that was a form of art in its own right. Describing punk, Meltzer has written: "For blazing, incandescent moments it oozed and spurted something *antithetical* to rock: it was honest. About its own pain, its own hunger, without candy coating, without vanity, without an *iota* of formulaic dissimulation."
45

For others, like Bangs, the street-level approach to rock was inflected with big ruminations about culture and society and politics. After leaving *Creem* and Detroit in 1976 and moving to New York City, in 1979 Bangs wrote a tough essay, "The White Noise Supremacists,"

that alienated him from many in the punk scene, but that drove him to an uncomfortable truth about punk and fascism and racism. “This scene and the punk stance in general,” he wrote, “are riddled with self-hate, which is always reflexive, and anytime you conclude that life stinks and the human race mostly amounts to a pile of shit, you’ve got the perfect breeding ground for fascism.”
46 Leaving aside the question of whether he was right or wrong (and anyway can’t he be both?) what matters is that this was just the kind of disruptive question that could be asked in the 1970s—and by somebody who loved punk. The point is that the very contradictions of punk itself—was it funny or scary? absurd or nihilistic? art or trash? anti-mainstream or pop? “stoopid” or smart? ironic or sincere?—were the same contradictions that riddled the best rock-crit writing about punk.

Although today we remember those writers such as Bangs, Meltzer, and Marcus, whose work has been preserved and anthologized, there were others whose writing was alive and alarming, but who for various reasons are not preserved in the current rock-crit canon. One of the joys of revisiting old copies of the *New York Rocker, Soho Weekly News, Trouser Press,* and other newspapers and fanzines is discovering the voices that introduced bands like the Ramones to readers. In the second issue of the *New York Rocker* (1976) for instance, Stephen
Anderson kicked off his article on the Ramones, whose first album had not yet been released, like this:

Revising a structural reality from the harsh poetics of rock is an arduous, remarkable task that the Ramones have accomplished. That’s not bad for a solid thesis sentence or

just a plain old opening remark, and it's as unnecessary as rock criticism is unnecessary. Los Ramones have locked themselves within a black leather embryo that neither sticks nor stones nor intricate musical pretensions may transcend.
47

Now, any article that uses the words "structural reality" in the very first sentence—and that isn't about something like a Thomas Pynchon novel—is risky, to say the least. And as we'll see later, this self-referential tendency so much rock-crit writing of the era possessed constitutes a larger tendency within punk itself, not unlike lines like "second verse same as the first" from the Ramones' first album. When Anderson, later in the essay, says he wants to defend the Ramones from a detractor by quoting lines from T. S. Eliot, or "maybe the cinematic philosophy or Godard. Or Artaud's theatre of cruelty," does he risk alienating an audience that picked up *New York Rocker* to read about their favorite bands rather than Godard and Artaud? Probably, and it is this defiant gesture, this unexpected detour into something other than the Ramones in an article that's supposed to be about the Ramones, that constitutes the
punk sensibility, and why the emergence of punk music and writing about punk music cannot be separated. In fact, the rock-crit establishment was powerful, ironic, and self-aware enough that in the January 26, 1976, issue of the *Village Voice,* critic Robert Christgau could write an essay called "Yes, There is a Rock-Crit Establishment (But Is that Bad for Rock)?" that basically mythologized and deconstructed, simultaneously, the rock-crit establishment, which for Christgau included himself, Dave Marsh, Jon Landau, John Rockwell, and others.

While *Rolling Stone* did provide some coverage of the emerging punk scene, it did so from much more of a West Coast perspective, one that was still, in many ways, inflected with a 1960s nostalgia that was fast becoming associated with a bloated, rock-as-big-concept mentality. Having said this, it is important to bear in mind that while *Rolling Stone* might have neglected the emerging New York underground music scene, it did in fact help to give shape and voice to rock criticism in general, and to promote the spread of gonzo journalism (Hunter S. Thompson, who began writing for the magazine in the early 1970s, undoubtedly brought a punk sensibility to the pages of *Rolling Stone,* even though he did not write directly about punk). Much closer to the punk scene were *SoHo Weekly News, New York Rocker, Village Voice,* and, from Detroit, *Creem.* While the *Village Voice* did not offer extensive coverage of the emerging punk scene, in its pages could be found some of the most consistently engaged and thorny discussions of punk, which often framed it in the larger context of New York's avant-garde traditions, the surrealists, and the French New Wave. Writing in the *Village Voice* in 1976, James Wolcott noted that the "[Talking] Heads look like a still from a Godard movie ('La Chinoise,' maybe) and Tom Verlaine looks like Artaud from Dreyer's 'The Passion of Joan of Arc.'"[48] This almost surreal mix of high and low culture is typical of much punk-oriented writing from the 1970s. Later in the essay, Wolcott says, "the Velvets and their progeny are all children of Dr. Caligari—pale-skinned adventurers of shadowy city streets."[49]

It's not that these writers were experts on punk, or even die-hard fans, which was precisely the point, for at their best (especially Bangs and Meltzer) they rejected the worshipful stance of hard-core groupies and, like punk itself, assaulted the audience with a sort of bright-light honesty that couldn't help but alienate them from any number of readers. As Jon Savage has noted, "America had inaugurated both Rock journalism—with the work of Paul Williams in *Crawdaddy* and Robert Christgau in the *Village Voice*—and the 'new journalism' of Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson. If new journalism took you there, and 'there' was pop for a while,
then Rock journalism took pop phenomena seriously, teasing out their meaning and importance in language that was no less high-flown."
50 And they brought to their writing a sense of adventure and a willingness to make connections between punk and art and politics in ways that always risked being dismissed as too intellectual, too obscure, too uninterested in the mechanics of the music. On the one hand, these critics risked alienating the die-hard fans, who viewed their writing as the sorry musings of wanna-be musicians-turned-writers who were always a step or two behind the evolving music scene; and on the other hand, the readers for whom punk, and pop/rock music in general, was the bubblegum province of teenagers, and who would laugh off the suggestion that Talking Heads had anything in common with a high-art Godard film.

What distinguishes rock-crit punk writing from the mid-1970s from most subsequent rock criticism is that a good deal of it was written by the musicians themselves, including Patti Smith, Richard Hell, Andy (Adny) Shernoff, Peter Laughner, and others. If there is any such thing as a punk canon that includes not only bands but also other writers and artists, then

its initial formulation can be traced to the underground press and fanzines of the era, where the contours of the punk sensibility were articulated not only by professional rock critics, but by the musicians themselves. In a 1976 essay for *Trouser Press,* for instance, Dictators' guitarist Scott "Top Ten"
Kempner paid homage to critic Richard Meltzer, providing a sort of bibliographic account of his writings:

A few years later, a second book appeared, entitled *Gulcher* [1972] (gulcher ... gulture ... culture, get it?). Like the first book, one can start at any point and read, in any direction. *Gulcher* is subtitled, *Post-Rock Cultural Pluralism in America (1649–1980)* and is the official document of the under-the-counter culture. Recognizing that rock itself is no longer the true focal point of the culture, Meltzer covers everything from wrestling and booze to television and bottlecaps.
51

Like Kempner and so many others, Richard Hell not only wrote about punk, but did so in such a way that performed punk's anarchy on the page. In a 1976 article about the Ramones in *Hit Parader,* Hell wrote that the "music the Ramones create from these feelings [of frustration] is incredibly exciting. It gives you the same sort of feeling you might derive from savagely kicking in your smoothly running tv set and then finding real thousand dollar bills inside."
52 If Hermann Goering popularized the line "whenever I hear the word culture, I reach for my pistol," then punk popularized the gesture of reaching for a guitar or a pen in the face of culture, not to destroy it, but to transform it.

And yet, many of the rock-crit writers did help to make safe a sort of narcissistic confessionalism that
marks much of the criticism of our era. The first-person reportage of writers like Bangs and Marcus and Meltzer, in the Jack Keruoac tradition, opened the door in rock criticism for the wholesale elevation of the personal to the public, a diary-entry journalism, which is great if you happen to be a good writer, but nothing short of horrible if you don't. When everything is permitted, it's hard not to be seduced by your own reflection in the mirror, and for these writers the mirror that punk held up was hard to look away from. Today, almost all rock criticism takes the form of personal anecdote and memoir; as in the movie *High Fidelity,* we want to see the story *and* the story about the story. We want writers to show their faces, to confess a secret, to show us that they are no better than us. Writers like Meltzer and Bangs and Tosches were blogging before there were blogs, and made it safe to talk about rock by talking about yourself.

Although it helped to create the confessionalist critic, punk itself was resistant to such openness. If anything, punk depersonalized itself, rejecting the needy, confessional introspection of progressive rock. The Ramones were perhaps the purest and most brilliant of depersonalized punk bands, appearing in an unchanging uniform, sharing the same last name, and making music that rearticulated over and over again a single idea. Even their "I Wanna" and "I Don't Wanna" first-person
songs were less about people than characters, concepts, ideas, ways of behaving. In fact, it is this unchanging purity that accounts, more than anything else, for the failure of the Ramones to fully enter the mainstream of American popular music. For rock is built on the myth of change, a fact that

serves record companies well, as they promote the evolution of bands to keep pace with the changing tastes of the marketplace. Early Beatles, late Beatles. Early Stones, late Stones. Early R. E. M, late R. E. M. Early Elvis, late Elvis, Vegas Elvis.

But punk stood against evolution and technical growth because this implied a growing expertise and mastery of music that ran counter to punk's studied amateurism, and because it suggested a future that, especially in punk's British strain, should not exist. Besides, why change a good thing? If you've found your music, your sound, your stance, why push it into something else? This is why for so many punk and new wave bands, the marker of selling out was not signing to a major label, but rather adapting your sound to suit market tastes. So many punk bands—ranging from the Sex Pistols to the Dead Boys—self-destructed rather than buy into the myth of evolution, of change, of progress. The Ramones' uniformity can be seen on a recording of a remarkable early television studio performance, among the first visual recordings of the band, preceding Amos Poe's 1976 documentary on CBGB, *Blank Generation,*
and the 1977 documentary *Punking Out.* There is no audience, just the band in a white television studio with a home-made "Ramones" banner draped on the wall behind them. Without any ceremony they break into "Loudmouth" and continue for twenty minutes, pausing only long enough mid-way through for Johnny and Dee Dee to take off their leather jackets.

Documenting the influence of the Ramones, and punk in general, on post-1970s music is perilous. In retrospect, the Ramones' sound—fast, loud, simple—served as a blueprint

for scores of bands and movements in the 1980s, 90s, and today. As much as the Ramones looked backward for inspiration—to early Beatles, surf rock, Iggy Pop—at the time they offered an alienated future rock, concocting a sound that, while echoing the past, was really disconnected from tradition. The very fact that we can look back to the Ramones with nostalgia attests to their triumph in mass culture: "Hey ho, let's go" is played as a rallying cry not only during New York Yankees games, but in many other baseball parks across the country, right along with "classic" rock snippets from bands ranging from Queen to Van Halen.

This is where distinctions between 1970s-era punk and its incarnations in the 1980s and 1990s become clear, as we'll see later on. Even a slight familiarity with bands such as Black Flag or the Minutemen, or with
punk magazines like *Punk Planet,* reveals a level of progressive politics and seriousness that distinguishes it from its 1970s roots. If there was a political dimension to the Ramones, the Dead Boys, the Sex Pistols, the Adverts, and other bands, it was ambiguous and contradictory, a mix of anarchist sentiments, fascist symbols (such as the Swastika), and anti-liberal humanist sentiments. Indeed, early issues of *Punk* are a testament to the self-deprecating humor that informed Ramones-era punk, and if anything punks—especially in the United States—mocked the political seriousness and message music of the hippies.

Looked at from one angle, punk provided the corrective to what, by the 1970s, had become the absorption of uncritical liberalism into mass cultural forms. If Johnny Ramone was punk's most famous conservative (his line at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony—"God bless President

Bush, and God bless America"—was widely reported in his obituaries in September 2004), he was certainly not its only one. If the free and easy sixties were, on one level, a reaction to the uptight fifties, then punk was a return to order premised on disorder, rendered all the more contradictory when considered in light of the excesses of the scene as depicted in books like *Please Kill Me.* In this context, it's not surprising that one of the outgrowths
of punk was the Straight Edge scene in the early 1980s, where sobriety itself became a form of rebellion in the context of punk excess.

Sure the Ramones were associated with New York City, but were they city kids? It seems a sort of dumb question, but it had resonance in 1975 and 1976 and went to the heart of perceptions about punk's authenticity. The Ramones had all met in Forest Hills, New York, described by Monte Melnick as "a middle-class, mostly Jewish suburb in the borough of Queens."
53 Part of the energy of the CBGB scene—and the underground scene in general—was this ambiguity about the social class and status of its performers. Were the Ramones suburban kids? What about the preppy-looking Talking Heads? While Clinton Heylin might be right that "the Ramones ... were no teenage delinquents,"
54 you wouldn't know that from reading Dee Dee's book *Lobotomy* or stories about them in *Please Kill Me.* In an early issue of *New York Rocker,* Suzanne Schwedoch devoted an entire column to musing on the relationship between suburban kids and the emerging underground New York City scene. "This report from the lowest echelons of rock by an un-authority on the local scene is a desperate plea for NY rockers to try their stuff out in suburbia where aimlessness

just may be converted into new fans and generate some sparx of enthusiasm from the hoards of boreds who listen to dying d.j.s on the FM dials."
55

David Thomas, who along with Peter Laughner founded Cleveland's Rocket from the Tombs, puts the allure poetically:

We were into this Urban Pioneer thing, which was a bunch of kids born in the suburbs to middle-class families, moving back into the city, because they thought the city should live. The city I loved everybody else hated: it was totally deserted, people fled when the sun went down. It was run down, but we thought it was beautiful at the time of youth when you're prone to romanticism.

I wondered at what point a civilization hits its peak and then begins to decline. All those deserted cities, the jungle overgrows them: at what point does the city die? At what point do the people who live there no longer understand the vision of the builders?
56

As noted earlier, the "deserted city," whether by planners' design, economic blight, or racial tension, gives rise in this case to inspiration. An inspiration not to those left in it, but to those raised outside it: suburban kids who saw it as a beautiful, romantic thing.

Crisis and disintegration often lead to rejuvenated cultural forms, and this is certainly true of early and mid-1970s popular culture. The punk movement—and the Ramones in

particular—drew upon and made their own an eccentric mix of pop culture references ranging from *Mad* magazine to Roger Corman. Indeed, *Punk*
magazine editor John Holstrom had studied with Harvey Kurtzman, founder of *Mad.* Legs McNeil, who was also involved in the publication and who in fact gave it its name, became the resident punk: "So it was decided I would be a living cartoon character, like Alfred E. Neuman was to *Mad* magazine."
[57]

Unlike the serious prog-rock and concept albums of the era that distanced themselves from the mundane triviality of popular culture, *Ramones* is laced with references to movies, news events, history, and the ordinary happenings of everyday life. As Donna Gaines has noted, "the Ramones' songwriting reflects their obsession with popular culture and Americana. Johnny and Dee Dee were war-movie fiends, and the whole band loved television, surf culture, comic books, and cartoons."
[58] The filmic world evoked on *Ramones* is one of B-movies, cult movies, and horror films. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was released in 1974, the year many of the album's songs were written. Film scholar Robin Wood has written that "central to the film—and centered on its monstrous family—is the sense of grotesque comedy, which in no way diminishes but rather intensifies its nightmare horror. ... The film's sense of fundamental horror is closely allied to a sense of the fundamentally absurd."
[59] This sense of comic-horror infuses the album's fifth track, "Chainsaw," a sort of homage to the film. This was also the era of the vigilante film, most forcefully

expressed in *Straw Dogs* (1971) and *Death Wish* (1974), in which Charles Bronson plays a tolerant New York City architect who turns to vigilantism after his wife is murdered. Mixed with the album's humor is a deeper menace and sense of pervasive violence running through songs like "Beat on the Brat" and "Loudmouth" ("I'm gonna beat you up") that is reminiscent of films like *Death Wish* and that in fact constitutes a wholesale rejection of the feel good, peace-love-and-understanding ethos that informed the rhetoric of the counterculture. For if in 1969 audiences were expected to see the violence of *Easy Rider* as tragedy visited upon well-meaning (if not innocent) drifters, by 1974 films like *Death Wish* pretty much had audiences rooting for those committing the violence.

Like the emerging punk scene itself, films in the mid-1970s were a heady mix of high and low, art and trash, domestic and foreign. Ads from an August 1975 issue of the *Village Voice* (during a time when the Ramones were playing at CBGB) offer a glimpse of the variety of films playing in New York City. At the Bleeker Street Cinema, you could see Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* and *Wild Strawberries,* Fellini's *Roma,* Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps,* and Satyajit Ray's *Two Daughters*. *The Eiger Sanction* was playing (for only $1.00) at St. Mark's Cinema, while a theater on Broadway at 49th showed *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre.* The Elgin, meanwhile,
offered Mickjagger in *Performance,* Jonathan Demme's *Caged Heat,* as well as *Don't Look Now, El Topo,* and *The Harder They Come.* Or you could catch Russ Meyer's *SuperVixens,* rated X (in the mid-1970s, X-rated movies were advertised alongside "family" movies in both underground and mainstream newspapers in New York City, including the

New York Times). The blurb for *SuperVixens* might just as well have come out of the punk imagination:

an all out assault on today's sexual mores, and more, a frontal attack against women's lib ... blasting through the male "machismo" syndrome, kicking the hell out of convention, hang-ups, convictions, obsessions! The whole bag. . . cops, robbers, sexually aggressive females, rednecks, sick men-of-war, unfaithful wives, impotence, athletic prowess, the 32-second satisfaction, cuckolding, breast fixation vs. hat jobs, egotism and other fun 'n games, racing cars, self-abuse ... and even death and reincarnation!

And of course PG-rated *Jaws* ("8th Record Week!") was playing just about everywhere, with its own image of a huge shark about to munch a practically nude female swimmer.

The most punk moment in any movie from that era has nothing at all to do with punk rock or punk style. About midway through Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*—which opened in 1976, just months before *Ramones* was released, and which was shot in the summer of 1975—Travis Bickle (Robert DeNiro) sits in his New York apartment watching *American Bandstand* on his crappy TV. Scorsese cuts between kids slow dancing to Jackson Browne's "Late for the Sky" and Travis watching in a kind of resigned numbness ("sitting here with nuthin' to do") as if the "normal" world being depicted on TV were utterly and forever out of reach for him. He has a gun in his hand, which he occasionally aims and the screen. Later, in a startling shot, we see a transformed Travis standing outside at the edge of a crowd listening to a hackneyed speech by a politician. Travis has changed: he is sporting a Mohawk (punk?) haircut that

signals his radical rejection of the "normal" world depicted on *American Bandstand.* While the film escalates into increasing and frenzied violence at this point, I think it is the few quiet moments where we see Travis watching the TV with a sort of deep and menacing sadness that best capture the spirit of loneliness that punk emerges from and addresses.

In *Midnight Movies,* J. Hoberman wrote that seen "strictly as a youth movement, punk was a kind of perverse, high-speed replay of the counterculture—complete with its own music, press, entrepreneurs, fellow travelers (including more than a few ex-hippies), and, ultimately, movies."
60 Punk films from this era include John Waters's *Pink Flamingos* (1973) and *Female*
Trouble (1975), Derek Jarman' *jubilee*(1977), and Amos Poe's *Blank Generation* (1976) and *The Foreigner* (1977). However, while these and other films are no doubt central to the articulation of a punk sensibility, it is another film, David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1977), which, like *Taxi Driver,* captures the sense of outsiderness that informs punk. In *Eraserhead,* Henry (Jack Nance) is the ultimate outsider, existing in a world so degraded that it's simply beautiful. He is practically inarticulate, defining himself though his actions, not his words. And that electroshock hair is as alarming as anything worn by Richard Hell or Sid Vicious. Above all, *Eraserhead* offers the illusion of a complete and separate world; like punk, its influences can (and have been) traced and demystified in dry studies of influence, and yet there is something about *Eraserhead,* and about punk, that manages to escape the most determined efforts to explain away its mystery.

And although it is beyond the scope of this book, it is also worth noting that from the very beginning, do-it-yourself "punk" cinema was an important part of the emerging punk music scene. Filmmakers like Amos Poe, who was also a writer for the *New York Rocker,* helped define the punk aesthetic in film and often wrote for or were featured in the music newspapers and fanzines that emerged in New York City in the mid-1970s. In
a 1976 profile on Poe in *New York Rocker,* Matthew Fleury, in his discussion of Poe's films *Night Lunch* (1975) and *Blank Generation* (1976), called Poe's work "presence filmmaking" and noted that Poe considered the Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination "the greatest single footage ever shot" because it captured, unintentionally, history.

Earlier I wrote that *Ramones* was either the last great modern record or the first great postmodern one. The more you listen to it, the more you realize: of course it's the first great postmodern one, and that's largely because it tunes in on the sound and the hum of our era. It gives shape and form to the low, almost imperceptible "oceanic sound" that Don DeLillo writes about in his novel *White Noise* (1985). The message the album conveys is, finally, noise. If the album can be said to be "about" anything, then it is about noise. That's why standard rock-crit discussions of the lyrics or the personalities of the band members are ultimately dead ends. Of course it would seem that all rock albums are about noise, but many are not, not in the least because they regard noise as a given. But, like a Jean-Luc Godard film from the 1960s, *Ramones* incessantly interrogates the formulation of its own sound. When Simon Frith wrote that "punk queried the 'naturalness' of musical language,"

61 I think this is what he was getting at: punk is as much a theory of music as it is music.

It has become commonplace to suggest that punk music was authentic and pure and somehow directly opposed to the tainted sellout status that widespread acceptance brings. In his excellent book *Subculture,* Dick Hebdige, writing about punk, notes, "as soon as the original innovations which signify 'subculture' are translated into commodities and made generally available, they become 'frozen.' Once removed from their private contexts by the small entrepreneurs and big fashion interests who produce them on a mass scale, they become codified, made comprehensible, rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise."
62 More recently, Stacy Thompson has suggested that one of punk's fundamental desires is "the desire to resist the commercial realm, and especially commercial music."
63 Yet what does it really mean to claim this about punk, especially in its mid-1970s incarnation? The Ramones were not rebelling against popular music, but rather against how popular music had come to be defined and experienced. If today we tend to think in terms of selling out versus not selling out, we need to be careful not to project these concerns backwards to the 1970s. For there was less worry about "selling out" to the mainstream than there was desire to replace mainstream music with something better, something more alive, something unexpected. The Ramones, in particular, desired a hit; after all, they believed in and were passionate about
their music, and they wanted to share it with others beyond the cramped space of CBGB. As Seymour Stein, the co-founder of Sire records who signed Ramones to Sire in 1975, has said, "their melodies were very catchy and stayed

with me, dancing around in my head, and it was absolutely clear that for better or worse, underneath it all was a pop-band mentality."
64 Others, such as Craig Leon, who produced *Ramones,* share this view: "Quite honestly, we thought we were creating a hit pop record. The Bay City Rollers, Herman's Hermits, and the Beatles were our competition in our minds. But do bear in mind we were laughing all the way through it."
65

Casting the Ramones and other bands as anti-corporate and anti-mainstream means that you have to ignore the tremendous amount of care and energy that went into promoting themselves. The Ramones, in particular, were very much aware of the press and publicity they were generating, and were active participants in shaping their image and generating further press interest, as this 1977 interview from the *New York Rocker* suggests:

What was the turning point?
Dee Dee: That festival [the 1975 summer Rock Festival at CBGB].
Tommy: The turning point was ... when Lisa Robinson came down... actually we got some nice writeups from some people and we sent them out to the people in the trades, with a little picture of us.

Johnny: I think we had a list of 100 people and we hit everybody.
Did you lick the envelopes yourselves?
Tommy: Yeah, addressed them and everything.
66

This form of do-it-yourself publicity, while much different in scale than the massive promotional engines that sustained supergroups like Led Zeppelin and the Eagles, was nonetheless driven by a desire to reach a broad audience. Rather than look at their success as something to be ashamed of, or as some sort of sellout, the Ramones remained keenly aware that, as one of the earliest punk bands to sign to a label, they were in many ways responsible for the potential success and viability of the emerging punk scene. "We were the first CBGB-punk-type group to get signed," Tommy noted, "and that was important because I think we opened up the doors."
67 While punk in the 80s and 90s very much cast itself in opposition to mainstream, corporate interests, and while recent writing on punk (often by academics) casts punk as a sort of Marxist music for the people and by the people, it's instructive to remember that in its early days, many punk bands desired and actively courted mainstream success.

And yet, despite the melodic, pop-oriented sensibility that characterized early punk and the Ramones' first album in particular, there is something—other than the obviously raw sound—that assured punk's marginality.
Please, dear reader, don't cast down this book when I remind you of the ironic dimension to the Ramones. Irony is a notoriously slippery word, often used as shorthand for insincerity, or intellectual aloofness, or postmodern cynicism. Rest assured, I use it in none of these senses. Instead, I'm using irony in a broader sense to suggest that one of the defining features of punk was its awareness of itself as punk. This does not mean it was insincere, any more than I would suggest you were insincere for dressing a little nicer than usual to meet someone you liked. Now, the Ramones have been called ironic before, but often in a dismissive way, as

when Greil Marcus writes that “much has been made of punk’s antecedents in ... the arty, ironic New York scene that emerged in 1974—especially as exemplified by the Ramones. ‘Beat on the brat / with a baseball bat’—what could be more punk than that?”
[68]

I think Marcus gives the band too much credit, and not enough. Certainly the Ramones did emerge from the New York scene that included Andy Warhol, Lou Reed, Patti Smith, and others whose work could be characterized as highly self-conscious. As Craig Leon notes, “the Ramones were much more part of the NY underground ‘art’ scene of The Velvets and Warhol & co. They had much more in common with bands like Television and Patti Smith’s group than the Sex Pistols and other so-called punk bands.”
[69] And yet the immediacy
and rawness in their performance and recorded music discredits the claim that they were more self-consciously artistic. Watching an early video of the band tearing, with determined fury, through a twenty-minute set in a television studio with no audience, it’s hard to see the irony anywhere. And yet... can punk—and its glam-rock predecessors—be completely separated from the sort of camp sensibility that Susan Sontag described as “camp.” “Camp is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world. It incarnates a victory of ‘style’ over ‘content,’ ‘aesthetics’ over ‘morality,’ of irony over tragedy.”
[70] Camp combats “the threat of boredom. The relation between boredom and Camp taste cannot be overestimated. Camp taste is by its nature possible only in affluent societies, in societies or circles capable of experiencing the psychopathology of affluence.”

71 In a discussion with Sontag in 1978, Richard Hell told her, "the generation I belong to has more in common among its members than any other generation that ever existed because of television and public school systems."
72 An album like *Ramones* is both an acknowledgment and a fierce rejection of this sentiment: saturated in pop culture, the album nonetheless rejects again and again easy connections to its influences and sources, which remain locked tightly in its self-contained songs.

Questions about whether or not punk was ironic are not merely academic questions put to punk thirty years later, but in fact constituted the tension and contradictions typical of the scene. Early accounts of the Ramones and other underground or punk bands raised the same questions. A 1976 issue of *New York Rocker* noted that the "Ramones hit hard, but when all the smoke and fury have subsided, one may recognize that despite the overwhelming amplification, the group is operating through the most basic devices of irony and understatement."
73 In that same issue, in the essay "The Clothes Nose: Sniffing Out NY Rock Dress Sense," Robert Swift says this of the Ramones: "Pretty calculated, but they'll probably say they have no money. Rounded haircuts—Beatles / Standells / kid's cereal commercials, and a singer with a kink in neck. Clothes are worn out levis, tee shirts, scuffed shoes or sneakers, sneers, and shades. A sort of Momma's boy punk. All in all done to perfection, and ultimately it looks unforced."
74 If not ironic, this hyper-awareness of style, as both legitimate and as camp, is one of the major differences between punk and progressive rock, for whom style was, even at its most theatrically excessive, unreflective. In this sense,

punk's indebtedness to glam rock is crucial, for while the Ramones are remembered as being almost anti-style in their unchanging uniform, they were heavily
influenced by glam rock. According to Dee Dee Ramone:

Joey had a band called Sniper [prior to the Ramones]. He was trying to break into the New York "glam" circuit that was happening around then. ...

The glitter took a lot of upkeep and the gear was expensive. We would get custom-made snakeskin boots sent from England via Granny Takes a Trip in New York. Johnny Thunders and Tommy Ramone both went to London to get the right stuff to be the top flashmen about town. Johnny Ramone had an exact replica of the James Williamson outfit with the leopard collar that James wore in the Stooges' *Raw Power* stage. John also had silver lame pants from Granny Takes a Trip that he wore for the first few Ramones gigs.
75

If the Ramones rejected the continual reinvention of style in their own formulation of style (just as their music rejected updating and modification), then this was not out of an ignorance or rejection of style, but rather out of an understanding that minimalism (no make-up, no costume changes, no glitter, etc.) could quite possibly form the basis of a new style.

The album does make you wonder, though, how seriously you should be taking this. The punk generation grew up not only with TV, but with cable, and with all the repetition ("reruns"), irony, and camp that the medium engendered. As Robert Ray has noted, the "new

self-consciousness also flourished on television, where ‘Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In’ (1968–73), ‘The Carol Burnett Show’ (1967–1978), and NBC’s ‘Saturday Night Live’ (1975-) all featured irreverent media parodies, particularly of movies and TV news. Other regular series could not be taken straight: ‘All in the Family’ (1971–79), ‘The Rockford Files’ (1974–1979), ‘Happy Days’ (1974–1984), ‘Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman’ (1976), and ‘Soap’ (1977–1981) all traded on obviously ironic uses of standard television formulas.”

76 The beautifully complicating thing here is not that *Ramones* offered itself as an ironic rock album, but that it might be received that way by an audience raised in a TV culture that always questioned the codes of sincerity. Or, looked at another way, punk irony was gradually evolving into the new norm, replacing the macho sincerity and you-better-take-this-concept-album-seriously of progressive rock, which would help explain punk’s delayed acceptance into the mainstream and its late-blossoming stature: it came at the very beginning of a decades-long process of incorporating irony into the mainstream, in which a show like “Late Night with David Letterman” was key. In 1976, *Ramones* sounded both very wrong and very right. Today it just sounds very right, not because the music on the album has changed but because the conditions into which that music enters have. Listeners coming to *Ramones* for the
first time today are conditioned to accept it because they have heard it before—perhaps without knowing it—in the very music that the Ramones helped to create. In this sense, the Ramones’ career is about creating the conditions under which their music would be retrospectively accepted. As Jon Savage has suggested in his study of British punk: “In the mid-1960s, pop had been modernistic: reveling in an everlasting present,

without reflection or theory. In the late 1960s, pop became 'progressive,' an idea implying some forward, unitary motion. Early seventies stars like David Bowie and Roxy Music broke up this linear motion with a plethora of references taken from high art, literature and Hollywood kitsch. As the new generation, the Sex Pistols were a finely tuned mixture of the authentic and the constructed."
77

Besides, isn't all performance, whether writing, acting, singing, dancing, or whatever, self-conscious by its very nature? Perhaps, but punk was predicated on a deliberate assault on the elaborate, over-produced, self-serious music of the era, and it is this reactionary nature that imbued punk with a complicated ironic stance. In short, unlike the music of its day, which sought to extend a tradition (i.e., Led Zeppelin or Eric Clapton "extending" the blues), punk sought to reject tradition. For even though it's true the music of the Ramones points back to an earlier time, as Craig Leon and others have noted, this earlier music is referenced not so much for its sound or style, but rather for its energy. While it's pretty easy to hear the blues in Zeppelin's "Dazed and Confused," it's not so easy to hear Herman's Hermits in "Loudmouth." It's harder to think of another rock album that, upon is initial appearance, sounded so little like anything that had come before it.

Is it surprising that a movement like punk—with its rejection of the musical indulgence and decadence of progressive rock—would embrace the iconography of fascism, which also rejected "decadence"? I suppose now is as good a time as any to say that I think people who have written about punk have by and large tended to go to great lengths to dismiss,

underplay, minimize, and even ignore the fascist iconography in the punk scene.
78 Dick Hebdige has argued that the use of the swastika, for instance, cannot be read as a political sign, and that, indeed, most punks "were not generally sympathetic to the parties of the extreme right." He goes on to say, "the swastika was worn because it was guaranteed to shock."
79 Stacy Thompson, meanwhile, argues Nazi codes, as used by punks, drew attention to unequal economic relations under the capitalist system.
80

Mary Harron comes closest to best explaining the use of fascist imagery in punk and by the Ramones in particular. "Joey Ramone was a nice guy, he was no savage right-winger," she has said. "The Ramones were
problematic. It was hard to work out what their politics were. It had this difficult edge, but the most important thing was needling the older generation."
81 If liberal humanist rock critics and scholars today are wary of dwelling on the conservative, sometimes reactionary political dimensions of punk (Johnny Ramone was a longtime conservative), while at the same time devoting page after page to delineating the socially-engaged political subtleties of Bob Dylan or Bruce Springsteen or Ani DeFranco, then it's at the risk of minimizing one of the many complexities of punk. Joe Harrington has suggested that these flirtations with fascist sentiments and iconography were the result of the "politics of boredom," noting that "we'd reached the stage where young people who could afford the luxury of playing Rock 'n' Roll strictly for the amusement of it had grown so blase that they literally wanted to see the world disintegrate for their own amusement. Far from being anti-war like the hippies, the new

kids welcomed carnage of any kind as a kind of liberation from their dull shopping mall surroundings. “
82

Dear reader, please permit me one anecdote here. The first Ramones song I remember hearing was “The KKK Took My Baby Away,” from 1981’s *Pleasant Dreams.* I had found the album in my girlfriend’s record collection (was she my girlfriend or was I just hanging around with her one summer?) and I thought it was a
funny and scary song at the same time, and of all the post-1977 Ramones music, that’s the song that still reminds me the most of their earlier records. I borrowed the album, played it a lot, and wondered: How could they get away with using the KKK like that in a song? Why wasn’t there a controversy or something? It wasn’t that the lyrics of the song were racist; in fact, the narrator was obviously dating an African American girl, and I assumed he was white, and therefore not racist. But it wasn’t that, it was those letters: KKK. Not that I was Mr. Sensitive, or anything, but those letters—like the symbol of the swastika—they just weren’t things you casually used in pop songs.

The sense of disequilibrium and unease that’s generated by moments like this is perhaps something that we ought to preserve, rather than justify or explain away, which is why arguments that punk (or the Ramones) used Nazi imagery or references for mere shock value, or to draw attention to their outsider status, seem lame. On their first album, the Nazi references (and other references to violence) might be ironic, or they might not be. Their power resides in precisely this ambiguity. In this regard, the Ramones were part of a larger movement in the United States that was producing what film

critic Robin Wood refers to as "incoherent texts." Wood doesn't use the word incoherent to indicate a disparagement, but rather to refer to movies, primarily from
the 1970s, that reflect the social, moral, and political instability of the era. As Woods says: "I am concerned with films that don't wish to be ... incoherent but are so nonetheless, works in which the drive toward the ordering of experience has been visibly defeated."
83 For Wood, films like *Taxi Driver* and *Looking for Mr. Good-bar* cannot provide easy endings or clear-cut heroes and anti-heroes, not because they are bad or poorly made films, but rather because they are products and commentators on the crisis of confidence that characterized mid-1970s America. The unresolved contradictions that make the Ramones' first album so dizzying—are the songs sincere or ironic? are the fascist references political or naïve expressions of defiance? if the Ramones hate hippies, why do they look like hippies with their long hair?—speak to a moment in American history when such ambiguity was part of the larger fabric of cultural life.

I don't believe that one should devote one's life to morbid self-attention. I believe that someone should be a person like other people.

—Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*

The plane rose and the camera went on. The girlfriend and I talked. The drinks arrived. I had poetry, and a fine woman. Life was picking up. But the traps, Chinaski, watch the traps. You fought a long fight to put the word down the way you wanted. Don't let a little adulation and a movie camera pull you out of position. Remember what Jeffers said—even the

strongest men can be trapped, like God when he once walked on earth.

—Charles Bukowski, *South of No North*
84

Society appeared to be in a state of advanced disintegration, yet there was no serious possibility of the emergence of a coherent and comprehensive alternative.

—Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*
85

Ramones in Their Time

Details of the trajectory that led the Ramones from the underground scene to a record contract have been well documented; I'll briefly touch on them here. In early 1975, Lisa Robinson, who edited *Hit Parader* and *Rock Scene* magazines, saw them at CBGB and began championing them in her magazines. As Joey Ramone recalls: "Lisa came down to see us, she was blown away by us. She said that we changed her life. She started writing about us in *Rock Scene,* and then Lenny Kaye would write about us and we started getting more press like the *Village Voice,* word was getting out, and people started coming down."
86 Robinson also convinced Danny Fields, who had managed the Stooges and was
an influential person on the New York music scene, to see the band; he would eventually end up managing them beginning in November 1975. According to Fields the "Ramones had everything I ever liked. The songs were short. You knew what was happening within five seconds. You didn't have to analyze and/or determine what it was you were hearing or seeing. It was all there."
87

The Ramones received further exposure, this time on a more national scope, after the CBGB 1975 summer festival of unsigned bands. As Tommy has noted the "turning point was when Hilly decided to publicize the place [CBGB] by having the Summer of Rock Festival in '75. It got a lot of publicity and after that the place was always packed. This was the Bowery, and nobody went to the Bowery, so it was a big deal."
88 On September 19, the band made a demo of "Judy Is a Punk" and "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend," both produced by

Marty Thau, who had previously managed the New York Dolls. Craig Leon, who had arrived in New York in 1973 to work for Sire Records and who was on the prowl for new talent, had seen them perform shortly after the summer festival, and was enthusiastic, eventually bringing the Thau demos to the attention of his boss Seymour Stein, who was president of Sire Records. According to Tommy Ramone, "Craig Leon is the one who got us signed. Singlehanded. He brought down the
vice president and all these people—he's the only hip one at the company. He risked his career to get us on the label."
89 Stein's wife, Linda Stein, also played a crucial role in convincing her husband to sign the band. The Ramones auditioned for Seymour in the late fall of 1975; they signed with Sire in January 1976. According to Johnny, "our advance was $20,000 to do the album and buy equipment."
90

It's always tricky to claim that rock and roll is great art, in part because, at its best, rock and roll promises an escape from the tyranny of all attempts to force hierarchies on human experience. In her classic 1969 essay "Trash, Art, and the Movies," Pauline Kael wrote of "trash" films that when "you clean them up, when you make movies respectable, you kill them. The well-spring of their *art,* their greatness, is in not being respectable."
91 While it could be said that punk fought long and hard against respectability, there is no denying that the early to mid-1970s New York scene from which it emerged was a heady mix of artists, filmmakers, writers, and performers. It's almost inconceivable today to imagine a contemporary music scene as peopled with artists, writers, and filmmakers as the early punk movement was, with people like Andy Warhol,

William S. Burroughs, Patti Smith, Mary Harron, Arturo Vega, Amos Poe, Gerard Malanga, and others all part of the scene. As Dick Hebdige has noted, "the New York punk bands had pieced together from a variety of acknowledged 'artistic' sources—from the literary avant-garde and the underground cinema—a self-consciously profane and terminal aesthetic."
92

This isn't to suggest a calculated effort, at least not by the Ramones, to draw on artistic sources, but rather that part of what made the band great was its emergence from a vibrant New York movement in which distinctions between pop culture and art were blurred. A friend of mine always likes to point out that British punk was more "authentic" than American because it came from the working class, as opposed to the suburbs. But leaving aside the problems of this distinction (claims of authenticity are always tricky and a little condescending) what I think he misses in that view is that it was the very *impurity* of punk—its mixing of suburban and downtown, of high art and "stoopid," of camp and sincerity, of humor and violence—that made it so radical. Arguments about purity or authenticity of punk inevitably end up excluding the messy, impure, hybrid qualities that keep it sounding fresh thirty years later.

Indeed, prior to his involvement in the band, Tommy Ramone had even made avant-garde films: "I was [getting] into film-making. I guess I was jumping around. I went to work for this film company. I was hanging around the Museum of Modern Art 'cause the company was right next to the Museum. I would take three-hour

lunch breaks and watch all the movies there and I got into avant-garde films. I started making some stuff like that."
93 The Pop Art movement of the 1950s and 60s—of which Andy Warhol was the American Giant—had already smashed distinctions between "high" and "low" culture; by the 1970s it wasn't that what punk was doing by mixing styles was new, rather that they had re-infused the process with a sense of fun and danger.

According to Craig Leon, most of the work with the band was completed in seven days: "It took just three days to get the music down, four for the vocals."
94 In the era of bloated, super group excess, $6,400 was a paltry amount of money. "Some albums were costing a half-million dollars to make," Joey noted, "and taking two or three years to record, like Fleetwood Mac . . . "
95 At first, the process sounds like the ultimate do-it-yourself, amateur, reckless ethic that is associated with punk. In truth, however, the Ramones approached the recording process with a high degree of preparedness and professionalism and a fiercely self-contained, unified sound. But this had not always been the case. In July 1974 Tommy became the Ramones' drummer, and the band's sound underwent a change: "To them it was just a hobby," he told *Punk* in 1976, "to me it was an avant-garde thing. Then we started getting really good and I said, 'This isn't avant-garde, this is commercial!' And that's when I started playing drums. When I saw the
$signs$ ... [we] changed the whole sound of the group into the way it is now—you know—hard rock."
96

Near the end of 1974, the band recorded fifteen demos in one day. These were "just basic tracks and vocals and mixes of most of the songs that made up their first album."
97 In September 1975 they cut the two Marty Thau demos ("Judy Is a Punk" and "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend"). The sound on the Thau demos is somewhat richer and warmer than on the other demos, and it hints at a more pop-oriented, melodic sensibility that shows how, with a slightly different approach, the Ramones' sound could be less assaultive.

Although the band wanted to suggest the intensity of their live performances, the album was in no way intended to be "live." As Craig Leon notes, "capturing the energy of the live shows was quite important. But if you jump to the conclusion that the sound of the recording was just the sound of the band live you would be mistaken even though that was what I was trying to convey. The album is quite layered and structured and took full advantage of the studio technology of its time without being obvious."
98 This tension—how to transfer the spirit of live performance without simply replicating it—was something that haunted punk, and in some ways worked against it. For if progressive, virtuoso rock encouraged deep, repeat listenings and a cultivated appreciation
for complexity, punk assaulted the listener in a way that almost begged for a live audience. One of the reasons punk did not move gently into the mainstream or receive more radio play was precisely because it was always about more than the music on the album: it was a stance, an attitude, that was difficult to transfer to vinyl.

Yet the band, and Craig Leon, were determined to create a live feel to the album. "I actually toyed with the idea," says

Leon, "of the recording being one long band with no breaks" in a way that would capture the no-break-between-songs live performances. There are hints of this at the end of the album's second side, where "I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You" is followed by "Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World" with no break. There were other experiments that didn't happen, either, according to Leon: "[T]here was a quadraphonic version that I played around with doing. I did a lot of quad encoded work in those days and almost did the Ramones album that way."
99 By the time they went into the studio to record, the Ramones had developed an archive of songs and had honed their sound before audiences at numerous shows. "We had the songs for the first three albums when we did the first one," Johnny has said. "We already had 30 to 35 songs, and we recorded them in the chronological order that we
wrote them. I didn't want the second album to be a letdown by picking through the best songs for the first one and using the lesser songs for the second album."
100

Before considering details of the album's production, it's worth noting how difficult it was—then, as now—for a good band to make the transition from live act to meaningful recorded presence. Indeed, the pages of the underground music press in New York City in the mid-1970s are full of ads and enthusiastic write-ups for enormously popular punk bands at the club level that subsequently failed to transfer that spirit to vinyl. In "The State of Pop Music in New York: A Symposium" from the *Village Voice,* musician and record producer Tony Silvester noted that the "reason a lot of great acts don't happen on records is because they don't feel that tension that they feel live—9 out of 10 times on a record they

try to duplicate the club scene and it doesn't happen." What's missing, Silvester claimed, is "simplicity from the standpoint of production."
101

Here is Craig Leon addressing the album's production:

The album was recorded purely. Nothing covered up. The same way that you would record a classical or jazz work. We use the same mic placement techniques on the London Symphony Orchestra or the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra today that we used on the Ramones in 1976. These techniques are the same as
what you would have gotten on classical or jazz recordings or for that matter good pop recordings in 1956. The sound of the music in the room. Minimal effects other than those created naturally. But it was not "cinema verité" all live and raw.

We did a lot of overdubbing and double-tracked vocals, going for a bizarre emulation of the recording values of "A Hard Day's Night." The stereo image was inspired by that as well. Due to the limitations of 4 track recording in the 60s the image on the old Beatles records in stereo used to have the entire backing track on the left and vocals and tambourine overdubs or whatever on the right. This is not so evident on the US releases but very clear on the UK versions. This fit the three-piece sound of the Ramones perfectly. There was a conventional mix of the recording but it wasn't as effective. Also, a mono mix. Some of those tracks surfaced on singles. The mono version is quite powerful.

We also did the recording quickly. Mainly because of budget restrictions ... but also because that was all the time we

needed. I think that getting a performance down on a recorded medium quickly helps duplicate the sense of being in the room when it was being made.
[102]

The important thing was to resist complicating the simplicity of approach that characterized the Ramones' sound. As Tommy (who co-produced the album) has noted: "What we had was an idea that it's not the virtuosity that counts, it's the ideas themselves that are important ... virtuosity is not only not necessary, but it
might get in the way."
[103] And yet for all the talk of amateurism, the early punk bands—and the Ramones especially—were hard working and serious about the music, honing their skills in relentless gigging. The fast, easy sound was the product of hard work; even a brief glance at their tour dates leading up to the first album reveals this nonstop touring—mostly gigs at CBGB and the Performance Studio—that would characterize their career. Unlike the Sex Pistols, who in interviews were likely to laugh off questions about musical influences, technique, etc., the Ramones talked seriously about the ideas beneath their music. "In retrospect," Tommy noted, "it's a great lo-fi album, almost avant-garde. It captured our music at that time."
[104]

Ramones was released on Sire Records on April 23, 1976; the top-selling albums from that month were:

1. *Eagles: Their Greatest Hits 1971–1975*— Eagles

2. *Frampton Comes Alive!*—Peter Frampton

3. *A Night at the Opera*—Queen

4. *Thoroughbred*—Carole King

5. *Wings at the Speed of Sound*—Wings

6. *Run with the Pack*—Bad Company

7. *Desire*—Bob Dylan

8. *Eargasm*—Johnnie Taylor

9. *The Dream Weaver*—Gary Wright

10. *Presence*—Led Zeppelin
105

Perhaps, in 1976, you listened to *Ramones* while holding its slipcase in your hand, and you thought about how the picture of the band on the front filled up the entire space, and how the photo and everything else was in black and white in a way that seemed to you anti-psychedelic; and other little things, like how Johnny's middle finger is there, casually flipping you the birdie (does this matter, you wonder), and how he's wearing what appear to be slip-on loafers (you wonder about this, too), and how unbelievably skinny Joey is, and how his hand looks almost fake, like a plastic hand, and how you can't believe that anyone would actually think they were brothers. If you turned the album over, you might read that someone named Roberta Bayley had taken the cover photograph, but unless you picked up a copy of *Punk* #3, published the same month the album was released, you wouldn't see the outtakes from the photo shoot that resulted in the cover, outtakes that

showed the band smiling, and even laughing: you would not see that in one photograph the graffiti on the wall behind them showed a drawing of an axe with the word HACK written beside it. You would not know that Sire Records paid Roberta Bayley $125 for that cover photo, or that the photo of the eagle belt buckle on the back was taken in a photo booth by the artist Arturo Vega, in whose loft Dee Dee and Joey lived in 1975 and 1976, and where the Ramones had signed their contract with Sire
Records, or that many years later, Dee Dee would say of Arturo that he "saw punk as some sort of brand new canvas to splash paint on."
106

When I sat down to write about the album's opening song, "Blitzkrieg Bop," my first line was "this is the best opening song to any rock album." Then I decided that sounded too creepily fanatic and more than a little disingenuous, since I haven't heard every rock album ever made, and I took it out. But then I went downstairs to the turntable and played it and midway through ran back upstairs and put the line back in even before the screensaver clicked in. Here's why: "Blitzkrieg Bop" succeeds not only as a song in its own right, but also as a promise kept. The songs that follow live up to the speed, humor, menace, absurdity, and mystery of that first song, whose opening lines "hey ho, let's go" offer not so much a warning as an invitation to the listener, an invitation and a threat that the song isn't a fluke or a one-off, but that it sets the stage for an entire album that would be fast and loud. As perhaps the most recognizable punk anthem, the song's relationship to the Bay City Rollers signals the deeply pop sensibility that was a driving force behind the album. As Johnny Ramone told *Goldmine,* "I think we wanted to be a

bubblegum group. At one point, the Bay City Rollers were becoming popular. They had written 'Saturday Night' and we then sat down and said, 'We have to write a song with a chant in it, like they have.'"
107 Later, Joey Ramone would say that "Blitzkrieg Bop was sort of a call to arms ... for everyone to start their own bands."
108

The song opens in full force. No vocals, just guitars and drums for twenty seconds. At the twenty-second mark, the guitars drop away, followed at the twenty-two-second mark with the first words, accompanied only by drum: "Hey ho, let's go," repeated once. Then it gradually rebuilds itself, adding a bass line the third time around at the twenty-eight-second mark, and finally in full force again for the fourth repetition at the thirty-second mark. And there, in half a minute, is the blueprint for a new sound and a new era.

They're forming in a straight line

They're going through a tight wind.

One of the great things about this song is that it's "they" and not "we"—for a song that's iconically associated with punk defiance, it's interesting that the point of view of the song is almost adult-like:

The kids are losing their minds. . .

What they want, I don't know

They're all revved up and ready to go.

Are these songs ironic or sincere? This ambiguity adds another alluring quality to the song.

Hearing the Ramones for the first time was like hearing something strangely familiar, even though you had never heard it before: although you didn't know it, this was the sound you were waiting for. In fact, it was almost too good to be true: Would you like it as much when you heard it again? What if you grew tired of it? What if the sound was a sort of accident, never to be repeated? I suspect that some of us deliberately tried not to become the sort of fan who wanted to know everything about the group in order to try to preserve the initial mystery and surprise upon first hearing the music. Indeed, for those of us who entertained a romantic view of the punk, bohemian life in New York, the illusion is positively threatened the more we learned about the details, the drugs, the pettiness. There is something to be said about learning as little as possible about that which you deeply love.

This is another area where arguments about authenticity and purity fall apart: what's great about "punk" isn't that it is true amateur music of the streets, or that it is genuinely anti-corporate, etc., but rather that it works because it is really not any of these things, any more than a classic Godard film is a "true" reflection of Paris street life in the early sixties. Punk is a vision of the way we want to see the world, not the way it really is, and this conflict is one of the things that make it so powerful, and that makes arguments about what
is "true" punk and what is not so elitist. And that's why it shatters distinctions between pop and art. It is art because it transports us somewhere else, outside of ourselves. The kid living comfortably in the suburbs outside of Toledo, Ohio, or the runaway who listens to the Ramones on a bus

somewhere—neither owns or is more entitled to the sound than the other. Does anyone have a monopoly on alienation, or loneliness, or frustration?

For what it's worth (and it must be worth something) "Beat on the Brat" is the only song on the album that's not sung in the first-person; the lyrics of each of the other songs are sung as "I" or "we." This seemingly trivial fact of narrative theory helps explain part of the unease of this song, transposing its literal violence into a violence of telling, as well. Joey has said that the idea for the song emerged when he "lived in Birchwood Towers in Forest Hills with my mom and brother. It was a middle-class neighborhood, with a lot of rich, snooty women, who had horrible spoiled brat kids. There was a playground with women sitting around and a kid screaming, a spoiled, horrible kid just running rampant with no discipline whatsoever. The kind of kid you just want to kill. You know, 'beat on the brat with a baseball bat' just came out. I just wanted to kill him."
109

This story of the song's origin and meaning illustrates the danger of relying on a song's author to explain its meaning. This objection is, of course, an old concept:
it was the New Critics of the 1950s and 60s who warned of the intentional fallacy, whereby readers of literary texts make the mistake of assuming that a correct interpretation of a text could best be found by determining the intention of the author. Instead, the New Critics argued, authorial intention can never be known: perhaps the author is lying when she explains the intention behind her text, or perhaps she has forgotten or misremembered her original intention, or perhaps

the text expresses subconscious drives and desires beyond the strict control of her intention.

Does it help to know Joey's supposed intention in writing "Beat on the Brat"?

Or, on the contrary, does hearing Joey's explanation shut down other possibilities of meaning for us as listeners? In interviews, David Lynch is notoriously reluctant to interpret his own movies or explain them because, he says, he wants to preserve their mystery for audiences. In our confessionalist era—our era of blogs, personal web pages, and reality TV—we are practically forbidden from withholding our "feelings," as if this would be a gesture of bad faith.

But let's be honest: isn't there a sort of letdown when you hear your favorite songs explained by their authors? Apart from the momentary rush of enlightenment—"aha, so that's what it's about!"—it's a tremendous letdown to discover that the song that's been knocking
around in your head has suddenly been nailed down to one single meaning. "Beat on the Brat," apart from Joey's explanation of what it's about, is a great example of a song that is difficult to pin down, in part because, as suggested earlier, it's the only song on the album that's not first-person narrated. The lyric isn't "I want to beat on the brat," or even "You should beat on the brat," but simply "Beat on the brat" (actually pronounced by Joey more like "braught").

Arguably the finest song on the album, "Judy Is a Punk" is full of small surprises, beginning with the fact that the first line is not about Judy, but Jackie. It is a perfect blend of humor and casual nihilism, undergirded by a mystifying

political dimension. The song was written in 1974, around the same time as “Beat on the Brat.” Joey recalls: “I was walking down the street by this place called Thorny Croft. It was an apartment house where all the kids in the neighborhood hung out on the rooftop and drank. And I remember walking by it and I got the first line. Then I was on another street and the second line came.”

110 The German angle appears again, as “they both went down to Berlin, joined the Ice Capades.” Later, “they both went down to Frisco, joined the SLA.” Patty Hearst had been kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army in 1974, and was shown caught on a surveillance camera during a bank robbery holding a machine gun, looking like a glamorous, brainwashed

Bonnie. Was it fake or real? Had she been revolutionized or was she just playing along? Could she pull the trigger? Was Patty Hearst the evil double of Patti Smith, who prefaced “Hey Joe” with a poem about Hearst?

111 Was Hearst a real-life punk, half a step away from Blondie, the other Patti, and Poly Styrene of the X-Ray Specs? Jackie and Judy: “perhaps they’ll die, oh yeah,” the song wonders, and you’re not sure whether this is a hope, a fear, or a possibility that doesn’t inspire caring one way or the other.

The song is beautifully confounding in other ways, and is a microcosm of what makes punk so difficult to categorize. With its blend of aggressive take-no-prisoners speed and more innocent 1950s “ooh aah” chorus (absent in the rougher early demo but there in the 1975 Marty Thau demo and on the album), the song stands against all that punk would reject from the weepy, indulgent, baroque AOR music of the era. And then there is the almost bored commentary on the song

itself, with the lines "second verse, same as the first" and "third verse, different from the first." Although too much could be made of the affinities between these self-reflexive lines and experiments in metafiction—fiction that breaks the frame and refers to the fact that it is fiction—it's clear that the song's self-aware qualities were products of the same cultural trends that made possible the experimental, frame-breaking novels of
Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, Hubert Selby, Charles Bukowski, William Gaddis, and others. This also points to why the album has had such influence and remains so current today: it was one of the first pop albums to recognize the artifice of pop culture while simultaneously glorying in it. This was, in fact, punk's most radical gesture, because at its most dangerous it pierced the whole mythology of rock and roll. "Second verse, same as the first" is both a line in a song and a line in a song about a line in a song. It is a comment on this particular song and all rock and roll songs (at least those that have verses).

The melodic, throwback sound hinted at on "Judy Is a Punk" is confirmed on "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend," which, after "53rd and 3rd," is the slowest song on the album. Like Blondie's "X Offender," also co-produced by Craig Leon, it offers what seems to be a straight-ahead homage to a sixties-era love song. Taken alone and out of context from the rest of the album, there doesn't seem to be an ounce of cynicism here: "Sweet little girl / I wanna be your boyfriend." Written by Tommy (with producer Craig Leon providing backing vocals) it's the first song on the album that doesn't, on some level, invoke images of violence or death, and its placement after "Judy Is a Punk" is inspired, offering a path

not taken for the album—a path dramatically cut off in the album's next song, "Chainsaw." But regarded
in the context of the entire album, and against the backdrop of the Ramones' image as street toughs, one can't help but consider the ironic possibilities of the song. However, unlike similar Blondie songs (like the spoken-word "I *really* wanted to go out with him" that opens "X Offender"), there is no over-the-top moment here: from beginning to end, "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend" maintains its innocence. Of all the songs on the album, this one underwent some of the most dramatic changes from its early demo version, although the overall spirit and approach remain the same. While the album version clocks in at 2:24, the demo version lasts only 1:39, and is the least ornate-sounding version. The 1975 Marty Thau-produced version, the most elaborate, extends the song to 2:58, and sounds positively Phil Spectoresque. All in all, the album version strikes a compromise between the relatively simple and direct demo and Thau's magisterial demo; in all three versions the basic sweetness remains intact. There is a very nice symmetry to these opening tracks: in many ways, the first four songs capture the full range of the Ramones' sound and stand as a sort of mini-album within the album. Craig Leon notes that there was some discussion of the ordering of the tracks, but not too much. "The first four tracks were pretty much always in place. We wanted to duplicate the feeling of the live set."
112

This sweetness is immediately dispelled in the next track, "Chain Saw," which literally opens not with a chain saw, but with what sounds to be a circular saw. Framed by Joey's bizarrely expressionistic vocalizing (pronouncing massacre "massacreee"), the song plugs into the narrative of Tobe

Hooper's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre,* released in 1974. Like the low-budget, do-it-yourself aesthetics of the film itself, "Chain Saw" is among the fastest songs on the album, and the most homemade sounding. Comparisons between the demo version of "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue" and the album version demonstrate the ways in which the Ramones tightened up their sound. The demo is considerably slower (and, at 1:39, about five seconds longer) than the album version. Much of the fuzztone has been eliminated on the album, and what could pass as an almost funky, James Bondish guitar solo in the demo has been transformed into a droning, hypnotic moment. (This would be the perfect spot for the album to develop a skip; an endless repetition of this part of the song over and over again would be very nice.) This is the second time on the album that a song refers to "the kids": "All the kids wanna sniff some glue / All the kids want somethin' to do." If the song was perceived as being dangerous (and indeed there were efforts to ban it in Scotland in the fall of 1976), it should be recognized
that the song does, in fact, refrain from fully endorsing the desire expressed in its title: for it is not "us" kids or "we" kids—it is "the" kids. In *Punking Out,* an interviewer asks Dee Dee about the song. "Well, that comes out of an adolescent trauma that all us kids probably went through.. .. It's really just a frustrating thing, cause there was nothing else to do. We got something better to do now. What do you want me to say, I want all the kids to go drink ammonia or something? I don't want 'em to do that." In this sense, *Ramones*—like punk—is not only a product of its time, but it also hints at a commentary and even critique of its time, much the same way that Nirvana's line from "Smells Like Teen Spirit,"—"here we are now, entertain us"—reflects both a desire and offers a scathing commentary on that desire.

Side one closes out with the album's longest song, "I Don't Wanna Go Down to the Basement," which ends abruptly at 2:35, as if the power had been cut out. Again, the album version is slightly faster and shorter than the demo. According to Craig Leon, "the first demo was fairly lackluster. In fact, when I played it for Ritchie Gottehrer and Seymour Stein, my bosses at Sire, it was one of the reasons they initially wanted to pass on the group. They thought that the band couldn't capture their live sound in the studio. Seymour, of course, later gave them a shot."
113

Perhaps, upon listening to the album for the first time, side two was somehow a disappointment, a let down. You don't even need to think about it to know why: the promise of the band has been fulfilled on the first side. Side two is merely a confirmation, and while there can be a thrill in confirmation, it is never the same sort of thrill as the thrill of discovery, which was side one.

The sun has crept across your bedroom floor in the roughly fifteen minutes that it took to play the first side, and you wonder: why does there even need to be a second side? "Loudmouth" does little to convince you were wrong, and somehow this comes as a tremendous relief, because it means you are not, and you probably never will be, the worshipful rock fan. You are glad to know this about yourself, but even more glad that the Ramones have made it difficult for you to become that sort of fan that you hate. The fade-out on "Loudmouth" is maybe your least favorite part of the album, but since it only lasts several seconds, what have you lost? The practical side of you says that maybe the Ramones knew this: if you don't like one of their songs, who cares, because it

won't last more than a few minutes anyway (and then you remember suffering through a few of the bad long songs from David Bowie and you're absolutely sure that the Ramones make short songs because they know there might be a few you don't like). You sort of feel the same way about "Havana Affair," but that song
is saved by "Spy vs Spy" in *Mad Magazine* and the fact that the strip was written by Antonio Prohias, who fled Cuba for the United States because his cartoons that mocked Castro got him into danger. The line "sent to spy on a Cuban talent show" makes you think of the point-nosed spies, and when you learn later that *Mad* magazine was a big influence on the punk scene, you will forever associate that song "Havana Affair" with "Spy vs Spy." Perhaps, if you are ever asked to write a book about the Ramones, the very first thing that will come into your mind is one of your old *Mads* from many years ago, so worn from reading that its pages feel as soft as toilet paper.

It's true that side two opens with two fairly heavy songs, "Loudmouth" and "Havana Affair," both of which proceed at nearly exactly the same tempo. (The original demo of "Loudmouth" has a funkier and more pronounced bass presence, which again offers an alternative to the uniform sound on the album version.) In 1972 Lester Bangs used the phrase "grunge noise" to describe an album by White Which; the first two songs on side two of *Ramones* (as well as "53rd and 3rd") demonstrate how, if you listened for it, Ramones-style punk sounded like a speeded-up version of Heavy Rock, or Heavy Metal. In fact, this "darker" side of their music emerges here, interrupted by "Listen to My Heart," and is even more pronounced on the demos, some of

which evoke Steppenwolf, Blue Cheer, Iron Butterfly, and even Black Sabbath. Strangely, Lester Bangs would predict this sound when, in 1971, he wrote that Black Sabbath "are just crass and artless and young enough that they might make it yet if they'd speed their songs up a little and shorten the times."
114

Now, I'm not suggesting that *Ramones* is heavy metal speeded up, but songs like "53rd and 3rd" are much closer to heavy metal than to Herman's Hermits or early Beatles. I realize that Iggy Pop is more generally acknowledged as the Ramones' sonic godfather, and that there is a general hostility on the part of punk critics to what is perceived as the overly manufactured, baroque sound of heavy metal (not to mention its macho sincerity). In truth, the bridge between heavy metal and the Ramones lies with the previously mentioned Dictators, whose 1975 album *The Dictators Go Girl Crazy!* is punk despite the extravagant sound and guitar solos. "The Next Big Thing," clocking in at 4:18, is a good example of what the Ramones might sound like if they played their songs at a slower tempo. Conversely, if you play "The Next Big Thing" at 45rpm rather than at 33 1/3 you have yourself a very Ramones-like song. (If you don't have a copy of *The Dictators Go Girl Crazy!* on vinyl, please track one down and do this.)

Despite the fact that it is among the fastest songs on the album, "Listen to My Heart" has much in common
with "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend," one of the slowest songs. Both are straightforward love songs, with approaches leaving only the slightest possibility for an ironic reading. "Listen to My Heart" also shows the enormous gulf between the

moribund progressive and singer-songwriter love songs, which either traded in some kind of macho sincerity or weepy-eyed self-pity. The Ramones, instead, recast the love song into a 1:56 burst of declarative sentiment, once again leaving the reader to fill in the blanks. No "boy has girl, boy loses girl, boy cries" here, just "boy wants girl." Period.

Any sense of letdown you might have felt at the beginning of side two is washed away during these last three songs—"Let's Dance," "I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You," and "Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World"—which justify the logic of the album. If the first four songs on side one served as a sort of self-contained mini-album, then these last four songs function the same way for side two, and illustrate why the Ramones could never really succeed as a singles band. If anything, the entire album constitutes two singles: Side One and Side Two. "Let's Dance," written by producer Jim Lee and originally performed by Chris Montez, reached number four on the charts in 1962 and in some ways represents the musical possibility foreclosed on by the Beatles, who performed with Montez
in England for several weeks in 1963 (Montez was the headliner).

The break between "Let's Dance" and "I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You" (the song with the closest thing to a guitar solo—really an anti-guitar solo—on the album) lasts just barely one second. There is no break between "I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You" and "Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World," which kicks in with a "one two three four" over the fade-out fuzz of "I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You." This last song—their most absolute—distills even further the sound and sensibility of the Ramones into the

shortest possible time. If it can be said that every great song must create the proper conditions of its own meaning, then this song works in reverse, creating and then rejecting all entry points into its world. The lyrics are radically ambiguous: is the narrator (perhaps speaker is a better term here) a Nazi? Is he being ironic when he says things like "I fight for the fatherland"? Is the "little German boy" the same person as the speaker? Who is pushing around the little German boy? Are we told that the little German boy is being pushed around so that we understand why he became a Nazi, if in fact he did? Or is the little German boy being pushed around by Nazis? You could say that the song is really a parody, like the Dictators' "Master Race Rock," and that lines like "I fight for the fatherland" collapse under the weight of irony. But I don't think so; the song's not coherent enough to be ironic. Its lyrics, like most others on the album, are really a sort of a loosely linked chain of phrases that suggest or imply a larger story that the listener can fill in. But again, considered in the context of the 1970s, the song's Nazi references could mean something else altogether. Mary Harron suggests that "the entire seventies culture was based on being 'nice.' You had to be nice. It's no accident that smiley faces became the symbol of the seventies. So when the Ramones sang that they were Nazis, they were really saying, 'We refuse to be nice.'"
115

Of course you can barely make out any of these lyrics anyway; other than fragments like "yes I am," Joey's mannered voiced renders the rest pretty unintelligible. (You are forgiven if, for the longest time, you thought the words "fight for the fatherland" were "five four five-there land.") The song also provides a full dose of the Ramones' sound

before the singing starts: vocals don't kick in (not counting the 1-2-3-4 lead-in) for a full thirty-three seconds. In this regard, it is similar to the opening track, which also delays the vocals for a fairly long time (twenty-two seconds). The fuzz-tone fade-out of the song looks ahead to groups like Sonic Youth and even Nirvana, but also to Neil Young and Crazy Horse, especially albums like *Ragged Glory* and *Arc,* on
which guitar noise at the end of songs suggests disintegration. It's interesting to contemplate a parallel universe Ramones, who might have followed the path suggested by the last nine seconds of "Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World."

Ramones was widely and favorably reviewed in both the national and local New York music press. Among those who had championed the underground/punk scene, there was a feeling of pride, tinged by an awareness that now that punk had gone public, it was bound to change and come under greater scrutiny. *Rolling Stone,* in July 1976, offered an enthusiastic review, which also managed to predict the difficulty punk would have in finding airplay. Writing that the album "is constructed almost entirely of rhythm tracks of an exhilarating intensity rock and roll has not experienced since its early days," reviewer Paul Nelson went on: "How the present will treat the Ramones, proponents of the same Manhattan musical minimalism as the New York Dolls who preceded them, remains to be seen. Thus far, punk rock's archetypical concept of an idealized Top 40 music—the songs stripped down like old Fords, then souped up for speed—has unintentionally provoked more primal anger from than precipitant access to the nation's teenagers, and the godheads of AM radio don't seem to be listening at all."

116 The album was widely touted in the pages of the local New York press. Robert
Christgau's assessment in the *Village Voice*—"For me, it blows everything else off the radio; it's clean the way the Dolls never were, sprightly the way the Velvets never were, and just plain listenable the way Black Sabbath never was"
117—reveals a general tone of hope that the Ramones would "make it."

In truth, punk worked best as something fleeting, something glimpsed out of the corner of your eye. It was doomed to failure, and that was its beauty. It couldn't last. The most radical and nihilistic noise groups of the time—the Sex Pistols, the Dead Boys—self-destructed, suggesting that the deep logic of punk was to play as fast as possible and get off the stage. Most of the bands that lasted into the 1980s and beyond, such as Blondie and Talking Heads, moved quickly through the new wave and pop into in modes that traded dangerously, though often beautifully, in nostalgia.

As early as 1977, a year before the Sex Pistols toured the US and broke up, there was already talk of the end of punk, as it became co-opted by mass market media and the record labels. Writing in *Trouser Press,* Ira Rob-bins directly addressed this issue: "I'm not knocking rock 'n' roll success, but musical careers built on nihilism and anti-superstardom seem a bit wobbly when the groups begin to accept the star's life."
118 And in a sort of challenge, he suggested that in order for punk and new wave (Robbins used the terms interchangeably) to
avoid becoming like the very form of music it disdained, its founding members needed to quit: "The style has been set, and now it's the duty of those who pioneered it to give it up.

If they have the creativity and the good sense they will refuse to become the stagnant heads of a dying movement."
119

The terminal cycle of punk/new wave that Robbins identified—the fundamental dissolution of a movement itself predicated on dissolution—makes it difficult to talk about contemporary punk, which, while it continues today as a category, as an idea, is fundamentally different from 1970s-era punk, which was the product of a specific historical moment, a moment that has vanished. As a historical movement, punk is over, much in the same way that Romanticism is over, or modernism, or Motown, or disco. And yet of course all those forms live on, if not as formal movements then as echoes reconfigured in new forms. And the Ramones remain central to the shape of post-punk music not only because they embodied a sort of radical middle space between underground and pop, but also because they created the conditions for the emergence of a different kind of noise.

Although this is not the place to map out the entire post-1970s trajectory of punk—it's worth noting that contradictions and debates that surround punk today, ranging from political debates about whether the soul of punk is fascist or progressive, or whether it is pop-oriented
or hardcore, or whether punk can exist as a corporate commodity or whether it must exist in a more independent sphere—these tensions are embodied in embryonic form on the Ramones' first album.

This is most evident in the pop-punk scene that emerged in the early 1990s, a movement closely associated with Lookout! Records and bands that included Green Day, the

Groovie Ghoulies, the Riverdales, and Pinhead Gunpowder. This music was, as opposed to hardcore punk, relatively non-political and ultimately more radio friendly, so much so that Green Day's 1992 album *Kerplunk* began a major-label bidding war that resulted in the band's signing with Reprise Records. As Thompson notes, "[a]s in the case of the New York and the English scenes [of the 1970s], major label contracts shattered the possibilities towards which Pop-Punk's core desires militate."
120

More recently, bands like Anti-Flag have reinjected a progressive political dimension to punk. The band's Justin Sane writes that the band's name emerged in reaction to the many punks he saw sporting the American flag: "their idea of idea of punk rock was VERY fascist."
121 And in an April 2004 essay entitled "Advanced Democracy is Punk," Nathan Means from the band Trans Am offers this critique of politics as spectacle: "Liberals always think that when confronted by 'the
facts' (which are pretty shocking in George W.'s case) people will see the light and vote for the logical choice. Liberals don't understand the power of fantasy and the fascist imagination. Bush is seen by many Americans as successful, confident, unpretentious, and morally forthright—these base qualities appeal to people in a leader."
122

Finally, the 2004 presidential election made explicit the political dimension of punk, on both the left and the right. Punkvoter.com imagines punk as a basically progressive force: "Punk rock has always been on the edge and in the forefront of politics.... Punkvoter plans to organize, educate

and invigorate today's youth to again think politically and become involved in changing their society."
123 ConservativePunk.com, on the other hand, notes that punk "music has been, and still is, one of the most heavy-handed genres of music there is. Unfortunately the topics of such heavy-handed songs are almost always seeped in left wing propaganda, bumper sticker rallying calls and oversimplifications of otherwise complex topics."
124 Although there were and are punks on both the left and the right, Stacy Thompson is probably right when he notes that punk, especially in its more recent formulations, has been imagined as a progressive (and often anarchic) rather than conservative ideology: "In short, 'punk' is the name that can be assigned to an organization of radical desires that, combined, express a wish for a noncapitalist structuring of social reality."
125

Why touch here on the politics of contemporary punk? Because groups like the Ramones were among the first to give fractured voice to such cultural expressions, and because the Ramones in particular embodied the very contradictions that we see played out today. For one thing, contemporary punk shares with 1970s-era punk the idea of the musician as writer. Just as Lenny Kaye, Patti Smith, Peter Laughner, Richard Hell, and others wrote for a public audience, so do many of today's punk artists. If in 1975 the preferred medium was the underground newspaper or fanzine, today that medium is the website and the blog. And yet, looking back through 1970s issues of *New York Rocker, Trouser Press, Punk,* and other publications associated with the rise of the punk scene, there is very little evidence of direct engagement with the political process, despite the fact that that in both the

US and England the national economies were in terrible shape. Instead of well-intentioned, sincere expressions of political belief, we find combative expressions of admiration for real life anti-heroes like Nixon and Hitler, and cinematic ones like Divine, Leatherface, and Travis Bickle, whose deeds become ironically enshrined as the ultimate in "bad taste." The American underground and punk scene in the mid-1970s was almost entirely devoid of sincere political expressions or dialogue, which makes the previous comments from sites like ConservativePunk ("punk music has been... one of the most heavy-handed genres of music") puzzling, if not downright amnesiac. And when the liberal/progressive Punkvoter.com claims, "punk rock has always been on the edge and in the forefront of politics" what does this mean? I doubt that the author has in mind the Dead Boys, who played at CBGB decked out in Nazi regalia.

The Ramones, in particular, as the most visible expression of punk in the US, presented anything but a coherent political stance in their interviews and on their first album. To claim that punk in the US is rooted in some vaguely anti-capitalist political desire is to ignore a lot of history, such as the fact that many, if not most, American bands from the mid-1970s were eager to sign with major record labels. In early interviews with some of the first bands and performers to sign, including Patti Smith, Blondie, the Ramones, and others, there is very little talk of "selling out" or resisting the dominant forces of commodification. It is perhaps natural that second-generation punk, emerging after the music had entered the mainstream, would mythologize early punk's supposed left or right-wing rejection of the commodity system, but in truth early punk did no such thing. Groups like the Ramones were more than happy

to be photographed for the music press, to give interviews, to talk openly about desiring a hit, to promote their albums, to sign contracts.

To claim that early punk either resisted selling out or that it didn't resist selling out is to pose a false opposition, one that has emerged in the years since in the mid-1970s, but which did not really exist in the 70s as it does today. Early punk delighted in rebelling, but it was more likely to be rebellion against the rarefied purity of the hippie culture than against corporate interests or political corruption. "Nothing we do is fabricated," Tommy Ramone told John Holmstrom in 1976, and that desire for authenticity transcended considerations of popularity or major-label success. One of the dominant themes that runs through Ramones interviews from this era is the belief that the band plays the way it plays, with a purity of sound and expression that has nothing to do with success.

The myth that early punk was somehow opposed to success is dispelled in page after page of the underground music press. In the second issue of *New York Rocker* from 1976, Fredda Lynn posed the question "Excuse Me, Are You in it for the $$$?" to a host of musicians. A few, like Richard Lloyd, flat-out answered "no," but most gave a more complicated answer:

Joey Ramone: Not completely. I guess I'm in it for a little of everything—glamour, glory, and money.

Chris Frantz (Talking Heads): I've always wanted to accumulate some money. It's not all I think about—but it would be nice to have a big bundle.

Clem Burke (Blondie): My ego says I'm in it more for the fame than the money. It's a fine line between the two.

Dee Dee Ramone: YEAH! I want a lot of money. I need it. You know I need it. There's nothing I want but the money. Give me the money anytime.
126

It's interesting that we hold musicians to a different standard of authenticity than, say, writers, even writers of literary fiction and poetry, for whom signing a contract with a known publisher is something to be celebrated. Perhaps it's the nature of fan culture, or perhaps, as suggested in Nick Hornby's excellent novel *High Fidelity,* we view music as a more personal, intimate archive of who we are. In any case, an underground or alternative band gets a lot more heat for trading up to a major label than an author does for trading up to a bigger publisher. Would we consider the work of experimental writer Ben Marcus any less experimental because his books have been published by Random House?

The other mythologizing force at play here—and I hesitate to mention this because it implicates me, as well—is what happens to something like "punk" when it becomes the object of academic study. Now this isn't
to say that there are not some terrific academic studies of punk, especially, as I've mentioned earlier, those by Dick Hebdige and Greil Marcus. This is not the place to trace the rise of the field broadly called "cultural studies" in academia, but I think it's important to at least acknowledge the impact of this on the shaping of punk in the public imagination. Cultural studies, which emerged as a force in the 1960s and 1970s, although we could trace its threads back decades

earlier, takes from Marx the notion that all cultural productions—art, literature, music, painting, architecture, fashion—are political insomuch as they emerge out of specific historical conditions and are thus imbued with historically specific political and social values. Here is Marx:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.
127

This notion that culture is basically ideology—the expression of the groups producing and controlling the dissemination of culture—was a powerful framework for cultural studies theorists, especially in the 1970s, as they began addressing the forces of popular culture. If
Marx suggested that literature and art were political, insomuch as they were produced by folks from the middle to upper classes (or at least by those who had the material luxury to create them), then cultural studies theorists suggested that pop music, including punk, could also rightly be explored through these lenses. The result has been some seriously exciting writing about popular culture over the years by people like Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Raymond Williams, Roland Barthes, Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige, and others. But the result has also been some pretty depressing and unimaginative studies that, one suspects, allow their

authors to find what they knew they would find over and over again.

What does this have to do with punk? A lot, I think, because it provides one of the main sources for the authentic versus not authentic division that still characterizes much of the current discussion about punk. This division was largely something that emerged after the initial mid-1970s punk explosion. It emerged both from fans and bands who, in light of punk's acceptance into the mainstream attempted to reposition punk as radically alternative, and it emerged from academic and historical treatments of the rise of punk, which were written by scholars who came of age within the cultural studies model. In fact, punk transformed the rejection of politics into a gesture of defiance. When asked by
Mary Harron in 1977 if "the anarchy thing has been misrepresented," Johnny Rotten responded that "people are trying to make it out as a bit of a joke, but it's not a joke. It's not political anarchy either. It's musical anarchy, which is a different thing."
128 Now, this gesture has not been adequately captured in writing (with the possible exceptions of Bangs and Meltzer), but how could it be?

The other problem with trying to make claims about authentic punk is that punk, much like Warhol, selfconsciously cultivated celebrity not simply as a by-product, but an art form in itself. Richard Hell has noted that "you realize that as a commodity, who has all the same intentions and attributes of someone who's working in high art, the way to protect yourself is to regard celebrity as being your *real* art form. It's just your personality that's the commodity and not your work."

129 Punk's fame for so long outstripped its commodity value (by way of example, remember that *Ramones* charted no higher than No. 181) in part because it was an avant-garde movement disguised as a pop movement; this in itself generated a sort of chaos that could not be recuperated in the marketplace. In an essay that contradicts the received wisdom that, historically, avant-garde movements have rejected the mainstream, Robert Ray notes, "to assume that increasingly rapid co-option will destroy the avant-garde ignores how much the avant-garde
itself has, throughout its history, promoted its own acceptance."
130 He goes on to argue that "mass taste ... must be educated to accept what it does not already know."
131

In 1944, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno—the bitterest and most poetic theorists of the Frankfurt School—wrote of the "ruthless unity in the culture industry," and how "culture now impresses the same stamp upon everything."
132 Their critiques of life in the post-industrial west were damningly beautiful in their sweeping, almost apocalyptic pessimism.

The neon signs which hang over our cities and outshine the natural light of the night with their own are comets presaging the natural disaster of society, its frozen death. Yet they do not come from the sky. They are controlled from earth. It depends upon human beings themselves whether they will extinguish these lights and awake from a nightmare which only threatens to become actual as long as men believe in it.
133

Who knows what Adorno would have thought about punk. Who knows if the Ramones ever heard of Adorno. Perhaps punk answered a challenge that it didn't know had been made, and in the process briefly broke free from the systems of the culture industry.

Of course, *Ramones* is also simply an album recorded in a few days back in 1976 in the spirit of reckless fun and adventure. Listening to it, all the historical and cultural analysis dissipates in the ferociousness of its sound. Like all great albums, it resists interpretation. It rejects the tyranny of meaning, whether imposed by the fan or the critic.

In the end, it comes down to this: the opening seconds of *Ramones* make a promise and you wonder, will the album keep that promise?

And then, remarkably, it does.

Ramones

1. Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming,* p. 157.

2. Colin Wilson, *The Outsider,* p. 15.

3. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* p. 19.

4. Steve Lake, "Down and Out in the Bowery," *Melody Maker,* 16 August 1975.

5. James Wolcott, "A Conservative Impulse in the New Rock Underground," *Village Voice,* 16 August 1975.

6. Ed McCormack, "N.Y. Club's Talent Search: Anybody Listening?" *Rolling Stone,* 23 October 1975.

7. James Wolcott, "The Ramones: Chord Killers," *Village Voice,* 21 July 1975.

8. Alan Betrock, "Know Your New York Bands: The Ramones," *SoHo Weekly News,* 1975.

9. John Rockwell, "The Pop Life," *New York Times,* 19 September 1975.

10. *Oxford English Dictionary,* http://dictionary.oed.com

11. Ernest Hemingway, *Winner Take Nothing,* p. 94.

12. Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon,* pp. 183–84.

13. William S. Burroughs, *Junky,* p. 30.

14. Thomas Pynchon, *V,* p. 145.

15. Lester Bangs, "The MC5: Kick Out the Jams," *Rolling Stone,* 5 April 1969.

16. Lester Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung,* p. 8.

17. Ellen Willis, "Rock, etc. An American Band," *The New Yorker,* 20 May 1974.

18. Greil Marcus, "Patti Smith Exposes Herself," *Village Voice,* 24 November 1975.

19. Legs McNeil, *Please Kill Me,* p. 203.

20. Ibid., p. 204.

21. Joe Koch, "Marlon Brando: The Original Punk," *Punk* no. 1, 1976.

22. Howie Klein, "AC/DC," *New York Rocker,* November/December 1977.

23. Johnny Ramone to Roy Trakin, "The Ramones: Rockets or Rubberbands?" *New York Rocker,* November/December 1977.

24. Johnny Rotten to Mary Harron, "Johnny Rotten—To the Core," *Punk* no. 8, 1977.

25. Craig Leon, personal interview, 26 May 2004.

26. James Wolcott, "The Rise of Punk Rock," *Village Voice,* 1 March 1976.

27. Tom Carson, "Truth & Beauty Etcetera," *New York Rocker,* February/March 1977.

28. Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids,* p. 238.

29. Johnny Ramone to Colin Devenish, "Johnny Talks Joey, Ramones Reissues," *Rolling Stone* online, 2 August 2001, http://www.rollingstone.com/news/story/__/id/5932720.

30. Keith Negus, *Producing Pop,* p. 108.

31. "News from EMI—Annual General Meeting—7 December 1976—Comment on Content of Records by Sir John Read, Chairman," http://www.stereocity.com/spread.html

32. Danny Fields, quoted in Legs McNeil, *Please Kill Me,* p. 334.

33. Mary Harron, quoted in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming,* p. 80.

34. Lou Reed to Janet Macosta, "Lou Reed is 'Alive' and, well, in Cleveland," *Trouser Press,* June/July 1976.

35. Felix G. Rohatyn, "New York's Fiscal Crisis: 1975–2003," Columbia University School of International Public Affairs, http://www.sipa.columbia.edu/news/Rohatyn%20 speech.

36. Mel Rosenthal, *In the South Bronx of America,* p. 3 7.

37. Francis X. Clines, "Beame Submits New Cuts," *New York Times,* 16 October 1975.

38. Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming,* p. 229.

39. Dick Hebdige, pp. 23–24.

40. Ibid., p. 87.

41. Legs McNeil, *Please Kill Me,* p. 299.

42. Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids,* pp. 346–65.

43. Jim Bessman, *Ramones: An American Band,* p. 59.

44. Joe S. Harrington, *Sonic Cool,* p. 323.

45. Richard Meltzer, *A Whore Just Like the Rest,* p. 276.

46. Lester Bangs, "The White Noise Supremacists," in *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung,* p. 275.

47. Stephen Anderson, "The Ramones," *New York Rocker,* March 1976.

48. James Wolcott, "The Rise of Punk Rock," *Village Voice,* 1 March 1976.

49. Ibid.

50. Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming,* p. 163.

51. Top Ten [Scott Kempner], "Media Eye," *Trouser Press,* June/July 1976.

52. Richard Hell, "The Ramones Mean Business," *Hit Parader,* 1976.

53. Monte Melnik and Frank Meyer, *On the Road with the Ramones,* p. 20.

54. Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids,* p. 176.

55. Suzanne Schwedoch, "Long Island Speaks," *New York Rocker,* March 1976.

56. David Thomas, quoted in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming,* pp. 136–37.

57. Legs McNeil, *Please Kill Me,* p. 204

58. Donna Gaines, Ramones Liner Notes, *Ramones* reissue. Warner Archives/Rhino, 2001, p. 9.

59. Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan,* p. 93.

60. J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies,* p. 275.

61. Simon Frith, *Sound Effects,* p. 162.

62. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture,* p. 96.

63. Stacy Thompson, *Punk Productions,* p. 10.

64. Seymour Stein, quoted in Jim Bessman, *Ramones: An American Band,* p. 42.

65. Craig Leon, personal interview, 26 May 2004.

66. Ramones, interview with Roy Trakin, *New York Rocker,* November/December 1977.

67. Ibid.

68. Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces,* p. 82.

69. Craig Leon, personal interview, 26 May 2004.

70. Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" in *Against Interpretation,* p. 287.

71. Ibid., p. 29.

72. Richard Hell, quoted in Victor Bockris, *Beat Punks,* p. 194.

73. Stephen Anderson, "The Ramones," *New York Rocker,* March 1976.

74. Robert Swift, "The Clothes Nose: Sniffing Out NY Rock Dress Sense," *New York Rocker,* March 1976.

75. Dee Dee Ramone, *Lobotomy,* p. 74.

76. Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency in the Hollywood Cinema, 1930–1980,* p. 260.

77. Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming,* pp. 162–63.

78. One of the best treatments of this topic is Roger Sabin's essay in his collection *Punk Rock: So What?,* pp. 199–218.

79. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture,* p. 116.

80. Stacy Thompson, *Punk Productions,* p. 30.

81. Mary Harron, quoted in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming,* p. 138.

82. Joe S. Harrington, *Sonic Cool,* p. 341.

83. Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan,* p. 47.

84. Charles Bukowski, "This is What Killed Dylan Thomas," in *South of No North,* pp. 129–30.

85. Robin Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan,* p. 50.

86. Joey Ramone, quoted in Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids,* p. 174.

87. Danny Fields, quoted in Monte Melnick, *On the Road with the Ramones,* p. 60.

88. Tommy Ramone, quoted in Monte Melnick, *On the Road with the Ramones,* p. 55.

89. Tommy Ramone, interview with John Holmstrom, *Punk* no. 3, 1976.

90. Johnny Ramone, quoted in Monte Melnick, *On the Road with the Ramones,* p. 62.

91. Pauline Kael, "Trash, Art, and the Movies," p. 115.

92. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture,* p. 27.

93. Tommy Ramone, quoted in Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids,* p. 169.

94. Craig Leon, interview with John Holmstrom, *Punk* no. 3, 1976.

95. Joey Ramone, quoted in Legs McNeil, *Please Kill Me,* p. 229.

96. Tommy Ramone, interview with John Holmstrom, *Punk* no. 3, 1976.

97. Jim Bessman, *Ramones: An American Band,* p. 38.

98. Craig Leon, personal interview, 13 September 2004.

99. Craig Leon, personal interview, 26 May 2004.

100. Johnny Ramone, quoted in Monte Melnick, *On the Road with the Ramones,* p. 194.

101. Tony Silvester, in "The State of Pop Music in New York: A Symposium," *Village Voice,* 8 September 1975.

102. Craig Leon, personal interview, 26 May 2004.

103. Tommy Ramone, quoted in Monte Melnick, *On the Road with the Ramones,* p. 55.

104. Ibid., p. 195.

105. www.superseventies.com

106. Dee Dee Ramone, *Lobotomy,* pp. 97–98.

107. Johnny Ramone, quoted in Carl Cafarelli, "An Informal History of Bubblegum Music," http://home.att.net/-bubblegumusic/goldhist8.htm.

108. Joey Ramone, in the DVD *Ramones: Raw,* directed by John Cafiero. Image Entertainment, 2004.

109. Joey Ramone, quoted in Jim Bessman, *Ramones: An American Band,* p. 21.

110. Joey Ramone, quoted in Legs McNeil, *Please Kill Me,* p. 183.

111. Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids,* p. 130.

112. Craig Leon, personal interview, 13 September 2004.

113. Ibid.

114. Lester Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung,* p. 68.

115. Mary Harron, quoted in Legs McNeil, *Please Kill Me,* p. 234.

116. Paul Nelson, "Ramones," *Rolling Stone, 29* July 1976.

117. Robert Christgau, "Ramones," *Village Voice,* 14 June 1976.

118. Ira Robbins, "The New Wave Washes Out," *Trouser Press,* October 1977, p. 22.

119. Ibid., p. 32.

120. Stacy Thompson, *Punk Productions,* p. 86.

121. "Anti-Flag History," http://www.anti-flag.com/AB10.php

122. David Means, "Advanced Democracy is Punk" http://www.punkvoter.com/print.php?GuestColumnID=13.

123. "About Punkvoter.com" http://www.punkvoter.com/about/about.php.

124. "About ConservativePunk.com" http://www.conservativepunk.com/cpabout.htm

125. Stacy Thompson, *Punk Productions,* p. 78.

126. Fredda Lynn, "Excuse Me, Are You in it for the $$$?" *New York Rocker,* March 1976.

127. Karl Marx, quoted in Dick Hebdige, *Subculture,* p. 15.

128. Johnny Rotten, interview with Mary Harron, *Punk* no. 8, 1977.

129. Richard Hell, interview with Victor Bockris, *Beat Punks,* p. 195.

130. Robert B. Ray, *How a Film Theory Got Lost,* p. 75.

131. Ibid., p. 76.

132. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* pp. 123 and 120.

133. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry,* p. 96.

Notes

Adorno, Theodor W. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture.* Edited by J. M. Bernstein. London: Routledge, 1991.

Bangs, Lester. *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung.* Edited by Greil Marcus. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.

Bessman, Jim. *Ramones: An American Band.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Bockris, Victor. *Beat Punks.* New York: Da Capo Press, 1998.

Bukowski, Charles. *South of No North: Stories of the Buried Life.* Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1973.

Burroughs, William S. *Junky.* New York: Penguin, 2003 [1953].

Frith, Simon. *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock.* London: Constable, 1983.

Hammett, Dashiell. *The Maltese Falcon.* New York: Knopf, 2000 [1930].

Harrington, Joe S. *Sonic Cool: The Life and Death of Rock 'n' Roll.* Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2002.

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style.* London: Routledge, 1979.

Hemingway, Ernest. “The Mother of a Queen” in *Winner Take Nothing.* New York: Scribner’s, 1933.

Heylin, Clinton. *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World.* New York: Penguin, 1993.

Hoberman, J. and Jonathan Rosenbaum. *Midnight Movies.* New York: Harper & Row, 1983.

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of the Enlightenment.* New York: Continuum, 1993 [1944].

Kent, Nick. *The Dark Stuff: Selected Writings on Rock Music, 1972–1995.* New York: Da Capo, 1995.

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

McNeil, Legs and Gillian McCain. *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk.* New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

Melnick, Monte and Frank Meyer. *On the Road with the Ramones.* London: Sanctuary Publishing, 2003.

Meltzer, Richard. *A Whore Just Like the Rest.* New York: Da Capo Press, 2000.

Negus, Keith. *Producing Pop: Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry.* London: Edward Arnold, 1992.

Nelson, Paul. Review of *Ramones. Rolling Stone*. 29 July 1976.

Pynchon, Thomas. *V.* Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1963.

Ramone, Dee Dee. *Lobotomy: Surviving the Ramones.* New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2000.

Rosenthal, Mel. *In the South Bronx of America.* Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 2001.

Ray, Robert B. *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Film, 1930–1980.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Ray, Robert B. *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Sabin, Roger (editor). *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk.* London: Routledge, 1999.

Savage, Jon. *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.

Siegel, Fred. *The Future Once Happened Here.* San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000 [1997].

Thompson, Stacy. *Punk Productions: Unfinished Business.* Albany: State University Press of New York, 2004.

True, Everett. *Hey Ho Let's Go: The Story of the Ramones.* London: Omnibus Press, 2002.

Wilson, Colin. *The Outsider*. New York: Dell, 1956.

Select Bibliography