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Postmodernism and Punk Subculture: Cultures of Authenticity and Deconstruction

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This paper examines punk subcultures as a response to "the condition of postmodernity," defined here as a crisis of meaning caused by the commodification of everyday life. Punk musicians and subcultures have responded to this crisis in one of two ways. Like other forms of "plank parody" associated with postmodernism, the "culture of deconstruction" expresses nihilism, ironic cynicism, and the purposelessness experienced by young poeple. On the other hand, the "culture of authenticity" seeks to establish a network of underground media as an expression of artistic sincerity and independence from the allegedly corrupting influences of commerce. Although these cultures are in some ways diametrically opposed, they have represented competing tendencies within punk since the 1970s, and I argue that they are both reactions to the same crisis of postmodern society.

During the past quarter century, artists, architects, and academics have written and spoken at length about "postmodernism" as manifest in aesthetics, epistemology, and politics. In philosophy and the social sciences, postmodernism is said to characterize the exhaustion of totalizing metanarratives and substitute localized, self-reflexive, and contingent analyses for the search for objective, universal truth (Best & Kellner, 1991; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Habermas, 1987; Lyotard, 1984; Rosenau, 1992). In the art world, postmodern style is defined by hybridity and intertextuality, by its license to (re)create using recycled objects and images from the past while locating the residue of previously authored texts within the modern and "original" (Jameson, 1991). In culture at large, postmodernism describes the collapse of hierarchies and boundaries between the "highbrow" and "lowbrow," as all cultural products are subjected to the same processes of commodification and incorporation, exemplified in the architecture of Las Vegas (Collins, 1989; Huyssen, 1986; Jencks, 1984). In politics, the postmodern age signifies the fragmentation of revolutionary subjectivity into a

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collection of identities and differences, or the dissolution of class politics in favor of the nomads of the "new social movements" (Gitlin, 1995; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Melucci, 1989).

Considering these epochal shifts in such disparate fields of social life, David Harvey and other neo-Marxists have theorized that they are the expression and consequence of socioeconomic transformations, or more specifically the emergence of "post-Fordist" strategies of accumulation deployed by the forces of global capitalism (Harvey, 1989; see also Ashley, 1997; Dunn, 1998; Jameson, 1991; Lash, 1990; Soja, 1989). Catalyzed by the economic crises of the early 1970s, these more "flexible" modes of accumulation responded to declining rates of profit by expanding the geographic space of corporate operations and quickening the amount of time necessary for the turnover of products and labor. Retreating from their social-democratic compromises with organized labor and the nationstate, multinational corporations have used new technologies of communication to relocate production to the cheaper, unregulated factories of Mexico and Southeast Asia or simply divested themselves from production altogether, relying upon the work of independent subcontractors when necessary. As the social order derived from industrial production has been exported south or wiped off the face of the globe entirely, the social roles and relationships of those living in the relatively affluent nations of the West have become increasingly oriented around consumption. Here, capital has employed the apparatuses of media, fashion, and entertainment to accelerate its shift from a regime of accumulation founded on the production of goods to one based in the circulation of instantly disposable spectacles and services, each dependent upon the creation of desire. Partially freed from the authoritarian grip of religion, family, local community, the military, and the work ethic, consumers are now left to themselves to fabricate an identity from the unending flow of celebrities, lifestyles, and products which confront them in public and in their homes.

Harvey has theorized that as capital mobilizes all available human and technological resources in pursuit of its ideal condition of instant turnover, minimal labor costs, and the total penetration of global markets, people around the world have experienced a compression of time and space in even the most private dimensions of their personal lives. As the self and identity are increasingly constituted through consumer culture, they begin to resemble the instant obsolescence and fetishized differences of the capitalist marketplace (Dunn, 1998; Featherstone, 1991; Gergen, 1991). Freed from the stability and certainty of traditional institutions and communities, the consuming subject is solicited in all moments and places of everyday life, divided into increasingly precise niches of demographics, taste, and lifestyle, and exposed to a volatile sequence of immediately vanishing signs and images. Technologies of simulation constantly problematize our grasp of "reality" as media spectacles, celebrity images, and corporate brand names have advanced from the status of merely "reflecting" society to become the backbone of global political economy and constitutive of social relationships

(Baudrillard, 1983, 1987, 1988; Kellner, 1989). In sum, the crisis of representation and sense of fragmentation characteristic of postmodern theory, culture, and politics are theorized as symptomatic of, though not reducible to, a broader shift in social structure catalyzed by processes of economic restructuring and political realignment.

In this paper, I argue that the subculture and musical genre known as punk responds to "the condition of postmodernity" in two seemingly contradictory ways. The first identifies a homology between postmodernism and punk performance, attitude, and style. Suffused with self-reflexive irony, these punks have recycled cultural images and fragments for purposes of parody and shocking juxtaposition, thereby deconstructing the dominant meanings and simulations which saturate social space. Sometimes, especially in Britain and the New York scene, this postmodern aesthetic has been created by musicians originally trained in schools of art (Frith & Horne, 1987). More often, it can simply be understood as the response of young people raised within a mass-mediated, consumer-driven environment who have turned signs and spectacles against themselves, as a means of waging war on society. Furthermore, many of these punk rock bands have personified the boredom and purposelessness of suburban youth socialized to be spectators and consumers, and the spastic flow of their music and musical careers dramatizes that fragmentation of experience. Thus, I argue that this semiotic assault of punk is both constrained and made possible by the socioeconomic changes which have erased the industrial system of Fordism while accelerating the stream of images, symbols, and commodities in everyday life. This structural transformation has particularly affected young people, who are constantly solicited through the media and entertainment industries and possess no memories of the previous social order.

The second way in which punk subcultures have responded to postmodern society has involved a quest for authenticity and independence from the culture industry, thus altogether renouncing the prevailing culture of media, image, and hypercommercialism. Whereas the first response to postmodernity appropriates signs, symbols, and style for the purposes of shock and semiotic disruption, the second attempts to go "underground" and insulate punk subculture from the superficiality of postmodern culture. Punk musicians and fans in search of authenticity have established local institutions of alternative media outside the culture industry (such as independently owned record labels and self-produced magazines, or "fanzines") while elevating musical production above fashion and appearance as the only sincere basis of creative expression. Within punk subcultures, the process of creating independent media and interpersonal networks in opposition to the corporate media is referred to as the "do-it-yourself," or DIY, ethic. While both variations of subcultural practice are evident throughout the history of the punk genre, the first (which I call the "culture of deconstruction") was more prevalent during the initial explosion of punk in the 1970s, while the second (or "culture of authenticity") is more characteristic of the "hardcore" or

"straight-edge" subcultures which emerged during the 1980s, especially in the United States. These two strategies have often formed the basis for debate and rivalry within punk subcultures, but I argue that they are simply different responses to the same system of social conditions.

It is not my intention to argue that either the "culture of deconstruction" or the "culture of authenticity" is more effective or politically progressive than the other. Rather, my analysis identifies both empowering possibilities and regressive limitations within each of punk's responses to the condition of postmodernity. The culture of deconstruction has allowed some punk performers to enact dramatic refusals and parodies of power, periodically capturing the media spotlight and inspiring further acts of defiance among the young and disaffected. But these gestures of resistance have typically proven to be as fleeting and ephemeral as postmodern culture at large. Moreover, punk's spirit of negation lacks a utopian counterpart, and as a consequence its aggressive nihilism occasionally expresses itself as an attack upon the powerless rather than the powerful. The culture of authenticity and the do-it-yourself ethic, on the other hand, have led to the creation of relatively durable communities and alternative media, which have not only maintained a measure of autonomy from the culture industry but sometimes also served as a forum for facilitating political critique and action. Yet even the most political hardcore subcultures have typically fetishized the imagined purity of commercial independence as an end in itself, and as a result they have willingly reinforced their own marginality rather than attempt to make subversive inroads into the dominant culture. Likewise, the pursuit of purity has often led hard-core subcultures to enforce a startling homogeneity of dress and sound, which effectively stifles artistic creativity and obstructs the participation of various types of "outsiders."

My analysis therefore expands upon those of other scholars who initially revealed the close kinship between punk style and music and postmodern culture at large (Grossberg, 1986, 1992, 1997; Hebdidge, 1979; Marcus, 1989, 1993). Because scholarly interest in punk has focused primarily on the British and New York subcultures of the mid-1970s, their conclusions pertain more to the culture of deconstruction than the culture of authenticity, the latter of which emerged principally within the subcultures of California and Washington D.C. during the early 1980s. By comparing these two divergent cultural practices and relating them to the socioeconomic conditions of postmodernity, my study reveals that an overarching structural transformation creates multiple possibilities for artistic and political response, rather than a simple correspondence between economic base and cultural superstructure. In addition, my analysis is meant to complement studies which have shown how other youth subcultures and musical genres, such as hip-hop and heavy metal, were shaped by the interrelated processes of industrial decline and media saturation (Gaines, 1992; Rose, 1994; Walser, 1993). In particular, Tricia Rose's analysis of rap music and hip-hop culture locates their emergence in the South Bronx at the very moment when black neighborhoods were suffering from the worst consequences of deindustrialization and urban renewal during the late 1970s (Rose, 1994). While the rise of a "postindustrial" economy severely constricted the opportunities available to black youth, it also made technologies of communication and reproduction available for appropriation in unintended ways, thereby laying the foundation for rap music's postmodern aesthetic of recycling and juxtaposition, commonly known as sampling.

The remainder of this paper takes us through the initial punk revolts of 1976-77 to the formation of hardcore subcultures in the 1980s, thus tracing a history which parallels the shift from deconstruction to authenticity as the prevailing response to a society centered around commercial media and consumer identities. Although a change in emphasis clearly did occur, it is not my argument that authenticity wholly subsumed the culture of deconstruction, for the two practices have continued to exist in tension with one another throughout the past twentyfive years of punk subculture (see Moore, 2000). The history of punk subculture also takes us through a tumultuous period of social, cultural, and political restructuring in the United States and Britain, including economic crisis and deindustrialization, the abatement of 1960s movements for social change, and the growth of ultraconservative political forces, culminating in the elections of Thatcher and Reagan. For David Harvey and other social theorists, these events signaled the exhaustion of Fordism in the 1970s and catalyzed the turn toward an even more ruthless "regime of accumulation" responsible for the condition of postmodernity. The remainder of this paper demonstrates how these same events—deindustrialization, the defeat of the Left, the hegemony of conservatism—also shaped the mood and tone of punk's emergence in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In short, I intend to show how punk—like the condition of postmodernity at large—is the cumulative consequence of both long-term processes of socioeconomic restructuring and the more immediate crises which represented a significant turning point in advanced capitalist societies.

I. Punk Rock in Britain and New York, 1976-77

The term "punk" first appeared in the world of popular music during the 1970s, when American rock critics used it to describe relatively unknown "garage bands" of the previous decade and a developing music scene centered in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Punk style and music came to the world's attention, however, primarily as a result of the well-publicized antics of one band, the Sex Pistols. The Sex Pistols were originally conceived in the imagination of their manager, Malcolm McLaren, one of the many "entrepreneurs" who had surfaced from the countercultural revolts of the 1960s. McLaren had dabbled in the philosophy of revolutionary moments developed by the Situationist International (a group which provided much of the inspiration for the student-worker revolts in Paris during May 1968), but more generally he seemed to understand that the mass media furnished the main stage for new kinds of symbolic warfare. McLaren

himself would later write: "The media was our helper and our lover and that in effect was the Sex Pistols' success... as today to control our media is to have the power of government, God or both" (quoted in Savage, 1992, pp. 165–66).

McLaren and the Sex Pistols usually failed when they consciously conspired to create a scene on their own terms, but they eventually succeeded in turning moments in the spotlight into opportunities for scandal. One inside observer put it this way: "Everything that Malcolm planned fell flat on its face . . . and everything he didn't plan made headlines" (quoted in Savage, 1992, p. 287). In December 1976, the Sex Pistols got their big break when they were invited to appear on an evening television show and band member Steve Jones called host Bill Grundy a "dirty fucker" and "fucking rotter" during a live interview. The so-called "Grundy incident" put punk and the Sex Pistols on the front page of virtually all the British daily newspapers with headlines like "The Filth and the Fury" (Daily Mirror), "The Foul-Mouthed Yobs" (Evening Standard), and "The Bizarre Face of Punk Rock" (Daily Telegraph). McLaren, according to one observer, initially viewed the "bad" publicity as a disaster until "he realized what the consequences were and how they could be used" (quoted in Savage 1992, p. 264). Six months later, the band released their sarcastically titled single "God Save the Queen" with an equally scornful campaign of cross-media promotion timed to coincide with the celebrations of Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee. Pressing plants, radio stations, and retail outlets objected to the "indecency" of the song and in some cases refused to produce or distribute it, but rather than censor its appearance, the controversy probably helped "God Save the Queen" to sell two hundred thousand copies in one week. On the heels of that success, the Sex Pistols played a concert on the top deck of a boat called the Queen Elizabeth as it drifted down the River Thames, mocking the anticipation of the Queen's own voyage down the river two days later. The band performed behind a banner which read "Queen Elizabeth Welcomes Sex Pistols" and a small but violent confrontation ensued between police and the audience once the boat docked. "God Save the Queen" should have reached number one in sales during Jubilee week, but the British Marketing Research Bureau manipulated the chart positions to show only a blacked-out song title and group name at the top spot (Savage, 1992, pp. 261–67).

The Sex Pistols' sensational terrorism thrived within a context of national collapse and rebuffed authoritarian attempts to use cultural symbols to deflect attention from social crises. The British economy had begun its downward spiral since the end of the 1960s and by 1975 there were over 1.5 million unemployed workers in the nation, most of whom were castoffs from its deteriorating manufacturing base. The "liberal consensus" of postwar Britain's social democracy was fracturing rapidly, and politicians railed against the spirit of "permissiveness" which had characterized the 1960s. Even after the government had made cuts of 1 billion pounds from the 1977–78 budget, the International Monetary Fund polarized members of Parliament by imposing further austerity in programs for social

welfare. New waves of xenophobia and vicious scapegoating swept through the country as the neofascist National Front made significant gains among the electorate. During the summer of 1976, the Notting Hill Carnival provided the setting for Britain's most severe riot in two decades, as more than 1,600 police officers fought with impoverished young blacks. The Jubilee celebration attempted to shore up these crises by suggesting that "one way to confront a future that might not work was with the trappings of a past which had worked" (quoted in Savage, 1992, p. 352). By the end of the decade, Margaret Thatcher had seized power from within this political vacuum (Savage, 1992, pp. 37–44, 229–43).

The Sex Pistols, as it turns out, were the appropriate omen for their times and created a groundswell of interest among dispersed groups of musicians, bohemians, and malcontents. But the movement they sparked immediately mushroomed beyond anything the Sex Pistols or their manager could have designed as punk music, style, and sensibility ignited the imaginations of young people faced with the circumstances of an apparently deteriorating society. As the Sex Pistols were thrust into the headlines of media scandal, punk fashion spread quickly among Britain's young and disaffected. Punk style emerged as a novel hybrid of its antecedent subcultures, taking from both the lumpen proletarian scruffiness of the skinheads and the meticulous attention to detail characteristic of mods and glam rock (Hebdidge, 1979, pp. 52–70). Punks presented themselves as catatonic street urchins through intentionally ripped and torn clothing, displays of selfmutilation, and an affected stare of vacancy and blankness, but they did so with a sense of self-consciousness and even vanity; as Hebdidge wrote, "Despite its proletarian accents, punk's rhetoric was steeped in irony" (1979, p. 63). These styles were designed to represent the darkness and impending disintegration of British society, and they fulfilled that prophesy when punks provoked onlookers into fits of rage and violence or became media scapegoats for the downfall of civilization.

The Sex Pistols and the original British punk subculture therefore exemplify what I have called the "culture of deconstruction" in response to the condition of postmodernity, the practice of appropriating the symbols and media which have become the foundation of political economy and social order in order to undermine their dominant meanings and parody the power behind them. The strategy for subversion employed by McLaren and the Sex Pistols involved trying to steer the institutions of mass media and icons of consumer culture against themselves, using their own signs and spectacles to expose the artificial and arbitrary nature of an apparently immutable social system. They brought punk to the center of national attention by way of a television talk show, tabloid headlines, the spectacular mockery of a royal spectacle, and the public display of fashionable antifashion, and in each case the disorder they caused immediately escaped the control of the band and their manager. These acts of semiotic annihilation also targeted the increasing commercialism of rock music, as the Sex Pistols consummated the form of noise which Lawrence Grossberg dubbed "rock and roll against itself" (1986, p. 58). Denouncing 1970s progressive rock and its extended

song structures as the product of culture industry largesse, the Sex Pistols' music disassembled the conventions of rock and roll by creating a kind of sound which "seemed to make no sense at all, to make nothing, only to destroy" (Marcus, 1989, p. 64). In deliberate opposition to commercial rock music, the Sex Pistols' Johnny Rotten defiantly "sang" in a working-class dialect, while the rest of the band flaunted their ineptitude as musicians, making noises that were louder, faster, and noisier than anything most audiences had heard previously. This antiaesthetic would be further developed by the dozens of British punk bands who emerged from the Sex Pistols' shadow, including the Clash, the Damned, X-Ray Spex, the Buzzcocks, Wire, Gang of Four, the Slits, the Adverts, the Mekons, and so on.

Punk also signaled a postmodern turn in the formation of subcultures insofar as it became impossible to distinguish between the "reality" of youthful deviance and the "moral panics" (Cohen, 1972; Hall et al., 1979) of media representation. In fact, the media scandals actually *preceded* the development of a full-fledged punk subculture. After the Sex Pistols made headlines in the tabloids, alienated British youth capitalized on the media's sensationalized discourse in making themselves into the symptoms of social disintegration. The style they then concocted borrowed heavily from postmodern techniques of juxtaposition, pastiche, and self-reflexive irony. Hebdidge (1979) has shown that the meaning of punk style did not reside in any one of its objects or poses, but rather in the way that such combinations of clothing and behavior were used to deflate the transparency of meaning and the ideological "common sense" it supports. Punk style shocked, parodied, and conveyed ambiguity by appropriating banal commodities (safety pins, vegetable dye, Vaseline), essential badges of Britishness (the Union Jack, the Queen), and the tools of conventional gender roles and sexuality (cosmetics, pornography), thus disorienting the "natural" uses and meanings of those items by situating them with a new "bricolage" of fashion and attitude. This style paraded its own fabrication through bleached hairstyles, the use of plastic and rubber as clothing, and most of all in the celebration of its own semantic contradictions and incoherent polysemy. The imperative to shock and disturb above all led some punks to display the Nazi swastika, not out of allegiance to fascism or the growing ranks of British fascists surrounding them, but as an irresponsible addition to their confusing montage of degeneracy and depravity.

The chaos set in motion by the Sex Pistols served as most people's introduction to punk music and style, but many of the ideas behind them were imported by Malcolm McLaren from a punk scene which had been emerging in New York since at least 1974. In particular, the New York scene was ripe with a culture of deconstruction which recycled media images and commercial spectacles. The toast of the Manhattan scene of the early 1970s was the New York Dolls, a band which personified excess with a highly developed sense of irony, performing in high heels, full makeup, and women's clothes while exuding the menacing cynicism of young street thugs without ideals. They lived up to the mythology of the

sleazy rock and roll band from the trashy urban underworld with a self-reflexive flair that led one onlooker to label them "mock rock." Before taking on the Sex Pistols, McLaren briefly acted as the Dolls' manager during 1975, convincing the band to perform in red leather outfits with the hammer-and-sickle flag of the Soviet Union behind them, but the partnership failed quickly as the band's career descended into a drug-fueled crash (Savage, 1992, pp. 59–65, 86–88).

The New York Dolls' self-destruction coincided with a shift in the Manhattan scene toward a dingy Bowery bar called CBGB's. The CBGB's scene included preppy but paranoid performers such as Television, the Voidoids, Patti Smith, Blondie, and the Talking Heads, a number of whom were former art students who used music to express anxious foreboding and cool detachment. However, it was a group of young men from the Queens suburb of Forest Hills, calling themselves the Ramones, who most personified the culture of deconstruction by lifting freely from past images of popular culture in ways that were neither wholly ironic or sincere, but instead impaired the ability to distinguish between the two. All four members of the band took the surname "Ramone" in reference to Paul McCartney's first pseudonym. On stage they appeared as moronic variations of the stereotypical juvenile delinquent seen in 1950s B movies, outfitted in black leather jackets, ripped blue jeans, biker sunglasses, small T-shirts with cartoon logos, and mop haircuts reminiscent of the Beatles or the Byrds. Their music put the vocal harmonies and catchy hooks derived from surf music and 1960s "girl groups" against a deliberately simple but high-speed soundscape of three-chord riffs and minimal rhythmic changes. Both on their albums and in their concerts, the Ramones performed only a succession of sonic blasts clocking in at under two minutes apiece, each kicked off by ritualized shouts of "One-Two-Three-Four!" The Ramones did their best to appear dumb, and the deliberately inane lyrics of songs like "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue," "I Wanna Be Sedated," and "Beat on the Brat" personified the idiocy and purposelessness of young people raised on junk food, shopping malls, cigarettes, and amphetamines (Garofalo, 1997, pp. 312–14; Savage, 1992, pp. 90, 130–39).

The scene at CBGB's grew quickly and soon became conscious of itself as a distinct cultural moment. The word "punk" was used to describe the scene, once again through reference to the symbols of popular culture and mass media. In late 1975, CBGB's regular Legs McNeil helped start and edit a low-budget "fanzine" of interviews and comics and gave it the name *Punk*: "On TV, if you watched cop shows, *Kojak*, *Beretta*, when the cops finally catch the mass murderer, they'd say 'you dirty Punk.' It was what your teachers would call you. It meant you were the lowest of the low" (quoted in Savage, 1992, p. 131). No one fit this profile better than the Ramones. A second dimension of punk was emerging at this time, however, and it too formed in relation to commercial culture, although it expressed a desire for authenticity and creative sincerity. The musical amateurism and fairly close-knit relations surrounding CBGB's helped create a do-it-yourself ethic which allowed those socialized to be consuming spectators of the mass media to

involve themselves in cultural production, and the homemade, photocopied *Punk* was both an expression and a result of this alternative response to the condition of postmodernity. McNeil's coeditor, Jon Holmstrom, helped advance this definition in an early issue of *Punk*: "Punk rock—any kid can pick up a guitar and become a rock 'n' roll star, despite or because of his lack of ability, talent, intelligence, limitations and/or potential, and usually do so out of frustration, hostility, a lot of nerve and a need for ego fulfillment [*sic*]" (quoted in Leblanc, 1999, p. 35).

The sense of amateurism and creative transgression surrounding punk inspired young people who could participate in the subculture by playing in their own band, writing for a low-budget fanzine, or creating an independent record label. Thus, a culture of authenticity began to develop alongside punk's spirit of negation and deconstruction. In Britain, the do-it-yourself approach led to the creation of punk fanzines like Sniffin' Glue, the hand-drawn and photocopied work of a young fan of the Ramones and New York punk named Mark P. To further advance the spirit of do-it-yourself production, Mark P. wrote in one early issue of Sniffin' Glue: "All you kids out there who read 'SG' don't be satisfied with what we write. Go out and start your own fanzines" (quoted in Savage, 1992, p. 279), and indeed within a few months there were punk fanzines selfpublished throughout the United Kingdom. A now-famous hand-drawn illustration in one of these fanzines advocated a do-it-yourself approach toward making music, humorously instructing guitar players how to play a minimum of three chords, followed by the caption "Now Form a Band." Countless punk bands did form during 1976 and 1977 and many, perhaps most, of their members had little or no previous experience as musicians. This opened unprecedented opportunities for the participation of women, as Lucy Toothpaste, the creator of a feminist fanzine called Jolt, recalled: "Punk didn't do much to challenge male sexuality or image . . . But in the early days it did give a lot of women confidence. Boy bands were getting up on stage who couldn't play a note, so it was easy for girls who couldn't play a note to get up on stage as well. By the time that they developed, women were singing about their own experience in a way which I don't think they'd done before" (quoted in Savage, 1992, p. 418). Punk groups led by female musicians, such as the X-Ray Spex, the Slits, the Raincoats, and the Adverts, formed soon thereafter. The recordings of these bands could be absorbed and sold by an expanding network of independent record labels and distributors. The number of "specialist" record shops in Britain increased from 1,750 in 1978 to 2,370 in 1981, and many of the newcomers (e.g., Rough Trade, Beggars Banquet) were punk-inspired retailers who also formed their own record labels or distribution companies (Hesmondhalgh, 1998, p. 258).

Punks also played a central role in responding to the political gains made by the racist National Front Party in Britain during the 1970s through an organization calling itself Rock Against Racism (RAR). Rock Against Racism coordinated a series of live concerts which put reggae, punk, and ska performers on the same bill—including the Clash, Steel Pulse (a renowned reggae act), Elvis Costello

and the Attractions, X-Ray Spex (a female-led punk band), the Specials (a racially mixed "2-Tone" ska band), and Tom Robinson (an openly gay singer)—in an attempt to bring black and white audiences together and debunk racist mythologies. One such concert in early 1978 attracted approximately one hundred thousand spectators. Significantly, RAR employed punk's do-it-yourself networks in its grassroots organizing, especially through the creation of a fanzine called *Temporary Hoarding*, which raised awareness about racism, sexism, and fascism and increased its circulation to twelve thousand by 1979. RAR sought to counteract the National Front's mobilization of young, disaffected white proletarians and the growing popularity of Oi music among racist skinheads, in part by organizing concerts in regions which had recently had local incidents of racist violence. RAR also played an important role in deglamorizing and eventually eradicating the use of the swastika within punk subculture itself (Frith & Street, 1992).

By most accounts, however, the punk movement in Britain had begun to splinter by late 1977, with the "social realism" supported by RAR at one end and the "artistic vanguard" seeking to escape society at the other (Frith, 1981, pp. 158-63; Savage, 1992, pp. 480-89). The possibilities for synthesizing art and everyday life appeared to be exhausted, and most saw the Sex Pistols' demise in early 1978 as an important symptom, if not the primary catalyst, of this fracture. The Sex Pistols had begun a tour of the United States after releasing their first and only full-length album, Never Mind the Bollocks-Here's the Sex Pistols, in the fall of 1977. During that tour, which lasted only two weeks but which was covered extensively by local media, the violent and mindless antics of the Sex Pistols' new bass player, Sid Vicious, were made to personify the nihilism of punk youth. McLaren had booked the tour to begin in the South (Atlanta, Memphis, San Antonio) because he hoped for sensationalized local news coverage and to maybe even stir up some violence, and Vicious was most prepared to glare for the cameras and adopt the thuggish persona on stage. The Sex Pistols were a spectacle dependent upon media controversy, and like all other spectacles which lack substance, they soon came apart in the glare of the spotlight. McLaren attempted to cash in, once again, with The Great Rock N' Roll Swindle, a film about his manipulative exploits and "rip off" of the music industry (movie critic Roger Ebert wrote an early version of the script, then titled Anarchy in the UK). But the story which captured the headlines this time was Sid Vicious's murder of his girlfriend, Nancy Spungeon, whom he had stabbed to death in the room the couple shared in the Chelsea Hotel. Vicious himself died from a heroin overdose four months later, while he was awaiting trial on charges of second-degree murder. Greil Marcus (1989) has argued that the Sex Pistols did not represent nihilism, but rather a form of negation which proposes that "if nothing is true, then everything is possible." Indeed, new sounds, styles, sensibilities, cultural networks, and political institutions had been created in the aftermath of the Sex Pistols' initial acts of semiotic destruction, but these events suggested something darker: If nothing is true, then maybe nothing is possible.

II. Hardcore California, 1977–84

There was no local punk scene in the Los Angeles area prior to the events of 1977, but thousands of young malcontents in the region were certainly prepared to embrace the new sound and style once it came to town. In proper LA fashion, a couple of fans started a fanzine called *Slash* before there was anything to really write about ("We were pretending there was an LA scene when there was no scene whatsoever"), and then reality eventually caught up with the media ("Within a few months there was a snowball effect: suddenly there were more bands than we knew what to do with") (quoted in Savage, 1992, p. 437). The local punk scene was initially centered in Hollywood, with bands like X, the Weirdos, the Screamers, and the Germs. A number of Chicano punk bands formed across Southern California, including the Zeros (one of whom later assumed the identity of El Vez, the self-proclaimed "Mexican Elvis"), the Plugz, and Los Illegals, the latter of whom once described themselves as "Tito Puente takes LSD and hangs out with The Clash, or hangs out with existential Marxist theorists" (quoted in Loza, 1993, p. 221).

Ultimately, however, the epicenter of Southern California punk rock in the 1980s was neither Hollywood nor East LA, but rather the suburbs and beach towns of the South Bay and Orange County. These areas had once been shining examples of postwar suburbanization, but by the time punk rock arrived they had become sites of widening social polarities and Darwinist ideologies. In 1978, groups of suburban homeowners and right-wing activists working in conjunction with the regional antibusing campaign successfully passed Proposition 13, which dammed the flow of suburban property taxes to be used for county services and education. Mike Davis has written that the "tax revolt" culminating in Proposition 13 was "an epochal event that helped end the New Deal and paved the way for Reaganomics" (1992, p. 156). The legislation, in other words, reversed fiscal efforts for progressive redistribution during a period of unprecedented inflation in the regional real estate market, thus allowing homeowners to pocket magical windfalls of wealth at the expense of underfunded schools and services. Perhaps more importantly, the campaign mobilized a new conservative constituency through "an implicit promise to halt the threatening encroachment of inner-city populations on suburbia" and "the inflammatory image of the family homestead taxed to extinction in order to finance the integration of public education and other social programs obnoxious to white suburbanites" (Davis, 1992, p. 183). Two years later, former California governor Ronald Reagan was elected president on the strength of a similar brand of rhetoric.

In London, punks had witnessed the breakdown of the liberal consensus and mocked its passage down the River Thames, costuming themselves as the empire's degenerate offspring. In the suburbs of Los Angeles, where a similar groundswell of anxious conservatism and greed had opened the doors of the White House to a former Hollywood actor, who then cleared the way for a glossier

but even more merciless form of capitalism, the symptom and the response was hardcore. Hardcore is a variation of punk music and subculture which grew out of the suburban garages of California in the early 1980s, and it embodied a different, and in some ways larger, spectrum of contradictions and possibilities. Indeed, Southern California hardcore was generally more nihilistic than British punk, its shows were plagued by violence and machismo, its sentiments were sometimes shamelessly racist, misogynist, and homophobic, and its rebellion was routinely defused by apathetic resignation and cynical fatalism. These tendencies dramatized, exaggerated, and in some cases parodied the condition of young suburbanites who are raised as spectators to an endless parade of meaningless images and taught to unleash their frustrations upon the powerless. But other strains embedded within the same hardcore subcultures personified more socially engaged and constructive possibilities, delivering some of the most piercing criticism of the political and economic order of the 1980s while creating an even more extensive network of do-it-yourself practices and institutions. This critique also formed in oppositional relation to commercial media and consumer culture, and its internal contradictions typically germinated from an all-encompassing insistence on purity and authenticity. In other words, Los Angeles, which had arguably emerged as the capital city of the condition of postmodernity, hosted even more extreme forms of both the culture of deconstruction and the culture of authenticity as they had been developing within punk music and style.

Black Flag, a band started in 1978 by surfers and skaters from Hermosa Beach, was among the first of its genre and quickly became one of the most popular groups which defined the nihilist sensibilities of Southern California hard-core. In songs like "Nervous Breakdown," "Wasted," "No Values," and their football chorus tribute to beer, "Six Pack," Black Flag spoke for young white suburbanites lacking morals or a sense of purpose to the point of self-parody, or more specifically to the point where it was impossible to tell whether they were a parody, the real thing, or somehow both. They were joined in this respect by Fear, whose singer became a celebrity in the LA punk scene by taunting his audience to the point of onstage violence and issuing calculated but nasty insults against women, homosexuals, Jews, etc. Fear's repertoire of songs included "I Don't Care about You/Fuck You," "Let's Have a War/So You Can All Die," and "We Destroy the Family."

Suburban hardcore immediately begat subgenres of what has been called "brat-core" or "snot-core." This refers to groups of young men who flaunt their immaturity and idiocy while making high-speed but very melodic music, which might be described as the sonic equivalent of being teased by an annoying child. The Ramones had fathered this approach in New York, and it caught on quickly in the suburbs of Southern California. The Dickies, residents of the San Fernando Valley, were the first of these in the LA scene, releasing an album called *The Incredible Shrinking Dickies* in 1979. Singer Keith Morris founded the Circle Jerks (a reference to group masturbation) after leaving Black

Flag, and their records *Group Sex* (1980), *Wild in the Streets* (1982), and *A Golden Shower of Hits* (1983) instantly made the Jerks one of LA's most popular punk bands. The Adolescents, an aptly named group from Orange County, characterized themselves as "just a wrecking crew/Bored boys with nothing to do" in 1981, and then followed that declaration with a barrage of verbal abuse aimed at women, gays, and racial minorities. The Descendents dumbed the Beach Boys' melodies down to fry-cook anthems such as "I Like Food," "My Dad Sucks," "I'm Not a Loser," "Weinerschnitzel," and the taunting sing-along, "Suburban Home."

The regression to sophomoric idiocy is a rebellion against authority, or at the very least an attempt to evade responsibility by playing dumb, but it is a rebellion which can also support reactionary and authoritarian ends. It flees not only from the demands of work, the law, family, and etiquette, but also from all accountability to anyone but oneself and one's immediate wants. All social forces larger than the self are indiscriminately reviled as intrusions and constraints. Thus, punk's capacity for parody and semiotic attack could be put in the service of misogyny, racism, and homophobia. As Greil Marcus has written of the Adolescents' music: "Attacked, one may side with one's attacker, and accept the terms of the attack . . . Contempt for and a wish to exterminate the other is presented here as a rebellion against the smooth surface of everyday life, but it may be more truly a violent, spectacular accommodation to America's worst instincts" (1993, p. 185). In this sense, the temper tantrums of brat-core punk served as a fitting soundtrack to Proposition 13 and the tax "revolts" of 1978, when homeowners in the valley and Orange County organized to rid themselves of responsibility for other people's education and other people's children.

The regressive persona of suburbia forms as a convergence of liberal individualism and pre-Oedipal narcissism, both of which have a long history in social life but which are further intensified by post-Fordist methods of production and consumption. Those employed in the retail and service sectors have few opportunities for vertical mobility or career advancement, are entrusted with only minimal responsibilities, and rarely establish a lasting rapport with co-workers or the customers they serve. The type of work performed is not likely to inspire feelings of achievement or satisfaction, and the worker often drifts from job to job without a sense of direction or purpose. Meanwhile, advertising encourages its viewers to think of consumptive desires as primordial instincts, to sublimate existential dissatisfaction with purchasing power, and shrug off those who stand in the way of a good time. Time and memory have been similarly disrupted as the spasmodic flows of television programming, video games, and commercial amusements dissect everyday life into a succession of moments enclosed within long periods of senseless repetition and boredom. Again it was Black Flag who articulated this condition of bored young suburbanites in their frathouse anthem "T.V. Party," where they parodied themselves as beer-guzzling couch surfers who stay glued to the television because they are terrified by the prospect of having to go into, or

even just talk about, the outside world; "T.V. Party" invites the audience to sing and clap along with the chorus, "We've got/Nothing better to do/Than watch T.V./And have a couple of brews/Don't talk about anything else/We don't want to know!/We're dedicated/To our favorite shows."

And yet Black Flag was also at the center of an even stronger do-it-yourself ethic within Southern California hardcore, and in this regard they straddle the extraordinary contradictions and multiple possibilities of punk rock. Two members of the group started SST Records in 1978 initially in order to release the music of Black Flag, and throughout the 1980s SST was the single most important independent label of American hardcore, releasing the music of the Minutemen, the Descendents, Hüsker Dü, the Meat Puppets, Bad Brains, Sonic Youth, Firehose, the Screaming Trees, Dinosaur Jr., and Soundgarden, among others. With a network of independent labels, touring punk bands, low-budget fanzines, and college radio stations, the West Coast and other regions of North America developed the culture of authenticity into an infrastructure for performance and participation, and in some cases also as an outlet for political dissent. In Berkeley, three activists formerly involved with the New Left counterculture started a fanzine called Maximum Rock 'n' Roll, a dense black-and-white periodical packed with tiny print and minimal advertising space, consisting of pages and pages of generally unedited letters sent in by readers debating one another about punk and politics. Maximum Rock 'n' Roll also featured "scene reports" about local punk rock in everywhere from individual suburbs of California to Eastern European nations, hundreds of reviews of recordings sent by independent labels, and feature articles about issues such as the nuclear arms race, Central America and South Africa, sexism and violence against women, and the history of anarchism. Later in the decade, punks in Berkeley established the Gilman Street Project, a cooperatively managed community center for hardcore shows and political activism.

Punk rock was also an important part of political protest in San Francisco, a city wracked with turmoil after November 1978, when mayor George Mascone and openly gay supervisor Harvey Milk were murdered by a former police officer named Dan White. White was convicted but sentenced to only five years after his lawyers successfully argued that his mental capacity had diminished because of a junk food diet (the now-infamous "Twinkie Insanity" defense). From this context emerged the Dead Kennedys, who chose their name in order "to symbolize the end of the American dream and the beginning of the decline and fall of the American empire. America is falling apart at the seams for a variety of reasons and so in order to call attention to that we call attention to what the catalyst was" (quoted in "Ten-year," 1987, p. 88). Also in the Bay Area, punks were a central part of the Livermore Action Group (LAG), an organization which blockaded the nuclear weapons research lab in Livermore, staged "die-ins" in the financial district of San Francisco, and invaded the lobbies of corporations connected to the military (Goldthorpe, 1992, pp. 50-52). Coinciding with the dramatic street actions of ACT UP/Queer Nation, a number of gay punk fanzines, including

Homocore, also began to emerge from San Francisco in late 1988 (Goldthorpe, 1992, p. 59).

The scene which has most exemplified the do-it-yourself ethic of hardcore while advancing it in new directions during the past two decades is located in Washington D.C. The band which quickly assumed leadership of the D.C. scene was Minor Threat, four white teenagers who played at a furious pace behind the bellowing shouts of their lead singer, Ian MacKaye. MacKaye and Minor Threat drummer Jeff Nelson founded Dischord Records in 1980 to produce seven-inch singles of D.C. punk bands, selling their products directly at shows and on consignment to independent music stores in the Northeast. But MacKaye and Minor Threat added a new twist to the do-it-yourself ethic by linking it to a "straightedge" lifestyle of total abstinence from drugs, alcohol, and promiscuous sex. The straight-edge lifestyle almost immediately became the focus for debate and subcultural identification within the rapidly growing D.C. punk scene. Minor Threat had broken up by 1983, but hardcore punk rock continued to thrive in the nation's capitol during the Reagan years, with Dischord Records serving as its flagship and centerpiece. Along with three other veteran musicians from the D.C. region, MacKaye formed a band called Fugazi in 1987, which extended the commitment to independent production while amassing an even larger following within and far beyond Washington D.C. (see Temple, 1999).

In Southern California, the straight-edge movement and a new emphasis upon positive, constructive action found expression in the Better Youth Organization (BYO), established in 1982. Most of their activities involved organizing punk shows and finding places for shows, putting out records, and spreading the message that drugs and alcohol and the violence they provoked were ruining the local punk scene. For the summer of 1982 the BYO had planned a North American tour featuring the bands Youth Brigade and Social Distortion, and two documentary filmmakers followed along to make a movie which would be titled *Another State of Mind*. Between 1983 and 1986, about 40 percent of punks identified themselves as "straight-edge" in the annual polls conducted by *Flipside*, a fanzine which had become the most widely read punk fanzine in Southern California, with a press run of around ten thousand per issue ("Ten-year," 1987, p. 125). The group 7 Seconds, which vocally aligned itself with both straight-edge and the Better Youth Organization, was voted to be "best band" by *Flipside* readers in 1984 and 1985 ("Ten-year," 1987, p. 125).

The emergence of straight-edge lifestyles and a discursive shift toward construction rather than destruction appeared to signal a drastic about-face within punk subculture in a very short period of time. But although the cultural response of positive punk was indeed very different from that of their more nihilistic predecessors, both factions of the subculture had reacted to the same series of social conditions and contradictions. Young people had been left with scant opportunities to find sources of fulfillment and creativity on the job, with no guidelines for transforming a culture of consumption into a basis for meaningful existence, and

unable to participate in the spectacles of mass media as anything but a spectator, left with "nothing better to do than watch T.V. and have a couple of brews." One cluster of punk bands and personalities screamed that they were bored, flipped the bird to everyone around them, and broke up after their first album. They were as dramatic and spectacular as the rush of consumer culture, and they vanished just as quickly. Those involved with "constructive" hardcore, on the other hand, sought to take control over what they consumed, transformed passionate consumer tastes into a basis for cultural production, and used the methods and apparatuses of commercial media for creating an underground scene they could call their own. Doing it themselves, they made the ephemeral world of consumption into a grounds for durable identities and participatory community.

And yet all manifestations of "positive punk" have been and continue to be hampered by intrinsic contradictions which place considerable limitations upon its potency as a counterculture and a social movement. Above all, the overriding concern of these hardcore subcultures is with the maintenance of purity. The quest for an imagined state of purity is the link between the anticommercial ethos of underground punk, the straight-edge rejection of drugs and alcohol, and an adherence to strict vegetarian diets and lifestyles. In each case, the hardcore is defined by its repudiation of the commodities typically denounced as "pollutants": corporate rock, major labels, meat, leather, mood-altering substances, and promiscuous sex. Consumption is portrayed by purists as a form of surrender, a loss of self-control which is to be resisted most vehemently through the body and the preservation of ecological self-control against foreign "toxins" and "contaminants." Like enraged Boy Scouts, positive punks and straight-edgers were so sober, earnest, and downright humorless that they could only attract those looking for a wholesale alternative to amusement and pleasure.

All subcultures make distinctions between the genuine article and the Johnny-come-lately, but within hardcore circles this became the predominant focus in itself, the purpose of cultural practice and the center of its symbolic universe. Maintaining an imagined state of commercial purity became the primary mission of hardcore rather than a means to an end, and the subculture closed ranks around itself as often as it reached out to new recruits. The scene had to be "defended" from the moment it was built, even during the times when corporations and most young people had absolutely no interest in hardcore. Enemies and alien forces were needed from the start, and they could always be found in the form of sellouts and "poseurs," bands which supposedly craved commercial success and spectators who only imitated "true" punks in their dress and demeanor. Throughout the 1980s, the pages of Maximum Rock 'n' Roll and Flipside including both regular articles and the letters sent by readers—were overwhelmingly concerned with defining what punk is and what punk is not, complaining about people who think they are punk but really are not, distinguishing between true originators and "trendy" followers who just "look cool," accusing certain bands of selling out or at least trying to sell out, and so on (see Fox, 1987).

Finally, while the political ideology of hardcore espoused inclusion and opposition to racism and sexism, its cultural practices ensured that the scene would remain almost exclusively white and male. There were many young women involved in hardcore subcultures, but the violence and molestation in the mosh pits guaranteed that most would stay away from the shows. But even less obviously, hardcore notions of anticommercial authenticity are inseparable from anxieties about mass culture and consumerism which echo Oedipal fears of castration and male uneasiness about stereotypically feminine attributes, such as passivity and vanity. In the language of the hardcore, rebellion might be "sterilized" or rendered "impotent" by commodification and the mainstream, which "absorb" and then "domesticate" their prey. Such discourses reduce possibilities for dissent to ejaculatory actions, and they misrepresent processes of co-optation by equating them with maternal smothering. They further define subcultures as a space for the expression of male anxieties and problematize the participation of women. For example, the hardcore association of fashion with superficiality and inauthenticity restricted the access and devalued the creativity of young girls socialized to construct their subjectivity through style and sexuality.

During the hardcore era, punk scenes became even more exclusively white than they had been in the late 1970s. It is important to note that although hardcore punk and skinhead neo-Nazism were routinely conflated in the tabloid media and by adult authorities, the latter remained a very small, though highly sensational, faction which was mostly removed from the larger hardcore subcultures. If anything, hardcore scenes were at times united, at least momentarily, in opposition to skinheads and their overt racism. And yet it is certainly true that the sound of hardcore punk was nothing if not pure white noise, rock music which had been purged of nearly all its debts to rhythm and blues or any other "outside" influences. In Southern California, one major consequence was the marginalization and eventual erasure of a budding Chicano punk scene, whose performers had attempted to incorporate various traditions of Latin music (see above). In Washington D.C. the ideology of liberal individualism which informed notions of anticommercial authenticity was further extended in the reactionary spew of Minor Threat's "Guilty of Being White": ("I'm sorry/For something I didn't do/ Lynched somebody/But I don't know who/You blame me for slavery/A hundred years before I was born").

III. Conclusion: The Contradictions of Postmodernity and the Possibilities of Punk

As forms of style, music, and attitude, the punk subcultures of the late 1970s and early 1980s represent divergent responses to the condition of postmodernity. Though characterized by a wide range of practices and meanings, each of the various subgenres of punk have taken as their point of departure the implosion of boundaries between media and reality and the deepening of commercial culture

in daily life. What I have called the "culture of deconstruction" initially emerged as Malcolm McLaren and the Sex Pistols attempted to redirect media and spectacles against themselves. In doing so, they exposed the constructed and arbitrary nature of popular culture, reappropriated past images with a sense of irony and self-reflexivity, mimicked the fragmentation and distortion of mediated perception, and embraced hybridity and simulation as a means of semiotic disruption. The "culture of authenticity," on the other hand, developed as young people attempted to insulate themselves from the culture industry and consumer lifestyles in their search for expressive sincerity and anticommercial purity. Those who embraced the do-it-yourself approach transformed media and consumer identities into independent networks of cultural production, which enabled a sense of local community, allowed spectators to become participants, and created a space for public debate and dissent.

Punk music and style emerged from a social context shaped by deindustrialization and economic stagnation, the rise of reactionary political powers, the exhaustion of 1960s social movements and countercultures, and a general mood of social decline and imminent collapse. "History is made by those who say 'No,'" Jon Savage wrote at the end of his book on the Sex Pistols and punk rock, "and Punk's utopian heresies remain its gift to the world" (1992, p. 541). But because punk's symbolic attacks were shaped by the surrounding context of apocalyptic disintegration, and because its message of "No Future" lacked an alternative vision, it could only respond to the self-interested cynicism of the new conservative hegemony with larger and more dramatic doses of cynicism and negativity. Lawrence Grossberg (1992) has theorized that punk was both a symptom and a catalyst in the hegemony of "popular conservatism" because it put the exclamation point on the crisis of "affect" in postmodern culture, or in other words because it signaled the exhaustion of countercultural attempts to articulate youthful passion with a larger project of social transformation. Punk's capacity for irony and parody not only undermined the powers-that-be, but also its own investment in youth, music, and style. History may indeed be made by those who say "No," but revolutionary agents also need something to which they can say "Yes," and punk subcultures have been mostly unable to formulate such alternatives. Writing about the New York scene at CBGB's in an article titled "The White Noise Supremacists," the esteemed rock critic Lester Bangs observed, "This scene and the punk stance in general 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" (1987, p. 275).

Both the culture of deconstruction and the culture of authenticity suffer from the loss of utopian imagination, and as we have seen this lack of humane vision has sometimes allowed punk to become the tool of authoritarian forces fueled by anger and fatalism. Some styles of punk performance have personified the widespread crisis of meaning and passion by dramatizing narcissism and nihilism,

parading their immaturity and stupidity, and consciously espousing the most overt forms of racism, sexism, and homophobia. In the wake of Proposition 13 and the "Reagan Revolution," the "snot-core" scene of suburban Southern California took punk to its most nihilist extreme by becoming a symptom of the narcissistic withdrawal and juvenile selfishness spreading throughout the neighborhoods of Orange County and the San Fernando Valley. In hardcore scenes focused on maintaining authenticity, the cynicism regarding possibilities for social change led the subculture to turn inward and police its boundaries with extreme vigor, for it only aspired to hibernate from the world of commercial culture and postmodernity. Devoid of a strategy which could make the do-it-yourself ethic into a basis for inclusion or the foundation of a mass movement, hardcore subcultures ridiculed outsiders and condemned all gestures toward accessibility or popularity as "selling out."

However, in the same way that socioeconomic conditions can enable multiple cultural possibilities, the political legacy of punk cannot be seen only in terms of cynical nihilism. Above all, the emphasis on creative access has opened spaces for artists representing a wide range of perspectives, and occasionally these bring the cultures of authenticity and deconstruction together in fresh and powerful ways. The LA punk scene of the 1980s, for example, also allowed for the emergence of the Minutemen, a band of three high school friends led by an enormously overweight singer, guitarist, and songwriter named D. Boon. All three members of the band were from San Pedro, a city adjacent to Los Angeles Harbor with large working-class communities of people employed in industries related to the shipyards, and the Minutemen were proud of that affiliation, including references to "Pedro" in songs, album covers, and T-shirts as an expression of their workingclass identities. Musically, the speed and immediacy of punk rock was the Minutemen's point of departure, but after a couple of years of touring and recording they had begun to expand the sonic range of hardcore by adding from other genres, such as funk and free jazz. By 1984 the band had recorded an eclectic double-album masterpiece, Double Nickels on the Dime, a collection of fortythree song fragments sandwiched between the sounds of a car engine, songs which laid down a beat, a riff, and an idea and then quickly took a right turn in a new direction. As working-class youth growing up in the age of Reagan, they authored principled and outraged anthems of protest, such as "The Price of Paradise," "Joe McCarthy's Ghost," "Viet Nam," "Working Men Are Pissed," and their tribute, "Bob Dylan Wrote Propaganda Songs." But D. Boon and the Minutemen were also very witty and funny, and they knew how to make politics a basis for humor (e.g., "If Reagan Played Disco," "Dreams Are Free, Motherfucker," "Political Song for Michael Jackson to Sing," "The Roar of the Masses Could Be Farts," "Little Man with a Gun in His Hand"). As they were both sung on the record and printed in the sleeve, the lyrics were perfectly suited to such fragmentation, sounding like a stream-of-consciousness jumble of words which were sometimes incoherent but often added up to a powerful thought and critique.

The Minutemen were also instrumental in building a do-it-yourself spirit within Southern California punk. While the Minutemen themselves recorded with SST, the band created and operated their own independent label, New Alliance Records. They were very prolific in the studio, releasing four full-length records, four EPs, and one double album between 1980 and 1985, spending as little as \$150 on recording costs ("Ten-year," 1987, p. 204). Bass player Mike Watt summed up the Minutemen's approach in this way: "Punk is something you have to do to know it, and the only ones who understand it are the ones who did. Punk was more than just starting a band, it was about starting a label, it was about touring, it was about taking control. It was like songwriting: you just do it. You want a record, you just pay the pressing plant. That's what it was all about" (quoted in Arnold, 1993, p. 40). Tragically, in December 1985, just as the Minutemen were hitting their stride, frontman D. Boon was killed in an automobile accident in Arizona. He and the Minutemen left behind an example which demonstrates the enormous potential of punk rock as both a forum for sociopolitical criticism and a means of participatory culture.

The Minutemen, along with a number of other punk performers and visionaries, embodied the explosive possibilities ignited when the cultures of deconstruction and authenticity are placed in dialogue rather than opposed to one another. Mobilizing against a postmodern, media-saturated, consumption-driven political economy necessitates an attack on multiple fronts, including both the transient flow of images and symbols and the durable organization of cultural practices and everyday life. Subcultures and social movements which are critical of society must respond to the political economy of signs and styles with the weapons of parody, irony, and performance epitomized by punk. They must also build alternative institutions which allow ordinary people to communicate, create, and participate in opposition to a society which relegates citizens to the position of spectator and consumer, and here again the punk do-it-yourself ethic serves as an exemplary model. Above all, however, symbolic mockery and independent culture must both be informed by an alternative, utopian vision which looks to the way society could and should be organized as a point of departure for its criticism of the alienation and dehumanization inflicted in late capitalist society.

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