"ANARCHY SOUNDS GOOD TO ME / THEN SOMEONE ASKS, 'WHO'D FIX THE SEWERS?'": THE DIALECTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUNK ROCK AND THE MAINSTREAM

by

Andrea Palmer

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1 Quoted from the Dead Kennedys song, "Where do ya draw the line?"
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Abstract

Punk music and style have coalesced to form an articulated, if dispersed, social and subcultural movement in contemporary society. Are cultural analysis and punk incompatible? Does the anti-authoritarian and purposefully off-putting nature of punk resist a critical assessment of the movement beyond the scope of literary readings of lyrics and musicological notational evaluation of the music? Since the birth of the movement in the mid-nineteen seventies, most modes of inquiry into punk have actually disregarded the movement as form—the music is decidedly lowbrow and technically primitive—and social analysts have tried to fit punk into the narrow, established template of the short-lived, rebellious ‘youth movement.’ Now, thirty years later, punk remains a strong subcultural presence, and has inspired much, including fashion, social behavior, methods of dissent, politics, the independent music industry, et cetera beyond its basic musical roots. This thesis takes a close look at the forming of the punk subculture, how it came to be and what remains. I use literary analysis of modern writing on punk and cite interviews with past and present members of the punk scene to form conclusions about the current state of the movement and how it is involved, unavoidably, in a dialectic relationship with mainstream culture.
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“We rarely hear the inward music, but we’re all dancing to it nevertheless.”

-Rumi
Introduction:

From its breakthrough into the mainstream in 1976, punk rock has served and survived its role as a chaotic musical genre and movement. Punk has, in many ways, transcended the role of musical type and become a cultural underground and artistic appellation. Since its debut in music, punk has influenced almost every art form from painting to print, and from fashion to theatre. Many artists and art forms that emerge now that challenge hegemonic views or confront authority are described as having a 'punk edge.' Early punks emerged in London, England in the mid nineteen-seventies in a social and political climate that ill served a young and impatient generation of youths. Dick Hebdidge has argued (1979: 62-70) that punk came out of the working-class experiences of historically changing race relations and of economic pessimism in England. Among the punk groups to emerge at this specific time, those who shaped punk's origins and continue to influence the modern face of the movement, include Billy Idol (who formed the band Generation X), Siouxsie Sioux (who formed Siouxsie and the Banshees), the Sex Pistols and American-born Chrissie Hynde formed The Pretenders. It was a fertile time and place for restless music. While the sentiment of social and political discontent was indeed expressed in early punk lyrics (as in the song "No Future" by the Sex Pistols), other cultural critics and punk scholars argue with, if not refute this view of punk origins. Simon Frith, who looks towards punk's American roots in the same era, sees early punk as more of new street culture, one produced by "...a self-conscious, artful lot with a good understanding of both rock tradition and populist cliché; their music no more reflected directly back on conditions in the dole queue than it emerged
spontaneously from them" (Grossberg 489). Early examples of American punk include The Patti Smith Band, whose Rimbaud-inspired lyrics informed a new subculture by infusing poetry, mainstream culture and punk rock. Punk band The Ramones also helped paint the face of punk, their stripped down style (basic, three-chord, two-minutes catchy songs) created the absolute template of the punk sound. Both construals of punk origin, and each is arguably as valid as the other, continue to influence the modern faces of punk that, Janus-like, reflect different sides and perceptions of 'being' punk. The sneering young female singers blaring their image from the television screens in videos and interviews all seem to borrow from the sartorial standards set out by punk in the seventies and early eighties, and all are described in varying degrees of punk idiom. The cultural dialogue on whether or not the popularization of punk has damaged or 'killed' punk has been ongoing in various forms since the early eighties, and as music, art and culture continue to change, so too does that argument. For some people, punk seems to exist as music only; yet the continued cultural presence of punks, adhering to the 'old school' and those who embrace musical and cultural derivatives, seems to indicate the movement is alive and well as a community. That punk has shared its anti-authoritarian and politically motivated roots with mainstream culture becomes evident with a close examination of, among other media, the literature it has spawned. How the dominant culture has influenced punk, other than serving to adulterate its subcultural presence on a mainstream scale—is less apparent.

The intent of this thesis is to demonstrate the lived, cultural presence of punk as it takes form in the lifestyle habits, sartorial expressions, and philosophical basis
of a unique and global subcultural community. From the place and space punks find, and from the social impact of derivative subcultures (in this work I focus on Straight Edge) I intend to use personally conducted and published interviews (by other researchers), autobiographical sources, scripts and novels and critical theory to establish the role punk plays as a community on its own and also as the kind of instigative force it has become in the mainstream. The name of punk is now invoked in art and in mainstream society in an almost ubiquitous manner when situations or works are observed that seem to counter dominant systems of tradition or understanding. The roots of the phenomenon lie in punk music, but the movement has exceeded its musical roots in such a way that its role as a subcultural force cannot be relegated to discussions of teenage deviance. Only hip hop has affected mainstream society in a similar vein, and has excited as much social and academic writing, discussion and fictive portrayal. The root of my interest and research into punk lies in the concept of identity, specifically the approach taken by Stuart Hall in his discussion of the definition of identity and how it is employed or deployed (Hall, Introduction 2). Hall sees identity as being always under construction (2), subject to the conditions of its origins, and current context. The framework Hall outlines for identity can be used in a discussion of the role punk plays in mainstream, North-American culture as a product of our society and shared ethos, but continuing to work against it, to challenge it. Punk itself is constantly changing, in flux, while still rooted in Western European and North American cultural history and context. Hall suggests, "Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end
conditional, lodged in contingency," (2-3) and so too can punk as identity be seen as the end result of the discussion of the music and movement. That is to say, while a discussion of origin and progress is integral to an analysis of a community, the dialogue begins and ends with the actuality (does it exist?) and conundrum (why?) of its identity. The discourse I intend to present is about punk, punk as a determined community, a powerful movement and a vibrant lifestyle. All of these aspects of punk bring together information and evidence to form as identity as rooted in bricolage as the music itself originally was. As Hall states, “Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption” (3) and “It [here, punk] requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process” (3); and so punk can also be seen as an identity driven by what is outside of it – the mainstream culture it originally rejected. In this work, I intend to provide evidence of this dialectic relationship between punk and the mainstream in the places and spaces punk community is formed, and also in how one of its most fervent derivative cultures thrives. Like Simon Frith, I am interested less in a discussion about how a particular music or music-based movement reflects the people, and more in “how it produces them, how it creates and constructs an experience” (Frith 109). It my understanding, after having conducted the research and analysis for this thesis, that punk has produced a living culture and constructed a unique form of experiencing, or ‘being in’ the world that is unique to the movement, and that this experience exists simultaneously as unique (within community boundaries) and heavily borrowed (within the mainstream and by other forms of art and media).
The following section consists of definitions and some brief discussion of the terminology used in this work. Part of the ever-changing narratives in culture, subculture and punk subculture make for the possibility of a variety of meanings in this type of discussion. The definitions include sections by and references to the cultural critics and theorists from whom I have derived much of understanding of cultural theory and the punk experience.

Definitions

CULTURE:

Miraglia et al. discuss a possible definition for the term 'culture' in their work “A Baseline Definition of Culture” (Miraglia et al., What is Culture?). Their definition and discussion of culture, now and through time, is comprehensive, acknowledges differing viewpoints and, in coming to graspable concept of definition, serves the purposes of this thesis well. The authors begin from the most basic supposition, supported by most other writing on the topic, that “people learn culture,” (1) and that culture, “as a body of learned behaviors common to a given human society, acts rather like a template (i.e. It has a predictable form and content), shaping behavior and consciousness within a human society from generation to generation.” The idea of a forming template and body of learned behaviors is then broken down by the authors into three categories, each an element of the cultural system:

1.) systems of meaning, of which language is primary

2.) ways of organizing society, from kinship groups to states and multi-national corporations
3.) the distinctive techniques of a group and their characteristic products

(Miraglia et al.)

What is significant to my research in using Miraglia's approaches to defining culture is the recognition of alternative or atypical cultural bodies (like the aforementioned "multinational corporations"). This inclusiveness creates an entry point for a discussion of the alternative culture form or body of punk, the topic of this thesis. Included in the discussion of What is Culture? is a section highlighting the ideas of Clifford Geertz on culture. Geertz's perspective draws largely from his ethnographic studies of Javanese culture and reflects an understanding of culture as "webs of significance" (4) in which analysis is not "an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning." This thesis is also intended as a search for meaning, most specifically for the meaning present in the ongoing existence of a modern subculture and its relationship to the dominant, or parent culture that generated it. It is important to add that in this specific thesis, unless a particular culture is specified (i.e. "British, " American or, more loosely, "North American"), I am referring to the dominant culture in the most general sense of the term as applied to the parent culture (that from which a subculture can be said to have cleaved). I take my cue, and indeed, focus much of my thesis in proving punk as an example of the suggestion that "Subcultures must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their 'parent' culture" John Clarke, Stuart Hall et al. 100).

We can examine Geertz's "search of meaning" by referring back to the fundamental categories in defining culture, systems of meaning (of which language
is primary). Basically, for a culture to function, members must be able to communicate; beyond that is the function of language as a set of further complicated symbols—even in a shared language the signs can be broken down to be used in specific way to signal specific meaning to members of fragmented cultures or subcultures. This concept refers to the term cultural presupposition. Nancy Bonvillain outlines the importance of this aspect of cultural makeup in her work, *Language, Culture and Communication: The meaning of messages.* “The concept of *cultural presupposition* refers to the fact that participants in speech interactions come to encounters with an array of knowledge and understandings (models) of their culture as expressed and transmitted through language” (64). Bonvillain goes on to state that the relevance of this shared knowledge is obvious, that “if a speaker mentions the World Series, he or she assumes that reference is to baseball” (64). What becomes obvious and interesting in this study of punk and punks, is how that shared knowledge is manipulated, sometimes initially only obviously inverted—but eventually transformed. Common references begin to mean different things to people *in* the subculture, but those alternate meaning may only be obvious to the few. Thus, the initial separation of the subculture form the parent culture begins. As a music-based subculture, punk is most notably rooted in this discussion. The language of communication also transfers to clothing (referred to in this text as ‘sartorial expression’), self-representation and even to expressions of occupied spaces. It is important to remember, most saliently when cultures divide, Michael Brakes words in approaching the studies of culture and subculture, “if culture indicates a relation to a way of life, this is intimately bound up not with consumption
in the social relations of capitalism, but in the social relations of production [...] [...] this leads us to the set of social relations most predominant in society – class relations” (02).

Finally, in beginning to approach the notion of subculture, as this entity somehow calving from the burg-like entity of the parent culture, we must look to Homi K. Bhabha. In a discussion of ‘part’ culture, the “partial culture[...] the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures – at once the impossibility of culture’s containedness and the boundary between..” (“Cultures in Between” 54). Bhabha sees the roles of culture, minority culture, and subculture as inherently political and unstable:

We have entered an anxious age of identity, in which the attempt to memorialize lost time, and to reclaim lost territories, creates a culture of disparate ‘interest groups’ or social movements. Here affiliation may be antagonistic and ambivalent; solidarity may only be situational and strategic: commonality is often negotiated through the ‘contingency’ of social interests and political claims. (59)

It is this very recognition of the instability, or transformation over time in culture and cultures’ templates that legitimizes the study of subculture.

SUBCULTURE:

For a definition of subculture, I turn first to Michael Brake. I have used his text Comparative Youth Culture: The sociology of youth culture and youth subcultures in America, Britain and Canada extensively throughout this thesis for a few reasons. First it draws heavily from those scholars whose work is primary to subcultural
analysis, such as Dick Hebdidge and Stuart Hall; secondly, the geographic research area are those countries most relevant to the existence of punk (Britain and America) and my own research (mainly in Canada with some research focused in the Czech Republic); and finally, Brake's focus on the youth demographic in the case of punk as a subculture is an interesting point from whence to debate. When he wrote this book (1985), punk was less than a decade in existence, youth were indeed the predominate members of the movement. Now, 30 years after the 'birth of punk', the movement can be more clearly seen and studied as an active movement and life-influence for many people. Brake defines subculture in this way:

Whilst culture is a cohesive force binding social actors together, it also produces disjunctive elements. To argue that culture is merely cohesive is to take an ahistorical, idealist view. In any complex society, culture is divisive merely because the presence of several subcultures indicates a struggle for the legitimacy of different subgroups' behavior, values and life styles against the context of the dominant culture of the dominant class. (3)

Brake elaborates on his basic premise that subcultures arise from perceived social problems or events, experienced collectively by a group, who then define themselves as individuals with materials and concepts derived from collective identities:

We are born into social classes, themselves complexly stratified with distinctive 'ways of life', modified by region and neighborhood. This local subculture into which we are first socialized is that parochial world against which we measure social relations that we meet later in life, and in which we
begin to build a social identity. Our social identity is constructed from the
nexus of social relations and meanings surrounding us, and from this we
learn to make sense of ourselves including our relation to the dominant
culture. (3)

While I do examine aspects of the punk subculture as being unique to the
movement, I must note that it cannot be seen as an entity somehow ‘apart’ from the
wider culture. The subculture is a subset, and, as such, shares a number of cultural
features with the mainstream (Ferraro 23).

IDENTITY:

The concept of identity has been constructed, deconstructed and
reconstructed in many forms of scholarship and philosophy in recent years. For a
definition and an approach to understanding how to discuss the idea, Stuart Hall,
Professor of Sociology at the Open University is my critic and theorist of choice. Hall
recognizes the paradox in seeking an understanding and a definition of identity while
remaining critical of “an integral, originary and unified identity” (Hall, “Who Needs
Identity?” 1). Hall chooses to see identity as a non-fixed construction within history.
He sees how we can fix identities in the past, to try to understand them study them
as “…a people with a shared history and ancestry [held] in common” (4), but never
allows for those identities to rest as unified. In accordance with Hall, I prefer the
following definition of identity:

Though they [identities] seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with
which they continue to correspond, actual identities are about questions of
using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of
becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (4)

In my discussion around punk identity, I use terms like ‘performed’ and ‘performative.’ I draw this terminology from Hall’s discussion of Foucault’s work with concepts of ‘self’ and identity, most specifically the production of self. Hall explains a reading of identity in Foucault’s work Discipline and Punish in this way:

Often, in this work, the ethics and practices of the self are most fully described by Foucault as an ‘aesthetics of existence’, a deliberate stylization of daily life; and its technologies are most effectively demonstrated in the practices of self-production, in specific modes of conduct, in what we have come from later work to recognize as a kind of performativity. (13)

This explanation works especially well in discussing a subculture that, in many cases, is an obvious, visually striking identity; perhaps employing the notion of a performed identity in a somewhat more ham-fisted manner than Foucault may have thought of, but a visual definition of the concept nonetheless.

COMMUNITY:

The term ‘community is used in multiple ways: to mean geographical area, social group and the notion of a social context —rooted in any number of intangible spaces, including philosophy, faith or even a musical following, like punk. Just as geographically rooted communities can become unbound (as lands and politics change), so too can those that are social constructs, as societies change. John Agnew wrote about his concept in his essay, “Place and politics in post-war Italy: a
cultural geography of local identity in the provinces of Lucca and Pistoia." It is the explanation of community in this work that I find most successful for my purposes in examining the aspects of punk that focus on a tightly knit local community. Although the sense of rootedness in the parameters of philosophy and music are better explained by other critics, Agnew's definition is a good starting point for an examination of how a community is formed. Agnew states:

People are social beings rather than isolated individuals or members of census categories. It is in social contexts that people acquire the practical reasons that lead them to act in some ways rather than others. These social contexts are formed geographically. Social relations are constituted in physical settings or locales that people cross into and out of constantly in the course of their everyday lives... ...Common experiences and interests create an emotional attachment and self-definition peculiar to the specific place in which the locales of enduring social relationships are concentrated. This is a local identity or sense of place. (57-8)

If a community can be defined as a local identity and/or a sense of place, then a logical step, in light of changing geographies and boundaries, is to suggest that a local identity or sense of place can be established by identifying with a fixed model of belief or behavior. Early studies in subcultures and punk have observed how the subculture initially found animation among youth for whom the common bond was rebellion against family or social norms, Sarah Thornton elaborates:

'Community' tends to suggest a more permanent population, often aligned to a neighborhood, of which family is the key constituent part... By contrast
those groups identified as 'subcultures' [still PART of the overall community] have tended to be studies apart from their families and in states of relative transience. It is also often assumed that there is something innately oppositional in the word ‘subculture’. While struggles over territory, place and space are core issues, subcultures would appear to bring a little disorder to the security of neighborhood. Subcultures are more often characterized as appropriating parts of the city for their street (rather than domestic) culture. These are some of the reasons why one hears frequently of 'youth subcultures,' but seldom of 'youth communities.' Youth attempt to define their culture against the parental home. (2)

ANARCHY:

Anarchy has a dictionary definition, "Absence of any form of political authority" (Concise Oxford English Dictionary), but its meaning and use in punk has come to hold different meanings over time and for different punks and derivative punk cultures. Punk emerged in London in the mid nineteen-seventies in a new political environment an environment with a high degree of social unrest among members of the young working class. The notion of anarchy as a freedom from the disheartening political climate of the day appealed to punks, and that appeal has continued through time, but the changes in punks' impressions of anarchic action and thought have changed. Early days of 'behaving' anarchically were represented in early evidence of violence within the punk scene, as evidenced by Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols, "I remember Scarborough because we were told that the local casuals were going to come and duff us up," (Lydon 97) he later describes a fight at
another Sex Pistols gig, in Nashville, as “this big symbol of early punk rock violence.”

As punk, over time, became more established as a long-term subculture, punks began to accrue more instances of violence from outside of their society—and, with sporadic exceptions, violence ceased to be a necessary component to the movement. When faced with violence (this will be discussed in further detail as seen in the texts Coloring Outside the Lines by Aimee Cooper, interviews with Ian McKay and other in All Ages: Reflections on straight edge and the Sonja Blue Collection), members retreated to each other and formed stronger alliances with each other and anarchy as a political stance, rather than as an excuse for disruptive, antisocial behavior. In a modern context, one most evidenced in this work by the straight edge community, anarchy has come to be a strongly cohesive force in the subculture. Punk’s strong roots in contesting capitalist control of mass music has its roots in this philosophy—raising questions about control, authority, governance and, ultimately, meaning. This ethos has spread to other underground industries affiliated with punk. Stephen Duncombe looks at anarchy’s role in ‘zine culture:

Anarchy has always played a starring role in punk rock and thus punk zines, and prominent zinesters like Factsheet Five founder Mike Gunderloy have been active in the anarchist movement. More significant, however, are the homologies between the nascent philosophies of the zine scene and those of anarchism. On the most basic level, anarchism is the philosophy of individual dissent within the context of volunteer communities.... (35)

Although the changing nature of anarchy’s role in the punk movement can make for endlessly argumentative discussion, it is important to note that before punk, popular
music was rarely a matter of theoretical concern, and among those individuals beginning to examine modern Western music the line, in so far as there was one, tended towards folk purism (Frith 166).

1 Patti Smith's famous song evincing this new art and culture is “Rock & Roll Nigger” from her 1978 album Horses, this song, more than any other at the time, established Smith as the seminal punk-poetess. The song's lyrics, and the 'nigger' of the title exalt those people who exist “outside of society,” as the lyrics go, “Outside of society/Waiting for me/Outside of society/That’s where I want to be.”

2 Among the myriad articles and websites describing rising star and pop singer Avril Lavigne is one where she is described as a “punk princess” (http://www.alavigne.com/). The ubiquitous use of the term 'punk' for anyone not conforming to the 'squeaky clean' image more associate with pop stars in the mainstream may or may not have deleterious effects on the way the movement is perceived as a whole and lived by its adherents.

3 Lauraine Leblanc gives a good overview of the scholarship written from the perspective of punks demise and continuance in chapter two, “Punk’s not Dead. It Just Smells that Way: Punk to Hardcore. with girls on the side” of her book Pretty in Punk: Girls' resistance in a Boys' subculture. Also included are interview excerpts and quotes from punks on how they see punks' role as part of their cultural identity.

4 Like Straight Edge, riot grrrl and hardcore.

5 For a glimpse into the depth and breadth of writing and discussion on the role of Hip Hop as a subculture cum cultural authority, see such works as Sheila Whitely's Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity (174-192); Michael Brake's Comparative youth culture: The sociology of Youth Cultures and Youth Subcultures in America, Britain and Canada (124-129); and Roy Shuker's Understanding Popular Music (163-164).

6 Dick Hebdige discusses how the concept of bricolage can be used to describe the construction of subcultural styles in his text Subculture: The meaning of style (102-106).

7 Phil Cohen describes the reasons behind the politics of the day in this way:

The labour aristocracy, the traditional source of leadership, has virtually disappeared, along with the artisan mode of production. At the same time there has been a split in consciousness between the spheres of production and consumption. More and more [Londoners] are forced to work outside the area; young people especially are less likely to follow family traditions in this respect. As a result, the issues of the workplace are no longer experienced as linked directly to community issues. Of course, there has always been a 'brain drain' of the most articulate, due to social mobility. But not only has this been intensified as a result of the introduction of comprehensive schools, but the recruitment of fresh talent from below – from the ranks of the respectable working class, that is – has also dried up. For this stratum, traditionally the social cement of the community is also in a state of crisis. (93)
Much of the writing on punk has developed from music reviews and reactionary (writing 'about' or 'on' events prescribed to the movement, rather than from within or truly about the punk scene) newspaper articles to academic research, biography and fictional portrayal. As punk has eased, or perhaps, more appropriately, blasted its way into the mainstream – so has conventional (mainstream) culture tried to map its presence and define its role in our society. 2001 marked twenty five years since what is commonly known as 'the year punk broke,' and the anniversary made the front covers of music and lifestyle magazines across the world. That a music genre might still inspire magazines, twenty five years after its inception may not be entirely unique. One must consider the relation of the genre to popular culture, that it was not initially a part of it. Punk has made its way in to the mainstream musically, and the genre's influence on other art forms has followed, but how punk and punks are treated in the mainstream sets the genre apart as a unique cultural entity. Academic researchers, fiction writers, film makers, and biographers have illustrated the role of punk 'in the world,' all creating a 'big picture' of how this subculture has managed to function as an independent community and influential artistic genre.

The Scholars:

In choosing a theoretical framework in which to place my discussion of punk, I had hoped to find a body of writing that would help in the examination of the complicated interplays of subculture, popular culture, animate experiences and
literatures (from both the English and Anthropological disciplines) that compose what punk is today. While no one text covers these aspects comprehensively, there have been some exemplary forms of scholarship produced that examine punk specifically—but more saliently, I have found it relatively unproblematic to extrapolate basic theories of understanding communities, places, spaces and ways of being from writings on a diverse variety of subjects, including anthropological and ethnographic studies of other types (other than subcultural) of minority or marginalized communities. My initial induction into the realm of cultural studies, and the scholarship that applies most broadly and evenly to my work, has been through reading texts by Stuart Hall. In his book Questions of Cultural Identity (co-edited with Paul Du Gay); Hall introduces the text with a discussion on identity. Hall says that “identities are never unified” (4) and that “they are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation,” it is precisely this notion of identities as un-fixed that attracted me to a closer reading or examination of the volatile (always changing and experimental in nature) and yet deeply rooted identity and community that punk has become. Punk was first constructed as a music genre, and through music, art, literature, film and individual lifestyles (and experiences), it has emerged as an identity constructed within discourse, and as such, as proposed by Hall, “we need to understand [identities, here punk] as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices…” (4). Hall's writing also informs the definition of identity used throughout this thesis; he states:
I use ‘identity’ to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be spoken. (5-6)

As I see it, the identity of what is punk lies at this point of suture, as proposed by Hall. Punk seems to lie in that place where the music, lyrics, biographies, interviews and investigations meet. This is the point at which the so-called ‘hype’ around the genre, the mainstream impressions and representations of it, converge with the actual experiences of those people who have had encounters, at various level, with it. Hall also says that every identity is, at its ‘margin,’ “an excess” (5); punk presents an interesting addendum to identity theory as it would purport to present an identity of excess; thus externalizing that interior space that drives the construction of self, ultimately of community. Interestingly, in the section on Straight Edge, we are presented with a derivative identity that rejects the notions of excess as exemplified in punk, but can itself be seen as a kind of excessively ascetic identity. This is best evidenced in the person of Aram Arslanian, who is interviewed and quoted later in this work. Aram is a strong and visible member of the Straight Edge community, eschewing drinking, drugs and promiscuous behavior as outlined in early evidence of the movement — but is, as Hall suggests, “an excess” in performing his identity — he has decorated his body with visible tattoos (full sleeves, wrist to shoulder) and dresses in such a way as to convey his musical interests. In portraying himself, he is
simultaneously portraying his community, and while genuine, this is still a constructed and performed identity.

In the body of modern scholarship specifically focusing on punk, Dick Hebdige is the most commonly cited and referenced researcher. His book, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* has formed the basis of much contemporary research done on punk and examinations of its subcultural impact.* Hebdige’s work is perhaps most important because he was the first academic to write specifically, and in objective detail about punk as an identifiable subculture. In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Hebdige closely examines the roots of punk from its origins in music to its visual presence as a style and completes his analysis with a discussion of how the subculture of punk broke from musical roots to form a social body, separate and distinct from mainstream culture. About this separation, Hebdige suggests, “The terms used in the tabloid press to describe those youngsters who, in their conduct or clothing, proclaim subcultural membership... would seem to suggest that the most primitive anxieties concerning the sacred distinction between nature and culture can be summoned up by the emergence of such a group” (92). Another aspect of Hebdige’s work that is worthy of mention — *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* was first published in 1979, only three years after ‘punk broke’ as a worldwide, known musical genre, and certainly well before the genre became an established subculture in its own right. Hebdige makes note of this lack of certainty that punk would indeed endure, “It is still too early to provide any comprehensive or confident evaluation of existing accounts of the punk subculture” (186); however, Hebdige’s work provides a pattern of analysis that would establish a research template for
cultural researchers and musicologists of all types for the next twenty years and counting.

Where Hebdige's work set an early guide for future researchers and certainly legitimized the study of punk in an academic context, Simon Frith has been a leading voice in relating the study of punk (and rock & roll, generally) more specifically to cultural theory. Frith's article, "Formalism, Realism and Leisure: The case of punk," lays bare some of the concerns in a discussion of how the production and consumption of a cultural product can fit into the construction of ideology and identity (163). Frith's observations stem most heavily, in the case of punk, from early subculture-specific writings rationalized in Hebdige's text, but also lead one to some of the considerations put forward by Theodor Adorno. In addition to introducing Adorno's theories on how the commodification of music determines its cultural quality (165), Frith also incorporates the relevance of Marxist perspective (171) and historical sociology (174). What is perhaps most relevant, for the sake of my own work, is the importance Frith places on the role of punk in the cultural studies approach to music and popular culture. He suggests that:

Before punk, popular music was rarely matter of theoretical concern... Within a few months of its emergence in 1977, though, virtually every left paper agreed that Punk was a Good Thing. There were no doubts that it had transformed pop... It seemed to be different from previous mass music in terms of how it was made and how it was used and how it meant. (166-67)

Both Hebdige and Frith agree that the music they discuss is a 'representation,' and while each captures important academic aspects of (punk) music's relevance in
contemporary culture, Grossberg suggests that neither one accounts for the “reality and the generality of the affective power of the music” (477). Hebdige’s argument is invaluable in any discussion of the observable presence of punk (his text is concerned heavily with the semiotics presented in style), yet this analysis falls short of justifying the truly wide reaches the genre has accessed in culture. Hebdige sees punk music as a set of (semiotic) practices, Frith sees it as an ideology and Grossberg sees music as practices of “strategic empowerment” (Grossberg 478). I choose all three; in an analysis of what punk is, what it means, and how it is lived, a combination approach of semiotic, meaning, ideological value and the notion that the music can lead to personal empowerment seems the most prudent way in which to approach a culture articulated through music, text (including film) and individual perspectives (in this work, via interviews and biographies).

In initiating the research for this work, one of the first punk-specific texts I drew from was a collated collection of interviews and whose analysis is somewhat analogous to my own. Lauraine Leblanc’s *Pretty in Punk: Girls’ Gender Resistance in a Boys’ Subculture*, uses formal theoretical analysis combined with extensive use of first person accounts and interviews. While Leblanc’s work is directed most specifically at a gender analysis of punk, many of her discussions, especially those on sartorial (centered on dress or costume) expression and symbolism (33-64) are relevant to my work also. Leblanc’s work incorporates interviews into the body of her discussions and research. I also follow this methodological pattern. She presents several chapters introducing her subject, history and theoretical interests, and incorporates personal interviews in later chapters. This interdisciplinary approach, of
theory supporting and being supported by the actual experiences of participants in
the genre, is also borne out in the specifically sartorial discussions proffered by
Valerie Steele in _Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power_.

A great deal of Hebdige's work is focused on what punks are saying and
meaning by the way they look, dress and generally present themselves to the world,
and because this most noticeable aspect of punk is, in part, what has brought it to
the mainstream, Steele's discussion of the modern cultural impacts of punk are
integral to establishing the significance and weight style has in an induction to punk
analysis. While it need not be said that no culture can be based on style alone,
certainly sartorial expression has had tangible and sociological effects on the
community now established as punk. However the codes (as established by
Hebdige) have changed, and as deeply rooted as the genre is in music, the cultural
standards (now worldwide) that punks almost always ascribe to or have some affinity
with are the norms associated with the early 'look' of punk. This look is well
described and culturally defined (in history, first-person account and via artifact
description) in Steele's text (37). In a modern take on what Hebdige suggested
almost two decades before the publication of her work, Steele approaches punk
style as a "forbidden discourse" (37), and places it firmly in the same heavily
influential spaces as subcultural practice (33) and commodification (50) in the power
roles fashion plays in constructing identity and forming cultural norms. The
importance of fashion in the construction of punk identity is very apparent in the role
of punk in fiction. In a medium where the musical role is limited to lyrical
presentation, fashion becomes the key identifier of what is punk in character
development, and this becomes even more imperative when punks begin to creep in that visual medium of film. Steele introduces the reader to ideas about what is seen in punk style, and even how it is seen - the discussion deepens in cultural effect with the discussion of where it is seen. Steele recognizes punk as "street style" and Leblanc's analysis of punk women includes a study of punk as a street-based subculture (167), and her summation of what this occupation of public space means for punk, in the context of an often aggressive mainstream rejection, is that "in their hostility toward the subcultural members, mainstream outsiders may serve to consolidate subcultural identity" (169). As a postmodernist, opposed to the binary oppositions of 'us' versus 'them,' cultural-identity theorist Homi K. Bhabha's discussions on living in a state of difference create an interesting context for an investigation into the contested nature of punk space. In acknowledging the legitimacy of this assertion, that punk space is simultaneously abrasive to and absorbed by the mainstream, the reality is that punk and parent culture become similarly situated in what Bhabha refers to as "the interstices of - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference ... [through which] the intersubjective and collective experience of nationess, community interest, or cultural value [or in this case the contemporary mainstream or popular collective understanding of the punk and that parent culture's relationship to it] are negotiated (Bhabha 2).

The visual impact of punk, more so than its musical origins or derivative attributes, places it firmly and irrevocably into the mainstream cultural consciousness. While music and community have fed the soul that drives punk as a subculture, physical representation, like race and gender, make that community one
that is defined and comprehensible (at least in terms of identity) in space (as physical geography). Many punk biographies and fictional representations present punks as living in a perpetually contested space. They are questioned, bullied, so one might question the motivations to live an existence of chosen difference. To this the argument may be made that choosing to live punk, well beyond the invisible identifiers of music, is choosing to visually represent the difference that is felt by members of the subculture. While punks may have (and continue to) suffered social denigration to some extent, they also form tightly-knit and closely bonded communities, and with in those communities are spread messages, ideals and systems of understanding that set punks apart from the mainstream as much as their appearances seem to. The role of punk style fulfils the function of occupying Bhabha's "problematic space" (181). Bhabha sees this space as "performative rather than experiential" (181), a place that, via the performed values of those who occupy it, becomes accountable for the "emergence and negotiation of those agencies of the marginal, minority, subaltern, or diasporic" (181). The perception of punk as an ideological place and space is borne out by those who live it—notice how Straight Edge musician Aram Arslanian responds when asked why punk rock is important to him, "It's the only place... it's the only thing in the world that I've found to be unwaveringly true in the sense of... as an idea, punk rock doesn't 'promise' anything. It doesn't give you anything but the freedom to live by your own rules" (Arslanian 2004). The ideological and the physical geographies that host punk meet when one considers the built (physical, geographical) environment punks must occupy.
Like many subcultural groups who initially develop without prescribed sites of socialization and interaction (note the early days of hip-hop, which started out as a street culture), punk owes much to the freedom and connectedness of the streets. As important as jam spaces are to the development of punk music, so too are public streets, which have historically and in present times continue to function as sites of association, communication and exhibition. In “The Street in the Making of Popular Geographical Knowledge,” David Crouch establishes the argument that “streets are themselves sites of cultural practices” (160), a claim supported by myriad other researchers on street culture and punk. In the chapter on punk place and space, this work examines the ways in which punks have carved a unique niche in the space of street culture—one that is often heavily contested. A comparison can be made between the role punk music had in the music industry and the parallel condition of punk on the streets, in the public eye, a forced recognition. Crouch suggests that the street “offers the opportunity to be (as well as to be seen)” (164), a notion enforced by punks who occupy this space and challenge the restrictions of its physical and metaphorical boundaries. This argument can also be made in the way that punks occupy ‘home’ space, again reconstituting the practices typically associated with ‘homemaking.’

Fiction and Film:

As punk has grown in popularity, it has been portrayed (by mainstream media) less as defined subculture of individuals and more as a conscription of infamous types. We began to see the punk-as-villain, or at least rogue, in the early eighties when images (and descriptions) that epitomized the ‘punk look’ started to
appear in popular entertainment, namely film. In 1981 Penelope Spheeris directed 
the film documentary *The Decline of Western Civilization* which followed the Los 
Angeles punk music scene in 1980. The film included personal interviews and 
marked the first time punks were portrayed in a vehicle destined for mass 
consumption that depicted them as informed individuals, some with articulate 
philosophies and political values. *The Decline of Western Civilization* brought punk, 
as a scene, to a North American public that had heretofore only been witness to a 
chaotic musical fad; as more individuals began to choose to look punk, a specific 
look and attitude could be more easily accessed by the mainstream. The film 
demonstrated a way of dressing and acting easily embraced and manipulated by the 
entertainment industry. By the time Molly Ringwald took her yuppie suitor to a hole-
in-the-wall punk nightclub (representing her outsider status, bringing him to her 
space, her community) in 1986’s *Pretty in Pink*, the punk as rebel outsider (and 
potential villain) was firmly entrenched in popular culture. In 1986 Alex Cox co-wrote 
and directed the biography of Sid Vicious, bassist of seminal punk band The Sex 
Pistols. While the film did not present a true glimpse of punk in a documentary 
sense, this snapshot of one of history’s most notorious punks imbued the genre with 
a sense of desperate romanticism (the film is centered on the doomed love story of 
Sid and his girlfriend Nancy Spungeon).

As a film, *Sid & Nancy* is most important in the history of the relationship 
between punk and pop culture for two reasons: it appeared in the middle of the era 
in which punk emerged as a widely recognized subculture, and it is noted as the 
first “commercially and critically successful film” (Viano 33) to focus on punk.
Unfortunately, the film also reinforced the popular perception that punks were drug riddled social rejects. When Spike Lee made his film *Summer of Sam* (1999), about fear and paranoia in 1977 New York City, he also used the punk prototype to depict a damaged character. His punk, Richie, (more than) dabbled in pornographic films (he ‘acted’ in them), ‘corrupted’ a female lead into the world of punk music, and was ultimately severely beaten for being a suspect in the serial murders. Like Sid Vicious, Richie is a tragic figure whose status as an outsider is part of his eventual downfall. The punk interloper continued as an archetype into the nineteen-nineties, but some changes began to appear.

In 1989 Nancy A. Collins first published her story of a female vampire/vampire hunter, “Sunglasses After Dark.” Described as a “punk vampire vigilante,” the lead character of Sonja Blue is established as being associated with punk by virtue of her appearance, wearing shirts with punk bands names on them (pages 258 and 399) and wearing her “dark hair twisted into a tortured cockatoo’s crest,” (399) this description is reminiscent of the punk Mohawk haircut, and this image is only reinforced by her role as existing outside of society. Sonja is an unwilling Vampire, unwelcome in human society, and unwilling to conform to the paradigm and monstrosity of the vampire world; her persona echoes the disenfranchisement epitomized in punk music. In many ways Sonja Blue facilitated the transfer of vampire-as-pure-villain to vampire-as-fallen hero, and this transformation owes much to the burgeoning mainstream acceptance of sympathetic outsiders, of punks. The use of punk symbols and style markers began to signal an increasingly widespread set of values. Since the beginnings of the movement, but even more so
after years of semiotic dissemination, people chose, and continue to choose, to be (or even just ‘look’) punk as an indication of their personal values, philosophies and identities. For members of marginalized groups the punk world offered a kind of acceptance and freedom to act or perform their identities that mainstream culture was not able to offer. This became true for the real-life gay community ‘as much as it ever was’ for the fictional vampire one. The influence of punk in the establishment of personal sexual identity is most apparent in Lorrie Sprecher’s Sister Safety Pin.

Perhaps one of the most influential aspects of punk on culture, in general, is how the punk identity is used and often co-opted by persons trying to find an identity when their own is either contested or simply ‘under construction.’ The picture one gets from these scenarios is not so much that these individuals want to be punk, but that they recognize in the music, style and identity a strong rejection of what is enforced by the mainstream. For a woman redefining her sexuality, in a space and time where living as an ‘out’ lesbian does not seem to be a safe or practical possibility choosing instead to act out her difference as a punk opens a new space. In this space personal difference is apparent and still defiant, but may be a less externally contested identity. Sprecher’s protagonist, Melany, is a young woman who does just that -she embraces the punk world just as she redefining her personal identity from straight woman to lesbian. Like Collins’ vampires, Melany is also introduced as a punk by virtue of her style and music preferences, and punk is established as being central to her identity. While most of the book deals with Melany’s sexual identity, she is introduced saying, “…the only thing I understood
about gender was which bathroom to use” (9); punk is consistently highlighted as being a part of her journey and self-awareness:

Punk came along and woke me out of my gender-induced coma. I bought the first Sex Pistols album, with its bright pink-and-green cover, because I heard it was offensive. It blew my mind. It sounded as discordant as I felt. I got the first Clash album next and never looked back. The whole point was to shock and offend people, which was fine with me because I found everyone, especially my family and teachers, shocking and offensive. It was like being a member of a really cool gang all by myself. Punk was fuck-you music—into androgyny and anarchy. It meant I didn’t have to dress like a girl. (10)

The punk community serves as a base for Melany, and continues to do so even as she does embrace her lesbian sexuality in the novel. The use of punk as part of a hybrid, queer/punk, identity is well documented by those who participated in the scene, often in the form of ‘zines, independently published magazines usually targeted to a specific subculture. HOMOCORE ‘zine writer and editor Tom Jennings describes his community as “a queer/punk hybrid thing, based upon anarchist principles, discordian silliness, distaste for de-facto-separatist gay culture and a burning desire to get laid” (26 January 2000). Through the 1980’s, punk spawned myriad derivative cultures, each forming its own subculture. Most were based, in some way on the positive effects belonging to a community of dissent had on individuals who felt disenfranchised by mainstream culture. One such punk-generated community that has remained vital over time is Straight Edge.
As much as 'old school' punk came to rely on visual cues as a cultural determinants, Straight Edge really seemed to embrace a more grassroots-based philosophy—rooted more in lyrics and closely formed social unity than in style and a loosely articulated anti-authoritarian viewpoint. The insurgence brought forth by punk was concentrated in Straight Edge, clearly defined and elicited deep devotion in its fan base. Ray Cappo was a forerunner in Straight Edge, along with his band Youth of Today. Cappo says this of the early days of Straight Edge:

When Straight Edge hit big in '87, it was unbelievable how it took over the club scene, record sales, fanzines and punk culture. Moving to downtown Manhattan in '88, and touring across the nation for the next few years, I watched it blossom firsthand with its stronghold in NYC, Connecticut, New Jersey, LA and Florida. This incarnation of Straight Edge was different than Minor Threat who had broken up in '83 and had officially coined the term “Straight Edge” on their monumental debut single and further supported it on their second single with songs like "Out of Step" where Ian MacKaye howled verses like, "I don’t drink, I don’t smoke, I don’t fuck...at least I can fucking think!" But there wasn’t much of a scene to support that philosophy in those days, so this newer generation took the ball and ran with it, and since then it has existed, leaving the Minor Threat singles as the Straight Edge version of the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Cappo xi)

It should be interesting to scholars, ethnographers and musicologists that this musical culture evolved from, essentially, a single set of written lyrics that issued a template of behavior still followed by members of the Straight Edge community.
Many music-based cultures, especially protest cultures, have their seminal texts, decisive artists and movements, but few can claim a single text as cultural originator. Indeed, the emergence of the 1960s counterculture owes much to music, particularly "emergent genres such as psychedelic or acid rock" (Shuker 196) which were (like Straight Edge) seen as "...uniting young people and confirming their radical potential" (196). The written foundation of Straight Edge (as a community culture) failed to transfer, over time, to the mainstream. Where punk’s brash and obvious presence made for good literary and filmic fodder; Straight Edge culture has managed to exist well below the cultural radar, despite its multitude of adherents and global musical and cultural presence. In fact, the only text specifically foregrounding a Straight Edge character is Charles Romalotti’s fictional memoir of 80’s punk and the early days of Straight Edge, *Salad Days*. Literature focused specifically on the punk community is limited, punk is still often reserved as a descriptive device or used as ‘wallpaper’ for action in a novel; even with a dearth in punks novels, the absence of Straight Edge is surprising given the widespread cultural impact of the genre. Straight Edge was not seen in popular film until 1999’s *SLC Punk*, and this portrayal was loose, at best. Although Straight Edge fiction may not be plentiful, lyrics, interviews and biographies of Straight Edge people have kept a written record. As in all of punk rock, fans and community members look to those individuals who are mainstays in the scene for inspiration and suggestion on how the community is moving on. As a result, for Straight Edge as well as the general community of punk, scholarship must have some focus on published interviews and biographies, in
addition to published materials, personal interviews compose part of my research for this thesis.

**The Front Line: Biographies and interviews:**

In addition to interviews I have conducted and compiled, I am including published interviews, biographies and memoirs. Prior to conducting my personal interviews, I applied for and passed a review by the ethics board of the University of Northern British Columbia, thus ensuring the safety, validity and ethical conduct in my interview-based research. I chose individuals for my interviews based on purposive or judgment sampling, in which I chose key informants (Sean Keane, Aram Arslanian and Bernice Jang) who possess "special knowledge, status or communication skills" as members of the punk community. The interviews included in this research were with individuals who have a varied history of participation in the punk movement and were able to offer me specific information on how they have been affected by their culture (punk) over time. In addition to long-term association, it was important for the discussion on Straight Edge that I meet with individuals who were culturally specialized. Straight Edge is a small community, and for my research in that area verity and reliable response are inexorably tied to cultural participation and specialization. I have two strong interviews from a specifically Straight Edge perspective, one interviewee is a vocal member of the movement and sings in an internationally supported Straight Edge band, the other has long history in Straight Edge (since early youth) and now heads an independent record label. Both those individuals also claim a long history with the parent punk movement, so information
and questioning crossed over the subcultural divide. Of four other interviews conducted, I quote heavily from only one since her information was most coherent, the least repetitive and provides a much-needed female perspective on the punk movement. The interviews were set up as formal contact (appointments made, timely parameters set) but were composed as semi-structured in nature (Bernard 205). Each interviewee was approached with the same basic set of questions, but the flow of the conversation was open-ended and subject to (welcome) digressions and natural forays into other areas of interest. I have attached a copy of the Informed Consent form and Interview Questions as Appendix and B, respectively.

John Lydon’s autobiography, co-written with Keith and Kent Zimmerman, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs* is a crucial text in the reconstruction of what punk was in its initial stages, as seen first hand by one its progenitors. Lydon’s work also shows how punk changed over time, and he discusses how other (than music) forms of art both influenced the genre and were, in turn, influenced by it. Lydon’s text is particularly useful for my work because it incorporates many quotations and interview samples from other people involved with punk at the time. The excerpts are positioned throughout the text, used in some cases to reaffirm claims made by Lydon or to furnish the details of context and background. Many of these early punks are themselves living evidence of the widespread influence punk has had across media and arts; some of the individuals quoted include Caroline Coon, author and painter; Bob Gruen, photographer; Zandra Rhodes, “one of the top couture designers in Europe” (Lydon 329); Julien Temple, filmmaker.
Aimee Cooper's memoir, *Coloring Outside the Lines: A Punk Rock Memoir*, provides a more contemporary perspective on what punk meant for those who were a part of the (very specific) Los Angeles punk community in the nineteen-eighties. Cooper's book confirms the notion of punk as a community, above and beyond its music base with illustrations of initiation, forming identity, kinship and the creation of punk space. *Coloring Outside the Lines* is written in plain language and Cooper's reminiscences of work, friends and shows are kept lively with detail, mention of contemporary bands and artists and a personal dialogue of how punk was changing her own perspective on life. In the end, Cooper admits that punk was 'an adventure' rather than a definitive lifestyle (132), but clearly identifies punk, as do others who have identified with the movement, as an exceptional part of her own life history.

As punks age and the culture that fostered the original movement has changed, while continuing to draw from punk, historical perspectives on 'what really happened' are growing in number. *American Hardcore: A Tribal History* is Steve Blush's narrated compilation of interviews and quotes from a plethora of punk sources, covering the "peak years of American Hardcore, 1980 through 1986" (Blush 9). While hardcore itself can be seen as a minor derivative culture, much of hardcore's impact is documented in Aimee Cooper's text and issues resulting from the genre are covered in my research on and discussion of Straight Edge. What sets this text apart from other historical glimpses into the genre and the era is the sheer volume of excerpts and individuals quoted. Each section has a theme (e.g.: "Straight Edge" and "New York Thrash") with artists and participants that were dominant in that area illustrating the events and social fabric of the time. Also included in the text is a
thorough discography, including song lists for compilations. This resource has proved invaluable to me as a researcher trying to find evidence of recordings and lyrics that were not often distributed on a large scale, were printed or recorded only once and may no longer exist in accessible quantities.

By researching, analyzing and including interviews (my own and those conducted by other scholars like Lorraine Leblanc and Beth Lahicky) as well as biographies (Aimee Cooper's *Coloring Outside the Lines: A punk rock memoir*) and autobiographies (John Lydon's *Rotten: No Irish, no blacks, no dogs*), I am making use of subjective materials to arrive at many of the conclusions in this thesis. The ideas put forth by the punks themselves are necessarily rooted in the ontological subjectivity of the speakers or writers themselves and their own particular sets of circumstances and life experiences. However, as it is those very life experiences that make this punk culture poignant for scholarship, a close examination of non-literary material and historical data are crucial in attempting a representation of the movement. While individual punks indeed experienced many different ways of ‘being in the world,’ there were many instances of collaborative experiences and ways of thinking outlined in the works examined here. Even in John Lydon's autobiography, which includes the testimony of a great many individuals he associated with in London more than thirty years ago, the famous punk curmudgeon acknowledges dissent in the telling of punk history (he perpetuates an ongoing conflict with Malcolm MacLaren and the idea that MacLaren was responsible for the initiation and success of the Sex Pistols), and includes interviews with people who may not always paint him in an ideal fashion, as with Chrissie Hynde, "John’s a bastard," (Lydon}
310). Fundamentally important to this thesis as a work of cultural relevance is the acknowledgment and appreciation of the personal voice expressing personal experience. Writing about culture, experience, representation and people necessitates the inclusion of their own words—including those flaws, inconsistencies and arguments innate to human enterprise.

The interdisciplinarity\(^4\) of my study has allowed me to use theory, literature and first-person accounts (my own and from the interviews conducted for this work, and from the interviews conducted by other researchers, biographies and first-person accounts expressed in 'zines and other publications) to compile a broad view of the punk movement. Literature and film have provided me with the cultural capital to process and research the breadth and depth of impact punk has had on mainstream culture, and also how the genre has changed and survived over time as a subculture. I prepared myself for this study with a firm grounding in cultural studies with specific focus on subculture and punk scholars. Finally, through interviews and analysis of biographies and memoirs, I obtained the first-person narratives necessary for an accountable investigation into the cultural significance of punk.

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1 *Spin* magazine featured separate U.K. and U.S.A. covers for its May, 2001 issue, "25 Years of Punk." The U.K. cover featured a leering face of Sid Vicious, who, with his Sex Pistols, released the song "Anarchy in the UK" (1976) to wide renown and infamy. The U.S.A. cover presented the shy figure of Joey Ramone whose band the Ramones released their eponymous album in 1976, and, in the process, helped kick start American punk and changed rock music forever.


3 He goes on in the same paragraph, "The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it 'lacks' (5).

4 Among the many researchers who use Hebdige's analysis to further their own arguments are Simon Frith in "Formalism, Realism and Leisure: The case of punk", Lauraine Leblanc, *Pretty in Punk: Girls' gender resistance in a boys' subculture* and John Storey in his book *Cultural Studies & the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and methods*. 
Adorno suggests, "Art is the cognition of ends and of sensuous particularity cut off from practice. Predomme art hoped to alter reality, while autonomous art is the quintessence of the division between mental and manual labor in a class society" (Adorno 6). The punk aesthetic can be seen as art in this context, that is, as a function of the contextual reality; where Adorno sees modern art as necessarily divisive, punk changes this imperative by succeeding in performing exactly what Adorno says modern art does not: it is both autonomous and public. This unity of art, lifestyle, and visual display, or commodity segues nicely into Adorno’s discussion of art as commodity, “As we have already seen, autonomous art arises fully only in a class society through the exclusion of a class society through the exclusion of the working classes” (9). Punk becomes increasingly important here as it is distinctly working class, in origin and accessibility; ironically, it is this very accessibility that makes the genre so immeasurably commodifiable.

It must also be noted that Stuart Hall has written extensively on the role of Marxist perspectives in cultural studies and the creation of culture and identity. All of Part I in Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies (London: Routledge, 1996) focuses on this discussion [(Un) Settling accounts: Marxism and cultural studies], most notably Hall’s own essay, “The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees” (25-46).

In creating this argument in “Formalism, Realism and Leisure: The case of punk,” Frith applies to punk ideology the same questions applied to all studies of media, “How do different media work ideologically? What are their ideological affects and how are they achieved? …how do different media organize the meanings with which and on which they work?” (163). Hebdige presents the reasoning behind his study of punk style by saying:

> It is this alienation from the deceptive ‘innocence’ of appearances which gives the teds, the mods, the punks and no doubt future groups of as yet unimaginable ‘deviants’ the impetus to move from man’s second ‘false nature (Barthes, 1972) to a genuinely expressive artifice; a truly subterranean style. As a symbolic violation of the social order, such a movement attracts and will continue to attract attention, to provoke censure and to act, as we shall see, as the fundamental bearer of significance in subculture. (19)

However sophisticated punk character development may be in novels and film, they are always initially represented by appearance and style. This disparity between how punks are articulated and how they would purport to see themselves is evident in many interviews where punks decry the ‘fashion’ of punk; however, the importance of punk fashion as being part of identity cannot be relegated to fad or represented as being of little importance to the creation of identity. In an interview with Bernice Jang, drummer, past and present, for a variety of punk and rock bands, she says of her early foray into punk:

> I liked the type of music that they had. Punk music, back in the day, was pretty good and I liked it and that was important to me. And I liked the style back then too, so I guess the fashion that went with it was really good and I guess I became me, being influenced by punk in this way. (Jang)

In fact, elements of punk style can be seen in many 80’s era films where the style is used to denote the villain. Characters in films that predate many of the ones that I discuss in detail in later chapters include Daryl Hannah’s role as Pris in Bladerunner (1982) and Tina Turner’s part as Aunty Entity in Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome (1985). Both women were imbued with distinctly punk aspects to their appearance, like hairstyle or makeup, that would be identifiable as such, and as threatening, to the contemporary audience.

An interesting photograph of two women titled “Punk Girls” shows eighties punks in full costume (43).

Guitar player for hardcore Straight Edge band Champion.

Acconci establishes a good understanding and frame work for comprehending all the implications of the ‘built environment,’ he states, “The built environment is built because it’s been allowed to be built. It’s been allowed to be built because it stands for and reflects an institution or a dominant culture” (Acconci 1990).

Notably Gill Valentine, “Food and the Production of the Civilized Street”; Lauraine Leblanc also discusses the street as cultural space in her text Pretty in Punk: Girls’ gender resistance in a boys’
subculture; and not least Ted Killian’s discussion of power relations in street space in his work, “Public and Private, Power and Space.”

In fact, Brian Michael Goss claims that punk, in the nineteen-eighties, may have emerged as the most widely recognized subculture (160).

I am working from the collected volume of Collins’ Sonja Blue stories, Midnight Blue: The Sonja Blue Collection

This description is taken from the editorial review of “Sunglasses After Dark” on the Amazon.com website (http://www.amazon.com).


Back-issues of Jennings’ ‘zine, Homocore, can be found at http://www.wps.com/archives/HOMOCORE.

Although gays and lesbians have always had a presence in punk rock, it is interesting to note that the first ALL gay (members) punk rock band arrived in 1991 with the forming of San Francisco band Pansy Division. See more about them at www.pansydivision.com. Other derivative punk cultures include skinheads, listening predominantly to the aggressive form of hardcore known as ‘Oi!’ and Straight Edge spawned its own offshoot of Hare Krisna devotees playing ‘Krisnacore’. These branches of punk can be identified culturally as well as musically —punk initiated many different forms of music that survive as such, including post-punk, goth (also, arguably, a community) and even new wave.

See H. Russell Bernard’s Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2002).

I am choosing to use the term ‘informant’ as it is defined by Gilchrist and Williams, “We will use the term informant to mean ‘the individual who shares information,’ simply because it still seems to be the most commonly used term in the literature.” (72-73)

Bernard suggests that, “Key informants are people to whom you can talk easily, who understand the information you need, and who are glad to give it to you or get it for you” (188).

As an additional note on the long-term affects of being affiliated with a subculture, Aram Arslanian (in an interview) said this of Straight Edge:

And even if someone’s not Straight Edge for the rest of their lives, they’ll always have that mark on them—the way they go about things. Twenty years from now, even if you’ve totally forgotten about hardcore, the way you go about things... at least some part of you is going to be touched by the experience you’ve had in this scene and the confidence you’ve built.

(Arslanian 2004)

The two disciplines I draw from in my research are English and Anthropology, with Cultural Studies being the theoretical bridge between the two. My own academic background is more rooted in literature and literary theory, but I have found using Anthropological research methods invaluable in re-examining even fictional works, in addition to my ‘real life’ based explorations.
Chapter 2

S/M Imagery as Identity in Punk Rock as Represented in Punk Fiction

Contemporary Punk Rock has its roots in a musical movement beginning in the mid nineteen seventies in Great Britain. Since that time the essential image of the punk, bondage or fetishist wear, body piercing, dog collars and chains, has remained while the music itself has transformed and evolved in other aesthetic directions. Although sadomasochistic fashions and attitudes associated with punk have continued to be more or less constant, it has become more socially relevant given contemporary popular culture’s embrace of those elements, but not the movement as a whole. The social and aesthetic presence of punk has been explored through film and literature, as in Alex Cox’s Sid & Nancy and Spike Lee’s Summer of Sam; and notably in Nancy A. Collins’ Midnight Blue: The Sonja Blue Collection and Lorrie Sprecher’s Sister Safety Pin. S/M or fetishist style has historically been used by individuals within the various incarnations of the punk scene both as identifier (between peers) and also as identified, a method of delineating border, that is, a symbol or indication of difference from the general public, essentially to the general public. In particular, punk style is recognized internationally by individuals both as a specific genre in dress and music, and also as a political statement by those who choose to self-identify in this manner. I intend to explore the punk elements in the aforementioned novel and film texts in terms of the characters portrayed as punk and their roles in society.
From the obviously fetishist styles of early British punks to more subtle current adaptations of those elements, S/M imagery has become a staple of the punk aesthetic. Used most obviously by punk women, S/M imagery facilitated the role of women in establishing themselves as noticeable and active members of the punk scene. Of notable iconic value are Poly-Styrene of the X-Ray Spex, who sang "Oh Bondage Up Yours!" and singer Siouxsie Sioux of Siouxsie and the Banshees who played an ascendant role in the visual representation of punk women. The Sonja Blue Collection and Sister Safety Pin are both novels that choose to focus especially on empowered female characters that identify as being punk. S/M components to dress are foregrounded in both Sister Safety Pin and The Sonja Blue Collection. These novels, as well as the films Sid & Nancy and Summer of Sam, reflect the style and social phenomenon of the punk genre by the authors' choice in portraying characters as punk-styled in order to emphasize their social divergence, or the inequity of their socio-cultural surroundings. Just as punk rock had dissected conventional forms of music and music making, so did it also form and reform standards of dress and physical/visual means of self-representation. Dog collars, rubber clothing and studded leather are all elements of dress more frequently associated with the hidden world of S/M sexuality and fetishism, but these also helped form the essential image of the individual punk and have remained grounded with this image while the music itself has transformed and evolved in other aesthetic directions.
Punk S/M Imagery in Culture:

Early punk icons, including members of seminal punk band the Sex Pistols, their manager and impresario Malcolm McLaren and his partner, clothing designer Vivienne Westwood and singer Siouxsie Sioux met in London in the mid nineteen seventies and formed the basis of what is now considered to be the bedrock of punk style. McLaren and Westwood founded the King's Road shop named Sex, initially a store selling sex aids to a clientele they referred to as “dull people” (Lydon et al., 70). Sex was quickly expanded to include Westwood designed items such as rubber shirts and 'wearable' straightjackets when punk fashion became a viable market. It is at this point that the visual iconography of the 'punk' is made most apparent in its relation to any politics or social messages it came to represent as a movement.¹ S/M fashion and imagery was sold to punk in its earliest stages and rather than undermining the "purity' or 'authenticity' of the genre" (McRobbie 192), this business of buying and selling of a new style worked to emphasize the transformative capacity of punk. A result of the commodification of punk was that signifying items purchased at Sex came to serve as deliberate statements, being "obviously fabricated" (Hebdige 134) rather than denigrating their politically-charged value. Many items of clothing were also changed and remade to suit their new owners, their original or intended meanings subverted (McRobbie 192). Sex [the shop] also operated as a meeting place for the new avant-garde.

Malcolm McClaren's involvement with the Sex Pistols began with his shop as a central meeting point for members of the band and future audiences. It was at this place and time that punk youth first began to self-identify as a separate class within
the ranks of subcultures in England. Using elements of reggae, dub and the fast
paced beats preferred by followers of rock-steady, punk music evolved as a kind of
pastiche of these various ethnic musical influences. It is interesting to note that while
ethnic sounds (for this discussion, non-Western European) were appropriated—early
punks were not usually of ethnic origin themselves. Stripped down and abrasive, the
music and fashions of Punk Rock were adopted by working class youth and
individuals for whom contemporary culture was both boring and exclusive despite
the perceived advantage of race and citizenship. Early images of Siouxsie Sioux
feature her aggressively facing the camera wearing spiky leather boots, torn
stockings and studded bustiers;\(^2\) Johnny Rotten, of the Sex Pistols, once wore a
rubber shirt during a performance that nearly caused him to lose consciousness due
to heat exhaustion.\(^3\) Just as their idols wore extreme dress, members of the punk
audience also began to wear traditionally clandestine garments such as lingerie and
bondage gear as visible components to their daily costume.

Punks became visible members of society, choosing to incorporate their
subcultural aesthetic into their daily lives. Initially a blue collar based section of
society where employment standards of dress (i.e., no suits or formal dress required
—many early punks worked manual and physical jobs where their outlandish identity
may not have been the taboo it would have become in a more formalized work
environment) may not have been a pressing issue, punks eventually infiltrated the
mainstream—finding an increased freedom through music and subcultural
identification. The anarchic political content of much Punk music brought the
movement to the attention of disaffected individuals for whom punk attire became a
sort of subcultural badge of courage. Wearing one’s hair in a Mohawk hairstyle or sporting studded leather was a kind of communication between members of the subculture. As this occurred, the profile of punk in the arts became more prominent in novels, film, painting and other visual or representational arts. In this vein, it can be said that punk music artists begat the punk genus which generated punk style and attitude in almost all forms of art and personal demonstration, as suggested by Will Straw, “one way to hear punk, of course, was as the centre of new relationships between the cultural spaces of art, fashion and music, and to pursue these threads of dissemination and influence outwards to their respective destinations” (Straw 14).

The use of S/M and fetishist imagery in the composition of the punk aesthetic is important as a signifier but also on a deeper level as a form of demonstration. Popular especially amongst female punks and gay men, bondage imagery plays an important part as a form of open protest by these formerly and often presently, oppressed groups. The photographic punk trademark blank stare into the camera became an avenue for punk women to present and wield their own image, in a sense to control the 'gaze' of the camera and the audience by addressing them directly. A woman dressed in sexually suggestive fetishist attire could at once appear socially as well as sexually dominant by choosing to acknowledge and challenge the audience with intent in dress and gaze. Devoid of coquettishness, sexually aggressive attire matched the social hostility and belligerence innate to Punk Rock and served as a component to the punk ideal of challenging and deconstructing traditional values and aesthetics. Punk women were the first rock stars to ignore standard notions of female public appearance, even in showmanship.
Choosing to portray sexuality in a direct and often jarringly abrasive manner, punk women used typically sexy accoutrements such as garter belts and mini skirts and ripped them or wore them in new ways to startle the viewer and make them review their own notions of sexuality. In director Alex Cox's *Sid & Nancy*, the fictional retelling of the romance between Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols and his girlfriend, Nancy Spungeon, punk women are depicted in typically punk attire and are associated closely with the sexual underground. Mirroring the real life experiences of people who associated closely with the Sex Pistols, women in *Sid & Nancy* are depicted as both stylistic influences, in the manner of decorative wallpaper, in the punk scene; as well as important members of music industry authority (as band members and managers); and also as female friends of the band, perhaps most notably interesting in their vocations as sex-trade workers who catered to the S/M clientele. In a scene involving a dominatrix busy working over her client, an obviously upper class businessman or parliamentarian, members of the Sex Pistols burst in, revealing a close ideological, if not trade related tie between the S/M underground and punk.

The dominatrix has long been closely affiliated with the punk in style and attitude, indeed, Nancy Spungeon herself often worked as a dominatrix, on the other hand, singer Siouxsie Sioux just chose to dress like one. Siouxsie Sioux was influenced also by the pointed sexual ambivalence and S/M stylings represented in the film *Cabaret* (Whiteley 109) and Liza Minnelli's physical portrayal (white shirt, black tie, cropped black hair; leather, black velvet) influenced her own, sexually charged, "Weimar image" (Whiteley 109). Other women, including members of
British band the Slits, used this kind of over the top sexual imagery as a kind of 'fuck you' to male rock culture. If the men in punk rock set an example of physical violence as a standard at punk shows, the women took this impulse and expressed it visually through their dress. Punk allowed for women to immerse themselves in a subculture on their own terms rather than according to a strictly male paradigm. Women have historically succeeded in punk rock in part because of this lack of rigid structure within the genre; the Do It Yourself (DIY)\textsuperscript{7} ethic associated with the movement forms the only real standard in punk. Punk women today still use sexually deviant imagery to set themselves apart from the mainstream; bands such as L7 and Babes in Toyland employ S/M imagery into their stage wardrobe including a fetishist rendition of the baby doll dress. Punk characters in contemporary fiction are delineated by their versions on punk dress, here evidenced by Melany, the main character in \textit{Sister Safety Pin}:

I was the only one in the club with blue hair. Black suspenders hung down over my ass, and strobe lights flashed against the silver studs and bondage rings on my black leather bracelets. (Sprecher 99)

Male use of S/M imagery is somewhat more limited in selection than it is for women, yet staples include the wearing of bondage trousers, black leather, and sexual paraphernalia like cock rings hanging from epaulettes, belts and bracelets. These stylistic elements were made standard over twenty years ago in Britain and continue to exist as punk signifiers worldwide. Director Spike Lee's 1999 film \textit{Summer of Sam}, depicted a New York Bronx based group of friends in 1977, the year of David Berkowitz's killing spree. Portrayed in many ways as stereotypical
Italian-American local hoodlums, the one character who has broken from his neighborhood mould of minor league drug peddling and disco dancing is Ritchie. Ritchie is presented to the audience as a 'punk' character first getting out of bed with spiked hair, chain necklace and allusions to British music on the posters in his room, most notably depicting Quadrophenia era Who. Old neighborhood friends and other community members vehemently (and ultimately violently) reject Ritchie's "new" look, cementing the construction of his character as an outsider, someone for whom the world is a greater place than the block they all grew up on. Ritchie appears wearing bondage trousers and a Union Jack T-shirt in his first major scene, and augments his new punk appearance with a false and heavily Bronx flavored British accent. When questioned by Ruby, local disco floozy, the only person who understands the relevance of his accent and dress, if he has been to London, Ritchie replies, "No, it's all in the attitude" (Summer of Sam 1999). A nod to the origins of punk style itself, Ritchie's choice of garb is also seemingly influenced by sexual deviance and alternative forms of sexuality. He earns the money he needs to look punk and play punk music as a stripper and hustler in a men's porn club. While he never identifies as being a gay character, in fact begins to date Ruby, his employment and image choices reflect his desire to live and identify as living a fringe or non-standard type of lifestyle. In this film, as in the real world for many individuals, choosing to portray oneself as a punk becomes a statement of rejection of average (in this case) American values and at this point in time, a rejection also of the prevailing music and fashion of the day: disco. An otherwise underdeveloped character, Ruby's big moment in the film, where her character is given the
opportunity to become realized is when she asks Ritchie for money, when he asks what she needs it for she responds, "I wanna ditch this whole disco look" (Summer of Sam 1999). This is a point in the film at which it becomes salient that Ritchie and his girlfriend may not understand what punk truly is, as indicated by Ritchie's reference to the Who as "the Godfathers of Punk," (at the very least a dubious proclamation). It becomes clear, however, that they certainly appreciate what it is not. Punk style, as a specific genre in dress and music, is for Ritchie and Ruby an almost pure statement of rejection of (first and foremost) disco, the neighborhood they grew up in, and the way they are perceived by the people with whom they interact. This dichotomy of youth culture versus youth counter culture is well represented in the film, where both cultures are shown to be as irreconcilable as are any rebellions against an adult mainstream.²

The pinnacle of Ritchie and Ruby's punk evolution is when they are granted the opportunity of playing a gig at New York's famous punk club CBGB's. CBGB's is America's first and foremost punk nightclub and was the first documented punk space—where musicians and audience meet and mingle as peers. The period of time depicted in the film—the late 1970's, marked the birth of the New York, thus the American, punk scene. It is at CBGB's that the audience is allowed to see the two in their preferred element. Surrounded by other, more extreme, punks, Ritchie and Rudy are no longer seen as odd looking or divergent members of society, but rather as individuals actively participating in a new 'scene' or social movement that necessarily sprung from the ashes of the dying disco. This scene is juxtaposed with images of two other characters choosing to instead go to famed disco night-club
Studio 54, the debauchery, pretence and flashiness of which is spliced with the raw energy of Ritchie and Rudy singing in CBGB's. The crowd inside and out of the club are easily identifiable as punks with the array of leather, spikes, piercings and bondage wear. Punk style is used here as a recognizable social identifier as much as a style of music. The fans outside of CBGB's, unlike those outside of Studio 54, are there to present themselves as individuals personally active in the construction of their social group and personal style. Once again the easily copied and commodifiable aspects of punk style are revealed as assets to the genre. As a statement of dissent, punk style is visible and adoptable to those who choose to recognize it as a mode for nonconformity, and is internationally accessible.

While culture-sharing across nations has become common between nations like Britain and the United States, this sharing is not always known as it occurs in smaller countries. The espousal of punk by individuals in the Czech Republic, for example, can have an even deeper meaning. For Czech punks the total freedom to express oneself through music and personal style is a component of a new political climate. Previous to the Velvet Revolution of 1989, when the communist regime was toppled, punks were rarely seen and punk music, from outside of the country's borders, was virtually unavailable.

The punk aesthetic, as a component to the scene in general, has been adopted and embraced in the Czech Republic and is described and accessed in part through 'zines, including Bulldog, written in both Czech and English and Riot News, published mainly in the Czech language (note the English names for Czech language 'zines), as well as in conventional print sources. Prominent veteran punk
band N.V.Ú. (Nepřicházi v úvahu) is featured in the April 2001 issue of Czech modern music review magazine Rock & Pop with members sporting Mohawk hair cuts, leather wear and bondage trousers. Identifying themselves visually with an overtly antagonistic subculture is a personal and political choice for members of N.V.Ú. in a culture that still favors conservative dress and cautious behavior after fifty years of communist rule. Distinguishing themselves as punk is important to the band, lead singer Štěpán 'Makeba' Málek says of the movement, “punk offers a multitude of possibilities for expression ...we don't like stereotypes” (Koral 65) (translation my own). It is interesting that Makeba, like many other punk artists, has chosen a style that essentially exists as a stereotype to western society and wholly renewed the political and confrontational aspects of it in a culture where punk has yet to become a trivialized and popular form of self-representation. Czech punk style is an interesting case study in the global arena as it borrows so heavily from the original British design in fashion and yet musically Czechs favor American and German influences. The use of S/M punk imagery by bands like N.V.Ú. abroad as well as in North America serves as a kind of subcultural signaling of a band’s politics as much as of their musical genre, or would at least purport to do so. That a band like N.V.Ú. is being interviewed in a popular magazine indicates their level of popular success; S/M garb helps the band maintain an image of punk purity and dedication to the genre.

Punk S/M Imagery in Fiction:

The use of bondage motifs as a signal to pop culture that one is still legitimately ‘street’ or ‘alternative’ despite contrary popular successes, or as way to
imply solidarity with other members of the subculture is used as a form of character building in literature as well as in pop culture. Nancy A. Collins' female vampire punk Sonja Blue dons elements of S/M style after realizing her new role outside of society as a vampire. The author uses Punk S/M elements as a mode of identifying the character as being legitimately Punk, with her ripped stockings, leather jacket and heavy boots, and reiterates the style throughout the novel with references to punk bands (Via T-shirts) and song lyrics. The author introduces Sonja Blue into an international punk persona after she has left her position as an S/M hostess (more S than M) in a Scandinavian brothel. Sonja consumed her first human prey, leaving her humanity behind and entered the London punk scene within two pages. Using narrative to construct a bridge between S/M culture and punk, the author reaffirms the bond between the two styles and enforces the notion of deviance in this particular juxtaposition. The author further asserts punk legitimacy by allowing for Sonja to 'become' punk in England in the 1970's, in effect 'tapping the source' of punk origin.

Sonja's punk look ascribes less to a sexually charged appearance, instead she dresses in the more modern, casual expression of punk attire, highlighted by the punk T-shirt which serves to attach underground legitimacy to her persona, "Tricked out in a battered leather jacket, a stained Circle Jerks T-shirt, patched jeans, mirrored sunglasses, and with dark hair twisted into a tortured cockatoo’s crest," (Collins 399) and "...a battered leather jacket over a Dead Kennedys T-shirt" (258). While Collins has chosen not to portray Sonja Blue in S/M punk attire, she continually collates sexually explicit S/M scenarios, as in Sonja's time spent in a
brothel, and punk music associations, specifically in the following scene which takes place in a human S/M club called The Ossuary:

I watch dispassionately as a young girl dressed only in leather boots and a blindfold is strung up by her hands. As she balances precariously on tiptoe, her partner dribbles hot wax onto her exposed buttocks. She whimpers and wiggles her bottom most becomingly. The master puts aside his candle and produces a whip, the head of which he inserts into his compliant slave, lifting her off her feet. She shrieks and moans at this violation, her hips bucking to the beat of a Cure song. (Collins 387)

Just as her character’s ‘outsider’ status is enhanced by being a punk as well as a vampire, so does this scene acquire more depth of meaning by being associated with post-punk group the Cure. The Cure are renowned as a band that helped spawn the post-punk musical genre of Goth, a genre which embraces themes of darkness and poetic despair. Vampires are a recurring theme in some Goth musical lyrics, as well as representations of Goth in novels and film, notably Anne Rice’s vampire chronicles, and individuals who choose to identify as being Goth tend to wear black, accept alternative lifestyles and often use S/M elements of style in their dress. Nancy Collins is playing with the personification of a genre, easily identifiable if not widely understood, and is incorporating elements, in this case musical, of that genre to intensify the notion of social deviance and subcultural legitimacy in her novel. Punk style is consistently associated with deviance in Sonja Blue, and is also typified in her all male pseudo-punk gang, the Blue Monkeys. To slightly digress from the discussion, in 1994 I visited a ‘rock bar’ in Prague (Czech Republic)
considered to be a punk influenced alternative to the traditional pubs and discotheques typical to most casual social activities. The bar was called “Modra Vopice” (The Blue Monkey) and, at the time was filled with an interesting mix of people dressed in a kind of rock/punk hybrid and women trying to emulate the ‘scandalous’ looks of early punk women like Siouxie Sioux by wearing similar makeup and torn garment, including an adoption of the ‘underwear as outerwear’ aesthetic. The venue remains a strong venue for punk bands today. It is a testament to both the rooted punk community in the Czech Republic and its development and increasing popularity that the club now stands as the premiere punk rock venue in the country. A quick search of the internet reveals a homepage for the club with a consistent live punk lineup including artists from around the world. The familiarity of the name (there are bands and other clubs across the globe named “Blue Monkey”) and the intercultural lineup of the music is another example of a cultural dialectic in punk.

In the introduction of the ultra-violent Blue Monkeys gang, Collins again uses her technique of incorporating punk rock associated music as a backdrop for the territory of depraved characters, in this case errant youth, “A Rockola jukebox strained the Ramones’ ‘Pinhead’ through the failing speakers” (45) A description of members of the gang as having blue hair and leather jackets further identifies the Blue Monkeys with a punk style. What Sonja’s interaction with the gang at this point in the novel illustrates is evidence of Collins’ qualified knowledge of the sexual elements associated with punk style, and her deliberate misuse of those elements. Avoiding more legitimate and cultivated forms of sexual innuendo in dress, Collins
fashions her characters after the punk genre and most often incorporates sexuality in the form of lasciviousness or, and more frequently, in the form of sexual violence, “Clear off the table. We gonna have ourselves one wingding of a gangbang” (47).

Again using early pro-female concepts from the punk movement, Collins' vampire is a strong female, not intimidated by male threats of violence and their physical authority. Collins is knowingly incorporating into the character of Sonja punk values such as “identification with the disadvantaged, the dispossessed, the sub cultural” (Whitely 113), all qualities which imbue Sonja with legitimacy as a punk woman, as much as a vampire, to “explore gender boundaries, to investigate [her] own power, anger, aggression – even nastiness” (Whitely 113):

A burly youth with a royal-blue Mohawk grappled with her. She caught a glimpse of the knife seconds before he slid it between her ribs, puncturing her left lung. She wrapped her arms around the mohawked punk, pressing him to her breasts. They looked like a high-school couple slow-dancing at the prom. The Blue Monkey stared into her upturned face, expecting her to die... “Hey, lover! You forgot something.” She flicked her wrist and the blade buried itself into the punk’s Adam's apple. (48)

While Collins has constructed characters using legitimate elements of punk style and culture, her manipulation of these elements to serve as evidence for depravity in her characters is a somewhat tawdry and contemptible use of a legitimate and intelligent counter or subculture. Where this novel fails is in presenting a truly genuine punk figure but it succeeds in reinforcing the status of punk style as being sexually and morally deviant, as well as being easily identifiable to one looking for the correct
stylistic clues. Collins, like most artists (who 'use' the world around them to recreate reality), directs her representation of a movement to fit with her artistic intent.

Lorrie Sprecher's *Sister Safety Pin* is a novel that uses punk imagery to define its main characters in a more authentic fashion. In this novel punk style is very clearly defined, "Her beer bottle chimed against a pair of handcuffs fastening the bondage belt she'd bought in a punk shop in L.A." (109) and is approached in what can be considered a more realistic manner than other fictional representations of the genre. The main character, Melany, is a woman for whom punk style is a way of self-representation and self-expression rather than a superficial feature of her character. Using bondage imagery here can be seen as a form of open protest from the point of view of a character that is both gay and a woman. Although identifying more generally as a "punk" than with a sadomasochistic sub-genre, the author furnishes her main character with items such as 'bondage trousers' and 'dog collars' without comment, essentially taking it for granted that these are stock items for punk attire. In this novel the links between the musical subculture (punk rock) and the greater personal and political issues being grappled with by the protagonist are unmistakable:

I asked Patti, "Can we really be punks and lesbians at the same time?"

She thought about it for a moment. "Of course," she said. "One's dressing to shock. The other's fucking to shock."

"But I don't just fuck to shock. I like being with women. I don't do it on purpose. I mean, I do -- but then again, I don't."
"But it has the same effect," Patti said. "Everybody else thinks you're doing it to shock them. They don't care about your personal needs. When you think about it that way, being an out lesbian is like being a punk. You're wearing your ability to shock people on the outside instead of keeping it to yourself."

(Sprecher 119)

This passage illustrates the ability of a subculture to avail itself to the multiplicity of needs of people for whom it becomes more than a representation of style. The link between punk style and the gay community is reminiscent of a time when looking unusual was unacceptable, especially in British pub culture. Cressida Miles discusses the incidence of punks and gays occupying the same "subcultural space" (55), "where a punk identity intersected with other sexual subcultures, there appeared to be a greater sense of tolerance and awareness of sexuality within the context of the Other" (55). In Sister Safety Pin, Sprecher has chosen to explore concepts of alternative sexuality in conjunction with images of unconventional style. Like Collins' Sonja Blue, Sprecher also uses the ubiquitous punk t-shirt as an indicator of 'punk-ness,' in this case of solidarity, between two members of the co-joined punk and lesbian cultures, "She threw on a black leather jacket and hugged me. I felt her ribs and the curve of a breast under the thin cotton of her black Patti Smith T-shirt."(29) Sister Safety Pin succeeds in exemplifying the function of punk and S/M style as a semiotic signifier. The notion that S/M and punk imagery or detailing has special meanings for people who understand those signs is best evidenced here by confusion within subculture signification. When leaving a gay bar
Melany is confronted with the questions “Are you into bondage?” (125), and the question confuses her with the weight of meaning it potentially carries:

I wasn’t sure what she meant, and several possible answers crossed my mind. All women are in bondage, serving the heteropatriarchal state No one is free until we’re all free. Did you say bondage or bandage? But I didn’t think that was what she’d meant. I wasn’t sure what she’d meant exactly... (125)

and she ultimately responds, “I’m a punk.” Female or ‘girl’ punks using S/M paraphernalia might be accused of sending out messages of a kind of sexual proclivity not entirely meant. It appears that when semiotic messages are miss-communicated between other types of alternative individuals, offence is not taken by those who are leaving the impression; the instances that seem to truly aggravate purists of punk culture are media or mass cultural misrepresentations and appropriations of punk.

When pop icons like Madonna use S/M imagery in their public and stage costuming, they are not just making use of fashions; they are exploiting the uniform of a culture without compliance (in the sense of a strong dedication and identification with the scene) or any real risk of reproach or discrimination. Costume as play has innately fewer social risks than costume as social identifier. By popularizing subcultural fashion, mainstream artists in fact disempower and confuse the semiotic messages inherent to such attire. Madonna’s use of bondage gear, in her videos ("Express Yourself") and books (Sex), was more overtly sexual in nature than traditional punk dress, and yet her particular representation was pilfered more from punk than from any real sexual underground. Many artists employ Madonna’s’
technique of looking ‘to the street’ for modern or ‘cutting edge’ styles and fashions. This kind of cultural pilfering is commonly used against many minority groups. Elements of visual representations are taken from the underground and set into mainstream culture with little or no referencing to their politically and socially subversive cultural origins. Certainly, punk appropriated S/M and yet this was done with a kind of mutualism. As a like-minded subculture in generally rejecting mainstream values, punk colluded with the determinism of S/M to exist outside of traditional lifestyle boundaries and objectives. Punk women in particular used the movement to resist “gender games of the dominant culture” (Leblanc 159), creating and adopting “forms of dress and behavior that subvert the norms of female propriety” (159). Unfortunately, this model (of resistance through the performance of identity) can, and too often is, reduced by general media sources to its symbolic foundations in fashion and violence.

Popularizing the symbols usually associated with the underground allows for one of two options, the symbol is either stripped of its subversive, anti-establishment or non-normative value and marketed as a fashion or fad; or the symbol is vilified in prevailing media sources as evidence for ‘unsavory types’ and seditious behavior. Examples of this include Madonna in the former and Nancy A. Collins’ vampire, Sonja Blue, as the latter. While the common cultural collective can certainly benefit from the insurgence of subversive elements in its media and fashion, indeed, it can be argued that this leads to a greater acceptance of alternative choices in lifestyle. Cultural appropriation applies as much to punk as it does to any other minority group. Part of the problem with this kind of mass cultural requisition of subcultural
symbols is the creation, in general culture, of punk archetypes which have little to do with a real counter cultural symbolic order. In this way Sonja Blue and Nancy Spungeon become the 'bad punk rock girl' whores to Melany and Ruby’s 'good punk rock girl' virgins. Sonja and Nancy seem to be used by their punk personas to behave harshly, acting out of carnal needs to fulfill their hungers (blood and heroin, respectively), while Melany and Ruby use their punk images in part to explore their sexualities and to reject the false values of the dominant culture. In Sister Safety Pin, Sprecher regularly juxtaposes images of punk rock with instances of political awareness and idealism, ostensibly battling the belittlement of the musical genre as a cartoonish illustration of empty rebellion:

...She looked like a bat in her long black police coat with The Clash embroidered on the back in clumsy red letters.

"Janie and I were at the kitchen table reading Spiked Head – a punk direct-action magazine – and there was an article about how gay people from other countries aren't allowed into the United States," (95)

A close investigation of the use of bondage and S/M motifs in the punk aesthetic reveals a multiplicity and layering of meanings behind its use. Individual punks, both real and as represented in literature, are initially identified by their "shocking" fashion that is meant to be deliberately and directly offensive (Hebdige106). Dick Hebdige refers to the 'look' of punks as constituting a kind of pastiche. This bricolage allows members of the subculture to appropriate a "range of commodities by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which serve to erase or subvert their original ...meanings" (104). S/M motifs play an integral role in this
reconstruction of symbol and context. S/M ornamentation worn by punk females allowed for individuals to acquire a "forbidden discourse" (sexually subversive) and redirect or "undermine its meanings" (Steele 37) by manipulating "sexual clichés such as fishnet stockings, stiletto heels, visible brassieres, and rubber mackintoshes" (37). When punks use S/M and bondage items, they "retain their forbidden connotations" (Hebdige 108). It is in this way that S/M imagery truly is identity within the punk aesthetic: in combining punk with S/M, individuals juxtapose social and sexual deviance giving what Hebdige refers to as "an impression of multiple warping" (121) or a visual impression which intentionally challenges even liberal measures of style and understanding.

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1 Cressida Miles discusses the idea of the punk shop and the store Sex in particular in her article: "Spatial Politics: A Gendered Sense of Place" (The Clubcultures Reader: Readings in Popular Cultural Studies, Oxford: Blackwell):
   The creation of the punk shop became a feature in many localities. The image each shop created appealed to those who enjoyed hanging out in such an environment, and those who enjoyed the pleasures of subcultural consumption. Here clothing provided a meeting ground for social interaction, a place to find out what was going on, what gigs were on the horizon.
   (57)
2 The 'look' of this day is given special attention in Valerie Steele's book Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power.
3 Johnny Rotten was pivotal in the emerging popularity of Westwood's designs. His influence is foregrounded in his autobiography, Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs, where he elaborates on his choices in fashion:
   I did a series of photos in a straightjacket. I really liked being in that straightjacket, so I wanted gear on stage that wouldn't be quite so restrictive but would look like it. That's how the bondage stuff came about. (153)
4 The concept of the 'gaze' has been given attention by Lara Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures. London: Macmillan. Sean Cubitt gives an interesting discussion on Mulvey's theories in his article "Digital Erotics and Narcissism" (Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender) where he elaborates on the idea that "we are as much conscious of being seen as of looking" (314).
5 Valerie Steele, Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power.
6 Note here the transparency of the dialectic movement of influences between the arts. Punk became a new form of sexual representation directly in relation to other avant-garde illustrations of sexuality and divergence from a social norm. These influences are apparent in film as well as theater and painting or photography. Indeed, the nineteen fifties pin-up girls also came to influence the punk genre, notable Betty Page with her whips and fetish shoes. Women who influenced or were influenced by punk as icons or performers shared was what Whiteley refers to as "both a new masculinity and a confrontational glamour" (98).
Information on DIY (Do It Yourself) can be found in a variety of sources as it serves as one of the few cornerstones for legitimate punk art. One of the better sources describing early punk pioneers in their own words through a series of interviews is the book *All Ages: Reflections on Straight Edge* by Beth Lahickey, published by Revelation Books. Just about anything from Revelation Books (itself a DIY enterprise) can be relied on a good source material regarding punk in its many incarnations.

This is a reference to mods, direct ancestors of punk. It is also an international filmic reference to the genre. The early rebelliousness of the mods was reproduced by the punks, if not the fussiness of their personal attire. Although it can be argued that punks were as scrupulous in the minutiae of detail regarding personal style, as the mods, while neglecting the order and meticulousness of Mod dress. More detail can be found in George Marshall's *Spirit of '69: A Skinhead Bible*. Scotland: S.T. Publishing, 1994.

There is an inherent danger to using the terms “youth” or “youth culture”, unfortunately these are the most identifiable forms of idiom related to punk culture. As Cressida Miles suggests:

> ...while subculture implies a limited space, the word 'youth' is at times overtly limiting, as it refers to a specific state of temporal development, between childhood and adulthood. In actual terms there is no real age limit on sub cultural participation. (59)

Their band name, Nepřicházi v úvahu, loosely translates to mean “It doesn’t even matter” or “It didn’t even occur to me”.

Western styles of dress were still largely unavailable to Czech at that time, as were the band or concert t-shirts often sported by punks.

Note in this passage Collins’ constant reiteration of the physical appearance of the youth. She repeats the term ‘mohawk’ (as in hairdo), removing any doubt that her use of the term ‘punk’ might mean wayward youth rather than punk as a member of the counterculture. This serves to reaffirm a correlation between the culture of punk and the insubordination of delinquency, or, in this novel, capital ‘E’ evil.

Often in both punk and popular circles, such accouterments used to be S/M, but now are punk. This indicates a normal semiotic shift, as languages change over time, so to do the exact meanings of words — a symbol that used to mean one thing, now means another. It is interest to see here how each culture appropriates, feeds from and alters to signifiers of the other, each audience, or group of consumers, engaging in what Michel de Certeau termed 'semiotic guerilla warfare' (316). Each culture seeing to incorporate its own meaning, often by excorporating those of another group. John Storey discusses this technique in greater detail in his text, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and methods*. 
Chapter 3

"Where the Streets Have No Name": The subcultural ‘counterpublic’ claiming space and asserting identity in public place and private space

THE STREETS:

Urban streets act as connective channels, both joining areas and locales at the same time as they detach localities from each other. Streets also function as essentially public places, acting as paths for mobility and as zones for public contact and socialization. Public contact is sanctioned by governing powers in the sense that streets are mapped, created places, and in the way streets are monitored, policed and controlled. Public places and spaces are subject to rules, to governances, which decide to whom public spaces will be made available, and to what degree. When these powers are challenged by alternative use of public places, or by the performative visual presence of subcultural groups, the ‘otherness’ of these individuals is augmented and their presence, as a public, is often limited. Access to and use of public places is of greatest concern for those individuals to whom admission is denied or greatly complicated. Members of visually apparent subcultural groups, including those who identify with and are identifiable as punks, encounter impediments to their access to public spaces and tenure over private spaces largely due to the visual ways in which they articulate their identities and the associated cultural reputation with that. Punks are one cultural group that represent visible difference, and, as such, are subject to many of the same conflicts as women, visual minorities and the city’s poor.
Private spaces, notably the notion of ‘home,’ are also often limited or denied to punks. Cases of parental dissatisfaction with punk teenagers seem to go beyond the normal difficulties of teenage rebellion – punk dress and music are inherently challenges to authority to the extreme that many parents reject their children in a version of the ‘tough love’ school of parenting. Likewise for older punks, some property owners may choose not to rent to people who ‘look punk,’ believing that these individuals may pose a threat to the property or social values of the home. This has led to the proliferation in ‘punk houses.’ Punk houses are, loosely defined, often communal – living environments where shared living is extended to the wider ‘family’ of punks who need a place to stay. The availability of punk houses affords punk culture a greater sense of community and cohesion – as punks travel, they can often rely on each other (other punks) for shelter. The second half of this chapter will deal with punk renegotiation of private space, in text and lived experience, a setting that also often challenges the notions of ‘privacy,’ ‘family’ and ‘home.’

City streets can be understood as “sites where difference is amplified and where a situated politics of difference is acted out in a multitude of ways,” (Jacobs 253). This is apparent as a site where many people group or pass through, and when seen as groups, those people that do not ‘blend in’ are made even more obvious that in close quarters where more homogeneous groupings are found. Set apart from the masses, punks can become apparent in any number of ways, as minority groups do in public situations. One way in which ‘politics of difference’ can be acted out is visually, as punks do - using appearance metaphorically to signify divergence or contestation from the norm. Streets, as public places, have been
mapped out for use by the 'general' public, and a departure from the general forms a contestation to the powers that mediate social order. Punks threaten social order by asserting their presence as a public, and they use the bounded form of the city street as a personal space for the representational and lived experiences of their lives. Punks are visually and spatially located on the margins of society; they claim this space for their own, and, in doing so, they simultaneously absorb the parent culture of general public society while embodying the rejection of the hegemonic forces which construct and divide it: members of the punk subculture challenge the ideological constructions of place, then go further and challenge the construction of ideology itself by the multiplicity of ways in which they express their narrative of dissent.

Streets, like most physically defined places in general, "...can be mapped, their locations specified in numerical terms, their borders found," (Curry 101); it is this notion of a bordered reality that allows for an examination of those individuals which exist on the border, who use streets for purposes other than conduit and commerce. Streets are public only in a restricted sense, that is, streets are ideally represented as "the consummate democratic space," (Lees 237) but this democracy is mitigated, even contradicted by "the structures of economic and social power that capitalism erects," (Low and Gleeson 31). This contradiction is supported by the fact that cities are sectioned off into general districts: of commerce, leisure, residence and 'other.' The 'other' section of the city consists of the areas populated by the poor, the homeless and visual minorities or marginalized people. We know this section or group of streets exists mainly when we see marginalized or subcultural
individuals occupying the incongruous space of the elite shopping district, subcultural individuals are most easily recognized by their difference. It is, indeed, a challenging juxtaposition, for example, to observe a group of punks 'hanging out' on a street corner in a busy 'uptown' shopping district colonized by 'couture' boutiques and expensive malls – it is just this type of concurrent (with moneyed shoppers and more elegant modern flâneurs) population that signifies the real existence of intangible borders. One current example of this situation is in the heart of Vancouver's downtown shopping district, Granville Street. Seeing increasing gentrification, most notably since the 1980's, the outer ridge of the downtown core area of Granville Street has still maintained a basic 'grittiness,' if you will, by virtue of the extreme difference in demographics as the street winds through the Vancouver downtown core. At the waterfront level, the street has long been a site of rock and punk clubs and pubs, peppered with the music retail and cheap ethnic restaurants favored by the clientele of that area. Gentrification in the form of hotels and cruise-ship centers replacing dockyards has altered this area, but it remains 'scruffy' when compared to the region closer to the shopping district of central downtown Granville. The waterfront section of Granville remains less of a place to congregate, as much as place to visit, to enter clubs or access other parts of the downtown core. Punks on Granville really become visible when they approach that bastion of low and haute couture – Pacific Centre Mall. Located conveniently between mall entrances and the main entrance/exit of the major downtown Skytrain (Vancouver's above-ground public transit system) stop, this section of Granville is rife with punks, street performers, indigent people and serves as a meeting place for most groups setting
about the downtown for any reason. My personal experiences with punks on Granville Street, including reasons for even being there include the social aspect. That is where people meet, interact and catch up with each other; the area also serves as the most lucrative centre for panhandling, essential for those punks for whom money is short but who may consider themselves separate from the more desperate drug-addicted panhandlers in other parts of the city. When I was active in the punk scene, it was this area, as well as further up Granville, that I went to locate people, find out about coming shows or generally make connections in the community. Past the mall, and further up the street one encounters more independent and avant-garde retailing. Sex and fetish wear shops share the block with those that sell punk or goth type clothing, artistic shoemakers, comic books shops and used record/CD stores. There are also punks gathered in this area, –but it has traditionally been where they shop. Less panhandling occurs, and more socializing. It is in this section of the street that I have typically observed a more ‘homey’ atmosphere. Punks and street kids sprawl out on sidewalks, they claim the street. It is interesting that as much as this part of the downtown core has been gentrified, made upscale with more fashionable clubs and restaurants –the denizens of the street are reluctant to relinquish their territory. In recent visits to Vancouver, I have noted the bustle and frequent clashes between the people in the street and the people on it, using it as means of access only.

By placing themselves in public spaces where they tend be obviously incongruent to the typical operations within those spaces, punks challenge and make obvious the unarticulated notions of ‘appropriate’ time and place for animate
experience. Streets are “specific, local landscapes [which] manifest broader social and cultural processes, establishing the strategic importance of the street…” (Fyfe 1); and, as an essentially street-based culture, punk has functioned well in evidencing the role of subcultural groups in (re) claiming street space as an occupied environment rather than a means or vehicle for travel. Crossing the boundary from public place to private, acculturated, space, punks use the street as the “terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood” (Bhabha 3) and in doing so, “the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing” (Bhabha 5). The act of being punk is both generated and sustained by its continual regeneration as a street, or liminal,¹ identity. Even punks who ‘live on the streets,’ do not typically sleep, as is usual for the homeless, on street spaces — but rather in squats or communally occupied spaces — but they reconvene to the street levels when awake. Apart from sleep, a good deal of their identity is performed on the streets (as is much represented in clubs, as will be discussed later in this work).

The punk subculture is historically positioned as a boundary-crossing entity. Punk first originated as a music-based subculture (Leblanc 33) and has since disseminated into the cultural spaces of fashion, art and a variety of music genres (Straw 14) as well as the occupied physical environments of urban streets and commercial districts. Musical origins aside, punks assert their identity through visual means — using style of dress and body modification as shared expressions of values of resistance in addition to ideals of individuality and personal insurrection. The visual impression of punks is composed of a set of sartorial cultural symbols which serve a wide variety of metaphors: “as a set of cultural symbols, punk dress [serves]
simultaneously to signify membership in the subculture, solidarity with other punks, identification with the subculture, and disaffiliation with mainstream culture," (Leblanc 40). Punk style acts as a symbolic, non-verbal method of communication – essentially working from metaphor to convey meaning. Punk metaphors are sartorial, based in style of dress or tailoring, but also spatial. Punks create new spatial realities by living and performing their existence in the streets. Punks appropriate the street as place by sculpting the cultural space (Lefebvre 105), by imbuing the space of the street with the “countless little rituals...” (Featherstone 179) of quotidian life, rituals made ‘other’ by the visual impression of those individuals enacting them (the subculture) on the mainstream public and also by occupying public space in which the private realities of daily life are not usually performed. I have observed and participated in these occupations in a number of ways with punks, as well as having observed participants in action: from eating meals to making money, taking naps and hosting social activities, non-traditional uses of street space continues to occur. What remains interesting for me about this use of space is how differently punks do it from other street people. Other than panhandling, punks have no use for other street crowds. While ‘attention getting’ in terms of how they look, this attention is not sought out, neither is it denied. Many remain simply oblivious to other people on the street. Where the poor and indigent may seek help, or be in some obvious need for care, punks are simply there for each other. Ironically, punks are often the only people on the street who do choose to notice or help the indigent. I once witnessed a kind of grandfather/grandson relationship blossom between a punk friend and an old homeless man. The punk
whose street name was ‘Wizard’ shared his panhandling earnings with the man and tried to make sure he ate daily. In this case, the alternative use of the street space was evinced by eldercare. Punks are ‘othered’ by their appearance and by their alternative occupation of public space. Subcultural occupation imbues the spatial reality of the street with a greater variety of cultural metaphors, encouraged by notions of school, club, theater, institution and home.

METAPHOR AND SYMBOLISM IN PUNK SPACE:

In his book Culture, Chris Jenks defines subculture as “the way of defining and honoring the particular specification and demarcation of special or different interests of a group of people within a larger collectivity” (10). An integral component to this ‘demarcation’ of different interests of the punk subculture is their own particular use of metaphor. The function of style as communication in punk works as metaphor in the sense that like sentences in a language, sartorial expressions can, and sometimes must “be interpreted in ways that are not predictable from an understanding of their literal meaning alone” (Basso 54). Keith Basso’s discussion of the role of metaphor in conveying cultural meaning is uniquely relevant to a study of punk subculture because he highlights the notion of discovery through an understanding of many different cultural features or artifacts. Regarding the model of discovering social meaning through metaphor, Basso says:

The concepts required to interpret a metaphor are not expressed by the metaphor itself. Rather, they may be said to underlie it and must be discovered through the adduction of shared features of connotive meaning. It is this act of discovery, coupled with the sometimes-puzzling search that
precedes it, that can make the interpretation of metaphor an original and
personal experience. (57)

Basso articulates the need to look at how the general contributes to the specific in
terms of grasping symbolic meaning. Indeed, with the essence of punk style being a
form of pastiche or bricolage, a true ethnographic analysis necessitates the
identification and discussion of the myriad cultural references implied. Unlike many
of his intellectual contemporaries, Basso also offers an explanation as to why the
reading of a foreign, marginalized or 'sub' culture’s symbols is useful and relevant:

...if we can determine how the concepts that underlie the interpretation of
metaphor are formed—we will have learned something interesting about
metaphor itself. We will have also learned something interesting about
cultural symbols and the way they work to impose order and meaning on that
elusive entity sometimes known as the “real world.” (58)

In punk, the ‘real world’ indicates the role and context of punk as a subculture
heavily informed and framed by a populist parent culture. The difference (and
cultural, semiotic value) between punk style and other subcultures which also use
items symbolic in value to the parent culture, inverting or oddly juxtaposing them, is
twofold, including the unique employment punk makes of such items, the use of the
very estrangement from popular meaning, along with the role punk has played in
conveying messages and means of personal rebellion to the greater populace.

Using imagery so provocative that the symbolic order of common understanding is
challenged, if not broken, punk style goes further than subversion as an end. Punk's
appropriation and use of popular images, such as that of the Queen of England,
highlights the practice of idolatry and mass consumption and derides these concepts while simultaneously adopting them. In foregrounding itself as a marginal culture or movement, punk is also, then, demonstrating a reliance on the mainstream/parent culture for existence. Much as the street relies on the building and locales that surround it, defining its space, so must any marginal space or culture acknowledge the center it contests or is at least noted as being separate from. Dick Hebdige suggests that punk exists as unique culture, made subculture, because it has first broken from the parent culture, but then, and more significantly, punk has broken from its own location in experience, he says:

This break was both inscribed and re-enacted in the signifying practices embodied in punk style. The punk ensembles, for instance, did not so much magically resolve experienced contradictions as represent the experience of contradiction itself in the form of visual puns (bondage, the ripped tee-shirt, etc.). Thus while it is true that the symbolic objects in punk style (the safety pins, the pogo, the [...] hairstyles) were ‘made to form a “unity” with the group’s relations, situations, experience’ (Clarke et al., 1975), this unity was at once ‘ruptural’ and ‘expressive’, or more precisely it expressed itself through rupture. (141)

The core then, of punk discursive and spatial metaphors, rest in the notion of rupture of divergence from the dominant or parent symbolic order, or system of cultural understanding, itself bounded by preconceptions, while simultaneously adopting identifiable characteristics of that culture. Punk sartorial and spatial metaphors,
communications and identities are informed by the parent culture and are then positioned as separate, or broken off, from it.

Punk re-shaping of space, like making a popular shopping district a home base and site of social conference, and the punk construction of new spatial metaphors, using the street as 'home,' is not necessarily indicative of a collective inclination towards social change or insurgence. Hebdige emphasized the notion of rupture, and punk's role, as a subculture, is to enact and facilitate this rupture. The actual imbalance of social power in the public realm of the street affects punks and is metaphorically represented as effect, or artifact; the material and the metaphorical are mutually implicated (Smith 98) and so the boundary between them is crossed, denied — ruptured. Unlike previous music-based subcultures, like the hippies of the nineteen sixties, whose attire was often meant to provoke a reaction to a given societal problem or to invoke public reaction to political ideals, punk style serves neither to inform nor protect, but exclusively as an example of challenge — of the very process of opposition, rather than a specific slant on or form of opposition. That punk protest is unconventional is only fitting, given that most punk ideals revolve around the rejection of all that is conventional in mainstream society. Punk presence (by virtue of appearance and demeanor) is in itself a form of assertion, of staged identity, which occupies a "problematic space — performative rather than experiential" (Bhabha 181). The performative structure of punk style and physical presence is both confrontational and expository in the sense that "it opens up a narrative strategy for the emergence and negotiation of those agencies of the marginal, minority, subaltern, or diasporic," (Bhabha 181). By making their presence
distinctly known on a public (street) level, punks use the politics of their appearance to challenge the dynamics of power that manage public spaces. Excluded as members of the general public, punks are one social group that composes part of the “subaltern counterpublic” (Kilian 122)—essentially made up of those individuals and groups who are identifiable as ‘undesirable’, often meaning poor and/or transient, or entirely too ‘different,’ often reading as visually eccentric, in some cases simply ethnic, to count as valid members of the general public. As a counterpublic, punks increase the publicity of their marginalization by “transgressing the exclusions that keep them out of the public and by asserting their identities into spaces [they claim this publicity of their identity and their rights as citizens] ...as public.” (Kilian 123). Punk identity, visually, is a form of discourse, a narrative which is informative, within the subculture, but also outwardly so. The meaning may not be clear, but the message of communication is apparent. Simply by existing, punks speak to existence of alternate ways of being, and ‘being in’ the world (Malpas 32). This concept of being ‘in the world’ is demonstrated by the punk subculture, which exists corporeally on a street level, but also engages with the street.

Much like the iconic flâneur, evoked in countless contexts (Bell and Binnie), punks engage their identities in a public, visual environment where their existence is continually mediated through the dialectic of seeing and being seen. Engaging with the physical environment of the street and with the public that inhabits it, punks embody a novel cultural identity, one continually informed by the action of the street. Associating with the public is a multi-faceted experience for punks; this most immediate contact with alternate sources of power (alternate to greater, hegemonic
sources) has mixed affect on the subculture. By engaging with the ‘public at large’ on urban streets, punks face the power relations therein (Kilian 122), thus using the aforementioned process of opposition to assert their identities and initiate a forum “…for subaltern voices to contest dominant social paradigms,” (Nagel 136). Punk style as metaphor incorporates the street into the allegory of subaltern identity. By transcending the utility of street space, and incorporating it as a metaphoric characteristic, the street ceases to be a material place, and becomes symbolic itself “embodied with all sorts of meanings and metaphors; of escape, discovery, of home, too” (Crouch 164). A scene in Sid & Nancy portrays the street as metaphor scene most poignantly with a shot of the couple beginning to kiss in bed that cuts to a matched long shot of Sid and Nancy in a tight embrace (Sid & Nancy 1986), seen only as a silhouette in a dark London alley. Sid leans against a dumpster as Nancy leans into him, and street trash swirls around them as the film slows. The image moves from allegory to metaphor as the trash whirls around them and rubbish bins fall like rain down from the sky. The image serves to place the couple as being ‘of’ the street –the juxtaposition of the punks with ‘trash’ identifies them as being a part of the marginal, liminal reality of the street – but they are also beatified in this parody of private romance. Sid and Nancy are the walking cultural metaphors of the street, and the street functions as a metaphor of their escape from the mainstream, their discovery of each other, and the home they have found in reconstructing the margins as punk centre.

Street space is truly the bounded no-man’s-land of the urban landscape, in the sense that, while the street does bisect localities, it is entirely connective as the
area in which strangers intermingle to various degrees. Streets are acknowledged public spaces of social interaction, and yet the degree of actual interface between individuals is often limited to brief encounters; the motion of coming and going taking precedence over paused or lingering communication. While many groups meet and greet on streets like Vancouver's Granville Street, few remain there for more than a negligible length of time, and even fewer choose to make the public street space itself a destination. Punks visibly remain and it is important to note that it is this choice of occupation that makes the members of the subculture engaging in street level life a noticeably interesting cultural activity. Punks were among the few modern subcultures who continue to choose to engage in most social activities on the street level; in doing so they simultaneously occupied Bhabha's abstract 'problematic space' (181) along with the actualized, marginal place of the street. Punk visual and representational renegotiation of public space, a figurative challenge, is also a real, active site of contact and confrontation.

For members of the punk subculture, streets serve as the primary location of social interaction (Leblanc 171) and because of that, “this lifestyle requires higher levels of interpersonal interaction than are usually found between strangers in public spaces,” (Leblanc 171). Confrontations between fellow members or social groups that comprise the ‘public’ can be even more bellicose in nature than the metaphoric defiance punk presents towards power structures. It could be surmised that a perceived insolence of contesting dominant power structures is manifested in the way members of the mainstream behave toward members of the subculture. This behaviour often extends from the shared environment of the streets to more
personal, established environments where punks also congregate and form
community association—clubs.³

Instances of police raids on punk shows in clubs and other punk spaces are myriad; various stories are relayed in interviews of punk and hardcore artists in American Hardcore (Blush 39-41). These events spurred the music to even greater levels of anti-authoritarian sentiment, "There were the songs ‘Police Story’ by Black Flag, ‘Police Truck’ by Dead Kennedys... and tracks on Copulation, the anti-cop [compilation]. But MDC (Millions of Dead Cops) delivered the ultimate vent of that rage; their anthem ‘Dead Cops’ summed up the anti-authoritarian mindset: ‘Whatcha gonna do/The Mafia in blue/Huntin for Queers, niggers and you’ (MDC, “Dead Cops”)” (Blush 41). Even though some perceive authority figures as antagonistic, many punks do not anticipate such extreme censure and reaction from the general public. This is where public spaces are always contentious for marginalized people, “Dressing the way we did, dancing the way we did, being different in an era of conformity...it was a blast.... Even that small hint of danger added to the allure of it all. But I never thought anyone would die because of it” (Cooper 49). Later in Aimee Cooper’s memoir she relates an incident of a random, public attack on a fellow punk, “…they could hear shots fired again right after that, further down the road; then another kid came running up to them, yelling that a punk rocker had been deliberately shot at” (50), “The kid was wearing an army jacket with Black Flag scrawled across the back in black marker; Ricky leaned in closer, and it was then that he saw the stained face and the spiked hair sticky with blood” (52). In addition to the forces of power, like the police, punks also face scrutiny and examination from
other members of the public; this is the disadvantage to the lived experience of a performative identity:

One of the most flagrant types of public harassment is being excluded. This includes being denied access to both public and semipublic places (such as streets, parks, shops and restaurants); being subjected to surveillance, and being offered poor service if admitted. Members of "situationally disadvantaged" groups, such as women, racial minorities, gays, and lesbians [and punks] are often denied taken-for-granted access to public areas as a whole, to certain areas, or at certain times. (Leblanc 173)

Exclusion and discrimination deny punks the rights "accorded to citizens in public places," (Leblanc 176). Certainly, these types of persecutions have no real-life justification and so the actual experience of public conflict must necessarily revert to a speculative analysis of subcultural groups, power and rights: "public spaces can be seen from this perspective as sites of struggle," (Kilian 117). Even in semi-public spaces, open to all of the public, this struggle is evident. Aimee Cooper describes one such incident while she and some friends were visiting a companion in the hospital:

The taller one spotted Emil. Already bored with the form. He tossed the pen down and raised his eyebrows.

"What are you looking at?"

Emil didn’t reply, reaching instead for a magazine. That wasn’t good enough for the young man, who was sniffing out a new form of amusement. He
elbowed his companion, nodding in our direction; he then said something under his breath, and they both laughed. His eyes never left Emil.

“Fucking punks.”

It was barely loud enough for us to hear. When we didn’t respond, he tried again.

“What should we do about these fucking punks?”

Okay, we heard that. I couldn’t believe it. We were going to get jumped, right there in the emergency room. I mean, it’s not like we could run for it; there was no way we were leaving Maggie. (57)

Just as mainstream individuals have difficulty understanding the visual metaphor that constitutes punk style, so do they problematise the role punks play in the composition of street dynamics. Kilian suggests that, “cultural identity, including who is safe and who is part of one’s community, are also deeply affected by who appears in public space” (118); the presence of socially deemed ‘undesirables’ challenges generalized notions of safety, generalizations which are supported by power structures that buttress the standards by which the public is itself defined and idealized. Just as the mainstream is challenged by punk style as means of expression (as in the transformation and reconfiguration of popular images and forms of dress), so too is the parent culture resistant to revisions, or boundary crossing in public space.

When socially deemed, rather than physically constructed, boundaries of public space are tested, tensions occur between the individuals that populate those spaces, bounded and otherwise, and also between the ‘proper’ meanings of “the
established spaces of the street and the ... incursions of confrontational words and images," (Cresswell 277). The fact that representational insurgence poses such an extreme threat to dominant paradigms of normality and power indicates the presence of a mapped, spatial landscape (Gibson 305) whose regulators determine its use and cultural topography (Sandoval 54.4). Despite social and institutional resistance, punks are a counterpublic, and they do occupy and recontextualise public street space. By merely occupying street space, punks, with their unconventional physical appearances, inhabit and embody the street. Punks are physically ‘of’ the street in a much closer social sense than general public, which can be said to be ‘on’ the street. Street topography is fundamentally changed with the inclusion of the personal into the public domain. Choosing to socialize, share, dwell - essentially live ones cultural life in a public place is a transformative alternative to how the public generally uses its space. Punk bodies physically, by presence as well as by metaphoric inference, make over public space. With streets as a focal point of punk cultural existence, streets change from the status of thoroughfare to realized cultural space. David Crouch discusses the notion of refiguring the street as an empowering cultural experience, one that can, over time, overcome the power structures that first defined it:

It is the presence and movement of bodies that assists the knowledge of a shared purpose and participation; and of a meaning that transforms the materiality of space itself. This situates knowledge both in shared action, and through the work of the body itself. In their presence and in their movement, [punk bodies] ...identified with similar purpose and direction, are dissolved
into an intention and an identity that overwhelms any other image the street may hold; shops, houses, traffic, as these become deafened by the ritual of occupation. (Crouch 167)

Crouch goes on, later, to say, "the body reads the space and the surrounding action of events, making sense of where it is, in an encompassing sense of culture, social relations and space, movement and artifacts; imagination and metaphor," (168).

Crouch is essentially iterating the notion that the body reads space, and as a street-based subculture, punk supports this idea – punk style incorporates and reflects the environment from which it sprung. Punk; however, also functions in a reciprocal manner with the public space it occupies by working to inform the space, sharing the cultural topography rather than merely reflecting it. Punk bodies are both informed by public space stylistically, making use of PVC as garb, ‘dustbin' liners and ‘drainpipe' pants (Hebdige 107); and existentially, “the street is truly their ‘home.'” (Lees 250). Much of the ‘street as home' model in North America also has its roots in the squat movement (occupying abandoned buildings) in the United Kingdom in the early days of punk. This movement, and the people who comprised it are described in this way, from the article titled “Punk Music in Britain”:

Some came from deprived working class backgrounds, others from suburbia where they felt stifled by the complacent affluence; some were art students eager to be a part of something new that they felt to be relevant to their lives. Many of them were already embracing alternative lifestyles and images, wearing outlandish outfits and living in squats in the soon to be demolished
Victorian houses in London, or sharing squalid flats with like-minded friends.

(Candi)

Local cultures, those which can be described as being born and generated by their localized physical and social landscapes, often reflect those locales in a myriad of ways. When in the Czech Republic I can distinguish a native of Prague by accent and by dress and, likewise, can identify the villager visiting the city, by dialect and costume – impressions assumed to be different than those native to urbanites. In western culture, it is assumed that when someone sports or uses the accoutrements of regionality, then these individuals are of, or affiliated with the implied local culture in some way. A person’s ‘home’ is just as great a component to their personal identity as it is a fragment of the landscape in which they physically reside. Using the images of the street to indicate their affiliation with it as a home, a private space, punks comply with the notion of reflective locality, that they are recognizably street residents. In Phenomenology of Landscape, C. Tilley refers to paths as dealing, fundamentally, with “establishing and maintaining social linkages and relations between individuals, groups and political units,” (30). Tilley's idea supports the novel role of punks as inhabitants of the street environment, save for his continued discussion of paths as conduits, linkages or channels for social interchange. It can be added to Tilley's argument that as well as acting in a socially connective fashion, streets also play important roles when reconstructed as destinations. The street, as home, in a collective, social sense, is a new place, a social world that is generally not acknowledged as legitimate or culturally significant by the dominant public world that it borders. This altered reality, from street to home, gateway to sanctum,
opposes the traditional construal of path or street and significantly contests the very ideology of interpretation. Streets are thought of in terms of movement, of transport, and are in this way made communally invaluable symbols of social life and interrelation:

The importance and significance of a place can only be appreciated as a part of movement from and to it in relation to others, and the act of moving may be as important as that of arriving. The path may be a symbol not only of interconnectedness and social relations but also of movement through life. (Tilley 31)

Streets (paths) are thought of in terms of motion through spatial and temporal reality and it would seem, by the nominally fixed occupation of the subculture, that this interpretation is somehow negated by the new spatial reality; however, the notions of movement and stasis can and do coexist. The bustle and motion of quotidian life, individuals using the street to access the different areas of commerce and residence, continues regardless of the fixed environment of street as home to a subculture. Streets border the environment of localized culture, composed of buildings and sections of natural construct, but also encapsulated their own bordered realities, of movement with pause. Quotidian life continues alongside the alternate reality of the subculture, unobstructed even though they share location in geography, as place. If the presence of a settled subculture, here punk, does not actually obstruct the physical flow of the street-scape, does not impede the movement by which such space is generally defined, then the subculture can be truly seen as a success as a new cultural frontier. This would be true if it were not for
the problem that while punks may be in many ways incorporated into the 'urban fabric' of the street scene, they are still 'other' and are not granted the same rights as other citizens, even with the successful admission into and incorporation of a portion of the public realm.

Streets are generally accepted as sites of movement, and access to those sites, even if public and 'available', is governed and politicized. Groups of people share the use of the street, and that use is participatory (Pellow 71), individuals can choose to engage in a variety of activities on the street level. Power becomes an issue when those choices are limited to specifics types of individual, or are themselves limited in selection. Punks are a physically unconventional, thus confrontational, social subculture – but appearance is not the focal point of their narrative of dissent. The ultimate conquest of the street, a functional, symbiotic relationship to the parent culture, represents a social challenge as an embodiment of the power in the margins. Social spaces, especially the home, become sacred spaces through the ritual acts of daily life. A sacred space, by the concentration of metaphor and enacted reality focused within it, becomes a place wherein power is localized (Chidester and Linenthal 7). Hegemonic forces are inevitably hostile to scattered, multiple sources of power, particularly those not sanctioned by any particular governing body. Subcultural occupation of street spaces is required to be political and contentious because a home or sacred space of any sort is a political thing, an exclusive, appropriated environment. I will discuss notions of home in greater detail in later segments of this work. The presencing, the performed identity of the individual in the home in a public space is a bold projection of sacred space.
into a carefully constructed public landscape the effect is metaphorically jarring, but not physically obstructive. In this way, a new metaphoric street space is truly more defiant, in nature, than an overt rebellion as it demonstrates the anarchic ability for individual persons to act and live of their own accord, in an appropriated, rather than designated, milieu, supported by an actual, peopled culture that it does little to impede. Punk reconfiguration of space gives credence to the notion that no hegemonic power structures are ever truly pervasive. By occupying the streets physically, and engaging the metaphor of the street representatively, punks reshape the positions of marginality. Being punk means also ‘being punk in the world’, that is, all social functions, encounters with persons, things and places, take place ‘in place’ (Malpas 15). This being in place, here a novel spatial metaphor, functions as a form of narrative, broadcasting information for and from the margins. Tilley refers to narrative as “a means of understanding and describing the world in relation to agency” (32) and punk spatial discourse does just that in relation to notions of access and public space. Socially inhabiting privileged or already-claimed spaces, or dis-empowered, liminal spaces, like that of the street as thoroughfare, the punk counterpublic uses physical appearance, occupation and spatial transformation to live theory that there is power in the margins, in that bordered, problematic space.

THE USE OF CLUBS AS ‘HOMEBASES’ IN SEMI-PUBLIC AREAS:

Streets have indeed provided the social and cultural ‘common ground’ for punk, as one among many ‘alternative’ cultural lifestyles; but as sites of conflict and struggle, it is inevitable that punks leave the open spaces of streets and seek out exclusive locations of their own. Minority groups finding resistance, even conflict,
public spaces do tend to seek out semi-private spaces to, essentially, 'be themselves', that is, to perform their own unique cultural lifestyles in the manner most comfortable to themselves. To be always seen as deviant weighs heavy on marginalized groups, especially when the notion of deviance is derived from the way in which they are accustomed to conducting quotidian normalities. In this case, the example is in the way punks conduct normally ‘private’ actions, eating, meeting, romancing, etc, in public street spaces. Punk clubs fulfill the role of the semi-private space, bounded by the “symbolic markers” of punk music, style and other semiotic displays, necessary to express their culture. Substantiation of the strong role clubs play in punk culture is evident in literature, film and interviews. It can be argued that without punk clubs — the genre would have great difficulty progressing and developing as a culture.

Clubs offer punks a space in which they are removed from the challenges and expectations of performing their culture in public areas in which they are a minority, and these spaces also affirm the unity of the punk population as a culture. Clubs of all types offer sanctuary to individuals and minority groups, and have been noted in their importance to social connectivity, “this desire to be in accord with the group, rather than to be exposed amongst strangers, to feel an affinity with a place and the people within it... to feel an identification with them and the social situation – can be seen as integral to the experience of other social situations” (Malbon 269). John Lydon discusses the early days of punk in his memoir, Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs, and relates how punks first found sanctuary, before they had their own clubs, in the ‘safe’ spaces of gay clubs in London, “We enjoyed going to gay clubs
because you could be yourself, nobody bothered you, and nobody hit on you, unless that's what you wanted" (67). Clubs, especially non-mainstream (i.e. specialized by music, lifestyle, ethnicity) clubs, are identified as places where punks could gather in a shared space and 'be themselves' in ways that were discouraged in more open, public environments. In my experiences observing life in punk clubs, they absolutely provide a safe space for all members of the subculture. Underage or young punks find a refuge from the rules and 'hassles' of daily life in school and the parental home—and they are also free, in this context from the threats of verbal and physical assault they often face in more generally public areas. Older (adult) punks find a community of peers and a centre for sharing communication. Most punk clubs are all-ages, allowing for a unique social mix of people from a wide demographic base. I spent a great deal of time as a youth in a club called “The New York Theater” which served as the all-ages punk base for shows during the 1990’s. As youth engaging with the diverse crowd, my friends and I felt safe and protected in the club, despite its lower east-side location (considered the most 'dangerous' section of the Vancouver downtown core). It was a place where punks could perform their identities as they chose—essentially a place for punks to ‘be themselves.’ The site of the New York Theatre now serves a small movie house specializing in Bollywood films—an interesting use of the space; perhaps a whole new subculture is also finding refuge in that freeing space. Literature also supports the notion that punks clubs serve a kind of emancipatory role in the culture.

The punk female protagonist (Melany) in Lorrie Sprecher's Sister Safety Pin spends the bulk of the novel trying to understand herself and her sexuality, and
many scenes in the novel, especially those in which Melany meets new people, take place in clubs. She articulates the role these spaces play in her life in this conversation with another woman:

“...Did you use a fake ID to get in?”

“Yes.” “I bought it off a high school friend’s older sister. I needed it to get into punk clubs. That’s where I really live. I get some of my aggression out. I like the dancing. It feels real. There’s lots of human contact. Sometimes you slam into someone, or get knocked down, but it’s not violent. It’s an expression. I shove people around and get shoved around even though I’m a girl. It doesn’t matter. It’s the only time I feel myself.” (53)

Punk clubs exist as created space where the very behaviors and physical distinctions seen as deviant in mainstream culture become normalized, accepted and encouraged. The result of this creation of space is a certain degree of enforced exclusivity. While clubs and halls rented for shows are public in the sense that most anyone can pay for entry, there is a sense that a punk space must necessarily be valued as such, and outsider participation is discouraged. Coloring Outside the Lines is Aimee Cooper’s memoir of her days as a punk in the early nineteen-eighties; she relays the significance of the punk club as a boundaried zone:

In the real world, short, spiked hair or a shaved head were considered by some to be an invitation to a beating, or at the very least, unrelenting verbal abuse. To Punks, it was the price they paid for being different, and they were willing to pay that price. Out there. In here, inside the clubs, it was their turf. You either became one of them or you stayed the hell out.
A word had cropped up for those who tried to be weekend warriors, or who were only slumming through this isolated world – they were called poseurs, and it was just about the worst insult that could be hurled at a punk. (10)

The notion of ‘being real’ plays into the importance of the status of legitimacy in the punk community. The sartorial style of the genre is easy to reproduce and manipulate; so members of the community are judged more by their levels of commitment – longevity (time in the scene), dedication (for example, staying straight in straight edge) and talent. Among some punk groups there is an element of extended respect for those willing to truly step outside the mainstream and accept struggle as a means to follow their talent or just an alternate lifestyle. Bernice Jang is a makeup artist and musician who has playing in punk, post-punk, alternative, emo, and modern rock bands throughout her life (she is a drummer). Jang find the notion of self-identifying as a punk particularly problematic, and is, in fact, reluctant to do so –despite the fact that she has strongly identified with punks and the punk scene throughout her adolescence and adulthood. Now in her late thirties, Jang continues to find the balance of ‘being real’ in the punk sense a difficult identity to negotiate. In an interview she states:

“...This is where I find them a little cliquey, ‘cause they’re not open to the idea of someone else looking a bit more normal. They’re into the more punk or more 'different' you look, the better they like it. If that means you’re a struggling artist on Commercial Drive,¹³ or whatnot, and you’re struggling as a result of your craft, then they’ll embrace you more for that.” (Jang)
If financial sacrifice is a part of pursuing punk ideals, as it often is, it is not surprising that the streets become such a focus of subcultural activity. But until the sacrifice becomes so overwhelming as to bring even the most private acts of eating and sleeping to the streets, even punks need a separate ‘home,’ and for traveling punks and musicians, the localized scenes of the globalized genre have provided safety and space for punk in houses across the world. I will refer to these homes simply as punk houses.

PUNK HOUSES AS SAFE HOME ENVIRONMENTS:

Joseph Rykwert distinguishes the difference between house and home by suggesting that “house” indicates shelter, implying the tangible existence of “edges, walls, doors and roofs…” (50); and sees “home” as the more abstract space that can be made anywhere, “[with] a little tinder, even some waste paper, a few matches, or a cigarette lighter” (50). As outlined earlier in the chapter, the concept of ‘home,’ for many punks, can be seen as operating within the public space of the street—and while there certainly exist punks who make their total home life a street experience (gutter punks, street kids and other homeless types), most punks would not choose to operate their truly private moments in public, sometimes unsafe places. Yet the lack of funding for proper individual housing is a problem, one solved by a method employed by many marginalized communities—the communal house. Shared space is seen as a strong part of maintaining ties within the punk community—from living with roommates to the arrangement of true punk houses, which house many individuals at one time and often house a revolving populace. At its best the punk house functions as a true household, in which all members of the ‘family’ participate.
in the running of the house as best they can—financially or by cleaning/cooking and providing the home with resources, including food. This example is best evidenced in literature in the Cooper memoir, *Coloring outside the lines*. At its worst, the punk house serves as a crash pad, degenerates via lack of household maintenance, and comes precariously close to existing as a 'squat,' this situation is described in Jones's 1978.

As a youth, I spent a great deal of time in 'punk houses,' though at the time we did not label them as such, they were just places where people lived or stayed for a while. Word would spread through the community that a few people had found a place, and gradually the rooms, couches and floor spaces would fill up as need decreed. In my experience, these houses have usually been in the low-rent parts of the city, like Vancouver's East side neighborhoods, along Commercial Drive and Main Street, and typically are close to standard hangouts or cheap public transportation. Punk houses are safe spaces for punks and word-of-mouth travels fast when they are established. The nature of living punk, as evidenced by the music itself, can be chaotic and disorderly; and yet punks also need shelter and a safe, stable place from which they can operate. Mary Douglas builds on Rykwert’s discussion of home:

> It is always a localizable idea. Home is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space. It does not need bricks and mortar; it can be a wagon, a caravan, a boat or a tent. It need not be a large space, but space there must be, for home starts by bringing some space under control. (263)
It is this notion of bring space under control that can be seen as most useful from a punk perspective. While streets can become somewhat appropriated, their utility manipulated by punks, it only in the truly private space of a house as home that they can totally control the machination of the space. Aimee Cooper first realized her new home had become a punk house quite suddenly:

Leslie chatted easily with Perry and Joe [two boys the roommates had just met a punk show], and she soon learned they needed a place to crash for the night. They might have been runaways, or maybe just directionless – living out on the street until they came up with a better plan. It was alright with me if they spent the night....

The next morning I woke and got dressed... Before me, crashed in a sleeping bag on our living room floor, was Perry. And Joe. And fifteen complete strangers.

Our living room was covered end to end with sleeping bags and sheets and blankets; barely an inch of carpet was visible underneath all the bodies. (30-31)

As the novel progresses, many characters come in and out of the narrative as household denizens, and all respect the space. The punk house in this novel, as have those recounted to me in anecdotal conversations, is a stable environment in which the members of the household contribute to the duties of the home:

Unlike the portrayals of punk ‘crash pads’ as dens of vacant, lazy miscreants, the house was filled with energy and wit. The girls might be in the kitchen
together cooking breakfast for the group, or off alone in a corner somewhere, drawing in a notebook. (34)

The news of safe punk houses spreads via word-of-mouth—at shows and on the streets as punks travel, meet and for punk musicians on the road. Aram Arslanian plays guitar for the straight edge band Champion. In conversations we have had, he describes how the only way the band could afford to travel internationally, as they do, is by staying with friends, fellow punks and members of the straight edge scene in the cities they visit across the globe. They contact their informal 'billets' through friends, via e-mail and are sometimes approached by the people that attend their shows with offers of food and/or lodging. Charles Romalotti's Salad Days sketches out the path of a young punk as he develops his musical career into adulthood. In one scene in the novel the main character, Frank, addresses the punk community as a group as he asks for lodging in a public way:

I stepped up to the stage once again and lifted the microphone to my mouth. The audience hushed immediately. "Thank you very much," I told them. "You may be seeing more of us for a while. We're experiencing some vehicular trouble that we need to resolve. If anyone has a couch or a floor to offer, we'd gladly accept." (181)

Frank calls upon the punk crowd in his time of need. He and his band do find a place to stay for as long as it takes to have their bus fixed.

In the conclusion to his discussion, "Domesticating the Street," Peter Jackson cites Marshall Berman's critique of urban modernism, that "urban spaces have been systematically designed and organized to ensure that collisions and confrontations
will not take place there," (188). Both Jackson and Berman see the increase in private commodification of public areas as a deterrent to a strongly identifiable social geography in street space. Yet those confrontations do continue to take place, regardless of the built environment. The streets, and by social extensions clubs and notions of ‘home’ are contested spaces—and all are regions of occupation by punks. Jackson recognizes the autonomy of the user when he states, “the meanings that people attach to particular places are culturally mediated through experience and use, and vary according to differences of ethnicity and class, gender and generation.” (188) Punk use and manipulation of space is an important component to the formation and confirmation of punk communities, and while fictional accounts of those connections may present a somewhat idealized version of the subculture’s cohesiveness, they are rooted in a base reality supported by lived or observed accounts, such as in Aram Arslanian’s experiences traveling with his band across the world, and by critical research in place and space theory. The important function of punk in the scholarship of place and space lies, fundamentally, in the examination of power roles. In manipulating the spaces they occupy, punks, as a “subaltern counterpublic” (Kilian 122) face the public at large. By challenging or transgressing the exclusions (built, enforced and perceived) that would keep them from occupying public space, they publicize those very structures, reveal them, and themselves as marginalized. A conclusion can be made that it is in the very nature of creating private spaces in public places that make them truly public at all, in the sense of being available to all people. Kilian suggests that “by asserting their identities into
spaces, thereby claiming it as public” (123) marginalized groups actually enforce the democracy of public space.

1 I would suggest, following Victor Turner’s definition, that this setting is a liminal one, located both physically in the margin between parts of land and politically and philosophically between places where laws of semantic, not natural origins apply. In his essay "Between Piracy and Justice: Liminality in Maxwell Philip’s Emmanuel Appadocca," Gregory Wilson defines the use of liminal perspective in this way:

   Liminality, then, refers to a state of existence in the margin, within the boundaries between one condition or place and another. It is not static, but is constantly in flux, shifting rapidly and adapting to changing conditions and circumstances; and further, by definition liminality implies a process of movement from one state to another. Within this chaotic environment, physical, political, and philosophical criticisms of the status quo can be initiated without fear of reprisal from the rest of society; in essence, liminal space is that region where societal norms can be most powerfully and effectively questioned.

2 A brief description of the flâneur by Walter Benjamin can be found at http://www.man.ac.uk/sociologyonline/vccc/12_Benjamin_Flanerie/Flanerie3.htm, where the character is described as, “[...] the stroller, the pedestrian who finds delight and pleasure in ambling contentedly and unhurriedly through the city. To promenade without purpose is the highest ambition of the flâneur. Walking in the city is its own reward.” The identity of the flâneur is entirely predicated on seeing and being seen—noticed as a strong visual presence of the street and promenade culture.

3 In “The street in the making of popular geographic knowledge,” David Crouch recognizes the role music plays in shaping space for youth, specifically punk youth. In his discussion he states, “Music is used to create and mark off physical and cultural space.” (170)

4 Kings Road, London, was a street that became a known punk district in the mid nineteen seventies. Vivian Westwood started her first clothing shop, 'Sex,' there with Malcolm McLaren (Steele 37), and the area quickly became a haven and hang out for punks. See John Lydon’s (Johnny Rotten) memoir, Rotten: No Irish, no blacks no dogs for numerous interviews in which punks and former punks recall meeting each other on Kings Road and at Sex (pages 70-73, for example). In the same memoir, Zandra Rhodes is quoted as saying, “The punk movement—with all its tears and safety pins—was a creative movement that started from the street.” (48).

5 John Lydon has this to say about early punk incorporation of street elements into fashion, "Wearing bin liners came from watching the transients in London. I used to love the way they wore bin liners. I thought it was so shiny and neat, much better than leather. Just sew on some sleeves and you’re happening. So I did” (Lydon 71).

6 Steve Jones reminisces about his early days as a punk, "I wouldn’t call myself a tough guy, but I was definitely a street person. I wouldn’t stay home, so at fifteen I was left to fend for myself. We would hang around Shepherd’s Busk Market” (Lydon 36-37).

7 Mike Ness, of punk band Social Distortion, says, "Where we lived in Southern California, if you walked down the street with a leather jacket on and dyed red hair, you were making a decision to get into some sort of confrontation" (Blush 25).

8 In using the term ‘semi-private’ I am indicating places that can be accessed by the general public but have been largely appropriated by one minority group of the public, here punks.

9 David Sibley, in his article Outsiders in society and space identifies certain spaces as being “strongly classified” (115) and suggests that these strong classifications of spaces cause groups who use them in other ways (likes punks using public streets for private actions) to me even more distinctly marginalized than they already may be:

To summarize, space is an integral part of the outsider problem. The way in which space is organized affects the perception of the ‘other’, either as foreign and
threatening or as simply different. The strong classification of space... implies a rejection of difference so the presence of minority groups in such spaces accentuates their difference and outsiderness and the likelihood of exclusion is increased. Similarly, when a minority which does not make separations between activities like home and work is relegated to a strongly classified space and subjected to socio-spatial controls [as when streets-as-conduits is enforced, i.e., 'no loitering'], its cultural practices are likely to appear deviant to the control agencies in the dominant society. (116)

10 See Roderick J. Lawrence's article The Multidimensional Nature of Boundaries: An integrative historical approach. He described the multiple roles of boundaries, specifically symbolic markers, "Boundaries can serve one or more of the following purposes... as symbolic markers, often with a decorative or aesthetic value, expressing differences between domains..." (15).

11 I use the term clubs generally and in the loose sense that punk clubs include halls and any other space appropriate for the purpose of playing punk music and set as a congregation point and safe space for punks.

12 In an interview in Lydon’s memoir, his friend John Grey reminisces about the new-found freedoms of clubs:

We'd go to the Lacey Lady and dance like lunatics. Although we were into all of this rock stuff, we were also into the Black Byrds with Donald Byrd, the Ohio Players, and other soul/dance groups. Most of the patrons would shuffle around the bar, drinking vodka and orange juice, but we'd go wild, dancing in the middle of the floor. We'd have spiky hair, dressed in ordinary jeans, with ties around our legs, baseball boots, and silly T-shirts. We must have looked bizarre. The deejay still talks about us, he remembers John and me. We thought it was strange that people formed a circle around us and watched us dance... Once we'd done that club and explored it, we started going to reggae sound systems and black clubs. (66-67)

13 Commercial Drive, commonly known as 'The 'Drive', is a well-own East-end neighborhood in Vancouver. Its heritage house-lined streets share the city's Little Italy with artists, many gay, lesbian, transgendered and transsexual people; funky boutiques and a known share in the city's drug trade. Despite, or perhaps because of, the eclectic nature of its populace, the area has a strong and organized community and thrives as the bohemian centre of Vancouver, British Columbia.
Chapter 4

True ‘till Death: The Ghost of Straight Edge in Contemporary Punk Literature

Straight edge, a modern (since the late nineteen eighties) sub-genre of punk rock music and subculture, challenges and reconstitutes the limits of what is generally understood about punk culture. Lyrics and ethnographic materials suggest that Straight Edge explores subjectivity and self-representation, within its cultural periphery, in new ways that dispute previous literary incarnations of punk. In an analysis of “the importance of an appropriate performance of self” (Valentine 196), Pierre Bourdieu makes the argument that

Classes reproduce themselves by their members’ internalization and display of certain tastes... [And that] ...At the foundation of these tastes is the body...

[That]...Taste is embodied being inscribed onto the body and made apparent in... demeanor, ways of eating and drinking, walking, sitting, speaking, making gestures etc. (Summarized by Featherstone in Valentine 196)

Taboos regarding taste and culture, as evidenced by social demeanor and physical bearing, were shattered by the social impact of punk rock and its adherents in the 1970’s, and were, continue to be, recorded and fictionalized in films like Alex Cox’s Sid & Nancy and novels like Michael Turner’s Hard Core Logo, which was itself made into the eponymous 1996 film by director Bruce MacDonald. Straight Edge, however, is something new.
Where literary representations of punk have often exploited it as a culture virulent with substance abuse,² packaged in identifiable cultural signifiers and fashions, Straight Edge has largely avoided the popular cultural radar by essentially transgressing the already transgressive nature of punk. Straight Edge people “Don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t fuck” (Minor Threat, “Out of Step” 1981) as prescribed in the first textual evidence of the Straight Edge movement, coined in the song “Out of Step (With the World)” by the band Minor Threat.³ Like the mod resurgence of the nineteen seventies, adherents to Straight Edge do not typically stand out as punks. Men usually sport closely shorn or shaved haircuts, wear some form of a jean and t-shirt uniform, are often vegetarian or vegan and eschew all forms of drugs and alcohol. While comparatively ‘normal’ looking, if not relatively austere, like punks, Straight Edge people often bear piercings and tattoos —here inscribing their bodies with the black ‘x’s’ symbolic to the movement, as well as Straight Edge mottos like “True ‘till Death.” Adherents to Straight Edge tend to display a high degree of cultural involvement, are usually politically aware and socially conscious—this is especially evident in the lyrics, ‘zines and websites devoted to the movement.⁴ The music Straight Edge is based on is ‘hardcore,’ a louder, faster and generally heavier form of punk rock than what is commonly heard. The Straight Edge movement, when placed within similar cultural paradigms and representative media as “mainstream” punk, reveals a wholly modern political use of autobiography and autobiographical fiction. An examination of the lyrical history of the movement, as well as the popular media allusions to its presence in society becomes an intriguing cultural study as scrutiny reveals a marked deficit of overt Straight Edge representation in literature:
there is a deficit of Straight Edge representation in literature, compared to its actual presence in the punk movement.

The autobiographical nature of music lyrics has long been a strong component of the formation of music-based communities. For punk culture this is particularly so, in light of its resistance-based ethics. The fictionalization of lyrics, of autobiography, has ensured the survival of the genre. Unlike much life writing, where authors endeavor to recount acts performed -punk writing seems to seek to do the opposite; much punk writing brings the chaotic immediacy of the staged music or lived scene to the written work. Punk text is itself performative. This sense of urgency has often been represented in punk literature in descriptive terms of severe substance abuse and almost total debauchery. Straight Edge, on the contrary, can be seen as being partly responsible for modern literary representations of punk – evolving from descriptions of self-abuse to more contemporary interpretations of personal strengths and a codified set of ethics. Literary uses of punk are changing over time, evidenced by an increased presence of Straight Edge principles, including (their full embrace and near appropriation of) the DIY (Do It Yourself) ethic and an apparently coherent and informed resistance to organized authority. It seems that Straight Edge punks have ‘grown up’ and maintained their identity as punks with greater facility than those members of the parent movement, and with their maintenance of specific cultural ethics, have had a deeper general cultural impact than more immediately ‘visible’ incarnations of punk. The fact that members of the Straight Edge movement find strength in a community of their peers is also a component of the movement’s longevity. This is evidenced in this conversation with
Sean Keane (former singer for hardcore Straight Edge band Dissent, currently co-owner/producer with the Global Symphonic record label):

A: Do you think being punk when you were younger helped you get through your teenage years, like emotionally or whatever?

S: Yeah. Because it made it O.K. to be like “who cares what other people say,” y’know? ‘Cause you’ve got this whole big scene, across the world, where people feel the same as you. So it doesn’t really matter what people in your high school think.

A: So how important is community?

S: That’s pretty much what it’s all about. That’s pretty much it, it’s the sound of the music... it’s hard to explain, but it’s all connected, but it is all about community and friends.

Later in the same interview Keane addresses the issue of what happens when members of the Straight Edge movement, most commonly thought of as a youth subculture, grow up:

A: A lot of kids become Straight Edge for a few years and then give it up [often when they reach actual drinking age], so how does the movement stay alive? How does it stay around as a way of being?

S: I dunno. Lots of people come and go.

A: Does it hurt Straight Edge that a lot of people stop identifying with it after a few years?

S: I don’t think so. I mean, I’m still here... my friends are still here –We’re still Straight Edge. Not much has changed in the way we think. We’re just older.
A: Even though you’re a real grown up now, do you still consider yourself a punk\textsuperscript{10}?
S: Yup.
A: Why is that important to you?
S: I don’t know... it’s too late! Once you are [punk] that’s what you are.
A: In what ways might punk, or anything associated with punk, be important in the world today?
S: It’s just important for the people who are punk. There’s just people who go against... the rules.
A: Do you think the existence of punk allows people who want to resist a vehicle to do it? Does the fact that it exists as a community help people be stronger in their beliefs.
S: Yeah. (Keane 2003)

Sean Keane presents a very interesting subject when posed with the question of punk (and Straight Edge) as purely youth movements –where do punks go when they get old? Clearly, they remain. Keane is an outwardly unassuming (hidden tattoos, basic jeans and t-shirt costume), employed member of society. He is married and a father of two young children. Being a member of a subculture has not set Keane apart from society. Indeed, his rejection of specific values and systems of the parent culture while still choosing to live according to his own principles within it has made him important to the subculture as a leader and potential agent of change. Keane embodies a negotiated identity: he lives a ‘regular’ life but makes specific choices that set him apart and dictate his decisions and reactions in life. He is
employed, but also runs a record label that he hopes will soon be self sustaining and some day be fiscally strong enough to employ him full-time. His social group is composed mainly of long-time friends he has garnered in his years in the punk and Straight Edge scenes—he has never touched alcohol or drugs. Many people have old friends and choose not to drink—but sets Keane and other members of subcultures apart for the sake of this study is their strong and continual devotion to this specific, music-based community. In addition, rather than politics fading and easy friendships continuing—politics seem to remain a strong component of the adult punk and Straight Edge scenes, and even becomes stronger as education and life experience inform members of the subculture. In a very practical way, punks like Sean Keane have integrated their beliefs in to their lives by staying true to a community that is steadfast in its ideals, “[t]he idea is that it’s like a separate thing, other than the real world that’s sexist, racist, homophobic, all that violence. Punk is supposed to be not sexist, not racist, not homophobic, not violent” (Keane 2003). This sentiment is echoed by Aram Arslanian, introduced earlier in this thesis, “That’s what you do: you work all week and you get drunk at night. Instead of going out for coffee, you go out for beer. And it’s like a trap, you fall into it and you don’t even realize it, and suddenly that’s who you are. You work all week, and you drink all week to forget working all week. I never want to be like that and I never want to see people I love fall into that trap” (2003). Arslanian has found international success through his work as a guitarist with the Straight Edge band Champion, and when he is not touring he works as a counselor with drug and alcohol addicted youth. He has recently expressed an interest in attending law school. We have had informal
conversations where he expressed a desire to bring his passion and motivation as articulated through Straight Edge to the mainstream world by serving as a role model and agent of social change. Like Keane, Arslanian has consciously negotiated his subcultural identity within mainstream culture—and he positions himself as an exemplary representative of his scene:

"...I'm not in anyone's face about it. I've been Straight Edge for along time, I've been into hardcore for along time—and I have other things outside of hardcore and Straight Edge that I do that are respectful things. It's very important to find a balance. No one can be involved in hardcore or punk rock for life and be healthy unless they have a balance where they negotiate with the 'real world' and the 'punk rock world' and find a balance between the two. I think everyone around me really really respects what I do." (2003)

Arslanian's efforts to be perceived as a leader both within the world of Straight Edge and that of mainstream culture have been successful—this is evident in the interviews he gives to 'underground' radio programs and Straight Edge publications, as well as in his successful employment with at risk and drug addicted youth. It is interesting to note that while Arslanian is noticeably a member of a specific subculture, due to extensive tattooing and a certain renown in his community, he, like Sean Keane and Bernice Jang also finds the notion of simplistic self-identification to the mainstream problematic:

"... why would we want everything 'explained' to the greater world?

Punk rock (and hardcore in general) is supposed to be a treat – I'm not
interested in making it 'safer' for anyone else. I'm not interested in being easily explained to our parents. It's supposed to be a scary underground movement for people who, when they get into it, they've found a place for themselves, not something that, you know, you can talk about at a picnic with your neighbors." (2003)

For those individuals who 'get it,' who choose to understand and take part in the subculture of punk or Straight Edge, explanation is unnecessary and communities easily form. For participants like Keane and Arslanian, their local peer communities are important to their everyday lives—and the more global nature of the subcultures of punk and Straight Edge make the other aspects of their lives (like running a record label and touring with a band) easier and more enjoyable.

The notion of Straight Edge as existing simultaneously as a localized scene based culture and a global lifestyle is evidenced by the movement's devoted international following. This subculture, which emerged from the Washington DC hardcore scene of the early nineteen eighties, has realized a strong presence in Switzerland, Germany, Italy, France and Canada. Just as punk rock has crossed cultural and linguistic barriers, so now has Straight Edge. Cataract is a Straight Edge hardcore band in Switzerland, Consequence is Italian and Lifecycle is female-fronted and Belgian. An internet search for Minor Threat lyrics shows a multitude of translations. Straight Edge has become an attractive subculture and lifestyle choice across the globe. While much of the movement focuses on the American roots (wearing clothing made under the brand 'Champion' was originally an effort for American Straight Edge folk to buy American-made clothing) and the sporting of
black Xs (on the hands or arms), the latter motion is culturally applicable and adoptable in any country where liquor laws have traditionally excluded youth from seeing live music performances. In the eighties, bars began to mark underage patrons with a black ‘X’ indicating that no alcohol could be served to them (Lahicky 99). It is important to note here that these Straight Edge identifiers are often imported without a clear understanding of the historical basis of the symbols.

Wearing the Champion label, marking or tattooing ‘X’s have become characteristics, signifiers, mannerisms. J. Finkelstein discusses the notion that “the purpose of manners and modes of etiquette was to distance oneself from the potentially menacing ‘other’ in order to distinguish oneself from them” (Valentine 196). In their inception, Straight Edge adherents did indeed function under a wholly new set of manners and mannerisms – they worked to reduce violence at gigs, prevented the violent dancing associated with punk shows and generally displayed a greater sense of communal respect and social decorum within punk culture. Finkelstein’s discussion is focused on the use of particular forms of etiquette by the bourgeoisie to separate themselves as a social class, but this dialogue of self-imposed social stratification is implicit to the existence of Straight Edge. Just as the bourgeoisie “…had to be particularly vigilant so as not to ‘slip up’ in their performance of the self and undermine their own social position, while simultaneously using ‘good manners’ to protect themselves from the greed and lower instincts of others…” (Valentine 196), so too does the Straight Edge work to create realized barriers between their presence in the social networks of punk and mainstream society. The eventually intentional sporting of the exclusionary ‘X’ symbol became a way for Straight Edge
folk to detach themselves from the two dominant groups on whom they initially depended – the “greed” world of music as big business and consumption, and the “lower instincts” of the older punk culture.

_Sid & Nancy_, based on the real-life character of Sid Vicious, bassist for the Sex Pistols, is a good text to use in an examination of the early days of punk (well before the existence of Straight Edge). The mood and tone of the film are set with the first scene of a drug-addled Sid Vicious sitting in a soiled, burnt and drug paraphernalia-strewn room in New York’s Chelsea Hotel. He had allegedly just stabbed his girlfriend, Nancy Spungeon. This ‘flash-forward’ of the actual finale of the film gives the viewer the immediate sense that this movie, this music and punk genre take place in a debauched world of extremes where chaos leads to destruction. The next scene takes place in the contextual present tense of London, 1976, and Sid meets Nancy for the first time in a dominatrix’s flat, where the two women have been smoking heroin. Sid breaks furniture and spray paints walls; for Nancy Spungeon it was, apparently, love.

The film presents a dystopic spectacle – virtually the entire film focuses on drugs and destruction as being component to the music being produced – at every gig the crowd is violent, instruments get broken and drugs are consumed – and the material destruction, mirrored by corrosively physical violence are enforced as being innately punk. Alex Cox’s films have been identified as “both mutations of modern life and products of it” (Atkinson 82), and so too can _Sid & Nancy_ be defined – as much as the portrayals of the individuals are recognized as well-done, they are romanticized, and this portrayal clearly has ideological effects (Goss 169).
Michael Turner's *Hard Core Logo* is another text that places great emphasis on the more dissolute nature of punk rock. The novel follows the reunion of a Canadian punk band, Hard Core Logo. The novel is pastiche of letters, poems, memos, song lyrics and interviews. The (fictional) song lyrics are largely based on drinking ("Have another beer," "Four nights drunk," and "The bootlegger song") and the reunion itself is predicated on the avoidance of the kind of substance abuse that had originally destroyed the band, "Remember the last tour? /Lee's Palace? /If we do this/it's gonna have to be different:/no hard drugs on gig days, okay?" (Turner 75). The pinnacle of Hard Core Logo's ruin as a band seems to be embodied in the poem/diary entry titled "Bucky got drunk, told stories":

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The Last time you saw me, at CBGB's,
I was hyping two bills a day.
It got so bad after you left
I started needing blood transfusions.
Needless to say I couldn't work:
And what work I did was awful.
All of my friends were dead or dying.
Everyone I met sucked up to me.
I realized I had to leave
When I got that dirty needle.
I was diagnosed with hepatitis.
The very same strain as Naomi Judd. (139)
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Drugs may not have been paramount to the daily experience of every punk, but it was certainly the way the culture has been portrayed by the media and art world, and, to be fair, the way the lives of famous punks seem to have been lived. Sid Vicious was, in reality, accused of killing his girlfriend while high, and himself died of a heroin overdose before the trial was completed. Hard Core Logo breaks up again at the end of the novel for essentially the same dysfunctional reasons it did in the first place: substance abuse and the types of behaviors that accompany it, “[a] triumph of selfishness, ignorance and stupidity” (Turner 171).

Perhaps it was the increased body count – the many physical, spiritual and artistic deaths exemplified in the genre that drove home the message in punk rock that drug use and abuse were only accessories. Those characteristic boundaries proved mutable and the romance of personal chaos was replaced with an increased focus on the actual music, lyrics and socially discursive implications of punk. Sometime in the nineteen eighties punk rock started to connote awareness and engagement rather than detachment – and textual representations of the genre followed the change.

In the mid-eighties, Ian MacKaye of Minor Threat initiated the Straight Edge Movement. He discusses this early time, the impetus for the genre:

In the real world, in the big world, we were out there pissing them off because we were non-conformist punk rock kids. In the punk world, we were pissing them off because we were straight kids, and we were being made fun of. I thought that the punk world would embrace us, which it did in a way, but a lot of people made fun of us even more. The punk rockers just thought that we
were hilarious and ridiculed us. They called us teeny punks, little Georgetown punks, but we [...] meant business, and we were very serious about what we wanted to do. (Lahicky 97)

MacKaye goes on to describe how he and his group of friends railed against clubs that would not let them in because they were not of drinking age. Although they eventually bargained for admittance (with bold black 'X's on their hands), the principles of capitalism and consumerism dictating access to art deeply affected the young MacKaye, "When you realize that this is a situation that was really predicated on the sale of alcohol it really aggravated us because we didn't even buy alcohol. It was ridiculous, the fact that we weren't going to buy alcohol made us not welcome at these music events...it was totally the wrong thing" (Lahicky 99). Within ten years of his early teen experiences, Ian MacKaye wrote lyrics for what is recognized as the first Straight Edge song, "Straight Edge," a song that has become anthemic to the movement:

I'm a person just like you
But I've got better things to do
Than sit around and fuck my head
Hang out with the living dead
Snort white shit up my nose
Pass out at the shows
I don't even think about speed
That's something I just don't need
I'VE GOT THE STRAIGHT EDGE
I'm a person just like you
But I've got better things to do
Than sit around and smoke dope
’Cause I know I can cope
Laugh at the thought of eating ludes
Laugh at the thought of sniffing glue
Always gonna keep in touch
Never want to use a crutch

I'VE GOT THE STRAIGHT EDGE  (MacKaye 1981)

Ian MacKaye helped start Straight Edge in the nineteen-eighties, and the genre has certainly become global since, but few literary representations articulate the movement. Not until 1999 with the film *SLC Punk* was a punk character portrayed as being drug free, and not until 2000 was a Straight Edge character written explicitly into fictional text."14

*SLC Punk* initially seems to work within the same cultural constraints as many other films featuring punk characters. It takes place in 1985, and the two protagonists (Steve-O and Heroin Bob) “look punk” as the style is popularly informed by the historically familiar nineteen seventies punk look of Mohawk haircuts, dyed hair, big boots and brash attitudes. *SLC Punk* is essentially a ‘teen flick’ using commonly recognizable punk conventions (style, music, and attitude) to broadcast the usual ‘growing pains’ driving the plots of teen films. What actually sets this film apart (for the purposes of this argument) is the characterization of Heroin Bob. Just as Steve-O, who narrates the movie, introduces himself and his best friend by
describing what they are not (a negative identity)—rednecks—so is the character of Heroin Bob partly formed by the opposing juxtaposition of his name with his actual lifestyle. Heroin Bob does not use heroin—he is afraid of needles—in fact, he uses no drugs at all. Steve-O describes Heroin Bob’s fear of drugs, “You couldn’t even get him to take an aspirin—he smoked and drank—but that’s it” (SLC Punk). Although not strictly Straight Edge (he smokes cigarettes and drinks alcohol), this role is the closest Hollywood has come to a portrait of the subculture. Bob is straight as a reaction to the substance abuse in his own family and the general instability of his personal life—just as it can be said that Straight Edge is a dialectic reaction to the substance abuse and promiscuity in punk. Heroin used to signify a kind of romantic rebellion within the punk movement, and to provocatively demonstrate against this kind of drug use negotiates a new, culturally informed rebellion within the culture. Followers of Straight Edge, here evinced as Heroin Bob, do not just avoid drug use—they are utterly contemptuous of it. At one point in the film, Heroin Bob rails against his friends for dropping acid, citing scientific materials and biological studies in his diatribe. The argument cannot be made that Straight Edge avoidance of drugs is supplementary to mainstream messages of prevention—it is clearly ideologically derivative of punk rock. But why?

While successful as a vehicle for acting out anti-authoritarian beliefs and performing subcultural values, punk is riddled with clichés. Punk has become, as it has been co-opted by mainstream culture, formulaic and outdated. Straight Edge takes the cliché and turns it on its ear. What SLC Punk demonstrates, and what Straight Edge realizes is that punk actually functions extremely well as a cultural
apparatus. The structure of punk is actually quite complex in its use of semiotics, involvement is selective, thus desirable, and it has historically displayed "a sophisticated consumer appreciation of its more intricate productions of symbolic form" (Hannerz 112). In Bourdieu's terms, punk has become "cultural capital."

Straight Edge uses this already successful system; it absorbs it and rejects what does not function well on a realized, active cultural level. Heroin Bob dies of a drug overdose at the end of SLC Punk (he is given some 'vitamins' for a headache, and the lot of pills he ingests turn out to be, in fact, 'percodan' and he is dead by morning). However ham-fisted in its use of irony and morality, the deeper message implicit in Bob's death has more to do with the death of old punk than the ardency of an anti-drug directive. Bob's death has Steve-O reconsidering his adherence to 'being punk,' his rejection of 'the system.' In the end, Steve-O mimics the development of Straight Edge by rejecting certain aspects of the antecedent (earlier incarnations of the punk genre), but not of the entire system (of mass culture). He still 'feels punk,' but indicates a choice to move away from those cultural conventions that impair his chances for personal growth and success. He recognizes that the implied liberty of punk rock is as much a system of conventions and precepts as any other cultural network.

The 'system' that is Straight Edge is more obviously structured and austere that that of more mainstream forms of punk, and deviation from the maxims of the lifestyle are often met with derision. For many people, if someone smokes a cigarette or drink a glass of wine, "you're not Straight Edge" (Lamacq 2000). Charles Romalotti's novel Salad Days presents the first fictional representation of a truly
Straight Edge character. Frank Smith identifies as being straight, that is, drug free, non-drinking, no smoking, no promiscuous sex – but he is reluctant to identify with the movement specifically, as evidenced in this exchange when he meets a Straight Edge man, "So you're Straight Edge, huh?" Posse asked me. 'My personal philosophy resembles the trend, yes.'" (Romalotti 193). Frank’s development as a character follows the growth and expansion of Straight Edge – and his discomfort with labeling himself is more 'of' the movement than a rejection of it. A disinclination to be categorized or grouped is characteristic of most underground cultures. A reluctance to be 'labeled' may stem, in part, from that process of "re-definition of deviant behavior by dominant groups – the police, the media, the judiciary" (Hebdige 131). This disinclination is articulated more succinctly by Pauline Tam, "If you can put your finger on it, it probably isn't punk" (F1). Straight Edge, however, often deviates from typical punk pretensions of detachment – most people involved with the movement feel a great deal of pride in their commitment and claim their identity. One such example is in a published interview with photographer Glen E. Friedman, "[m]ake sure that you put in to the intro or whatever that I'm totally pro-environmental, Straight Edge and vegan" (Resh 26). Frank is introduced early in the narrative as a (straight) punk with a long, dread-locked Mohawk, and later shaves his head – alluding to monastic associations, links representative of a Straight Edge recognition and appreciation for austerity. In one scene where Frank is being propositioned by a beautiful woman, the comically inflated prose imbues his efforts at resistance with an almost priestly sense of battling impurity and longing:
The clouds began to seep through my ears. My thoughts were suffering hormonal distortion. The base instinct of my existence began to roar. The temptation rendered me close to paralysis. I swept all my reasoning into a pile to muster my attention. I had the will to resist, to quiet the yearning. I couldn't give in, not this easily... “Don't touch me...” (Romalotti 221)

Where punk rock had focused on a frenzied absolute of freedom and dissipation, Straight Edge encourages a structure that is rigid but based almost entirely on personal strength and motivation. The identity is derivative, but in very strictly negative terms. Straight Edge is punk, but they identify separateness by not drinking and not doing drugs; they are anti-mainstream and refute subcultural norms.

So the question now is where does punk go from here? Where will Straight Edge take it? What is the evidence for it? Textual representations, of which lyrics are an ongoing component, indicate an effort for self-inscription in a culture ever defined by derivatives. Straight Edge is only now taking root as a presence in mainstream culture beyond punk, only in recent times has general access been available, if limited. There are legitimate theoretical concerns that relating a negative identity may prove disempowering to cultural groups on a larger, community-based scale (subcultural members may know what they are NOT, but what ARE they?); and while Straight Edge’s implicit negative identity is apparent and sometimes problematic, members of the movement can also be seen as components necessary to the development of a whole derivative movement. Time, space and growth of cultural place allow for the growth of this new subcultural identity.

1 Dick Hebdige summed up punk, generally, in this way, “The punk subculture... signified chaos at every level” (137).
In addition to those outlined in this chapter, Daniel Jones’ 1978 and Richard Hell’s Go Now are especially drug-soaked novels that depict punk life from two men ‘who were there’. Both texts epitomize the drug culture typically associated with punk.

It is widely known within the scene that early Minor Threat lyrics formed the first written evidence of Straight Edge as community and a movement. This understanding is corroborated in Steven Blush’s American Hardcore: A tribal history. “The song “Straight Edge [Minor Threat, “Straight Edge” 1981] inspired the movement by that name” (26).

Straight Edge has spawned innumerable independent publications —and the DIY ethic espoused by lovers of hardcore has generated (along side myriad independent record labels) independent publishing houses like Revelation Books. The sheer volume of material produced by lovers of the genre makes the paucity in fictional depictions all the more curious.

Resistance in punk and hardcore is typically a learned experience. Police have clashed with punks in much the same way that authorities have long clashed with marginal cultures. Steven Blush states, “…the police represented HC’s [hard core’s] most identifiable enemy” (39). He goes on in more detail, “Today you’d call what the police did to hardcore kids harassment or even a form of ‘racial profiling.’ They busted shows, accumulated dossiers, gathered evidence. The authorities recognized the threat of violence, real or perceived when Black Flag and Dead Kennedys came around. Cops didn’t want a new movement, so they tried to kill it before it grew.” (39)

For example, Steven Blush’s American Hardcore: A tribal history is a basically a dynamic compiling of interview quotes and song lyrics connected by first person narrative. Michael Turner’s Hardcore Logo is essentially a moment-to-moment tour diary.

On DIY, although the original “drunk and stoned” punks also ascribed to ideals of self-sufficiency, their total rejection of structure for style proved devastating for the actual artistic and personal autonomy of working Punks. Take ‘impresario’ Malcom McLaren’s well-documented creation, control and manipulation of seminal punk band The Sex Pistols as a case in point. Straight DIY as evidenced by Straight Edge focuses on the possibility of autonomy and artistic control over business and art. They set up their own gear, perform, take it all down—arrange their own bookings, etc. Lyrics, underground ‘zines and the internet all contribute to the global ethos of Straight Edge, and allow for the possibility of an international ‘anti-entertainment industry’ form of entertainment to thrive as a subculture. The careful creation and cultivation of communities or “scenes,” the often deeply informed politics of their lyrics and outspoken scorn for the economic motivation of much popular art takes Straight Edge beyond the culture of “Indie” rock (those acts that record independently and also mainly support themselves by touring).

There exist myriad lyrical sources to support the notion that members of the Straight Edge culture, on the whole, ascribe to specific and informed, often anarchic, political ideals. In an interview with Bernice Jang (formerly of The Maneaters, currently a drummer with a number of different punk and rock bands), she states, “Well I think definitely that more often than not a lot of the kids that are punk now definitely hold views that are very anti-establishment.” (Jang 2003)

I use the term ‘scene’ in the same way it outlined by Alan O’Conner, “When punks use the term ‘scene’ they mean the active creation of infrastructure to support punk bands and other forms of creative activity. This means finding places to play, building a supportive audience, developing strategies for living cheaply, shared punk houses, and such like.” (226)

Like many adults who have long identified with the punk movement, Keane finds it, if not exactly difficult, at least unnecessary to define the term. His attitude—and devotion—are apparent in this excerpt from our interview:

A: What does punk mean to you?
S: Get a dictionary. I’ll look it up.
A: Why is it important to you?
S: This has been what I do since I was twelve, that’s why [it’s important]. It is important.
A: You run a record label. Do you put out punk albums?
S: Yes.
A: Why did you choose to do this on your own?
S: Because I’m old now and I don’t have the energy to be in a band, but I still want to stay involved in the scene. (Keane 2003)
The cultural relevance of *Sid & Nancy* can be construed in myriad contexts—but Alex Cox has stated that he sees the story of the film most basically as a love story. In his article "Spectacular Recuperation: Alex Cox's *Sid & Nancy,*" Brian Goss quotes Alex Cox, "Sid and Nancy are this great pair of lovers... which is a much more interesting thing to make a film about than the Sex Pistols." (169)

12 John Lydon (Johnny Rotten, former Sex Pistols singer) says of Gary Oldman's portrayal of Sid, "he's a bloody good actor." (Lydon, Zimmerman and Zimmerman 148)

13 Sid Vicious has become a dubious folk-hero in punk. His inspiring start as a non-musician who 'did it anyway' has inspired many young punks, who also endeavor to emulate his personal style (black leather, pad lock chained around his neck). The status of Sid Vicious as a punk icon reveals one pole from which subgenres like Straight Edge diverge. Drugs killed this punk idol and simultaneously revealed him as a dupe, "Sid couldn't see that it was just a sham and an image. To Sid, that was the way New York rock stars lived their lives—morning, noon, and night. He thought they all went to bed with their high heels on." (Lydon, Zimmerman and Zimmerman 256)

14 This would be the protagonist in Charles Romalotti's *Salad Days.* The title lifted from a Minor Threat song of the same name.

15 Patty Smith, singer, songwriter and photographic muse to Robert Mapplethorpe, seen as one of the earliest influences on the development of punk, along with Richard Hell (formerly of the Voidoids) and Lou Reed bestowed a literary heritage (Noland 586) on punk along with a narcotic one. All were once renowned as much for their heroin use as for their art.

16 The most explicit connection between Straight Edge and any sort of monastic tradition is the ongoing associations between the sub culture and the Hare Krishnas. Most famous is the example of Ray Cappo, formerly of the immensely popular Straight Edge band Youth of Today, who is now a Krishna devotee and performs with "punk rock Hare Krishna band" Shelter (Shelter 20).
Chapter 5
Conclusions

At the time of writing and research for this work, the world is just on the horizon of the thirtieth birthday of punk rock. Since its simultaneous inception as musical genre and subculture – punk has formed a firm base in its own right as a subculture, but has also carved out a niche as an important and grounded base of general dissent within its parent, mainstream culture. In addition to its presence in the North American scene, the punk movement has spread worldwide as an identifiable social construct.

In “Subcultures, Cultures and Class,” John Clarke, Stuart Hall, et al. suggest that in order to exist as identifiable, researchable, social entities, subcultures must have a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiable from their parent culture (100), and must “be focused around certain activities, values... ...territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture.” But as a sub-set culture, and this is continued in the text’s discussion, punk must also be somehow be bounded and articulated through the parent culture. This dynamic relationship, the push and pull of identification, rejection and reclamation between the parent and subculture, has allowed punk to thrive and grow in its own unique cultural and social terrains. Examples of this dualistic relationship can be found in punk fashion which distinguishes members of the movement, but has also functioned to inform the mainstream fashion industry and culture. As a reflection of a community, the use of identifiable sartorial characteristics allows the subculture to
self-identify and articulate itself. This identification concurrently allows the parent, mainstream culture to observe punk and also to draw from it. Textual narrative, in the form of fiction and films, has benefited from the use of punk imagery as a tool for characterization. Punk characters have changed over time as the mainstream has come to accept the 'different' looks of people in its cultural boundaries and as writers and directors have found the image of the punk increasingly useful as a metaphor for informed dissent (as in Salad Days and Sister Safety Pin) rather than as pure antagonist or fallen youth (like in the earlier works, Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome and as seen in the character of Sid Vicious in Sid & Nancy).

Clarke, Hall et al, also discuss how subcultures take shape "around distinctive 'focal concerns' of groups," (100) and can be loosely or tightly bounded. Evidence for this can be seen in the shaping of space and place that punks conduct in streets and in their uses of punk clubs and homes. If a focal concern can be said to be a desire for unique, peer-controlled space, then these places are integral to marking the differentiating axis (100) of punk. Essentially, punks create tightly bonded communities that promote a sense of belongingness and rootedness to members of the subculture, even to those not tightly bonded within a specific scene. This acceptance recognizes the individual worth of punks and helps validate and support them as members of the movement. The ability for punks to find a safe place to congregate or live, something not always possible even ten years ago, in environments mediated by other punks, confirms the community as supportive and in control of its own traditions and social constructions. But punks still live in the mainstream, parent culture. Although punks are seen by the mainstream as 'other'
by engaging in a subcultural community, membership in a subculture does not protect them from the inevitable experiences and conditions that shape their culture as a whole. It is in this basic truth that punks have found accomplishment rather than negation or contradiction. The best example of this sense of triumph is in Straight Edge.

Like many subcultures, punk arose, as a movement, from the conflicted intersection between the parent culture and the mediated institutions of that dominant culture. Examples of this stem from the musical arena, independent record labels are often formed as a protest against the controlling nature of major record labels, to the social: Straight Edge is a reaction to socially accepted, and often destructive, codes of behaviours and leisure-seeking. Aram Arslanian articulates this point in regards to Straight Edge in his response to my question, “Has Mainstream Culture given anything to punk?” (2003) Arslanian states, “They've given us the fuel for the fire, they've given us the things that we've rejected and the reason we exist. I wouldn't be Straight Edge if there wasn't alcohol. If our society didn't venerate and celebrate the alcoholic lifestyle, I wouldn't be what I am today.” As each person's personal encounters with the dominant culture are articulated in punk, their ideas are absorbed and adapted by the movement to ensure its growth. As much as the mainstream has absorbed parts of punk (note the recent fad of preteens with blue Mohawks and pop-punk bands like Sum 41 and Avril Lavigne), so too has punk appropriated some of the structures and 'straight' social constructions of dominant culture. In research for this closing discussion, I have found punk cookbooks, notably those written by Joachim Hiller, author of three punk-rock cookbooks and
editor of punk rock magazine OX (Kien); and even a punk-directed cooking show based out of Manhattan titled, "The Post-Punk Kitchen" that broadcasts on local cable television (www.theppk.com). What this suggests, and what is exceedingly important for this work, is that the punk subculture has succeeded in becoming a unique and identifiable way 'to be' in the world.

Like any thriving community, punk changes over time, but the essential ideals of self-motivation and perpetual questioning of authority structures and controlling mechanisms ensure a rootedness and specificity in the movement as a whole. And because the movement is essentially insular, it will continue to be drawn upon by the mainstream culture in its perpetual exploration and search for authenticity. As elements that distinguish and delineate punk are rearticulated back into the mainstream, the movement changes accordingly. This process of succession is confirmed by Aram Arslanian:

Like anything else, and this isn't even a bad thing; punk rock, to a degree, had become socialized, commercialized. But the thing is, as some levels of punk rock become commercialized, new, more underground, levels always develop. So it's a cycle, it's almost like shedding skin. As one level becomes more commercialized and it becomes more mainstream, it's not really so punk rock anymore - there's always a deeper level. It's fine. People always say that it's gotten worse, and it's not what it used to be, but I disagree; I think, specifically, hardcore is incredible now and I really love it, and I think punk rock is great too. I also like that bands can be somewhat successful on
a level where they can do really cool things, but also remain really committed to their ideals. (2003)

Arslanian's last comment (regarding bands) refers specifically to new opportunities for punk bands to achieve specifically commercial (read: mainstream) success and manipulate and direct that achievement back in to the punk movement. This can be seen in the long-term success of independent record labels like Dischord, Epitaph, Kill Rock Stars, to achieve higher distribution while still feeding back into the community.

Punk has changed in how members of the movement react to the mainstream, and changing narratives about punks have changed how the mainstream depicts and includes them as an acknowledged sub-set culture. In many ways being punk is a calculatedly negotiated identity. Punks are of the parent culture but seek to find a way in which to make decisions, recreate and consume goods in manners reflective of their own community. Now, more than ever, punks are not relying on the mainstream to use them or their images, as they increasingly use the constructs of the mainstream in subversive ways, and they are not relying on writers and directors to depict them in falsely constructed characterizations. Punks are increasingly writing for and about themselves as evidenced by independent, punk owned and operated organizations like the publishing house Revelation Books.

Punks have always responded to the world through music and lyrics. The subculture has expanded and is now addressing the world through its own literature and nonfiction writing. As the punk movement ages, and its adherents along with it, it is possible to predict that more and more evidence will come forward of punks slyly
subverting or questioning mainstream social norms. It does not stop at cooking programs! As punks themselves succeed and move forward, those new to the movement will absorb new structures and continue to forward the movement. Again, Aram Arslanian synthesizes this notion, "I think it's [punk has] made it safer for people to rebel in a positive way in the sense that people see the people that have gone before us take these risks, and you realize, 'hey, if that person can do it, I can do it myself'. It encourages people, and gives people some hope" (2003). In punk, many individuals have found the "subcultural solution" (John Clarke et al.) to the stylistic, moral, musical, special and contextual limits ascribed by mainstream culture. In the past their identification has made punks subject to some negative consequences (violence, jeering, etc.), but this identity is coming to represent an informed and developed subculture, with its own codes and ways of being that embody a new and assertive freedom to experience the world.
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Appendix 1:
Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form – The Participation Experiences of Individuals in Punk or Punk-related Subcultures

The purpose of this study is twofold:

1.) To investigate and document the experiences of individuals who have participated in music-based subcultures, namely associated with punk, and
2.) To develop an understanding of how their experiences coincide with or deviate from fictional or academic representations of their culture.

The researcher for this study is Andrea Lebl, who will be using the results as part of a Master’s of Arts thesis in the Interdisciplinary Studies (English and Anthropology) program at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) in Prince George. Dr. Stan Beeler, Chair of English, UNBC, is the supervisor. If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Andrea Lebl at (250) 564-5025 or Dr. Beeler at (250) 960-6619. Complaints about this project may be directed to the Vice President of Research (UNBC), 960-5820.

Your Participation in this interview is completely voluntary. Please feel free to ignore questions or parts of questions. The interview should take about 45 minutes, although you may stop the process at any time.

Strict confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study; names of participants will not be associated with statements made during interviews, if you wish to remain anonymous. Approximately eight people will be interviewed. No results will be represented such that any individual could be identified, unless you choose otherwise. Results from the interviews will be stored in a secure office and only Andrea Lebl will have access to the files. All data will be destroyed when the study is completed.

I, _____________________________, have read the above information and I understand the procedures to be used in this study. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation at any time. My signature certifies that I consent to participate and acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form.

Check one:

( ) I wish to remain anonymous in the results of this research.
( ) I wish to be identified by name in the results of this research.

Date: _______________________________ Signature: _______________________________
Appendix 2:

Interview Questions: -- The Participation Experiences of Individuals in Punk or Punk-related Subcultures

*Note, some questions may be altered or omitted depending on the flow of the interview, gender of participants, or sub cultural affiliations of participants

Name __________________ Address ___________________________ Phone ________________

Date __________ Time ___________ Place ______________________

1. What does the term ‘Punk’ mean to you?
2. How have you been (or are you now) involved with punk? How long?
3. Is punk important to you? ---Why? Why not?
4. How do you see punk represented by the mainstream? (movies, books, comics, etc.) -
   --Do they ever get it right?
5. How do mainstream representations of punk make you feel about the genre?
6. (For older participants) How was punk important for you when you were younger?
7. How has it changed?
8. How have you changed, or been affected by choosing to be a part of punk culture?
9. What does it mean to be punk? Why?
10. If you don’t identify as (still) being punk, what aspects of the genre do you identify with, if any?
11. What do you believe punk has brought to mainstream culture?
12. What has mainstream culture brought to punk?
13. Do you (have you seen) see many women associated with punk culture? Why or why not?

14. What is it like being a woman in punk?

15. Do you think your experiences as a woman in punk are different from those of men? If yes, how so?

16. What does the term ‘Straight Edge’ mean to you?

17. Are you straight edge? Why or why not?

18. How is straight edge related to punk? What are some of the differences?

19. How do people react to your beliefs?

20. How does straight edge fit in with punk?

21. In what ways might punk, or any of the genres associated with it, be important in the world today?