

Did Punk Matter?: Analyzing the Practices of a Youth Subculture During the 1980s

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In 1991, an odd thing happened in the world of popular culture. A new single by the group Nirvana, “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” with its abrasive tones and acidic lyrics about mainstream youth culture (“Here we are now, entertain us. . . . I feel stupid and contagious”), chased Michael Jackson off the charts. From September to December, 1991, 3.5 million Americans rushed out to buy Nirvana’s follow-up album, *Nevermind*. Soon, Nirvana’s lead singer, Kurt Cobain, graced the cover of *Rolling Stone*, decked out in a cheap t-shirt with “Corporate Magazines Still Suck” scrawled on it, sneering at his newly found mass audience. Something certainly seemed to be happening here.¹

Though the mass media treated Cobain like any other rock star, and though he played out his role to a tee (even committing the requisite suicide), he never denied that his music and ideas came from something bigger than himself. Cobain talked quite a bit about the youth subculture in which his music was nurtured. When asked what he hoped for from his fame, he explained, “Hopefully, [our fans] like our music and listen to something else that’s in the same vein, that’s a bit different from Van Halen. Hopefully they’ll be exposed to the underground by reading interviews with us. Knowing that we do come from a punk-rock world, maybe they’ll look into that and change their ways a bit.” In essence, Cobain hoped that the youth counterculture and underground that he was a part of would come above ground, if only for a fleeting moment.²

Cobain was referring to a widespread punk rock music scene and youth subculture that sprang up during the conservative era of the 1980s. This scene went beyond bands and musical performers, and included among others independent record companies, show producers, zine writers, and general fans. It was a disparate movement, driven by a variety of values and including everything from fundamentalist Christian punks, who typically went unnoticed, to the performance artist, G.G. Allin, whose nihilistic antics—including self-mutilation and smearing himself with his own feces while on stage—drew great attention. There were also right-wing skinhead and fascist punks. Around these different formations raged debates among young participants about what the purpose of their movement really was. Letters to *Maximum RocknRoll*, the national magazine that focused attention on this youth subculture and its intersection with politics, reflected an inconclusive debate about punk rock during the 1980s—going so far as to ask if it was safe to use the word “punk” since the term had little coherence. Clearly no single definition of this youth subculture will stick.³

Nonetheless, during the 1980s, the mass media tried to pin one exclusive meaning on the movement by stressing its nihilistic elements. Television shows which dealt with this youth subculture—most notoriously dramas such as *Chips* and *Quincy*—portrayed young punk rockers as barbarian hordes seething with violence and rage, either destroying others or themselves. Punks were literally killers chased by good-guy cops in these shows. Worse yet, if only because they had more time to develop their characters, were sensationalistic movies like *Class of 1984* (1982) which showed high school youth wearing swastikas (colluding with a common misperception in the mass media that punk rockers were Nazis) and who—after attending shows replete with slam dancing and drug abuse—went off to rape their teacher’s wife. When they were not busy doing crimes, they were spouting inane statements like: “Life is pain, pain is everything.” Punk rock became synonymous with violence and nihilism in the popular media of the 1980s—a reflection of conservative Reagan Era optimism that turned any rebellion against the status quo into inexplicable nihilism.⁴

In countering this sort of interpretation, many academic treatments go too far in another direction. For some analysts, this youth subculture was neither violent nor nihilistic, they viewed it as devoid of any meaning. Evading interpretation, the cultural critic Stewart Home overdraws his point by arguing: “It’s not only pointless, but counterproductive, to attempt to produce a definitive account of the subject [punk rock music] due to its flexible parameters.” Certainly, the 1980s youth subculture, out of which Nirvana and so many other things grew, had conflicts and differences, but it also had common themes and concrete historical practices that add up to a wider movement. Contemporary cultural theory often overstresses the *reception* of cultural products, highlighting the subjective act of enjoying and consuming mass culture commodities. This stress plays down the very determination that cultural producers actually impart to their products. In fact, as we shall see, young people participating in

this subculture of the 1980s were obsessed both with the *production* of cultural products as well as self-definition and issues of identity within a corporate culture. Nor were all of them—as much as the mass media tried to infer—nihilistic (though most were ironic); instead, they believed that authenticity could be reached in cultural expression—if cultural producers played by certain rules.⁵

Part of the reason that the element of production in this subculture has been overlooked is that it can be hard to document. Cultural critics often overlook “underground” cultural practices that are hard to uncover. One of my advantages here is that I had personal connections with the subculture to be discussed (which meant that I could interview a number of participants and have them provide me with documents on what they did during their youth). But even without this personal experience, this subculture left behind numerous sources to be examined. First, there were records and cassette tapes, which more often than not included extensive lyric sheets and a variety of other inserts. Second, punks produced enormous amounts of “zines” (short for fanzines), many now housed in the Factsheet Five Collection at the New York State Library in Albany. This collection served as the basis of Stephen Duncombe’s important book, *Notes from the Underground*. National punk magazines like *Maximum RocknRoll* have been microfilmed and can be found in some public libraries. Just as important as these “primary” documents, many urban “alternative” papers—the *Village Voice* (New York City), the *City Paper* (Washington, D.C.), the *Chicago Reader*, etc.—ran intelligent pieces on punk scenes in their respective cities. The journalists who wrote these stories tried to counteract some of the nastier depictions in the mainstream press, making them that much more important. All of these sources—records, zines, journalistic accounts—provide anyone interested with a vast array of sources to analyze.⁶

Perhaps the major reason that subculture practices are not documented or discussed relates to academic theories of subcultures. The most influential attempt to analyze youth subcultures comes out of the work of subculture theory itself in the writings of cultural critics Dick Hebdige and Mike Brake. Though these thinkers rightfully pay attention to the working-class roots of many British subcultures (one reason their theories do not apply too well to the United States where class consciousness does not operate the same way), they often place *too much* stress on the style and symbols that constitute rebellion. Certainly style matters, but by placing our emphasis here, we can miss the more challenging aspects of youthful rebellion. As Hebdige argues, young punks in England (as with subcultures before them) relied on commercially produced items—leather jackets or safety pins, for instance—by which to show off their rebellion. Subcultures, for Hebdige, signify themselves through “conspicuous consumption” (again, the emphasis is on consumption, not production). Style overwhelms the work of subculture theorists, precisely because these thinkers focus on how membership is demarcated through codes projected towards non-members. Subcultures, from this perspective, become not just synonymous with style but with a *hopeless* attempt to rebel against a system that constitutes the rebellion in the

first place (through the proliferation of commodities on the market used by the rebels). Though this theory is powerful in explaining the limits of subcultures, it does not do service to the variety of efforts that subcultures engage.⁷

This essay will, at first, de-emphasize the stylistic elements of this American subculture of the 1980s (hairstyles, clothing, “hardcore” musical styles, etc.). In doing so, I am not denying these elements (they will come back into play later in the essay) but placing the stress, at least at first, elsewhere—on the ways in which youth *created* culture by developing their own concrete institutional means of cultural production. This also allows us to widen our examination to include not simply the musical groups known at the time but also a wider number of young people who participated in a myriad of ways. Perhaps my own Americanism comes into play here. I want to stress the ability of cultural practices to resist—not necessarily change—the larger structures they rebel against. Rather than simply tell another story of cultural cooptation (although that story will be told), I want to explore how young people forged what I will call a *robust community of producers* through independently creating musical commodities (sold through alternative networks) in addition to innovative performances and hand-crafted zines. Through these means, young people tried to renew sincerity in cultural production and challenged the dominant control of the corporate market in America. To a large extent, they tried to create an “oppositional” form of rebellion that could challenge the nature of cultural production in late-twentieth-century America. This is perhaps the most remarkable and creative element of this subculture, one overlooked by those who only examine style. Some of these young people also made connections between their cultural activities and politics (admittedly, I am treating one *strain* of a wider youth subculture here). In doing so, these participants shed light on the intersection between culture and politics during the 1980s or what is more properly referred to as the Reagan Decade. They will also tell us—as we come to understand their failures—a great deal about the fragile nature of rebellion and subcultures within a corporate and consumer culture. Here I will bring back the insights of subculture theory, the Frankfurt School school writing on the culture industry, and Paul Goodman’s critique of the Beats’ limitations as cultural rebels. But I will not tell this side of the story before giving credit where credit is due: to those who struggled within this youth subculture in the ways that they could.⁸

“Do It Yourself” Rebellion Against the Corporate Market

Instead of focusing on the superficial styles or nihilistic antics of some members, we must look deeper into this youth subculture. Local “scenes”—federated through formal and informal communicative networks—constituted the basis of this subculture. The primary participants were young, white, middle class, and male. They traditionally lived in either major metropolitan suburban or urban areas. It should be noted that these young white males had counterparts in the rap scenes of ghetto culture, which also sprang up during the 1980s (in Washington, D.C., these punk and rap music performers double-billed certain

shows). Additionally, the “Riot Grrl” movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s arose out of frustration with the male domination of the 1980s scenes. Recognizing the white male make-up of their scene, an early punk rock band, the Dils, explained, “You don’t have to be poor, black or on welfare to know it stinks.” Punks were therefore part of a proud tradition of middle-class rebels who spoke in “jeremiads” against the wayward ways of their culture (like utopian communitarians of the nineteenth century and certain arts and crafts movement activists at the turn of the century). This spirit and the youthful efforts it inspired proliferated during the 1980s, with local scenes starting up in places as unexpected as Salt Lake City, Utah, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, as well as bigger cities and more expected sites like San Francisco and the District of Columbia.⁹

When these local scenes are examined, one common feature clearly held them together: the spirit of Do-It-Yourself (DIY). The making of music, among other things, was to rely on local initiative and production. Like previous “folk cultures,” which arose from the daily activities of ordinary citizens, this one took up the clarion call of a punk fanzine published during the late 1970s in England which showed the fingering of three guitar chords (“This is a Chord, This is Another, This is a Third” appearing in bold, handwritten letters) and then declared: “NOW FORM A BAND.” This spirit was further energized by a complete disgust with corporate music, especially the puffed-up sounds of disco and arena rock (i.e., bands like The Bee Gees, Journey, and Foreigner). These young people wanted to forge their own identities and cultural products, instead of relying upon corporations to do it for them. One advertisement in a local zine for a college radio station asked: “Feel culturally deprived in a world of Top 40? Socially manipulated by meaningless music? Are you tired of hearing bands like Wham and Madonna?”¹⁰

During the 1980s these youth rebelled against more than the tired sounds coming from mainstream radio stations; they opposed the large corporations producing the music solely for profit. Or as one zine writer spewed, how the music industry was “being controlled by a bunch of boring bozos who spent long hours at the beauty salon being told how great they were.” On this count, these young people made an acute historical and cultural observation. For throughout the previous decade of the 1970s, the music industry had consolidated. The countercultural rebellion of the 1960s had died down, leaving behind a set of big name bands and rock stars that corporate record labels snatched up. By 1970, as Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo point out, “few independent record companies of any significance were left.” With increasing power, record companies asserted the right to determine product and promotion (i.e., what songs on an album would be promoted as “hits,” etc.). As Chapple and Garofalo explain, due to “greater concentration of wholesaling and retailing functions,” the “old independent distributors and the mom and pop retail stores” became a thing of the past during the 1970s—leaving behind only major corporate outlets for records. Additionally, concerts and promotional tours required major amounts of money, as did exposure in corporate magazines like *Rolling Stone*, a publica-

tion which shed its more freewheeling youth culture aspects for a more “professional” role in corporate music promotion during the 1970s. Every element of rock ‘n’ roll production took on an increasingly corporate feel during this decade.¹¹

The 1980s witnessed the consolidation of what Mark Krispin Miller calls the “national entertainment state.” This was best captured in the “vertical integration” of the entertainment industries in the 1980s, represented in massive buy-outs and mergers of empires like Sony (which bought out CBS Records in 1987) and Warner Brothers—“the largest media corporation in the world.” Other critics believed it was epitomized in the product placement and general corporate shilling done by rock bands like Genesis, David Bowie, and Eric Clapton. Perhaps more famously, Nike’s use of the Beatles’s song “Revolution” symbolized it which, ironically, Michael Jackson profited from since he owned the rights to the Beatles’s repertoire (and which resulted in corporate lawyers duking it out over copyright conflicts). For others, the rise of MTV clearly captured the corporate control of music. Here was a new way of promoting music that inherently upped the costs of production (placing a new premium on visual and stylistic elements within the music) and that made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between corporate advertising for products and advertising for rock stars. The result of all this, as far as Mark Krispin Miller and others are concerned, was a limited range of music and ways to produce and talk about music.¹²

Instead of waiting for the corporate monoliths like Sony and Warner Brothers to bestow more acceptable products, young people simply made their own culture. They formed countless bands, publications, and alternative networks. This DIY ethic fueled the movement and gave it a distinct identity. As one young person explained, “How many other music or youth or other type movements or whatever you could call this thing, are made up of people doing what participation they feel like doing, writing, communicating via zines, trading, being in bands, or doing a [record] label or artwork or just consuming any of this stuff, or combination of all these things and mas!” The production of culture became the domain of youth themselves. Though this young observer overstated this and ignored how previous countercultures pursued similar practices (as we will see these young people lacked a sense of history), the level of self-consciousness among this particular youth subculture did seem to reach new heights. In part, this was due to just how powerful a corporate empire they attempted to resist.¹³

Though the spirit of DIY could at times become a vague call to arms—witnessed in jeremiads to “get involved in your scene” sounded constantly in the pages of *Maximum RocknRoll* and other publications—it was not merely substanceless sneer or style. Rather, it grew from actual experiments in alternative production and distribution of cultural products. This is most clearly captured in how youth put on hardcore shows during the 1980s. In part because they had no other place to go but also in order to control the production of concerts, venues outside of commercial outlets (i.e., nightclubs and arenas) were

best. Indeed, there was a creative variety to places where shows took place: home basements, churches, community centers, rented halls, public parks, and even VFW headquarters. Sometimes regionality influenced the venue: bowling lanes were popular in Wisconsin and the Mexican Patriotic Club was rented out in a Hispanic area of Chicago. With more control over these venues, bands could experiment during performances. At the Institute for Pragmatic Malice in San Francisco, for instance, organizers tried to “get away from the typical promoter/audience/performer trip” by “passing out lyric/propaganda/artwork sheets by the bands, having the bands pay expenses and [letting] the audience in free, giving away oranges, popcorn, and fruit juice, showing slides.” These methods challenged the typical elevation of performers to the status of “stars”—supplementing their activities with other ones. One “hardcore promoter from Northeastern Wisconsin” went so far as to pull bands’ names out of a hat to see who would play first or last—this way getting out of the rock star mentality behind a “headlining act.” They promoted the shows themselves through informal methods like plastering flyers (known as “wheatpasting”) in areas where young people would congregate. And to ensure that these shows were accessible to the youth who made up their audiences, an “all ages” policy was often instituted, ensuring that shows were open to those below drinking age.¹⁴

None of this was easy. Problems emerged with the expenses and liability of putting on independent shows. And when bands decided to go on tour they faced greater logistical problems. Using alternative networks and means of travel often proved difficult, and sacrifice and hardship became the norm for touring bands. Ian MacKaye, a major figure in the Washington, D.C., punk rock scene, described touring during the 1980s this way: “It was fifteen teenagers, two of them only fourteen, in a van, a Volvo, and my Plymouth Duster.” For other bands, touring took on a special DIY spirit, including “loading yourself into a van, sleeping on people’s floors, roadie-ing your own equipment, for . . . a measly two hundred bucks a night, split five ways.” Bands did what they had to do in order to be heard, working with local people who controlled alternative venues (they were very often contacted by local people about the possibility of stopping by their area). In the process, they challenged the cult of stardom so prevalent in American rock n’roll culture.¹⁵

Beyond the fleeting shows, other non-corporate ways to distribute music to fans emerged. Witness, for example, the great upsurge in cassette tape duplication which was the most accessible and cheapest way to distribute music. By advertising through zines, tapes could be promoted throughout the United States, with all the work of production and distribution (i.e., direct mailing) done in one’s home. A magazine like *Maximum RocknRoll* told its readers the best tapes to use and the best ways to duplicate and distribute them. And many of these experiments blossomed into independent record labels. For instance, Subpop Records—the label which originally recorded Nirvana—started as a fanzine and tape duplication experiment in Washington state. Other record labels like Dischord (Washington, D.C.), Alternative Tentacles (San Francisco), and R.

Radical Records (San Francisco) grew to be strong independent ventures that combined local entrepreneurialism and principled resistance to corporate takeover. Most of these businesses made their independent nature well known. For instance, SST Records (Los Angeles) adopted the slogan: “Friends Don’t Let Friends Buy Corporate Rock.” More important, these record companies sought out alternative ways to distribute music—by selling at shows, dealing only with smaller record stores, or by using the mail system in order to reach out to young people who could not access shows or record stores in major towns. They plastered “Pay No More Than . . .” on the front of record sleeves in hopes of retaining control over the product once it reached the record market (and they often put a note inside to tell them if the purchaser had been charged more so that the company could then scold that record store). Additionally, much of the original airplay for these records came from nonprofit college radio stations that controlled their own format and refused pressure from corporate music companies as had FM stations in the 1970s when they rebelled against the commercialism of AM stations. The call to be “independent” from corporate culture led to interesting experiments to produce and distribute music within this youth subculture.¹⁶

Alternative culture included ideas as well as music. As Stephen Duncombe has shown, zines (short for fanzines) served as a primary means of communicating among young punks. Crude tactics of typing articles on clunky typewriters (often with handwritten corrections simply written in on the final copy), photocopying (which often created interesting works of pastiche art as it did with the flyers announcing shows), and stapling together the final pages created the zines that were sold at shows or traded through the mail. Often these zines carried independent record and show reviews in addition to stories about politics and whatever else the “editor” wanted to put in (including notes on his or her personal life). These zines kept participants in touch with one another and on top of local scene developments. If they were ever sold at a store, it was typically a small anarchist book collective or a music store which carried punk rock, and only if a larger city was fortunate enough to have either of these establishments.¹⁷

Sometimes, these different independent ventures—shows, record labels, and zines—coalesced into bigger projects. Building on a general momentum, participants combined different DIY methods. For instance, there were numerous zines that also distributed tapes. Perhaps most important of all was the Gilman Street Project—a culmination of the DIY spirit in the mid-1980s. In Berkeley, California, activists created an independent venue for shows by working with the socialist mayor, Gus Newport. Based out of a warehouse, they put on all-ages shows. They refused to advertise the shows in commercial magazines and also diversified performances to include theater, poetry readings, and slide shows. In addition, they put together a zine library, a record store, and an independent label (Lookout Records). Eventually, they created Pressure Drop Press. Though Gilman was perhaps the most famous expression of DIY during the 1980s, there were also numerous independent networks across the country. As Ruth Schwartz

explained in an interview in 1984, “There’s this circuit of independent labels, fanzines, radio (college stations, etc.) who support this music. There’s a distribution system all that goes through.” This network of institutions formed the basis of this independent youth subculture.¹⁸

All of these different independent initiatives existed outside the influence of major corporations, and therefore allowed young people to see themselves as a robust community of independent cultural producers. A young person need not have been in a band to have gained this sense. One could help produce or promote shows, distribute tapes and records, create a zine, or generally support these initiatives (rather than buying corporate products). This variety of activities constituted the basis of this youth subculture. In the pages of *Maximum RocknRoll*, *Flipside*, and other national publications, young people discussed their local scenes and debated what motivated them. One writer in a local zine wrote in 1987, “The big key is that there is no corporate individuals [*sic*] molding us to be tasty to millions of calm, safe rock/pop kids who just wanna get safe jobs and listen about ‘rock and roll will live forever’ and ‘I love you baby.’” Resisting corporate influence led to prizing independent thought. Hence, one young person in answer to the question “What the Hell is Punk?” stated: “Punk is not a look . . . , but is a way of thinking” for oneself. Seeing themselves as independent cultural producers and consumers led many to ask further questions about their culture and politics.¹⁹

Enter Politics: Resisting Reagan’s America

Of course, this subculture could have remained a purely cultural phenomenon, dedicated solely to the production of independent cultural products. But for different reasons, many strains within it took on heavy political overtones. Sometimes the anti-corporate stance led directly to politics, especially when circumstances forced the issue. In Seattle (the future home of Nirvana and grunge rock), the difficulties of pursuing the DIY spirit were made especially clear when police started shutting down independent shows during the mid-1980s. In protest, about twenty young people, many of them teenagers, formed the Youth Defense Campaign (YDC). Since shows were expensive to put on, the leader of YDC called for “the Seattle City Council to open up school facilities, to open up public buildings for youth entertainment.” This call for cheap all-ages shows reflected the DIY culture out of which the organization grew. It also made clear how their independence connected them to the idea of a public good—reflected historically in the tradition of founding governments and public schools—that counteracted corporate profit. YDC blamed corporate interests for the inaccessibility of so much youth culture, proclaiming that, “The crisis in youth entertainment has not been caused by young people, but by the huge entertainment corporations.” From this initial call for cheap accessible entertainment, the YDC made a pact with the labor movement, citing that youth were slotted into “the worse jobs” with “low wages.” From the practices of alternative culture, the YDC made a clear leap into politics.²⁰

Sometimes articulate leaders leaped into politics without any provocation. First, there were bands which conveyed a political message through their lyrics and album liner notes. This included the Proletariat from Boston; the Minutemen from Los Angeles; Articles of Faith from Chicago; Beefeater and Fugazi from Washington, D.C.; Reagan Youth, @pple, Heart Attack, and False Prophets from New York City; and the Dead Kennedys, MDC, Atrocity, Tri@l, and @ State of Mind from San Francisco. Additionally, there were individuals involved in local scenes who saw a clear connection between anti-corporate music and an oppositional form of politics. Often they voiced their visions loudly, as John Jankowski, a leader of a youth collective in Chicago, did in a letter to *Maximum RocknRoll*: “I really can’t understand why [some] people are so intent on making punk nothing more but a musical fad when it could be so much more.” Others believed that the energy created by local music should naturally spill over into other areas—including political activism. Michelle Cali, a young political activist, explained that “with the alternative art and politics scene there is enough imagination, motivation, and ability” to galvanize the sort of activist culture she desired. Ian MacKaye, the head of Dischord Records and singer in the band Fugazi, explained, “We have friends who have gone on to do things outside of the music, and it certainly is as valid and important as anything they could have done in the music.” The connections made by the YDC in Seattle seemed a natural leap for many articulate bands and individuals within this youth subculture, even without direct provocation.²¹

To explain why some youth went political, it is necessary to pull back from the local punk subculture scenes and take note of the general political culture of the Reagan era. The 1980s was one of the most conservative decades in United States history (similar, in ways, to the 1920s). Ronald Reagan oversaw an incredible conservative ascendancy built out of a quirky coalition of free market libertarians and culturally conservative, fundamentalist Christians. By doubling the military budget (to fend off Communism) and cutting back on social welfare programs as much as he could, Reagan steered politics in a new direction, away from the New Deal paradigm of social equality that had previously reigned. Most importantly, Reagan’s ideas of deregulation and supply-side economics started to villainize government and placed the unfettered corporation at the center of political power and legitimacy (while at the same time corporations underwent a massive process of vertical integration and mergers). But Reagan was more than a political leader. In his own way, Reagan sought not only to reempower the private corporation but also to make this effort part of a new *cultural* era for America, perhaps best captured in his television advertisements that told viewers it was “morning again in America.”²²

Reagan tried to build a culture of “self-confidence and self-esteem” for America, after the Vietnam War, Watergate scandal, and Iranian hostage snag had dragged America down into a sea of doubt. Reagan’s era glorified not only optimism but a sheer celebration of wealth—the sort embodied in the corporate success of Donald Trump and his excesses (the 1980s equivalent of Robber

Barons). Critics pointed out that Reagan's inauguration celebrations were much more garish than most, and as Barbara Ehrenreich made clear, Nancy Reagan's \$46,000 inaugural dress symbolized obvious overindulgence. Reagan made clear his political sentiments through political actions—like smashing the airline controllers' union—but also, in large part, by expropriating popular culture. One of Ronald Reagan's major moves was to shed any presidential embarrassment at embracing popular culture; indeed, he elevated popular culture and put it to conservative political use. As Michael Rogin makes clear, Reagan was an "idol of consumption," having his career originally forged in Hollywood. Reagan used Dirty Harry's (Clint Eastwood) statement—"Make My Day"—in order to state his opposition to redistributionist tax policies. And he told the public that he knew what to do next time in any foreign policy imbroglio after having seen the movie, *Rambo*, with its celebration of brawn and machismo in the face of foreign enemies. In both his celebration of corporate wealth and his patriotism, Reagan cultivated what Sidney Blumenthal called a "spectacle of optimism" and Nicolaus Mills termed a "culture based on triumph."²³

Beyond Reagan's own use of it, popular culture during the 1980s was marked not only by corporate centralization but also by conservative *content*. As Susan Jeffords has shown, the "hard body" movies like *Rambo*, *Lethal Weapon*, and *Die Hard* promoted an ugly machismo no longer tempered by any remnant of 1960s pacifist guilt. Other films of the times, Alan Nadel argues, celebrated yuppie acquisitiveness, making a clear connection to Reagan's politics of deregulation (Nadel points out that Reagan watched, as president, two movies per weekend). Frank Capra's small town hero battling against monied interests seemed out of place in 1980s popular culture (even as films nostalgically celebrated small towns). Popular television shows like *Dynasty* and *Dallas* instead glamorized the new wealthy of the Sunbelt areas (one of the most important set of players in Reagan's new coalition), placing them at the center of Americans' attention. These cultural works never acquired the sort of unified message that the popular front culture of the 1930s did, but they certainly made clear that politics and corporate culture intersected during the 1980s.²⁴

This intersection made it easy for dissident youth rebelling against the corporate influence on music to see in the political culture of Reaganism a clear-cut enemy—a politician and political movement seemingly in cahoots with the world of large corporations and popular corporate culture in general. It is interesting to note that during the late-1970s, at the beginning of the American hardcore rebellion, some punks felt comfortable poking fun at liberals (such as in the Dead Kennedys' famous song, "California Uber Alles," which, when originally released in 1979, made fun of the state's liberal governor, Jerry Brown). But by the 1980s, the enemy clearly became Reagan (in 1984, the Dead Kennedys re-released "California Uber Alles" with the new title, "We've Got Bigger Problems Now"). Anti-Reagan symbols proliferated in fanzines—Reagan pictured with shriveled skin and a vacuous look on his face, an obligatory X obliterating his visage. Against the era's orchestrated optimism, young rebels openly em-

braced “anger” or what one called “positive negativism.” They saw in Reagan a powerful cultural symbol easily detested, reacting almost in a visceral way. As one political punk zine explained: “Who could be easier to hate as president? Reagan presented the perfect picture of an idiotic, argumentative, disgruntled, reactionary, doddering old uncle who was nonetheless charming enough to be unbelievably irritating.” Many members of this youth subculture connected Reagan’s politics to the corporate culture of the 1980s against which they rebelled. The editor of the *Third Rail* zine (Tulsa, Oklahoma) drew together—in sweeping terms—Reagan’s aggressive foreign policy and the corporate culture of the 1980s:

You’ve heard all of the stories of injustice before, i’m [*sic*] sure: . . . Nicaragua, El Salvador, Philippines, Chile, Nuclear Waste, Bhopol, Vietnam, Socialism for the rich, and any and all manifestations of our bully boy foreign policy. . . . [Add to this,] the drab, dreary, faded-out, boring, shitty existence all of us share to one degree or another in this so-called paradise of free enterprise with only a few mundane distractions to keep us sedated and satisfied.²⁵

This sort of youthful disdain counteracted Reagan Era optimism. Since the mass media stressed the negative image of punk rock (the sort depicted in *Class of 1984*), it suppressed these strains of political protest, only further alienating these young people from the mass media. As one young punk observer argued, “The media, for its part, continued to ignore progressive punk, either discounting the punk scene altogether or confusing new wave apoliticality with violent right-wing images. The Reagan era, which had spawned the desperate youth scene, had no room in its mythology for a new countercultural underground.” Because this strain was overlooked by cultural analysts, it is important to recover this political strain and ask: What sort of politics did these youth articulate? And how did they play themselves out within the wider culture of Reagan’s America and the overall developments of the corporate market and the commodification of youth culture during the twentieth century?²⁶

DIY Politics and the Formation of Youth Subcultures

Reagan’s use of the mass media in his renewed celebration of America led young people to another political tenet of the DIY faith: the independent search for information outside the influence of the corporate mass media, or what one high school student called the quest to “find out information for [our]selves.” The act of becoming independent from the influence of corporate culture—creating a community of robust producers—required, for some, a need for alternative political discussion. Protesting the seeming apathy of many young people during the 1980s and the “McInformation” of the Reagan Era, members of this

burgeoning youth subculture decided to create spaces in which to pursue alternative education around political issues. In doing this, they widened the conception of politics beyond the activities associated with centralized forms of power (i.e., lobbying for legislation) in order to include learning and information gathering in local settings. Leading this pursuit was the organization Positive Force, originally started in Nevada. Soon after the Nevada group formed, chapters spread to Chicago and Washington, D.C.²⁷

Started in 1984, primarily by Nevada teenagers (many of them a part of this overall subculture), Positive Force focused on raising the political awareness of high school youth. As one organizer explained, “One of the things that . . . Positive Force is about is getting kids in school aware of what’s going on in the world.” The Nevada group aimed to put together a “thriving activist community” by nurturing collective political education. The young people in Nevada who formed Positive Force worked with previously established, non-profit organizations—including pacifist, anti-nuclear, and anti-intervention groups—to educate themselves. The Positive Force chapter that organized in Washington, D.C., also began as an attempt to raise high school student awareness. They put on collective meetings within high schools around issues of nuclear war, the spread of homelessness during the Reagan Era, and the history of U.S. intervention in Central America. In addition, this organization put on benefit shows and other performances like Rock Against Reagan and the Alternatives Festival which often raised funds for progressive non-profit organizations and which became forums for ideas—via literature tables and speeches by the representatives of organizations—among young punks attending these shows. In effect, these activists tried to *politicize* the youth culture out of which they had gained their first awareness of social issues.²⁸

Due to the typical young age of the participants (though there was no age limit in any of these groups), they often used high schools as places to meet and discuss political issues. But the relation to the high school was strained, to say the least. Students organizing a peace group in one school had to stage a “sit-in” to protest the administration’s ban on political meetings. This adversarial relationship was relatively typical. There were often good reasons for it. For instance, the Supreme Court, in a conservative mid-1980s decision, ruled that high school administrators could have final edit on school newspapers, further limiting the freedom of student expression. And in rebelling against local authorities and the conservative leanings of the Supreme Court, most young punks believed high school life in general was repressive and conformist. Often they resorted to pranks and put out subversive “underground” newspapers which mocked school officials (one at Barry Goldwater High School in Glendale, Arizona, described imaginary torture techniques used by the principal of the school against unwieldy students). But more importantly, as they rejected the corporate media, so too they rejected the high school as a place for information seeking. They searched for alternative politics outside the confines of school.²⁹

If these young people lived in a large city or college town, they often found political consciousness in the remnants of the New Left, manifested most clearly in the protest politics of the 1980s. After numerous defeats in the late-1960s and early-1970s, the New Left did not entirely collapse (as some accounts describe it) but scattered into issue-oriented protest organizations that tried to oppose the conservative ascendancy of the 1980s. This included everything from mainstream (though politically independent) protest groups such as SANE and the Nuclear Freeze organization to more radical direct action organizations which staged civil disobedience. Though these remnants of the New Left successfully brought mass attention to issues of nuclear war and power and challenged Reagan's intervention in Central America (or at least helped provoke the increased use of covert operations instead of out-and-out war), they became issue-based and often lacked any overarching vision or proactive policy solutions. Nonetheless, they were the only viable protest options that existed during the 1980s, and many young punks threw themselves into traditional protest marches against Reagan's militarization of American society. This culminated in numerous protests against nuclear testing in Nevada and the Great Peace March when a group of protesters crossed the United States in order to create a "broad-based citizens movement to bring about the end of the nuclear arms race." This event was widely reported in many punk zines.³⁰

Just as important as protests against nuclear war were those against U.S. intervention in Central America—especially Nicaragua and El Salvador. Political punk zines constantly protested U.S. aid to the Contras (the counter-revolutionary forces in Nicaragua) and support of the El Salvadorean government (both policies adamantly defended by the Reagan Administration). Many youth made a connection between the general anti-corporate attitudes in their music scene and the multinational corporate interests which, they believed, had great influence on American foreign policy. If they rejected corporations domestically, these young people rejected them at the international level as well. Punk kids engaged in the traditional paths of protest—including letter writing and mass protests. Trying to sway their political leaders to change foreign policy became a primary means of 1980s protest within this youth subculture.³¹

The same spirit that rejected traditional (i.e., corporate) and mainstream music tended to reject traditional and mainstream protest styles. The experience of creating one's own culture led to the idea of *directly engaging* in political expression. Hence, trying to affect the decisions of representative political leaders paled to the idea of direct and decentralized political action. Protest marches were too placid for youthful rebels, and lines of orderly picketers failed to reflect their anger. Instead, these young people wanted to "cultivate . . . spontaneity" and their "sense of play" even when it came to protest. Though they thought of themselves as breaking new ground, these young people simply renewed the legacy of radical protest from the 1960s—such as the "guerilla theater" of the Yippies and others. This ethic culminated, during the 1980s, in spontaneous and more aggressive protests known as "War Chest Tours," actions that made more

mainstream activists uncomfortable. Protest participants performed “die-ins” at headquarters of corporations that manufactured weaponry or banks that supported military dictators. This act consisted of protesters falling to the ground in mock mass death, often throwing fake “fall-out” in the air (typically baby powder or stardust) as they fell and, in the process, blockading the entrances of corporate headquarters or the streets they occupied. During the 1980s, they used this tactic at the 1984 Democratic Convention in San Francisco. As one story in a San Francisco newspaper (reprinted in *Maximum RocknRoll*) explained: “The punkers, in torn T-shirts and polychromatic hair styles, are a relatively new force on the political scene, part of a new generation of protesters who prefer street theater and spontaneous action to marching with placards.” This was not a new form of protest, but it certainly challenged the peace movement of the 1980s. For by this time, peace marches and protests had become normalized, a part of politics as usual.³²

This independent protest style showed up again in the Shadow Project where young people painted shadows on walls and sidewalks, in an attempt to create a sense of surprise in those who saw them and to symbolize what would be left behind after a nuclear war (they also practiced political graffiti—another aspect shared with the rap subculture of the time). It also appeared in protests against South African apartheid. Besides die-ins at banks that invested in South Africa, young people in Washington, D.C., staged “Punk Percussion Protests” outside of the South African embassy where they pounded on drums to make their anger known. Other types of “guerrilla-theater” style protests emerged—including throwing fake blood on the windows of fur stores or posing as fanatical Christians and mocking anti-abortion protesters. Though marked by controversy and conflict, some organizers tried to tie these new styles of protest together into one day of mass action. Called “No Business As Usual Day” (N.B.A.U., April 29, 1985), protests were held against the escalation of the arms race and the possibility of World War III. Though typically small in size, die-ins and War Chest Tours occurred on N.B.A.U. day in Michigan, Atlanta, D.C., San Francisco, Chicago, and in other areas.³³

As some saw it, though, this spirit of “direct action” and spontaneous protest could be practiced best in everyday, private rather than public life. Personal life became, for many young people, a more authentic realm in which to express political beliefs, a place uncorrupted by the demands of public life or political compromise. By expressing their outrage in daily activities, young activists felt they confirmed their commitment to social change more than by writing letters to Congress members or taking part in periodic public protests. Punk zines constantly published the 1-800 numbers of right wing organizations (especially Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority), encouraging their readers to call and waste the organization’s money by either hanging up or rambling on—cleverly turning the public outreach programs of these organizations against them. To oppose Reagan’s reinstatement of compulsory Selective Service registration (perhaps one of the most obvious signs of military preparation during the 1980s), many young

punks refused to register and counseled others to do the same. Some became interested in policies by which people could—following the principle of conscientious objector status during wartime—direct their taxes solely to peaceful purposes and away from Reagan’s military build-up. The hope to make politics into a personal set of activities was best captured in “boycotts” against corporations which had pernicious policies. Knowing the growing purchasing power of young people, zines published long lists of corporations with bad track records and encouraged young people to boycott their products, raising the connections between rebelling against corporate culture and the politics of personal protest. In addition, many became vegetarians, arguing that meat-eating was inherently violent and ultimately unnecessary. In all of these activities, this youth subculture made clear that *lived life* was the clearest expression of a person’s protest against social and political ills—especially the ways in which corporate culture had taken over everyday life. Direct action and anarchism stressed *lifestyle* politics, a domain over which someone could possess full control.³⁴

The World of Ideas: Searching Beyond Corporate Power

Around all of these activities swirled a set of ideas—a pastiche of views that never quite formed a coherent philosophy. If there was any philosophical consequences to the DIY spirit of this youth subculture, it was a critique of spectatorship, apathy, and passivity and an embrace of what Randolph Bourne once called the “experimental life.” They strove for a model life and personal identity of active engagement and personal change. Since these youth had been involved in a robust community of cultural producers, they celebrated an engaged and independent life. Based on this outlook, some participants asked a provocative question: what could explain the apathy that they rebelled against? Why, they asked, were so many other youth passive in the face of a bogus corporate culture or political injustice? Though some stressed direct repression that often marked the conservative era of the 1980s and was perhaps best captured in police shutting down shows and the Parental Music Resource Center’s crack-down on the political punk band, the Dead Kennedys (leading to a court trial on counts of obscenity), others saw something more subtle. Not surprisingly, many pointed their fingers at corporate culture and advertising. After all, this generation had been bombarded by advertising at an early age, more than previous generations, and the 1980s witnessed the emergence of the culture industry’s boldest attempt to target youth—MTV (to which the Dead Kennedys responded with the song: “MTV Get Off the Air!”). When young people at times tried to make sense of apathy and conformity, they simply argued that television had “brainwashed” people (a constant refrain in political zines during the 1980s). But sometimes, they drew up a more sophisticated understanding of corporate mass culture. *Going Under*, an Ann Arbor, Michigan, zine sold at “schools and concerts,” as its editors explained, published articles on mall culture. Sounding like Frankfurt School theorists, one young writer claimed: “The shopping mall

embodies a creeping sameness conquering diversity bit by bit.” There was even some interest (though only among the most heady of the bunch) in the obscure French theory of Situationism (which derived from a small set of intellectuals interested in Marxist theories of “reification” as well as avant-garde writing). Some zines used terminology like “society of the spectacle” to explain mass apathy in advanced industrial societies—arguing that a reified world of commodities put citizens into a stupor. Though this theory never prevailed within the DIY youth subculture, it signified a search for explanation of social and historical issues typically examined only by academics and intellectuals.³⁵

Another contributing factor of apathy was found in the history of the left and social movements in America (or in the abuses of this history by others). Though they might not have had a great deal of historical knowledge in general, many young people stressed a generational perspective, having heard stories about the activist generation that preceded them (often from the mass media). At times, they expressed a hatred for hippies and the 1960s rhetoric of “peace and love,” since it did not suit their anger (the D.C. band, the Teen Idles, had a song with the refrain, “I’ll be Grateful when You’re Dead”—a pun on the hippie band, the Grateful Dead). But what they hated most was the popular culture depiction of the “sell-out” and cooptation of hippies. Young punks noted stories about the ex-Yippie activist Jerry Rubin holding chic parties at Studio 54; some believed that all that remained of previous countercultural rebellions were images of 1960s protests and substanceless style (long hair and tie-dyes).

Other young punks actually identified with the ideals of the protest movements of the 1960s and bemoaned their decline or “mellowing out,” as one zine writer called it. In the words of Seven Seconds, a punk band from Nevada, their goal was to “succeed where the hippies had failed.” As one zine writer put it, “As far as I can see, the only good that a once very rebellious generation chickening out does is make room for another possibly more rebellious generation to act.” Though these young people had ties to New Left remnants, they, at times, took part in the mainstream culture’s general amnesia, believing that the 1960s had simply died a whimpering death, collapsing into the apathy they noticed around them. When at their best, though, they tried to challenge the recent abuses of history by the popular media, such as an overemphasis on hippie sell-outs that ignored those who remained committed to their ideals. After all, the same mass media that had over-reported the excesses of Jerry Rubin was reporting that most punk kids were killer Nazis. Having resisted the corporate media in other ways, these young punks called into question its superficial treatment of previous oppositional rebels.³⁶

The search for an alternative form of politics, one in opposition to the conservative ascendancy of the time, made it necessary to come up with some sort of positive vision of politics as opposed to merely protesting. Unfortunately, there was not very much in this vein, and when it took place, it was vague and spotty. At times, the critique of Reagan’s militarism led to a call for more social spending on welfare programs as they seemed to lean towards democratic

socialism. But the anti-authoritarian (and anti-statist) strain of this subculture's political thinking checked this tendency. This subculture could probably *never* have produced a coherent vision of political change, nor did it necessarily want to do so. For the most part, as any examination of 1980s political zines makes clear, the central outlook among young politicians was a left-leaning anarchism, a vague hope for decentralized communitarianism (versus radical libertarian individualism). Anarchy for these youth, as one of them pointed out, meant "cooperation" not chaos, that is, creating the sort of cooperative community of independent producers and zine writers that had flourished in the 1980s. At their best, these members of this young subculture fit within a general lineage of American radicalism that called for a "cooperative commonwealth" that was both decentralized and egalitarian. But even their best could rarely overcome their failures.³⁷

The Limits of Youth Rebellion and the Power of the Corporate Market

This politicized youth subculture reached its height from 1984 to 1986. At this time, Positive Force chapters were forming, and concerts like Rock Against Reagan and the Alternatives Festival along with benefit concerts for political organizations grew popular. Additionally, the protest methods of War Chest Tours and Die-Ins were proliferating, culminating in No Business As Usual Day. Numerous political punk zines were founded at this time, and in the back pages of any zine could be found the names and contacts for many others. It seemed that this subculture was going places. One older observer recalled his memories of 1984-85 with a special emphasis on San Francisco (which was clearly the capital of this youth subculture, with D.C. following suit): "Many of the bands involved had been criss-crossing America with a traveling road show of culture and politics called Rock Against Reagan. On the airwaves and in print, the *Maximum RocknRoll* gang had been reporting on [these events] and at the same time galvanizing a new youth movement." By the mid-1980s, many of the activists and zine writers within this subculture were hopeful that more was to come. By the late-1980s, though, things had changed—for the worse in their minds.³⁸

At this time, many young political activists and punks came smack up against the limits of the youth subculture they had helped spawn. Though much of their rebellion grounded itself in the independent production of culture, many young punks were more enamored with style—with certain haircuts (mohawks, buzz cuts, hair dye, etc.), clothes, and musical style. Though style was not *everything* for this youth subculture, it still operated as a traditional means—often a short-cut—of self-definition and membership demarcation (especially for recent "converts"). If anything, style often conflicted with the other values of this youth subculture, and the most astute members recognized this. Style helped some members create a sense of collective demarcation. And as society grew increas-

ingly conservative and as the mass media treated them as hoodlums at best, subculture style helped young punks to draw into themselves, rather than trying to challenge their own culture and political system. As one of the best (and few) histories of 1980s political punk put it: “Hardcore punk took on a stance of encapsulation, growling and sneering not only at obvious neophytes and outsiders, but also at its own veterans.” Because of this, the punk subculture became increasingly exclusionary—setting itself apart from the rest of society.³⁹

Nonetheless, this tendency did not go unchallenged. Some of the more perceptive young people became aware of this inherent limitation of subcultures, the tendency to become obsessed with self-demarkation more than anything else. In the late-1980s, one anarchist zine explained the “suicide” of the punk movement this way: “It was because Punk was, cultural [*sic*] and psychologically, a throwback to exclusionary social groups. Most punks did not want more people to be punks, because it would dilute their self-conscious status as social outcasts.” Even worse, some young people noticed growing conformity within their subculture during the late-1980s—a hardening and simplifying rather than a growth in the rebellion. The music scene seemed to be dominated by what one zine writer called “sid vicious clones.” Instead of believing in ideals, activism, or debate, more young people seemed drawn solely towards *style*—a “look” or way of dressing or playing music that was devoid of any further meaning. Of course, this fear of punk becoming a mere fad had been around for quite some time, but in the late-1980s it most certainly crescendoed and related directly back to wider changes in American society and culture. In 1988, Sammy Blue, in an article entitled, “Do-It-Yourself Punk,” declared: “Punk has become fashion.” More and more young people saw destructive behavior within music scenes, including drunkenness, macho violence, and, less destructively but no less annoying, superficial fashionism and the commodification of youth rebellion itself.⁴⁰

More than previous countercultures, this one recognized the limits placed upon it by the form of consumer capitalism it rebelled against, precisely because it began self-consciously as rebellion against corporate culture. By the mid-to-late-1980s, numerous zine writers were talking about the cooptation of punk rock music, citing overpriced shows in big venues as evidence. One writer, commenting on the “selling out of the underground music scene,” explained: “I despise anyone who dares to try to capitalize on what was so carefully built, maintained, and preserved for so many years.” Having watched punk bands become more like traditional rock stars, this author glanced back at the history of youth culture—something that was rarely done in these circles—and concluded pessimistically: “From Elvis Presley to the Rolling Stones to the Sex Pistols, youth dissatisfaction has been manipulated and exploited.” If reduced to *style*, any form of rebellion could be easily marketed and sold to a mass audience, including punk. Recognizing this, this writer saw no reason to remain involved in the youth subculture to which he had pledged so much of his time. He saw a clear choice, one seen by many other politically minded punks during

the late-1980s: “I must kill either social conscience or music. I prefer to kill music as it always has been a passive vehicle for mindless entertainment, what with its lack of individuality of late.” Since stylized rebellion seemed empty, the writer, among others, chose political opposition. To the writer and others, the limits of youth culture and rebellion within the context of consumer capitalism had been reached.⁴¹

It is no coincidence that this outlook coalesced with the rise of what was called “alternative rock.” As Gina Arnold points out, smaller, independent bands either broke up or broke bigger (through corporate record contracts) at alarming rates in 1987. Following suit, bands with clear connections to the punk subculture of the 1980s became headlining acts at increasingly large venues. Jane’s Addiction and the Pixies—due to their record contracts—got wider radio play than previous bands had. In 1989, Lookout Records (the Gilman Street Project’s record company) announced release of a new record by Green Day, a band on the verge of mass fame. At the same time, *Flipside* did a big story on the Offspring, another band posed for corporate success. Its 1989 poll also declared Nirvana one of the best new bands. By the late-1980s, it was clear that certain bands—but not the subcultural institutions themselves—could potentially break big and win corporate backing. A style of youthful rebellion—which eventually, in the popular mind, was whittled down to the hip look of flannel shirts, nose rings, and the loud guitar sounds of grunge bands—was soon marketed to a mass youth audience. What was perhaps most amazing to so many participants, even if it should not have been, was the speed by which corporations marketed this style. The musical sounds which used to be connected to independent sources of distribution and promotion (i.e., independent shows, record companies, and zines) were suddenly severed and brought into the corporate world of music production. The political strain of punk traced out here was no longer evident either. The only thing left was a style of music and dress, and these things could easily be marketed by the same corporations this youth subculture of the 1980s rebelled against.⁴²

Why did this happen and why were young people incapable of doing very much about it? Much of it had to do with the larger history of subcultures in America. Previous subcultures had a stronger connection to the world of critical ideas than did this 1980s youth subculture. The most prominent subculture of the early-twentieth century—in New York’s Greenwich Village—formed out of the activities of young writers and artists. Max Eastman and the small magazine, *The Masses*, were typical of this counterculture: experimental in lifestyle but deeply intellectual. Ideas and debates were central to its existence. It too celebrated the rebellious spirit of youth, as witnessed in the ideas of the Greenwich Village bohemian Randolph Bourne, which glowed with the praise of youthful energy. But at the same time, it preserved space for serious intellectual inquiry and debate. This intellectual spirit persevered until the 1950s, a time when America’s countercultural rebels were still predominantly writers, intellectuals, and high culture artists (as Dan Wakefield has shown in his recollection of New

York City during the 1950s and as the Beats make evident). But during the 1950s, rock n' roll hit the scene. Afterwards, rebellion became more closely associated with the loud sounds of this music. In the late-1960s, the New Left—made up mostly of young intellectuals who were often clean-cut and straight—merged with the hippie rebellion. The line between radicalism and subculture completely blurred at this moment. This late-1960s merger, which has been documented by Todd Gitlin and others, meant intellectual radicalism started to decline or, just as importantly, gravitated towards academia. Subcultures divorced themselves from serious intellectual cultivation, something that was increasingly seen as “square” and lacking passion. From the late-1960s onwards, rebellion was now about sounds and beat, not sophisticated analysis of current society or culture. Punk stood at the end of that development.⁴³

The limits of this became especially clear in hardcore music with its blitz-like speed and shotgun lyrics. The youth of the 1980s sped up rebellion to a frenetic pace, further hampering sophistication and analysis. Of course they did this, in part, to resist cooptation, becoming intentionally difficult in order to resist easy access. The results were increasingly rapid protest songs that barely skimmed the surface of the political topics broached. Typical was this song about the nuclear arms race by Siege, a band in Boston: “Arms Race/Disgrace/Armageddon, Armageddon (Chorus)/Peaceful Claims/Yet Bombs Are Aimed/Repeat Chorus/Arms are Poised/World Destroyed/Repeat Chorus/Nation of Pain/Nation Slain/Repeat Chorus.” This superficial treatment of issues—a general whittling down of analysis to sheer rage—also manifested itself in the world of independent ideas found in political zines. Ideas seemed to be shouted at readers in short barrages instead of being thought out or fully developed. For instance, the contradiction between the cooperativism/communitarianism/social welfare strain of thought among young punks and the prevalence of anarchist/individualist/libertarian ideals was never squarely faced (of course, some would argue that this was an inheritance from previous bohemian subcultures like *The Masses* thinkers of yesteryear who tried to balance socialism and individual liberation). Ideas were simply amalgamated and thrown together (like the collage aesthetics found in zines). The counterculture was no longer a place for thoughtful dialogue but simply angst-ridden expression and rapid-fire protest lyrics. This was the end result of the close association between subcultural rebellion and rock music, already begun in the 1960s.⁴⁴

The way young punks interpreted the past also hampered their ability to build a viable and sustainable opposition movement to both corporate culture and conservative politics. These young people had little history to draw upon as a resource for hope or for understanding their predicament. Many young punks understood the protestors and rebels before them, including the more politically minded and intellectual elements within the New Left, in purely generational terms. Seen as baby boomers whose days had passed, the activists and organizations of the New Left did not merit serious attention in the minds of many punks. The idea that something could be built upon, or at least learned from, failed to

cross their minds. The 1960s simply belonged to the generation that lived through that decade. Of course, there were baby boomer activists who believed and wrote as if the 1960s *did* belong to them—what has been called “possessive memory.” Many punks picked up on this and simply bemoaned the “hippies” who had supposedly sold out (even those punks who were sympathetic to hippie ideals). The past was seen as antiquated, something that could teach these young rebels next to nothing. Punks could not see any traditions that informed their work; they saw only dead residues unworthy of serious attention.⁴⁵

Just as important, those remnants of the New Left that were still around during the 1980s offered very little substantive vision for young punks to develop. By this time, the activist left focused on a myriad of single issues (i.e., nuclear power, the arms build-up, intervention in Central America, etc.) and became solely reactive against the conservative ascendancy of the Reagan administration. The left had not only splintered into an assortment of social movements, it lacked any overarching and proactive vision of what it wanted from American politics. As Van Gosse has put it, the activist struggles around Central America seemed, at times, “inchoate . . . and episodic, from vote to vote, or event to event.” All of the movements of the 1980s articulated what was wrong with American politics but not necessarily what protestors thought was best for America’s future. This created a low level of paranoia among young political activists, since they were constantly reacting against the latest move of the Reagan administration, be it a new foreign policy initiative or a cut-back in domestic resources. To the mind of a young political activist, the world seemed a barrage of new right-wing developments waiting to be opposed in protest. Rarely did politics seem to be about giving voice to positive alternatives or proactive policies. After all, this was a time when liberalism as a public philosophy started to fall into a state of exhaustion. If this did not create paranoia, it certainly led to “burn-out” at the least.⁴⁶

With this wider historical context in mind, it is easier to assess where this youth subculture stumbled and why it failed to counteract its self-perceived decline. It also becomes easier to assess the limits of youth rebellion at the end of the twentieth century with a corporate and consumer culture. This youth subculture tried to weld together two traditions in the history of radicalism: the cultural shock provoked by avant-garde rebellion and the protest tradition of the 1960s. This tendency to connect the avant-garde and the political also had its historical predecessors in the much more intellectually oriented movements of Dadaism and Surrealism. Indeed, protest in the 1980s could simply become another form of “*épater le bourgeois*,” or shocking the middle-class culture that alienated young punks. Attempts at communicating political anger were marred by a confrontational ethic and a tendency towards “encapsulation.” This was best seen in Die-Ins and War Chest Tours—symbolic acts that often confused or simply entertained bystanders who witnessed them. As Barbara Epstein has shown, the direct action movement of the 1980s—which drew many young punks and was one of the left’s primary remnants—tended to lack far-sighted political vision

and became more obsessed with building community among its members. These features represented a general descent of the American left into theatrical politics—and sometimes even therapeutic politics (activities meant to make activists feel better)—during the 1980s. When protest politics became obsessed with shock and provocation, it became increasingly superficial and exclusionary. In certain ways, this youth subculture's politics mirrored the larger tendency towards the empty, symbolic politics of the late-twentieth century, ironically captured in Reagan's tele-screen presidency. The symbolic intent of confrontational protests like Die-Ins had more in common with negative campaign advertising and vacuous commercials than with substantive protest politics and proactive policy. Both relied less on rational appeal and more on symbolic provocation.⁴⁷

But the biggest tension of all was between the formation of a culture of robust producers, in which young people saw themselves acting publicly as creators of a common life, and an emphasis on personal commitment and lifestyle. As I have argued, subcultural theorists miss the *practices* of cultural production that members engage in. This essay has shown how this set of activities provided young people with a spirit of independence and opposition. Nonetheless, subculture theorists are right in seeing style and the use of commodities and signs as a major means of postmodern rebellion. This tendency manifested itself in the 1980s subculture's increasing focus on alternative lifestyles. By stressing the authenticity of *personal* commitment to social change in the activities of vegetarianism or boycotts, private and personal behavior were often elevated above political and collective activity. When stress was placed on lifestyle practices—on what one ate, wore, or generally consumed—young people idealized individual power and influence, turning politics into lifestyle choice and lifestyle choice alone. This subculture slipped away from what Raymond Williams has called “oppositional” cultural rebellion towards “alternative” rebellion—away from engaging in projects that tried to change the terms of society and towards those that simply manifested a different set of parallel practices.⁴⁸

For instance, at the Gilman Street project, organizers instituted a policy in which audience members could tell the bands that performed why their lyrical content was racist or sexist. This foreshadowed the political correctness of the 1990s which policed personal behavior to such an extent as to become puritanical and almost reactionary (or, at the least, overevaluated personal behavior). The Positive Force D.C. collective also became more inner-focused during the late-1980s. Telling its history during the late-1980s, a report in *Maximum RocknRoll* traced out how the group started in the mid-1980s by doing teach-ins and demonstrations but was now more content with “living the life” within a communal house (this expression perhaps epitomized a shift away from oppositional to alternative rebellion). The organization now stressed personal behavior and what its leader called an “ascetic punk purity” focusing on vegetarianism and abstinence from drugs and alcohol. Though the aim here was to find a way for young people to get directly involved in social change by changing their personal behavior, this stress actually limited the range of political action by

making public activity beyond personal lifestyle seem inauthentic, impersonal, and ineffective. When change was seen as “beginning with oneself,” as Positive Force leaders declared, interpersonal persuasion and public activity seemed remote. The “beautiful soul” (to use Hegel’s term) free of external pressure and prejudice stood apart from the rest of society, assured of its high-minded purpose and sanctity. From being an opposition—in contention with the dominant form of culture and politics at the time—this youth subculture settled for becoming an “alternative” *style* of being.⁴⁹

In this vein, a larger change within America’s consumer culture needs attention, one that relates directly back to this youth subculture. By the late-1980s and early-1990s, corporate advertisers had caught onto the idea of marketing to youthful rebels (who would eventually become known as Generation X). No longer driven by a homogeneous view of their audience (as white, middle class, and conformist, like those depicted in *Leave it to Beaver* re-runs), the new advertisers embraced nose rings, hip irony, and a shallow form of cultural alienation in their own advertisements. As Russell Berman has remarked, the culture industry—Hollywood and television especially—has generated an “artificial alterity . . . , as a show of pluralism, and as an effort to counteract the deadly sameness that advanced capitalism constantly produces.” Within this context, rebellion which focused on cultural expression and lifestyle politics alone could not claim to be terribly radical or “oppositional.” The hope for finding an alternative identity among the youth activists of the 1980s also wound up feeding into new forms of marketing, especially that of the “alternative lifestyle” industry (the Body Shop, body piercing, etc.). The youth subculture rebellion of the 1980s came smack up against this new ethos of corporate culture. The consumer culture that they rebelled against wound up embracing rebellion itself, much like what happened to the earlier 1960s counterculture.⁵⁰

So, in the end, did punk matter? I would answer yes, with a number of crucial qualifications. Young punks made clear, through their criticisms and activities, that corporate culture engendered only passive leisure. These youth showed that much of the pleasure of culture comes from its production and communal sharing. At the same time, though, these young people could not *transform* the corporate domination of culture. This would have required much more than creating alternative networks, it would probably have required some sort of public policy that proactively nurtured local cultural production, something these punks never thought about. When these youth did come to recognize politics, they often took their activism in the direction of style, confrontation, or purely personal protest. Once again, this cut them off from making a larger impact. A great deal of their politics became, strangely enough, apolitical.

Many of the youth involved in this subculture recognized the limits of their own project and decided to drop cultural rebellion and instead embrace political struggle. They had essentially re-learned a lesson taught by subculture theorists of the 1970s, that stylized rebellion does little to challenge the structures of society and politics. But at the least, they could allude to a set of institutions and

practices that might have prevented their rebellion from going the way it did. They had been a part of a community of robust cultural producers, something ignored by cultural theorists who only examine style. They also recognized that their rebellion had alerted them to the intersections of politics and culture in the wider world—seen most clearly in Reagan’s presidency. They saw a connection between the sincerity they hoped to achieve in their music, shows, zines, and alternative networks and an oppositional politics that would challenge the terms of politics and society on a larger level. That recognition did not prevent their rebellion from being marketed back to them as a style. But they did leave behind the hope that through the creation of independent culture and oppositional politics, America could be changed for the better. What this entails for the future remains to be seen.

Notes

The author would like to thank the following people in researching and writing this essay: Daniel Grobani, Sharon Cheslow, Stephen Duncombe, Joe Austin, the readers for *American Studies*, and especially Billie Aul who made sense of the Factsheet Five Collection at the New York State Library (Albany, New York). In addition, special thanks to Vicky Stone for making sure this manuscript made it across the tumultuous waters of Low’s Lake and for so much else.

1. On the figures on Nirvana’s album sales, see Gina Arnold, *Route 666: On the Road to Nirvana* (New York, 1993), 4. On Nirvana’s rise to fame in general, see Michael Azerrad, *Come as You Are: The Story of Nirvana* (New York, 1994).

2. Cobain quoted in Michael Azerrad, “Nirvana,” *Rolling Stone*, April 16, 1992, 97. Nirvana’s bassist, Chris Novoselic, also talked about listening to political punk during the 1980s: see Azerrad, *Come as You Are*, 52.

3. On Christian punks, see the zines, *Summer Fun*, *Boomerang*, and *Different Drummer: An Alternative Christian Music Zine*, in the Factsheet Five Collection. On G.G. Allin, see the report on him in the California fanzine, *Flipside*, Spring/Summer, 1988 (no pages). For an especially good selection of letters about the meaning of punk rock, see *Maximum RocknRoll*, July, 1987.

4. See “Class of 1984,” directed by Mark Lester (1982, Vestron Video). For a bit more sympathetic view of punk rockers in another movie-length drama, see “Suburbia,” directed by Penelope Spheeris (who had directed a documentary about the L.A. punk scene earlier) (1984, Vestron Video). On the “Chips” and “Quincy” episodes, see the letters to *Maximum RocknRoll* in the March, 1984 issue. See also, Larry Zbach, “Punks and the Mass Media” and Galen Young, “Punks on Film,” *Maximum RocknRoll*, February, 1985.

5. Stewart Home, *Cranked Up Really High: Genre Theory and Punk Rock* (Hove, England: CodeX, 1995), 69. In Home’s defense, his was a healthy reaction against the famous rock critic, Greil Marcus, whose over-determined theories of punk rock have been so popular. Marcus attributes far too much power to Situationism in his history of punk rock and ties together too many disparate themes. See his *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1989). Besides Home’s critique, see Chris Lehmann’s debunking of Marcus in “The Dustbin of Theory: Greil Marcus’s Hipster Historicism,” *The Baffler*, #8 (1996). On the critique of cultural theory as becoming too concerned with cultural reception rather than production, see Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (Chicago, 1997), 18-19. The irony of the punk scene can be gleaned from one of its most famous songs, “Kill the Poor” by the Dead Kennedys (whose name itself reflected irony).

6. On the difficulty of studying youth culture due to its local and undocumented character, see the helpful introductory essay by Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth Century America* (New York, 1998), 13. On “hardcore” music, see Bill Brown, “The Death of Hardcore,” *The Metro Times* (Detroit), October 26-November 1, 1983.

7. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London, 1979), p. 103. See also Mike Brake, *The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures; Sex and Drugs and Rock ‘n’ Roll*

(London, 1980); Dave Laing, *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock* (Philadelphia, 1985); Tricia Henry, *Break All Rules! Punk Rock and the Making of a Style* (Ann Arbor, 1989). For another treatment of the conformist and status quo outcome of youth cultures, see Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (Hampshire, England, 1977). My stress on culture as a process of production draws, in part, from Raymond Williams, *Problem in Materialism and Culture* (New York, 1980), 47-8.

8. For Paul Goodman's dissection of the Beats, see *Growing Up Absurd* (New York, 1960). For an interesting criticism of subculture theory and its British origins, see Douglas E. Foley, "Appendix A: A Performance Theory of Cultural Reproduction and Resistance," in *Learning Capitalist Culture* (Philadelphia, 1990). Though I do not agree with all of Foley's points, his "performance theory" provides an important corrective to the structuralist emphases of much European theory.

9. The Dils quoted in Peter Belsito and Bob Davis, *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (Berkeley, Calif., 1983), 81. On the youth make-up of local music scenes, one writer explained that "the most common reason" for bands to break up in Washington, D.C. was "because one or more of its members are heading off to college." Alan Keenan, "Angry Young Men," *The Washington Tribune* (Washington, D.C.), October 8-21, 1982, 12. On the widespread nature of music scenes, see, for instance, the fanzine, *Third Rail*, (Tulsa, Oklahoma) in the *Factsheet Five* Collection at the New York State Library in Albany, New York and the report on a Salt Lake City music scene in *Maximum RocknRoll*, November, 1985 (no pagination).

10. The three chords example is found in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming*, 280 but is set out within the much fuller context of DIY by Stephen Duncombe in his *Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (New York, 1997), 119. College radio advertisement in *R@D*, Number 35 (Factsheet Five Collection), no pagination.

11. Writer in *Third Rail*, # 15 (Factsheet Five Collection), no pagination; Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock N' Roll is Here to Pay* (Chicago, 1977), 87, 89. See also Marc Eliot, *Rockonomics: The Money Behind the Music* (New York, 1989). On *Rolling Stone*, see Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock N' Roll* (New York, 1981), 169-170. It should be noted that though Frith analyzes the corporate take-over of rock during the 1970s, he still believes that as a form of music, rock maintained an attachment to "authentic" expression. As we will see, the youth subculture I am studying here believed that corporate control inherently eradicated any authenticity in music.

12. Mark Crispin Miller, "Who Controls the Music," *The Nation*, August 25, 1997, 11; "Free the Media," *The Nation*, June 3, 1996, 9-15. On the CBS buy-out of Sony and the use of "Revolution" by Nike, see Mark Eliot, *Rockonomics*. On MTV's blurring of the line between music and advertising, see E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock* (New York, 1987), 12-13. I find Kaplan's reading of MTV's supposedly more rebellious side to reflect a wishful projection that is found in much of contemporary critical theory attempting to find rebellion in what should be understood solely as corporate and mass manufactured products. On the corporate nature of popular culture, see also Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston, 1983), chapter 2 and the more historical work of William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York, 1993).

13. Writer in *Third Rail*, #15 (Factsheet Five Collection), no pagination. It should be noted that the punk movement's desire to control alternative means of distribution showed how different it was from previous "do-it-yourself" trends like the "hobby" craze of the 1950s.

14. Quote on Institute from Pragmatic Malice comes from *Maximum RocknRoll* (hereafter abbreviated *MRR*), March, 1984 (no pagination). The quote on Dan from Northeastern Wisconsin comes from *MRR*, January-February, 1984. For shows in basements and homes, see the various letters in *MRR*, April-May, 1984 and the Eugene, Oregon report in *MRR*, May-June, 1985 as well as remarks about shows in people's homes in *Banned in D.C.: Photos and Anecdotes from the D.C. Punk Underground (79-85)*, edited by Cynthia Connolly, Leslie Clague, and Sharon Cheslow (Washington, DC: Sun Dog Propaganda, 1988), 21, 36, and elsewhere; on churches, see the Iowa City scene report in *MRR*, June, 1984; on community centers, see the San Francisco scene report, in *MRR*, August, 1984; on rented halls, see the Champaign-Urbana scene report, *MRR*, January, 1985; on bandshells in parks, see the Northern California scene report in *MRR*, September, 1986; on VFW headquarters shows, see the Iowa City scene report in *MRR*, May-June, 1985; on bowling lanes in Wisconsin, see *MRR*, September, 1984; on the use of a Mexican Patriotic Club in Chicago, see *MRR*, October, 1986. On "all ages shows," see the letter from Jon Sanborne in *MRR*, December, 1983 and Gina Arnold, *Route 666*, 110.

15. Ian MacKaye quoted in Gina Arnold, *Route 666*, 49. The other quote is found on 118. On the expenses of shows, see *Flipside*, #45. In the letter section, one writer describes the expense of security deposits for rented halls. This is not to deny that there were the equivalent of "stars" among this youth subculture—including MacKaye himself and the lead singer of the Dead Kennedy's, Jello Biafra.

16. On tape duplication, see *R@D*, #31, about the legality of tape duplication (in the Factsheet Five Collection) and *MRR*, October 1984 (letter section) and "How to Duplicate," *MRR*, July, 1985. On the story of Subpop, see Gina Arnold, *Route 666*, 154-155. On Dischord, see Arnold, 48-49. On Alternative Tentacles, see Peter Belsito and Bob Davis, *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (Berkeley, CA: The Last Gasp of San Francisco, 1983), 123. On R. Radical Records, see *MRR*, January-February, 1984. The SST slogan is from Arnold, p. 189. On "Pay No More Than," see *MRR*, September, 1984 (note that this method often did not work, since record stores simply covered up the "Pay No More Than" label). On college radio, see a story on how one station was forced to play major labels against its own wishes: *MRR*, March, 1986.

17. See Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*. Some of the anarchist bookstores in big cities included Wooden Shoe (Philadelphia), Impossible Books (Chicago), and Bound Together Books (San Francisco). Information on these stores can be gleaned from various issues of *Factsheet Five* (especially earlier numbers).

18. Ruth Schwartz quoted in Jeff Goldthorpe, "Interview with *Maximum RockRoll*," *Radical America* 18 (1984): 21. For examples of zines doing tape distribution, see *R@D*, #38 and *Issue #69* (from San Luis Obispo), various issues (both zines found in Factsheet Five Collection). On the Gilman Street Project, the best source is *MRR*, November, 1986 which has an in-depth description of this experiment. See also Craig O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk: More than Noise!* (San Francisco, AK Press, 1995), 50 and Jeff Goldthorpe, "Intoxicated Culture: Punk Symbolism and Punk Protest," *Socialist Review* 22 (1992): 56.

19. "The Future of Punk," *Daily Impulse* (San Diego), June-July, 1987, 8 (Factsheet Five Collection); "What the Hell is Punk?" *Roosevelt A-Word*, #6 (underground newspaper from Wheaton, Illinois found in FSF Collection).

20. Leader of YDC quoted in story reprinted in the fanzine, *Anti-Media*, #9 (February, 1986) (Factsheet Five Collection); the second quote comes from *MRR*, July, 1986; the third from *MRR*, February, 1987 (both found in the Washington scene report).

21. Letter from John Jankowski, *MRR*, January-February, 1984. Michelle Cali in *MRR*, September, 1986; Ian MacKaye in an interview with *Flipside*, Summer, 1988, no pagination. Or as the band, @ State of Mind, put it: the "anarchist/punk movement" must become more than "rhetoric [sic] ramblings and cheap entertainment . . ." Quoted in *Postwar*, May, 1986 (Factsheet Five Collection).

22. See especially Gary Wills, *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1987). On the Reagan era's politics in perspective of a broad framework, see Steven Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) and Frederick Siegel, *Troubled Journey: From Pearl Harbor to Ronald Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984).

23. Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years* (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 28. Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, The Movie* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 8-9. Sidney Blumenthal, "Reaganism and the Neokitsch Aesthetic," in Sidney Blumenthal and Thomas Byrne Edsall, eds., *The Reagan Legacy* (New York: Pantheon, 1988); Nicolaus Mills, ed., *Culture in an Age of Money* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 1990). On Nancy Reagan's inaugural dress, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Worst Years of Our Lives* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 192.

24. Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Alan Nadel, *Flatlining on the Field of Dreams: Cultural Narratives in the Films of President Reagan's America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 19 on the fact that Reagan watched two movies per weekend; Blumenthal, "Reaganism and the Neokitsch Aesthetic," 275 on "Dynasty." It is interesting to note that the popular front culture of the 1930s existed both in popular culture (the films of Frank Capra, for instance) but also in more grassroots cultural productions (sometimes funded directly by federal, WPA monies). On the popular front culture, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* (New York: Verso, 1996).

25. "The Future of Punk (Part Three)," *Daily Impulse*, October-November, 1987, p. 2 (Factsheet Five Collection). *Third Rail*, #23 (Factsheet Five Collection).

26. Spider Rainbow, "Beat, Hip, Punk," *Circle @*, #13 (mid-1980s, out of Atlanta, Georgia) (Factsheet Five Collection). For a contrarian perspective denying any political perspective on the part of punk rock, see Shane Williams, "Penned In," *Factsheet Five*, #9. Williams argues (26) that, "Punk politics are a web in a snarl of constructive and destructive attitudes with all kinds of goals in or out of mind."

27. High school student quoted in "Speakin' Out (Part One)," *S.P.E.W.*, #1, 4 (Factsheet Five Collection). On "McInformation," see *Lookout Magazine*, November, 1986 (no pagination, Factsheet Five Collection).

28. The reference to "activist community" is made in *MRR*, March, 1985. On the formation of Positive Force in Nevada in 1984, see *MRR*, December, 1984. That the majority of these youth were teenagers is quite clear from the report in *MRR*, March, 1985 (where the age of members is

listed). On Positive Force D.C., see *Off Center*, #1, 3 (fanzine in possession of the author). On Positive Force benefits, see *MRR*, January, 1987 and July, 1987. See also the largely dismissive but humorous article about Positive Force, D.C. by Todd Kliman, "Punk is Beautiful," *Washington Post Magazine*, December 9, 1990, 24-28, 44-46.

29. For the Students United For Peace "sit-in" see *S.P.E.W.*, #1 (Factsheet Five Collection). On the mocking nature of underground newspapers, see, for instance, the zine, *Amerikan Underdog* (1988) (found in Factsheet Five Collection, along with a newspaper story about this Glendale, Arizona paper). See also the *Roosevelt A-Word*, produced in Wheaton, Illinois at Wheaton Central High School (Factsheet Five Collection). On the Supreme Court ruling in favor of school administrations editing newspapers, see *R@D*, #41 (Factsheet Five Collection). See also the Supreme Court Ruling, *Hazelwood School District, et. al., v. Cathy Kuhlmeier, et. al.* (1988) and "The Student Press After Hazelwood," in *Banned in the Media*, ed. by Herbert Foerstel (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998).

30. Quote comes from *MRR*, January, 1986. See also *Anti-Media*, #11, April, 1986 (Factsheet Five Collection); issues of *Issue #69* (Factsheet Five Collection);

31. On the connection between anti-corporate attitudes and protests against foreign policy, see *The Peace Alternative*, #3 (Marietta, Georgia) (Factsheet Five Collection). On anti-intervention protests, see *Going Under*, #7, 1985 (Ann Arbor, Michigan) (Factsheet Five Collection); *Third Rail*, #7 (Factsheet Five Collection); the Pledge of Resistance reprinted in *Smash Apathy*, #9 (Fairlawn, N.J.) (Factsheet Five Collection); and *Primal Scream*, #1 (Longmont, Colorado) (Factsheet Five Collection).

32. "Do-It-Yourself Anarchy," *Daily Impulse*, February-March, 1986 (Factsheet Five Collection). *MRR*, August, 1984. Benefit shows with political bands were done for protesters who were arrested during War Zone Tours: see *MRR*, October, 1984.

33. On the Shadow Project, see *Daily Impulse*, August-September, 1985, where the illegal activities reported on are done by "punk affinity groups" (Factsheet Five Collection). On "Punk Percussion Protests," see *Truly Needy* (Washington, D.C.), 1985 issue (Factsheet Five Collection) and *MRR*, September, 1985. On No Business As Usual Day (NBAU), see *Circle @*, #12 (Factsheet Five Collection); *R@D*, #29 (Factsheet Five Collection); *Daily Impulse*, June-July, 1985 (Factsheet Five Collection); *Going Under*, #8, November, 1985 (Factsheet Five Collection); *The Peace Alternative*, #3 (Factsheet Five Collection); *MRR*, September, 1985.

34. On 1-800 numbers, see *Anti-Media*, #12, May, 1986 (Factsheet Five Collection as are all the following zines); "800 Number Fun," *Daily Impulse*, October-November, 1986; *Issue #69* (no issue number). On counseling against registering for the draft, see *R@D*, #41; *Anti-Media*, #10, March, 1986; *Daily Impulse*, April-May, 1985; and the article on the "Selective Slavery System," *Going Under*, #7, 1985. On conscientious objector status for tax payers, see *Subculture* (Hartford, Connecticut), 1987, 3. On boycotts, see *Anti-Media*, #6, November, 1985 (and subsequent issues); *Issue #69*, #11; *Primal Scream*, #2 (Summer, 1987). On vegetarianism, see *Anti-Media*, #5, October, 1985; on animal testing in general #12, May, 1986 and *Smash Apathy* (Fairlawn, New Jersey), #10.

35. *Going Under*, #10, February-March, 1986. For a critique of overt domination of power, see commentary on the Parents Music Resource Center and its relation to the Supreme Court ruling against freedom of expression in student newspapers in *R@D*, #41. On friendly treatments of Situationist theory, see the zine *Journey into Savagery* (Poughkeepsie, New York) and *Not Bored* (Buffalo, NY), both in Factsheet Five Collection. See also the article written by Bill Brown on the Situationist International in *MRR*, November, 1984.

36. *Anti-Media*, #6, November, 1985; Seven Seconds quote in *Lookout Magazine*, #18, June, 1986; "Return with Us Now to the Golden Age of Vietnam," *R@D*, #41.

37. For the critique of Reagan's militarism and calls for more social spending, see the zine, *Postwar* (out of Fullerton, CA), especially January, 1985 (Factsheet Five Collection). On the anti-authoritarian spirit of punk, see Craig O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk: More than Noise!!*, 12-13. On left communitarian anarchism, see the political spectrum set out in *Daily Impulse* (with libertarianism at the far right and anarchism at the far left): September-December, 1988, 3. On defining anarchism by stressing "cooperation" rather than "chaos," see *Going Under*, #9, January, 1986. On the idea of the "cooperative commonwealth" in American history, see, among others, John Thomas, *Alternative America: Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Adversary Tradition* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1983).

38. Lawrence Livermore reporting in *Lookout Magazine*, #18, June, 1986.

39. Jeff Goldthorpe, "Intoxicated Culture," 44.

40. Bill Meyers, "Death of Punk," *Daily Impulse/Point-Blank* (published some time in the late 1980s and Factsheet Five Collection along with its predecessor, *Daily Impulse*); *Third Rail*, #16, June, 1987; Sammy Blue, "Do-It-Yourself Punk," *S.P.E.W.*, #1, 11. For more on these themes, see *Flipside*, #55, Spring/Summer, 1988 in which one letter writer argues that punks turned too many people off, explaining, "You can't change society unless you work with society . . ." On a young punk's alienation from the macho side of this subculture, see *Primal Scream*, #1, 1987, no pagination.

41. The first quotes come from *Smash Apathy*, #4; the last quote comes from *Smash Apathy*, #10 (published some time around 1988). For more evidence of this sentiment, consult *Lookout Magazine* and then see how the Gilman Street Project's end is announced and then followed up by a story on the sell-out of Seven Seconds, one of the political punk bands of the mid-1980s. These reports come from MRR, October, 1988 and May, 1989.

42. Gina Arnold, *Route 666*: 124-134. On Green Day, see Lookout Records, Fall, 1989 catalogue (*Lookout Magazine* general folder in Factsheet Five Collection). Green Day here are described as led by "two East Bay High School students." For the story on the Offspring, see *Flipside*, #61 (probably 1989). For a good recent documentary about this process, see the movie "Hype" about the Seattle punk rock scene.

43. On the counterculture of the early twentieth century, see Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Robert Humphrey, *Children of Fantasy: The First Rebels of Greenwich Village* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978); and Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). On youth, see Randolph Bourne, "Youth" and "The Experimental Life," in *Randolph Bourne: The Radical Will, Selected Writings, 1911-1918*, ed. Olaf Hansen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). On the counterculture and intellectual rebellion of the 1950s, see Dan Wakefield, *New York in the 1950s* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992). On the merger of the New Left and the subculture of hippies, I rely upon Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), 213-241; James Miller, "Democracy is in the Streets": *From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 306-13. On the academic nature of radicalism after the 1960s, see Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), chapters 5-7.

44. The lyrics from Siege are found in MRR, July, 1984. On the inability of 1980s youth to think through some of the contradictions of its positions, see Craig O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk: More than Noise!!*, 77.

45. For more on this point, see Kevin Mattson, "Talking About My Generation and the Left," *Dissent*, Fall, 1999, 58-63; "Rick Perlstein, "Who Owns the Sixties?" *Lingua Franca*, May/June, 1996, 30-7; and L.A. Kauffman, "Emerging from the Shadow of the Sixties," *Socialist Review*, October-December, 1990, 13.

46. Van Gosse, "'The North American Front': Central American Solidarity in the Reagan Era," in Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker, eds., *Reshaping the US Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s* (New York: Verso, 1988), 39. This collection of essays is extremely helpful in understanding the American left during this period.

47. Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). My interpretation here differs from Epstein's in that I stress the more negative side of these protest movements. Though Epstein recognizes the communitarian (and sometimes even the therapeutic element) of these movements, she sees in them much more promise in renewing an effective left than I do.

48. On the difference between oppositional and alternative rebellion, see Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, 41-2 (thanks to the readers at *American Studies* for suggesting this work).

49. On the Gilman Project and the ability of audience members to ferret out politically incorrect behavior on the part of band members, see MRR, November, 1986. On Positive Force, see MRR, November, 1989 and on "ascetic punk purity," see Todd Kliman, "Punk is Beautiful," 28.

50. Russell Berman, *Modern Culture and Critical Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 89. See also the recent collection of essays by the writers at the *Baffler* for more on this point. Thomas Frank and Matt Weiland, eds., *Commodify Your Dissent* (New York: Norton, 1997). See also W. Russell Neuman, *The Future of the Mass Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).