PUNK

By Jon Savage

I: INTRO

I'm a street-walking cheetah with a heartfull of napalm…

It starts with a feeling.

I'm the runaway son of the nuclear A-bomb….

A feeling so intense and so out there that it struggles to make itself heard.

I am the world's forgotten boy…

These screams of rage fall on deaf ears in the woozy hedonism of the early seventies. The singer is: too dumb, too blank, too violent. A dose of Amphetamine among the Quaaludes. He cuts himself on stage, flings himself into the audience….

Sick boy, sick boy, learning to be cruel…

..trying to get a reaction, any reaction. Anything but this boredom. Anything but this stoner ooze that avoids the issue of what it is to be young, outcast, and ready to murder a world.

Is there concrete all around or is it in my head?

The bloom is off youth culture as the promises of the sixties fade. The charismatic dark stars of the early seventies, David Bowie, Alice Cooper, catch this mood but by mid decade they are too successful and too old - sixties people themselves – to embody this feeling. They can write as observers but they aren't *inside* it.

I'm getting tired of being alone….

The secret heart of pop culture shifts from the country to the inner city. This is a dark, dangerous world. It's a jungle out there.

Somethin' comin' at me all the time….

But after sundown, when everyone has fled, there is space. The new breed find the feeling in the midst of emptiness. The metropolis is their playground.

I could swear the city's like a magic beach…

They have nothing to lose. They crawl like replicants or post-hippie hoboes out of forgotten suburbs, squats, demolition sites. They appear blank, vacant, like shell-shocked survivors of a psychic bombardment. But that is just a façade.

Time to give ourselves to strange gods' hands…

Because dammed for so long, the feeling erupts with unstoppable force. It has had time to build up momentum and from 1975 on, it erupts in passion, noise, fury.

Hey ho, let's go!

And nothing can stop it.

We created it, let's take it over![i]

But first, what to call it?

2: PUNK

'It's like if delta Blues oughta be played by old black men, and if Fag Rock oughta be played by real queers, then it stands to reason that Punk-Rock oughta be played by Punks!'
Mark Shipper, liner notes for the Sonics, "Explosives" (Buckshot Records, 1973)

In late 1975, three young men had a short discussion about what to call their new magazine. Inspired by the CBGB's scene, they sought to reflect and document this fresh energy from the inside. A student at NY's School of Visual Arts, John Holmstrom had grown up in Cheshire, Connecticut with high school drop out Legs McNeil: during the summer of 1975 they were busy making what Holmstrom calls a forgettable 'gangster comedy' with Jed Dunne.

Legs McNeil: ‘John Holmstrom was going to do a magazine, which I thought was stupid. But he said, if we do a magazine we can go everywhere for free, we'll get drinks, people will take us out, and we use that as a stepping stone to other things. To tell the truth, I didn't know how we were going to fill it up. John had this definite attitude, he wanted to call it Teenage News, which I thought was really stupid.’

‘Now Lester Bangs had used Punk Rock before, but I didn't read Creem, so I didn't know. So I said to John, why don't we call it Punk? He said okay. We were driving, and John said, I'll be the editor, and Jed Dunne said, I'll be the publisher, and they both looked at me and said, what are you going to be? I'll be the resident punk. It was all decided in about two seconds.’

So Punk it was. The etymology of the word goes back at least to Shakespeare, where it used in a decidedly ambiguous way in “Measure For Measure” (1603/4): ‘My lord, she maybe a punk, for many of them are neither maid, widow or wife.’ In his new “William Shakespeare: Complete Works”, Jonathan Bate annotates the meaning of the word as ‘prostitute’. But there is a hint of transvestitism, or homosexuality.

The standard dictionaries cite the word’s origin in a 17th centuary word used for rotten tinder, but by the late 19th century the meanings were beginning to coalesce around the idea of ‘inferior’, bad’ or ‘worthless’. By the turn of the century the word was in common use in prison and underworld slang, meaning catamite, specifically referring the younger inmate preyed upon by the older.

In his memoir of prison life in America at the turn of the 20th century, the anarchist Alexander Berkmann reported the following exchange between himself and an older inmate:
‘How can a self-respecting gentleman explain himself to you? But I’ll try. You love a boy as you love the poet-sung heifer, see? Ever read Billy Shakespeare? Know the place, “He’s neither man nor woman; he’s punk,” Well. Billy knew. A punk’s a boy that’ll…’
‘What?’
‘Yes, sir. Give himself to a man. Now we’se talking plain.’

By the early 1920’s, the word had spread out into underworld vernacular to denote a green, and inexperienced young hoodlum. It was this meaning that took hold in America after the Second World War, when new words were needed to explain the rise in juvenile delinquency. The term was used in the JD novels of the period, like Harlan Ellson’s “The Amboy Dukes”, and in newspaper headlines covering youth crime- for example “Punks Caught Robbing Safe” (from April 1950).

The word's entry into popular music occurred in the late 60's. One of its first uses was by the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band in "Big Shot", their spoof of hard-boiled detective fiction (on the 1967 album, "Gorilla"). The writer Lester Bangs infamously used it in his April 1969 put-down of the first MC5 album, "Kick Out The Jams": 'they come on like 16 year old punks on a meth power trip'.

Very quickly however, Punk's use turned from negative to positive. It became the word used by a small but influential group of writers to register their disgusted with the state of Rock in the early seventies. In their opinion, psychedelia had degenerated – within three years – into drugged passivity or the navel-gazing of the new generation of singer-songwriters.

The early seventies were a hard Rock desert. What was needed was a return to the primal, earthy energy of the mid 60's. Hence writers like Bangs, Greg Shaw, Dave Marsh, Robert Somma and 'Metal' Mike Saunders would use the word, approvingly, in articles about the Stooges, ? and the Mysterians, the Sonics and the Flamin' Groovies. As Lester Bangs wrote in his mammoth rant "James Taylor Marked For Death": 'all right, punk, this it'.

Bangs' famous article was printed in issue 8 of Greg Shaw's "Who Put The Bomp", a magazine dedicated to hard Rock past and present. Most of these writers worked for fanzines like WPTB or Rock magazines like Detroit's Creem or Boston's Fusion. This was part of a fan groundswell that broke above ground in autumn 1972, with the issue of Lenny Kaye's ground-breaking double album, "Nuggets: Original Artyfacts From the First Psychedelic Era 1965-1968".

For Rock fans this was a revelation. Kaye pulled together twenty-seven tracks by the little-known sixties groups like the Electric Prunes, the 13th Floor Elevators, the Standells, and many more. Most of these covered the moment in American Rock when, after the incredible success of the British Invasion, young teens decided to make 45's inspired by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds and Them, among others.

The result was an earthy directness – what Kaye called, 'the relentless middle finger drive' – that, mixed with psychedelic touches, just sounded great. Almost no track was over three minutes, and some – like Count Five's "Psychotic Reaction" - were huge hits. This was a true people's music that, as Greg Shaw noted in a January 1973 review in Rolling Stone, was 'the closest we came in the 60's to the original Rockabilly spirit of Rock'n Roll'.

Kaye's great innovation was to cast an avant-garde fan taste into a total aesthetic, and then to give that aesthetic a name. In the notes, he cited 'the name that has been unofficially coined' for these groups: "Punk-Rock". As fans in America, Britain and France devoured "Nuggets", 'Punk' became a general term in the Rock press, used in reviews for performers who reflected the move back to hard Rock that happened from 1972 onwards.

In Britain, David Bowie had come a hard Rock superstar, and in his wake he produced great records by Lou Reed, Mott the Hoople – the generation gap anthem, "All The Young Dudes", and the single record that prefigured what would occur only three years later, Iggy and the Stooges' "Raw Power" – a record about which the British critic Simon Frith wrote: 'all this Punk noise and contempt has got a focus – Nixon's America.'

In America, Alice Cooper had huge hits with teen angst Rockers like "Eighteen" and "Schools Out": his theatrical, droogy style marked him out as something different, something new. The New York Dolls took this androgynous allure even further, wearing make-up and women's clothes as part of their attempt to galvanise a new generation. As singer David JoHansen told Rolling Stone in 1972, 'we like to look 16 and bored shitless.'

By 1974/5, Punk had become such a common word that it was used in the music press to describe artists as varied as the Troggs, the Who – whose 1973 opera, "Quadrophrenia", included a song called "The Punk and the Godfather" – Lou Reed, Bruce Springsteen and even fifties Rocker Eddie Cochran. It was a classic example of a word waiting for a context, which was provided, in 1975, by one of the Ramones' key early songs: "Judy Is A Punk".

As one of the groups spearheading the CBGB's scene, the Ramones were a major inspiration to the young men planning their new magazine at the end of 1975. Like their forerunners, the Dictators, the Ramones played an unashamedly white Rock, stripped down to the basics, with cartoon strip lyrics delivered from an obnoxious, teen standpoint. With their leather jackets, minimal presentation, and brutal, buzzsaw guitar sound, they sped Rock up forever.

As John Holmstrom remembers, 'The word was being used to describe Springsteen, who was on the cover of Time and Newsweek in the same week in '75, and to describe Patti Smith, and The Bay City Rollers, and AC/DC when they were in England, Eddie and the Hot Rods. It was pretty obvious that the word was going to be very popular, so we figured we'd take it before anybody else claimed it.'

‘Legs thought of the name and I thought it fitted what we wanted to do, it had so many different meanings. Happy Days, the TV show, the 50s, leather jackets. I wanted to strip Rock'n'roll of all the bullshit. During the 60s Rock'n'roll became acid Rock and folk Rock and it got political, until it became really horrible in the early 70s, classical Rock, Rock operas, and we wanted to get rid of all the bullshit.’

‘We figured Punk was the name that would express that very easily. But we had people coming up saying, what is Punk Rock? What is this new kind of Rock? We tried to explain to writers that it was getting back to the old sound, but the writers didn't like that, they wanted Punk Rock to be a new scene. What I wanted to do was promote basic Rock'n'Roll. Like the Ramones. They were the most basic group.’

Published right at the end of 1975, Punk Magazine featured a long article about Marlon Brando – the archetypal 50’s jd with a leather jacket in his 1954 film “The Wild One” – as well as interviews with the Ramones and Lou Reed. With its cartoons, hand-written lettering, and hostility to both the sixties and Disco, “Punk” captured the zeitgeist so successfully that it sealed the deal: that is what the New Wave of Rock would become known as.

For Legs McNeil, what the word actually meant was simple: ‘on TV, if you watched cop shows, Kojak, Berretta, when the cops finally catch the mass murderer, instead of saying, you fucking asshole, I'll kill you, they'd say, you dirty punk. It was what your teachers would call you. It meant you were the lowest, that you'd never get anywhere. It also meant a complete failure.’

‘But everyone wanted success. I don't think anyone in the Dictators graduated from high school, I don't think any of the Ramones did. All of us drop-outs and fuck-ups got together and started a movement, we'd been told all our lives that we'd never amount to anything, that we never lived up to our potential, lazy idiots and all the rest. We're the people who fell through the cracks of the educational system’.

Punk was a brutally simple, short word, sounding like junk, but ending with a percussive ‘k’ - like Rock. It pre-empted the reaction to this new generation of brutal, apparently incompetent Rock music. In exactly the same way as radical blacks used the term nigger and gay activists used the word queer, the punks attempted to magically convert a term of disapproval into something that proclaimed their difference, their damage to the world.

Revolutionary hippies had also understood the power of taking an insult and throwing it back in the face of the aggressor: 'whatever you say we are we are'. But there was the danger of taking on the word's original meaning, so that your psyche was infected with the thought: am I actually inferior, bad or worthless? As the word spread out from New York during the next few years, much of what ensued would be determined by these contradictions.[ii]

3: CBGB'S: 1974-77

'Tommy: Oh, one of the highlights of our life? 1910 Fruitgum Company…."Yummy Yummy"…we're quite young.
Punk: How old are you?
Tommy: 23, 24.
Punk: Oh, that's us!
Tommy: Lovely generation.
Mary Harron: "Ramones", Punk Issue 1

If Punk was about the outcast, the hopeless, and the worthless, then its perfect American home was CBGB's in New York. A small, long-derelict bar set right underneath a notorious flophouse called the Palace Hotel, CBGB-OMFUG – in full country, bluegrass, Blues and other music for uplifting gourmandizers – was opened at 315 Bowery by Hilly Kristal in December 1973. Within two years, it would become internationally famous.

The Bowery had long been notorious for generations as the centre of Manhattan's Skid Row. In his book, "Low Life", Luc Sante describes some of the late 19th century mixtures available to the most desperate: 'a villainous mixture of water and liquid camphor', or a 'hot punch compounded of whisky, hot rum, camphor, benzine and cocaine sweepings'. Contemporary accounts had drinkers jerking in a spasm, as though they had been touched an electric line.

As a dirt poor district, it was the site of the most derelict bars: the Plague, the Hell Hole, the Cripples' Home, the Inferno. It was also home to notorious 19th century gangs like the Atlantic Guards and the True Blue Americans. The most famous and lasting of these were the Bowery Boys, who later provided an international image for juvenile delinquents thanks to their appearance in the 1935 Broadway Production of "Dead End" and the subsequent movie.

Kristal opened at an opportune time. The New York Dolls had done much to regenerate New York City as a Rock 'N' Roll town with contemporaries like Suicide – who, in 1970,

had advertised themselves with a flyer 'Punk Music by Suicide' - and Wayne County's Queen Elizabeth. However when the building that housed the Arts Center collapsed, new and unsigned acts were faced with a dearth of live venues, with only Max's Kansas City open to them.

Although he had hoped to feature Country, Kristal was receptive to Rock and favoured original material – no covers band in *his* club. At the end of March 1974, he instituted a Sunday night residency by Tom Verlaine and Richard Hell's band, Television at the end of March 1974 – a regular event that brought in other fledgling groups like the very early Patti Smith Group, the Stilettoes (later to become Blondie) and the Ramones.

By early 1975, the scene was beginning to generate its own look. This was the generation after glitter Rock, 1970's Bowery kids with spiky hair, ripped T-shirts, with a dose of fifties and sixties retro – the clothes you could find for nothing in flea markets. 'We were just funky street kids from the slums of New York,' remembered Richard Hell; 'Vermin. Most of my clothes had holes in them so I exaggerated it. Then I used safety-pins to rearrange it.'

At that point, New York was in a dire state. The city was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy: it was in October 1975 that the then President Ford canned a rescue package, occasioning the famous New York Daily News headline: 'Ford to City: Drop Dead'. But if you were young and foolhardy, there was nothing to lose. The flight from the inner cities meant cheap accommodation near to the centre of town. The city was yours: nobody else wanted it.

Mary Harron began writing for "Punk" magazine soon after moving to New York in 1975: 'my happiest time was a time of decay. I remember looking out over the Lower East Side, and feeling that the whole city was infested and crumbling. Part of the feeling of living in New York at that time was this longing for oblivion, that you were about to disintegrate, go the way of the city. Yet that was something almost mystically wonderful.'

Both the Patti Smith Group and Television had a love of sixties garage bands: Television covered the 13th Floor Elevators' siren call, "Fire Engine", while the PSG tackled both "Hey Joe" and "Gloria". They fused this with an urban mysticism that derived, in part, from the French Symbolist poets of the late 19th century: Gerard Nerval, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud. The idea was to find a new language for Rock while returning to the origins of youth culture.

Hence the pseudonyms: Tom Verlaine, Richard Hell. 'Tom and I thought our names

were boring', remembered Hell; 'and we wanted to make ourselves over. I saw the band as a way to carry into real life my most secret ambitions of who and what I could be, so I changed my name. Hell had something to do with Rimbaud. I thought, "I'm trying to be completely honest", so I picked a name to describe the way I feel'.

In many ways, Rimbaud (b.1854) is the first teenager. When he was 16, his hometown of Charleville was on the front line in the Franco/Prussian War. He revelled in the destruction. 'I saw a sea of flames and smoke rise to heaven,' he later wrote, 'And left and right all wealth exploded like a billion thunderbolts'. In the spring of 1871, he ran away and joined the Paris Commune, the anarchist/ worker uprising that took control of the city for a few brief weeks.

Although the Commune was quickly smashed within weeks, the adolescent took away the sense of liberation that he had experienced and determined to apply it to his own work and life. The two would become indivisible. On the 13 May 1871, he wrote to his friend Paul Demeny: 'the problem is to attain the unknown by disorganising all the senses. The suffering is immense, but you have to be strong, and to have been born a poet'.

For Rimbaud, poetry was a mystical calling. He followed the visionary dark line that began with the Romantics and passed through Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire. After 1871, his poems were full of revolutionary turmoil, anti-bourgeois invective, pagan mysticism, and apocalyptic visions: 'this is the time of the sweat bath, of oceans boiling over, of underground explosions, of the planet whirled away, of exterminations sure to follow'.

Both the PSG and Television followed this visionary imperative, expanding from their garage band roots into long verbal and instrumental improvisations. While Smith would extemporise on the work of the outsider psychologist Wilhelm Reich, Tom Verlaine redraw the map of New York as something magical: 'you know it's all like some new kind of drug', he sang on "Venus de Milo": 'Broadway looked so medieval -- it seemed to flap, like little pages.'

The metropolis had become a blank slate that, for the overstimulated and undernourished young, threw up new possibilities. The other keynote early CBGB's group, the Ramones, found the musical language to unlock this energy. Their brief songs – many of which lasted only 90 seconds – and brief, fifteen minute sets – epitomised their severely edited approach, which aimed to distil everything they liked about Rock into the simplest, most direct form.

Nothing was too degraded to source. Their keynote song, “Blitzkreig Bop” took from the Bay City Rollers’ “Saturday Night” and the Sweet’s “Ballroom Blitz”, while the interjection on “Judy Is A Punk”, ‘second verse, same as the first’, was lifted direct from Herman and the Hermits’ “I’m Henry VIII, I Am”. The group all took on the same surname, Ramone, in homage to Paul McCartney’s first ever pseudonym: Paul Ramon.

At the same time, guitarist Johnny Ramone perfected a distorted guitar style that, with its overloaded harmonics flying all over the place, simulated an aural environment where anything could happen. With guitar as texture, the melody was often carried by Dee Dee Ramone’s bass guitar: Dee Dee also drove the group’s accelerated tempo which, with its sheer speed, jolted audiences like the spasms enacted on stage by singer Joey.

In 1975, the Ramones impact was extraordinary. Leee Black Childers, manager of Iggy and the Stooges in their Hollywood phase, remembered seeing them at the Bottom Line club: ‘you could see the audience holding on to things, like they were on a rollercoaster’. As well as their brutal speed, the Ramones assaulted their audience with barked, sloganistic lyrics: ‘perhaps she’ll die’, ‘you’re a loudmouth baby’, ‘today your love, tomorrow the world’.

That final lyric, from the track of the same name, was the key into another side of the Ramones: their use of confrontational, extremist imagery. “Today Your Love, Tomorrow The World” cited Nazi stormtroopers, while other songs on “The Ramones” mentioned acronyms like the SLA – the Symbionese Liberation Army, whose most famous exploit was to kidnap heiress Patty Hearst in 1974 (also cited in Patti Smith’s first single, “Hey Joe”) – and the CIA.

So what was going on? ‘The Ramones were problematic, they did hover on the edge,’ says Mary Harron; ‘it was hard to work out what their politics were. I don't think they were more right wing than bands are today, it was putting the needle into liberals and hippies. Hating hippies was a big thing. Now we can see that they had a lot in common. But it was needling the older generation. It had this difficult edge’.

The attitudes of the band members were split. The Ramones’ designer Arturo Vega made dayglo swastikas and guitarist Johnny Ramones was a card-carrying Republican, but Joey was, as Harron remembered, ‘no savage right-winger’. The Ramones used whatever means at their disposal to mark themselves as different from the previous generation. Whatever it took. As long as everything seemed new.

At the same time, their clothes were extremely influential. The Ramones uniform was, from the bottom, Converse sneakers, straight legged, often ripped jeans, and cartoon T shirts, topped with the black leather jacket. This was a mixture of hustler style – thanks to Dee Dee's adventures recounted on "53rd and 3rd" – mixed with the classic insignia of the hoodlum that harked all the way back to Marlon Brando in "The Wild One".

'I walked out the next day after seeing the Ramones and bought my first leather jacket,' Legs McNeil remembered. 'Nobody in New York wore black leather. They wore brown leather bomber jackets with fur collars. If you had a black leather jacket, the streets parted in front off you. It was very threatening, black leather was aggressive. It was a return to the 50s, you know the Fonz? "The Lords of Flatbush". "Happy Days" started on TV about '73.'

Through 1975 more groups poured through Hilly Kristal's doors: Talking Heads, Mink DeVille, Tuff Darts, the Miamis and the Heartbreakers – the group that Richard Hell formed with Johnny Thunders and Jerry Nolan of the New York Dolls. All of these, plus many more, played in the two week CBGB's Rock festival that began on the 16th of July 1975 – the one event that helped to publicise the scene beyond the borders of the Bowery.

CBGB's already had its boosters – most notably Alan BetRock in the Soho Weekly News and Robert Christgau in the Village Voice – but after the festival there were articles in the New York Times, Rolling Stone, and British papers like the New Musical Express (the NME) and the Melody Maker. 'The press really got into it,' remembered Kristal; 'and as they started reading each other's articles it got so more and more. Then the record companies started coming down'.

By autumn 1975 the CBGB's scene had a definite buzz. It also had all the requirements of a culture that can be sold: a sound; a look; an attitude; and a sociological angle, thanks to the Richard Hell song "The Blank Generation". The word generation is in itself significant, for it denotes the wish on the part of the user to define a new and particular age group, usually in definition against its elders. Hence the idea of 'the generation gap', or Generation X.

"The Blank Generation" freely used the chorus and refrain from Rod McKuen's theme tune to the 1960 beat-exploitation flick, "The Beat Generation". In Hell's hands, the blank did not necessarily mean vacant, but whatever you wanted it to: 'I was using that tag for two or three years, and every possible permutation of meaning that it could have passed through my mind. That was the appeal of it, all the readings you could give it, each of which had some ring that I liked. I'm not going to exclude any of it.'

However in the nature of subcultures, the CBGB's scene was on the point of definition for the wider media and the marketplace, and this fluid idea was quickly overtaken. By the time that the first issue of Punk Magazine came out, the Patti Smith Group already had a record out, on Clive Davis' Arista label, and the Ramones had signed to Sire Records. Charles Shaar Murray also wrote a major article on the club for the NME that whetted the Brit appetite.

Produced by John Cale – the Velvet Underground link – the first PSG album, "Horses", was a major statement. Firstly, there was the Robert Mapplethorpe cover that presented Smith alone, in stark black and white, wearing a man's shirt and a fierce expression. This was a severe, stripped androgyny. The music inside mixed garage and improv while highlighting Smith's voice, which went where no woman had been before.

The fact that this heralded a new Rock age was made explicit on Smith's second 45. On the flip of "Gloria" – taken from the album - was a raucous live version of the Who's infamous sixties youth anthem "My Generation", with John Cale guesting on bass. As the song disintegrated into feedback and then faded, Smith shouted out: 'we created it: let's take it over'. This clarion call did not go unheard.

A few months later, in April 1976, came the first Ramones album, "The Ramones" on Seymour Stein's Sire label. Recorded for $6000, it was a perfect distillation of the group's attitude and sound. With fourteen songs lasting just over half an hour, it brought the new generation into being: accelerated, stripped, taboo-busting. Nothing had sounded like this before, and nothing would ever sound the same again. If you had to play just one record from this whole chapter, this is the one.

Just as influential was the cover, a black and white snapshot of the band taken by CBGB's door person Roberta Bayley: 'it was over round the corner from CBGB's cos Arturo Vega who worked with the Ramones had a loft there. We just went down 1st street to some vacant lot. There's one sequence where DeeDee steps in dogshit and he's trying to scrape it off the bottom of his shoe. One reason I think they used that picture was it made Tommy look almost as tall as Joey. Everybody has tried to copy this shot.'

By this time the secret was out. After releasing their first 45 on the Ork Label, the seven minute "Little Johnny Jewel", Television signed to Elektra Records and starting working up their first album. Talking Heads signed to Sire Records and issued their first 45: "Love→Building On Fire". Mink DeVille signed to Capitol Records. In an attempt to get in on the act, Hilly Kristal put out a double album compilation "Live At CBGB's" on his own label.

This was, unfortunately, an inferior selection of the lesser acts that played the club, except for Pere Ubu, the psychedelic group from Cleveland, Ohio. The club became a victim of its own success, as Roberta Bayley remembered: 'it got more and more like it wasn't a place to hang out and meet your friends, it was more like a regular concert thing, most of the people you didn't know, it was too crowded to have any fun'.

During 1976, the CBGB's sound went national and international when Patti Smith and the Ramones toured the US and went to Europe, to inspirational effect. The latter set the template for a whole generation of British punk groups, while Patti Smith moved towards mainstream acceptance after spring 1978 after "Because The Night" (co-written with Bruce Springsteen) went top twenty - as did her third and fourth albums, "Easter" and "Wave".

By spring 1977, CBGB's was hosting the next wave of groups, like the Dead Boys, who were very different from the disparate pioneers that had helped to build the venue out of nothing. Having seen countless sub-genres of punk come and go, it continued as a venue right through to October 15th 2006: Patti Smith played the final night. Hilly Kristal died of complications to do with lung cancer in August 2007.[iii]

4: SEX PISTOLS AND BRITISH PUNK: 1976-77

'You're only twenty-nine
Got a lot to learn
And when your business dies
It will not return'
Johnny Rotten for the Sex Pistols, "Seventeen" (1976)

The Sex Pistols are the alpha and omega of British punk: unlike the CBGB's groups, who together kickstarted a scene, they single-handedly galvanized a generation of young British musicians, writers and artists. For such an influential group, their life-span was very short – from September 1975 to January 1978 – and their original material ran to about fifteen songs, but they were a finely honed, almost infernal machine programmed to change lives.

They began in the shop run by Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood at 430 Kings Road, right on that road's western fringes in a district called World's End. The shop had gone through various changes, reflecting McLaren's restless pursuit of novelty and wish to be different from everything else. In 1972, it was called "Let It Rock", selling

1950's fashions – Rocker and Teddy Boy clothes – while everyone else was selling velvet and denims.

Among its clientele were the New York Dolls and the Stooges – then in London recording "Raw Power" – but, despite igniting a long-time fascination for the Dolls, that was not enough for McLaren. When the Teddy Boys – Rock'n rollers reviving a youth style from the early 1950's – got boring, the shop moved into Rocker and zoot suit clothes, changed its name to Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die and the Teds were shed.

During 1974 and 1975, McLaren and Westwood began selling rubber and leather wear not only to fetishists but to teenage kids like their assistant Jordan, who wore it out on the streets to outraged reactions. They wanted to confront and provoke by any means possible: they sold Nazi memorabilia and produced T shirts with explicit sexual imagery. When a customer, Alan Jones, wore their 'nude cowboy' T shirt (taken from a gay pornzine) he was arrested.

One of their T shirts, 'you gonna wake up one morning and *know* what side of the bed you've been lyin' on' was constructed like a classic Dada or Futurist manifesto, with hates on one side and loves on the other. With their friend Bernard Rhodes, McLaren and Westwood laid down the ground-rules for what would happen over the next few years: among the loves were 'Eddie Cochran', 'Raw Power' and Kutie Jones and his SEX PISTOLS'.

At this stage, the Sex Pistols were just a gleam in Steve Jones' eye. They were a three piece formed out of the teenagers who hung around the shop: Jones and his friend from Shepherd's Bush, Paul Cook, and Glen Matlock – a Saturday worker at 430 Kings Road. Jones was an accomplished thief – it was as a shoplifter from "Let It Rock" that Matlock first encountered him – and had amassed a PA and several instruments. So he started a band.

All three were from West London and the kind of music they favoured was the Faces and their sixties mod forebears, but they could not find a singer. When McLaren went off to New York in early 1975 to work with the dying New York Dolls, the group continued to practice. The fashion in British music was shifting from the tail end of glitter to the tough street Rock of Kilburn and the High Roads, Dr. Feelgood and new bands like the Count Bishops.

The mood of change was in the air. When McLaren came back from New York in the early summer of 1975, he had an idea in his head that he could do something with this

young group – along the line of what he seen in CBGB's. In particular, he had been struck by Richard Hell's haircut and clothes. He sought to transplant this attitude to London, and was alerted to the presence of shop regular John Lydon by Bernard Rhodes.

The son of an Irish family from Finsbury Park, Lydon was in the habit of haunting the Kings Road with his friends, all called John: John Grey, John Wardle (later to be known as Jah Wobble) and John Beverley (also known as Sid Vicious). He stood out with his hacked-short hair and a ripped Pink Floyd T shirt to which he'd added I HATE above the logo. After an audition in front of the shop's jukebox, miming to Alice Cooper's "Eighteen", he was in.

The Sex Pistols were put together by McLaren – 'I was out to sell lots of trousers', he later said – to promote the latest incarnation of the shop 430 Kings Road, which was simply called 'Sex'. The four young men were very different and never really got on, but the tension fueled the music. They played their first show in September 1975 and got an immediate reaction: hostility from the mass, total identification from a tiny minority.

Their set included covers of the Who's "Substitute", the Stooges' "No Fun" and one of their own songs, "Seventeen". Adam Ant remembered how 'they came in as a gang, not as a band and they were abusing the instruments, turning it up'. Another early witness, Al McDowell saw the group's polarizing effect: 'they had a mirror standing in front of them all the time. It must have been very satisfying to get such a violent reaction to everything they did.'

During the winter of 1975/6, the Sex Pistols learned their craft, playing art schools and colleges, and attracting a small hard core of suburban malcontents drawn by the clothes and the hostile attitude. In February they got their first major music press review, in which they stated that they were 'not into music' but 'chaos'. Their behaviour got them banned from London venues, most notably after a major fight at the Nashville involving most of the group.

By then they were attracting other musicians. Peter Shelley and Howard Devoto had seen the Sex Pistols twice and went back to Manchester to form Buzzcocks. After seeing the Nashville show, Joe Strummer quit his group, the 101'ers, and formed the Clash with Mick Jones and others from the pool of struggling young musicians. The Damned formed in the same way. Suddenly, the Sex Pistols were not a bunch of hooligans but the spearhead of a scene.

How did they manage to do this? Thrown together to sell clothes, the Sex Pistols had an extraordinary mix of personalities. Steve Jones and Paul Cook provided the bollocks, the hooligan element: what McLaren called 'the tradition of mutated, irresponsible hardcore raw power: Iggy Pop, New York Dolls, MC5, The Faces'. With the guitar and drums locked down – just like the way the Rolling Stones worked – they provided an unbeatable foundation.

Glen Matlock's contribution was his pop savvy. It's a testament to his arranging and composing skills that all but two of the Sex Pistols' originals were composed while he was in the group: as he says, 'the chords that I wrote were more influenced by the Who and the Small Faces. That's where my inspiration came from'. In the early days, most of the material was written by Matlock and Lydon, and the tension between them drew sparks.

John Lydon – renamed Johnny Rotten after Steve Jones focused on his teeth – was the wild card. His musical roots were in freak Rock - like Hawkwind and Captain Beefheart - and dub reggae. As the lyricist and frontman, he was a riveting mix of eloquence and amphetamined aggression. 'He seemed like a real prick,' Steve Jones remembered, but 'he looked really interesting, there was something about him that magnetised you to him.'

In his account, Lydon wanted something very different from the good-time Pop Rock of his band-mates: 'Glen wanted us to be a camp version of the Bay City Rollers. He wanted that kind of innocence and I'm sorry, I was completely the other way, I saw the Sex Pistols as something completely guilt-ridden. You know the kids want misery, they want death. They want threatening noises, because that shakes you out of your apathy.'

The result was a series of brief, tough songs that took from Tom Verlaine and Richard Hell's tales of rejection and rebuttal as a very basic launch-pad and gave them an authentic London twist. "Pretty Vacant" was suggested by a Television poster that McLaren had on the wall of "Sex" – with a list of songs including "Blank Generation" - but the Sex Pistols added sarcasm, punning obscenity, and an instant hook stolen from Abba's "SOS".

Instead of simply listing their "Problems", the Sex Pistols turned their lyric into a direct attack: 'the problem is YOU'. They took a similar tack with "Liar" and "New York", an insult song aimed directly at David JoHansen and the New York Dolls. Like "Pretty Vacant", "No Feelings" turned blankness into a virtue, while "I Wanna Be Me" offered another manifesto: 'now is the time to realize/ to have real eyes'.

By spring 1976, Rotten was already shaping up as a generation-defining star. John Ingham did the group's first big music press feature, for Sounds in April 1976, and he remembered the singer's impact: 'I turn to him and look him in the eye and say, okay, I've heard it from everyone else - why are you doing it? And it's like a snap edit, one frame he's normal, and the next frame, the kilowatts are on'.

'There's no transition at all. "Because I hate shit" - and he rants on and on, I hate this and I hate that, glaring at me. I just cracked up laughing. This boy was incredible, you know, he really amused me. He's going, I hate hippies. I'm finding myself defending myself to this kid, going, I'm not a hippy, I've never been a hippy, I just haven't shaved. From the first sentence, I was absolutely sold. I admired the man, instantly.'

The Sex Pistols took care to distinguish themselves from everyone that had come before them. 1976 was Year Zero. Despite their roots in glam and mod, they were programmed by their manager and their own inclinations to do the opposite to everyone else. Most of all, they sought to distance themselves from the CBGB's scene: 'they're not like us,' Steve Jones and Paul Cook sneered in Ingham's feature; 'they all have long hair'.

With a residency at London's 100 Club and frequent shows around Britain – in particular two groundbreaking concerts at the Lesser Free Trade Hall in Manchester – the Sex Pistols picked up speed over the summer of 1976. It was a strange time in the country's history: a time of economic depression, political polarization between the extreme left and the extreme right, with everything heightened by an extraordinary heatwave that lasted for over two months.

Two big events sealed them as the leaders of a new pop generation. Their August 1976 show at London's Screen on the Green also featured the Clash and Buzzcocks, while the September 100 Club Punk Festival included all three groups, plus the Damned, the Vibrators, Subway Sect, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and – from Paris, a nod to internationalism – the Stinky Toys. Mclaren's wish for 'a rumbling, anarchic, noisy energetic Rock scene' was coming true.

Conditions in London helped to make this possible. The early seventies had seen a great deal of inner urban slum clearance but the money had run out before any reconstruction occurred. Many of those involved in the punk era – like Johnny Rotten or Joe Strummer – were squatters, inhabiting derelict or forgotten properties, while for the not so bold or desperate, flats were available to rent or share near the centre of town.

Kids had access to the inner city. London was still cheap then, and the fact that many areas had been left derelict offered physical and mental space. There was room to run around in. Malcolm McLaren had always been fascinated by Charles Dickens – in particular the film and musical "Oliver" – and the Sex Pistols were Dickensian urchins, wandering at will through the streets of London, with McLaren cast as Fagin.

British Punk began as an outcast aesthetic, made by and for 'the flowers in the dustbin'. In contrast to its later, macho image, it attracted the discontented and alienated: sex workers, gay boys, gay women, dissident intellectuals, teenage runaways and bright working class youths with no way out. 'That's when I used to hang out with prostitutes,' John Lydon remembered, 'who I think are the most open and honest people on this earth'.

Just as the music appealed to outcasts of all descriptions, then they found places to play and hang out in forgotten parts of the city. One of the hottest Punk clubs in 1976 – found by the flamboyant suburban fans called the Bromley Contingent – was an obscure Soho Lesbian joint called Louises, while the best known Punk club of all – the Roxy – opened up during late 1976, in a hustler bar called Chaugeramas. This was in Covent Garden, the then deserted site of London's fruit and veg market that had moved in 1975.

Many of the Bromley Contingent appeared in the long October 1976 article by John Ingham in Sounds that heralded this new generation. Whether it was Siouxsie Sioux, Debbi Juvenile – a teenage runaway from the suburbs - or Sid Vicious, they all reinforced the anti-hippie, anti-sex and anti-empathy Punk line. Ingham also had a problem with what to call the movement: should it be 'Punk', 'New Wave', or – the one he finally selected – 'Rock'?

The term Punk was problematic because of its associations with New York. The influence of the CBGB's scene had been highlighted by the Ramones first UK show in July 1976: in that one night, the whole of UK Punk sped up. Except for the Sex Pistols – who were formed before 1976 – all the UK groups that followed would build on the Ramones' wall of thrash: the distorted guitar, barked vocals and the bass carrying the melody.

The Sex Pistols were forged before anyone in the UK heard the Ramones, and they favoured slower tempos, with more light and shade, tension and release. 'We never played fast,' remembered Glen Matlock. 'There isn't one really fast Pistols record, if you think about it. That was the difference between us and the other Punk bands. Anarchy in the UK is strident, but because we weren't rushing through it, it gives it more power.'

However the relationship of New York to London Punk would prove problematic. Despite the obvious debt – if only of spirit – there were many differences between the two scenes. Most of the New York groups were in their mid twenties by 1976, while all the Sex Pistols – for instance – were between 20 and 21. They might have touched on the same themes but, while Tom Verlaine sang 'I understand all destructive urges' ("See No Evil"), Johnny Rotten simply chanted: 'get pissed, destroy!'

These differences were observed by Mary Harron, who visited the UK in late summer 1976 and saw the Damned and the Sex Pistols: 'there was violence in the air, you could tell it was a different world. There was violence in the streets. I'd come from a place where it was dangerous, and therefore in your club, you don't want aggression and violence. Your club was an absolute sanctuary and haven where there was friendliness. It was very tranquil'.

'There was something electrifying about the mythology that the Sex Pistols had already brought with them. They were chaotic, which I liked, I thought they were very good, and they had this big guitar sound, Steve Jones was very good, and Glen Matlock. It was wild, whereas everything had been much more proficient in New York. Much more controlled. There was a sense of chaos, and the New York scene was not about chaos, it was anarchy, nihilism'.

'When English Punk took off, no-one was interested in American Punk. It had an image, it had teeth, it was genuinely hostile. I remember feeling that my whole attitudes to life, my middle class liberalism, were being ripped apart. It sounds fine to talk about it now, but I came back feeling shredded. I didn't know what I believed in anymore, and that was why it was so good. American Punk had no moral authority'.

After an incendiary appearance on Tony Wilson's music show, "So It Goes", where they played "Anarchy In The UK", the Sex Pistols signed to EMI Records – the UK's most established label – in October 1976. Seen by the music press and the industry as the front-runners of a new generation, they began to attract stories in the national press. In November, they released their first 45, "Anarchy In The UK", an incendiary call to arms that revealed their ambition.

They weren't singing 'anarchy in Soho'. The fact that the Sex Pistols could be signed to a major and get such a volume of press also marked another difference between Britain and America. Whereas the CBGB's groups had struggled to make headway outside New York, the British punks could be assured of attention in any one of the four music

papers, which sold between 100,000 and 200,000 copies weekly, and were read by many more.

As well as the NME, Sounds, Melody Maker and Record Mirror, there were also national radio stations and newspapers ready to pick up new trends. A group could be playing the clubs one week and on the nationwide music show, Top of the Pops, the next, playing to one fifth of the total UK population. Despite their radical nature, the Punk groups could be assured of signing to a major label and getting national attention. This did not happen in the US.

As an example of this expectation, the Sex Pistols planned a nationwide 'Anarchy' tour with support from the Clash, The Damned, and the Heartbreakers – who had just come over from New York to check out this new scene. On December the 1st, they made the television appearance that changed everything: faced with a dismissive, and drunk interviewer, Bill Grundy, the group were eventually provoked into a torrent of swearing on prime time TV.

The main instigator was Steve Jones, who had put away two bottles of wine in the hospitality room: 'he started coaxing us out, so when drunk, the obvious thing to do is to have a go, you know? That was hilarious. It was one of the best feelings, the next day, when you saw the paper. You thought, fucking hell, this is great. From that day on, it was different, before that it was just music, and the next day it was the media'.

If there was any doubt what this new movement was called it was dispelled by the torrent of newspaper headlines that followed on December the 2nd: "the Filth and the Fury", "Who Are These Punks?", "Grundy Goaded Punk Boys", "The Bizarre Face of Punk Rock", "The Punks – Rotten and Proud of It!". This was publicity like you wouldn't believe, and it made Sex Pistols national news and a sociological phenomenon: 'the anarchic Rock of the young and doleful'.

The press coverage changed British Punk overnight. Focussing on the surface aspects of the clothes and the music, journalists accentuated the stupid and violent side of Punk. Jonh Ingham: 'if that had been allowed to go on its merry way, without Bill Grundy, it would have grown very slowly across all of 1977, like a snowball. It probably would have ended up being a lot more intelligent.' Many of the original fans and stylists turned away.

Marco Pirroni had hung out at "Sex" in 1975 and played with Siouxsie and the Banshees at the 100 Club Punk Festival: "after Bill Grundy, that was the end of it for me, really.

From something intellectual and almost artistic from a lot of arty people in weird clothes, suddenly there were these fools with dog collars on and 'punk' written on their shirt with biro."

'Before then, it had been like that Velvet Underground scene, the Warhol set. Film makers and poets and artists and God knows what. There wasn't many musicians. It was like the Factory, with Malcolm as the Warhol figure. that's why I hated it when people like the Damned, who were what we used to call monkey boot punk... when people started wearing Doctor Martens, that was the degeneration of it all. It became an excuse to be stupid.'

Punk had become a national sensation but life suddenly became very difficult for the Sex Pistols. Their single slipped down the charts while the Anarchy Tour became an exercise in frustration, with most of the dates cancelled by local councils. Cast as public enemies number one, harried by the press and the law, the Sex Pistols would never be able to work as a normal Rock group again – during their first lifetime. They became a spectacle.

Yet in other ways, the Grundy scandal marked a beginning. In the wake of the Sex Pistols, other groups came up strongly. The Damned had already released the UK's first Punk single, "New Rose" – a storming track that epitomized the new spirit of energy. The Clash had settled into a four piece and, with a strong humanist/ left-wing agenda epitomized by charismatic front-man Joe Strummer, were set to take the Sex Pistols' crown.

And, in very late December 1976, the Buzzcocks went into make the record that would change the record business: "Spiral Scratch". This was a four track EP, recorded by Martin Hannett, that captured the Buzzcocks' mix of a scratchy, sly sound and witty, absurdist lyrics. "Boredom" in particular satirized a word then in currency – the punks professed themselves bored with everything – and topped it with a perfect two note guitar solo by Pete Shelley.

Like the Polaroid snapshot on the sleeve, this was a snapshot document of the moment when Punk was still new. It was released on the Buzzcocks' own independent label, and its success – it sold over 10,000 copies within weeks – helped to institute the idea of the independent sector within the UK. Assisted by record shops like London's Rough Trade, young groups could self release a 45 and have enough guaranteed sales to recoup their costs, at least.

This was paralleled by the rise in fanzine publishing, stimulated by the success of Mark Perry's "Sniffin' Glue". In issue 5, he called for others to flood the market with punk writing, and by early 1977 there were a dozen fanzines, including White Stuff, Ripped & Torn, Bondage and London's Outrage. This was another example of Do It Yourself: armed with just a few sheets of A4 paper, you could go and get them Xeroxed. Then you had a magazine of your own.

At the same time, the Buzzcocks' record showed that it was possible to live outside London and get your music released. The Sex Pistols concerts that they had set up helped to kickstart the city's music scene: in the audience for the two shows were future members of Joy Division, the Smiths, and the Fall. Other cities soon followed suit, with their own groups and fanzines: Penetration (Durham); the Prefects (Birmingham); Big In Japan (Liverpool).

This was an underground economy. By the summer, alternative bookshops like Compendium would be listing over fifty fanzines. As well as existing labels like Chiswick and Stiff – which released the Damned – there was Step Forward, run by Sniffin' Glue's Mark Perry, and Refill Records. This was the home of the Desperate Bicycles, who gave the definitive Do It Yourself rallying call on "The Medium Was Tedium: 'it was easy, it was cheap, go and do it'.

After the Roxy Club opened in late 1976, Punk had a regular showcase in Central London. It was banned almost everywhere else, which made the Roxy all the more important: in four months, the riotous basement showcased groups as diverse as the Clash, the Heartbreakers, Generation X, Eater, Wire, X-Ray Spex, Siouxsie and the Banshees, the Slits, Slaughter and the Dogs, and Wire. Some of these were collected on the charting "Live At The Roxy" lp.

Attracted by the relentless publicity, the majors were getting in on the act. CBS signed the Clash, while Buzzcocks eventually signed to United Artists. Then there were the band-wagon jumpers: the Jam (Polydor); the Stranglers (United Artists); the Boomtown Rats (Ensign). While none of these were Punk – and all of them were terrible – they passed as new, and offered a less challenging version of the real thing. Naturally, they had hits.

London's international infamy as a Punk centre also drew in groups from other countries. Of these, the best were the Saints, who had already put out the "I'm Stranded" 45 on their own Fatal label. Frustrated by the lack of any support in their native Australia, they came to England in spring 1977. Guitarist Ed Kuepper remembers: 'I wasn't incredibly impressed by the music scene, which was very

contrived. The initial spirit had probably already died out, and there were too many people slavishly following after'.

However their first album, also called "I'm Stranded", captured the sound of the period like nothing else; all sneered vocals and distorted guitar. Ed Kuepper: 'I tended to overdrive the amp, and I used a lot of open strings on my playing, playing high on the fretboard. It came down to not playing straight chords. You could notate the Stooges songs, and then play them, but there's something else happening. The Velvet Underground also did that splendidly'.[iv]

The biggest British Punk record of the spring was the Clash's first album - simply called "The Clash". This was a model of underproduction, with the group's trebly attack pushed up front. Strummer's lyrics were at once humorous, angry and empathetic – most notably on "What's My Name": 'what the hell is wrong with me? I'm not who I want to be'. Mick Jones' pop smarts arranged these rants into concise, melodic chants. The 45 of "White Riot" lasted just under two minutes.

Their masterstroke was their epic, six-minute cover of Junior Murvin's "Police and Thieves". This reggae classic had been the big song at the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival, which degenerated into a riot after the area's Afro-Caribbean population reacted against oppressive policing. (A snapshot from the riot was on the back sleeve of the Clash album.) This was the Clash's part of London, and they wrote "White Riot" as their response to events.

They also sought to include some of reggae's space and lyrical confrontation into their music. The underground sound in London during 1975 and 1976 was Dub, the technique whereby instruments would be stripped out of the mix, creating an incredible tension when everything dropped back in. (The same principle works in many House records). Early Clash songs had used drop-out but "Police and Thieves" pushed their reggae influence up front.

In retrospect, this was a crucial move. Nothing sounded whiter than Punk Rock: in its Ramones-influenced form, it had been bled of almost anything black, anything funky. At a time when nationalist, if not quasi-fascist parties like the National Front were making political inroads, Punk's ethnicity could have gone the wrong way. Especially when people were wearing swastikas in a misguided attempt to shock the wartime generation.

Along with Johnny Rotten and the Roxy DJ Don Letts – who played reggae because there were almost no Punk records in early 1977 – the Clash helped to make reggae and

dub fashionable amongst punks. It was, after all, what you heard all over London at that period. It also laid the ground for the massive political intervention made against the National Front by Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, which would peak in 1978.

Meanwhile, the Sex Pistols were lurching from crisis to crisis. The Grundy furore had resulted in their sacking from EMI Records (with their advance) during January 1977. Glen Matlock left soon afterwards, unable to get on with Rotten. Rotten's old friend Sid Vicious joined on bass, but, although his image was perfect, his skills were rudimentary. The only shows they could play were chaotic, hit-and-run, word-of-mouth events.

Desperate to get their next record, "God Save The Queen", out in time for the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations in June 1977, McLaren signed the band to A&M Records in March. But they were quickly dropped (with their advance, again) after a murky incident of violence involving the group at music industry nightspot the Speakeasy. With almost every move reported in the press, they had become almost untouchable, a music industry pariah.

It was at this point that they passed into myth. With the Jubilee deadline coming up fast, Malcolm McLaren signed the group to Virgin Records. Released in late May 1977, "God Save The Queen" was banned right across the media – TV, radio, newspapers, ads – but still rose to number 2 in the charts, assisted by the independent chain of record shops and the music press. There is some evidence to suggest that it was artificially kept off the top spot.

On the Jubilee Weekend, the Sex Pistols played a rare date on a boat, called The Queen Elizabeth, that floated up and down the River Thames. As it grew near the Houses of Parliament, the group broke into "Anarchy In The UK" – an extraordinary act of theatrical provocation that did not go unnoticed. The event was stopped by the police and, in the ruckus that ensued, eleven people were arrested, including Malcolm McLaren.

In many ways, this was the zenith of London Punk. The fact that "God Save The Queen" went so high in the charts marked a populist, youth vote against the Jubilee and the antiquated view of England that it epitomised. The Sex Pistols' single was all the more powerful because it offered the protest – which made the group's stand all the more courageous. When everyone else was celebrating the past, they were looking to the present and the future.

But this was a lot to ask of a Rock group. The boat trip was a marvelous moment of theatre – and a heart-stopping moment for all who were there – but it marked the Sex Pistols as enemies of all that Britain held dear. As one newspaper headline had it, after the Jubilee: "Punish The Punks". Within weeks, Johnny Rotten and Paul Cook were violently attacked on the streets of London, as was Sex Pistols graphic designer Jamie Reid.

Jordan had been friendly with the Sex Pistols since they first started, but she noticed that 'it was touch and go on the boat. John wasn't in the mood to do anything, he was in a mood. He was fed up, here was this anarchist group, the Sex Pistols with people like Richard Branson coming to see them, and record company people, poshes on the boat that he didn't think should be there. I just thought there was doom coming, after the boat trip'.

'John was being really obnoxious to everybody. It was the star trip, and him thinking that everything had got too commercial. I don't think he could quite handle it. Nobody quite believes how difficult it is to carry on something like that. Anyone can sing, if you've got a good voice, but to sing with conviction, those sort of powerful words every night, words that were black and white, not clouds and rolling hills. I think by then he'd lost the need to do it.' [v]

5: PUNK 1977-8: NEW YORK, LONDON, WEST COAST

'In this world of mine, nothing lasts:
It's got to....blow up"'
The Dils: "Blow Up" (October 1977)

When the world's media came to London to cover the Queen's Silver Jubilee during June 1977, they found a perfect anti-story. During the previous few months, the Sex Pistols had moved from the music press to news front pages and op-ed stories about the state of England. The Jubilee became the story of a divided nation. As images of Britain's most notorious group flashed around the world, American Punk found itself somewhat eclipsed.

There were several reasons for this. In the UK during 1977 was a centralised, national media which had four weekly music papers read by up to one million adolescents a week, and a chart show called "Top Of The Pops" which was seen by one third of the total UK population. Even the most rebellious Punk acts – like the Sex Pistols and the

Clash, who refused to appear on “Top of the Pops” – could rely on enough media attention to get hits.

In contrast, the sheer size of US makes it much tougher to break new acts, and the music media – especially radio – was actively hostile to Punk. The music industry sensation of 1977 was Disco which, originating in the underground black, gay clubs of New York in the early decade, had taken over the charts. Most of all, it fit the cultural imperative of the time, which was hedonism: the freedoms of the sixties – sex and drugs – gone mass.

The very first issue of “Punk” magazine had an editorial – “Death to Disco Shit!” - called Disco ‘the epitome of all that was wrong with Western Civilisation’. In fact, Disco espoused values that were the mirror image of Punk: an annihilating insistence of sex as opposed to Puritan disgust; a delight in technology as opposed to a Luddite reliance on the standard beat group format; acceptance of mass produced as opposed to militant individuality.

It was the difference between confrontation and seduction, and guess which was going to win. At the same time, Rock music was stuck in the values and sounds of the hippie era, or to be more accurate, the mass marketing of the style that had followed the film of “Woodstock” in the early seventies. If you spun the FM dial in any major US city during that time, all you’d hear would be Fleetwood Mac, Cream, The Beatles, Wings.

‘I think a lot of the country picked up on the conservative end of the hippy thing,’ says John Holmstrom, ‘which was typified by the culture of the early 70s, the Grateful Dead, the Allman Brothers. I think there was some government tinkering, too. They didn't like what happened in the 60s and they wanted to make sure it didn't get resurrected with Punk. I heard that Carter said during a jazz concert on the White House lawn that he wanted to stop Punk.’

The principal US music medium, radio, was also hostile to Punk. ‘It seems to me that the establishment music people don’t want it to happen here,’ said radio consultant Paul Drew in late 1977; ‘the industry seems to be saying “Yecch”.’ Another consultant, called Lee Abrams noted that, although Punk was not ‘a passing fad’, it didn’t ‘look like it will happen with the same kind of impact’ in the US: ‘the social climate is different. It’s more positive here’.

There was another factor. The British genius for packaging and synthesis was evident in the way that UK Punk was full of hard, straight lines and coherent attitudes. Successfully promoted as a subculture – with its own rules and regulations, fashions

and slogans – it had become easy to promote and sell. In contrast, the US groups were more stylistically diverse and, outside the major urban centres, without much of a constituency.

During 1977, most of the CBGB's groups had record contracts, many with Sire Records, and were out trying to make headway in the industry. Patti Smith made the charts, but the Ramones and Blondie – despite making the charts in the UK - struggled in the US market. In the meantime, a new generation of groups had come to prominence, most of whom – like the Dead Boys – had been influenced by British Punk.

Fronted by Stiv Bators, the Dead Boys had been part of the legendary Cleveland group, Rocket From The Tombs, whose singer – David Thomas a/k/a Crocus Behemoth – had formed Pere Ubu in late 1975. Unlike Ubu, who explored a highly individualistic path, the Dead Boys seemed content to throw basic, mediated Punk shapes – with self-harm, a fixation with weaponry, and an aggressive misogyny as part of the stew.

The open climate that had fuelled the diversity of CBGB's and the mid seventies Cleveland scene – with Ubu, the Electric Eels and the Mirrors – had disappeared. David Thomas felt that 'the New Wave movement was the worst thing that ever happened to music in America. The main interesting groups that came out of that period, Talking Heads, Devo, Tin Huey, all those people had been working prior to that window of '75/76/77, in isolation.'

'The New Wave episode was a marketing thing. It was a template. Once you have a template to mould yourself to, you're out of isolation, you're out of real geekdom, It destroyed a generation, These people who would end up being in Talking Heads or Pere Ubu or Devo suddenly had something to copy, and at that point it doesn't matter what you're copying, you're still copying. In the end, it screwed up a lot of stuff, it removed that isolation.'

Signed to Mercury Records in late 77 after releasing four terrific singles on their own Hearthan label, Pere Ubu pursued their vision of an environmental music - that would have a huge influence on Post Punk. 'The steel mills were fascinating, ' says Thomas, 'they turned the sky different colours and made wonderful sounds. There's a wonderful geometry, and you could appreciate them the way you'd go to an art museum and look at sculpture.'

'We understood the relation of sound to vision. You'd go by the steel mills and there was this very powerful electrical feeling, combined with a particular sound in the air that conjured up a whole set of visions with it, so we began to appreciate that sound

had a very visual, psychological component. The original idea was to make sound stimulate the imagination. We always saw what we did in very visual terms.'

It wasn't enough just to sing about love, or getting high. Punk injected a new urgency into the sharp end of American Rock culture, and other cities sought to pursue this relationship between music and environments in their own ways. Two of the most vital and creative American Punk scenes were in Los Angeles and San Francisco, and they both coalesced around specific venues and a local fanzine: Slash and Search and Destroy respectively.

During 1975 and 1976, there had been attempts to get something off the ground in Los Angeles that wasn't the Eagles. In the wake of Rodney Bingenheimer's English Disco scene, groups like the Nerves and the Pop started a power pop revival centred around the idea of 'Radio Free Hollywood'. Then there were the Runaways, the kick-ass all girl hard Rock band masterminded by LA scenester Kim Fowley, who showcased a young Joan Jett on guitar.

However it took the Damned's April 1977 show at the Starwood to kickstart the LA Punk scene proper: the British group were at their peak and, playing at warp speed, they electrified the tiny audience. We'd never seen anything like it', remembered Slash's Claude Bessy. 'About ten percent of the crowd had worked really hard at looking like punks. It went down a storm.'

A French transplant to the West Coast, Bessy was in the process of organizing a fanzine: 'we were not knowing what to write about except to review the few records we had, and give out own interpretation of what was going on. Then we heard about these kids living in Hollywood, who were walking around with their hair sticking up. So we contacted them, and they were the Screamers. So we did a centrefold of them posing.'

'Then in May '77 the first issue of Slash came out. It cost $400 to produce, and we basically waited. In about two weeks we started getting a response. By issue number two we decided that, because we were having a hard time financially, we should have a benefit concert. Whatever money we made at the concert went into the next issue. The first one was The Screamers. They were very minimal, but great. It became just an art party'.

In July 1977, the LA Punk scene found its first and its most emblematic club. Claude Bessy: 'The Masque was opened by an ex-patriate Scot called Brendan Mullen,

downstairs below a skin show on Hollywood Boulevard. No fire regulations, totally illegal place to run anything. Later it got raided so often it had to close, it was a daily, weekly confrontation with the LAPD'. The atmosphere was like one long, illegal party.

In the six months after it opened in July 1977, The Masque showcased most of the great first wave LA Punk groups: the Germs, the Weirdos, the Screamers, the Zeros, the Dils, the Alley Cats and the Bags. Bessy remembered how 'there was a snowball effect, suddenly there were more bands than we knew what to do with. It started as a bluff, we were pretending there was an LA scene when there was no scene whatsoever'.

While there was a certain similarity of outlook, pace and style, there were differences: the Germs combined Iggy Pop's confrontational routines with a gleeful garage ineptitude, while the Screamers showcased abrasive electronic textures with live drums and a performance artist front man, Tomata Du Plenty. The three man Dils were more agitprop, like the Clash, while the Weirdos were Hollywood gone mad, an living collage of thrift-shop clothes.

Claude Bessy: 'the disaffection in Los Angeles was a lot more enormous than I imagined it would be, there was a closet of closet art weirdos out there. They had an incredible sense of humour. They were really proud of looking like shit on the streets. While people were walking around with shorts and tans, they were wearing pale make up and long raincoats. People would be extremely aggressive. Stoned out hippies would physically attack you'.

Early Los Angeles Punk 45's by the Germs ("Forming" and "Lexicon Devil"), the Weirdos ("Life of Crime", "We've Got The Neutron Bomb"), the Dils ("I Hate The Rich" and "Class War"), and the Zeros ("WIMP" and "Wild Weekend") were as good as anything produced in New York or London. However they were only released on small independents: Chris Ashford's What?, David Brown and Pat Garrett's Dangerhouse, or BOMP records, run by Greg Shaw.

Despite that these groups were playing right in the heart of what was a key music industry town, no major label would touch them with a barge pole. 'The record companies and media were all hippies who had made it,' remembered Claude Bessy, 'and they were very hostile. I think that's when it got really good, actually. We decided it was our party, nobody else was interested, so lets just go wild. It definitely seemed that we were going to be rejects forever.'

The same pattern held in San Francisco, up the coast. V.Vale, the editor of Search and Destroy', remembered going to see The Ramones in San Francisco in August 1976: 'I was astounded. I could see that these lyrics were not 60s lyrics, they're a total critique of society, and this was not music, this was like minimalism: two minute songs, fifteen minute set - a lot of anger and vituperation coming from the band, pure negative energy. But it was very disciplined.'

'Then there was a totally different look that we hadn't seen before - black leather motorcycle jackets, ripped up t-shirts that were too small, saying things like, "Let god kill em all", "sort 'em out and die" - unpleasant messages. Ripped up jeans, and the cheapest tennis shoes you could get. Fury. It was an incredible contrast. It made all the Rock music of the time seem florid and baroque with all its self indulgent excesses.'

Within months, a scene had formed around local groups like the Nuns and Crime, who played the Mabuhay Gardens – a former Filipino nightclub that almost by default, became San Francisco's Punk central. After the Damned visited in April 1977, tempos sped up and a set of new groups – like the Avengers, UXA and the Dils, transplants from Los Angeles – began to develop a visceral music that was more critical than the trash-soaked LA groups.

We went down to Los Angeles,' remembered Vale. 'The Mask was the club, and we felt that there was a difference between the LA scene and the San Francisco scene, cos the first two bands here were older and deeper people, I felt. You felt that the cultural scene there in LA was more social and style, and it was more political in San Francisco. A lot of the people were just born rebels, I guess. I went to LA and it was much younger'.

'People here had been rebellious and nurtured their lifestyle of rebellion for a much longer period, it was more complex as a result, there weren't any role models. Like I said, most of the people in the early Mabuhay you could easily get to know personally, cos there was such a small number. They were all dissident artists, refusing to use a canvas and oil paints. Inventing the Punk collage posters, with much hard core imagery'.

Just like Los Angeles, the San Franciscan Punk bands had the similarities that came from being in the same subculture, but with individual quirks. Fronted by Penelope Houston, the Avengers were a loud Rock group in the Sex Pistols mould (and were produced by Steve Jones in 1978). Nuns were Ramones-like, with an ice-queen keyboardist, Jennifer Miro. The Sleepers were, perhaps, the best of all: an authentic Psych-Punk group with trance guitar and a shamanic front-man, Ricky Williams.

None of them had major label contracts or mass media attention, but, as V.Vale notes, this lack of attention worked in the Punks' favour: 'what we were doing with Search & Destroy, and Slash, we had an open field. It was very unself-conscious. Self-consciousness was one of the big killers. That's what media brings in. People mugging for cameras, and that didn't happen much in San Francisco, it was allowed to develop in an extremely pure way.'

Search and Destroy not only documented these groups – in some cases conducting the only in-depth interviews that they would ever have – but also had features on out-of-town visitors like Devo or Nico, film directors like John Waters and Russ Meyer, writers like J.G.Ballard and William Burroughs, and rants about the Situationists. It was, as V.Vale remembers, a free-form climate in which people could meet, communicate and encourage each other'.

A big boost for this emerging subculture came with the nearly simultaneous issue, in late 1977, of the Ramones' "Rocket To Russia" (Sire) and the Sex Pistols' "Never Mind The Bollocks" (Warner Brothers). The initial signs were encouraging but the real test came with the Sex Pistols' first tour of the US. Their first show in Atlanta on January the 8th, 1978 was a huge media event. As ever when they were under pressure, the Sex Pistols did not shine.

In the intervening months since the height of the Jubilee, the Sex Pistols had released two further UK singles – "Pretty Vacant" and "Holidays In the Sun": both UK top ten – and "Never Mind The Bollocks", which topped the album charts. Despite this success, the group was stalled: unable to play in public thanks to blanket bans, and unable to write new material – ¾ of the songs on the album were more than a year old.

The Sex Pistols had became a huge, national event in the UK and it had broken them. Relationships within the group were deteriorating – not the least because of Sid Vicious' heroin abuse – and their inability to function as a normal act tore at their nerves. The only normal shows they could play were in Europe (Holland and Sweden), while those that they did attempt in the UK were shrouded in rumour, mystery and farce.

Manager Malcolm McLaren had conceived of a US tour itinerary that avoided most of the media centres and concentrated on working towns and the deep south. In practice, this meant long travel distances and small, often hostile audiences. The relationships within the group fragmented: Steve Jones and Paul Cook traveled separately from an increasingly withdrawn Johnny Rotten and an out-of-control Sid Vicious.

It all came to a head with the final show at San Francisco's Winterland theatre on January 14th. In front of their biggest audience ever, the Sex Pistols saw their future and they hated it, and each other. The big stages were always a challenge to Johnny Rotten as a singer. As he remembered, 'I'd seen us as a small clubby band at that time, we were way ahead of ourselves. We didn't know how to cut it onstage, how to get past the first twenty rows'.

V.Vale went to the show and remembered it as 'an oppressive, police state kind of atmosphere. We'd already heard all the songs and deciphered all the lyrics, and read his interviews, it was exactly what I thought it would be. It was a zombie performance, people who were already dead, re-animated for a while, going through their motions. They were media-saturated, they'd run out of message to deliver'.

On the closing song, the encore "No Fun", Johnny Rotten sat down on the stage and started singing in his real, everyday voice. The show was over, and as he left the stage, he shouted: 'ever get the feeling you've been cheated?' As he remembers: 'I meant it - no fun. Ever get the feeling you've been cheated? Well I meant that from here, because I felt cheated. I knew it couldn't go on. There just didn't seem to be a way of connecting it all, evermore'.

Within a couple of days, the Sex Pistols split up: the end not just of the group. Legs McNeil saw the Winterland show: 'I was hanging out with the Ramones in LA, so I watched the Sex Pistols come across America, as they toured I watched the kids skin their heads, in that week. The kids there got it off the TV, Telly Savalas saying, and next the fabulous Sex Pistols, on some award show. It was every five minutes. It was so weird'.

'The Ramones were great. It was "Rocket to Russia", and it looked like they were going to take off too, but then along came the Sex Pistols and ruined the Ramones too. If you wore a black leather jacket after the Sex Pistols you were Punk, and punks were these horrible people who threw up on aeroplanes. It wasn't the Ramones' style, cos they were a lot smarter in a way. They had a mystique, and the Sex Pistols blew away that mystique'.

"Punk" magazine editor John Holmstrom also witnessed the Sex Pistols tour: 'the Sex Pistols broke it. If something happens in New York nobody pays any attention to it in America. That's why it had to happen in London. America loves England, at least it did. When the Sex Pistols came over and did the tour and broke up, that was the official end

of Punk Rock, because they were the only Punk Rock group in the world, according to America's perception'[vi].

6: SOME CONCLUSIONS: 1978

'First it was "Punk", then "New Wave". As each term for the new Rock 'N' Roll falls by the wayside, people are getting the idea there's a wide range of Rocking going on within the new sound. A new generation of Rockers with as many styles and viewpoints as any other generation of Rockers. They're not the same. No amount of tidy terms or slogans will ever make them the same. We know. Check this lineup out and you'll see why'.

Sire Records ad in BOMP magazine, Mar 1978 (featuring Ramones, Talking Heads, the Dead Boys, Tuff Darts, The Saints, Richard Hell and Patti Smith)

Punk was an international movement that originated, like all good ideas, in several places at the same time: New York, London, Paris and Cleveland, to name but four. Brilliantly packaged and embodied by the Ramones and the Sex Pistols, it spread throughout the US and the US during 1976 and 1977 – inspiring a generation of musicians, writers and artists. It was a severe, nihilistic aesthetic – black and white – that attracted and repelled at the same time.

Like the hippies – of whom they were the negative, mirror image – Punks were highly critical of the media and the construction of consciousness. They asked the same question: does life have to be like this? And made the point: if you want a better world, then go make it. The whole tenor of Punk was a wake-up call, an injection of raw electric energy – like sticking your finger in a wall socket - that demanded involvement rather than apathy.

The Punks pretended to despise the hippies for two reasons: to distinguish themselves from the previous subcultural generation, and to express their fury at the way that the promises of 1966 and 1967 had decayed into slop by the mid seventies. Indeed, many Punks had been hippies as early teenagers. In order to make this difference obvious, the Ramones and the Sex Pistols bled out all black influences from their music.

'In the sixties, hippies always wanted to be black,' says Legs McNeil. 'And we were going, fuck the Blues'. This was very different from the "Kick Out The Jams" MC5 – to whom the Punks are often compared - although their bleached out second album "Back In The USA" was a big favourite. The Velvet Underground and the Stooges – with their

unsyncopated slabs of sound – were big influences, as were elements of glitter Rock and even sixties Brit-Beat.

The Sex Pistols began by covering the Small Faces and the Who, while the Ramones sourced both Herman and the Hermits and the Bay City Rollers. But the point was to be new: thus everything that had gone before was to be dismissed and trashed. Punk emerged fully formed as a radical break: that was the only way to clear space in a cluttered, decadent pop culture and to give a younger generation new hope. This was Year Zero.[vii]

The rhetoric of Punk was totally successful, and was backed up by the music. In 1976, seeing the Sex Pistols or the Clash was to be confronted, like a jump cut into the future. In the same way, the Ramones sounded like nothing you'd ever heard before: impossibly fast and distorted. The attitude and the fashion were totally new, as well: the hostility, the black leather jackets, the abbreviated, almost truncated songs – sped up for an accelerated age.

Apart from the Sex Pistols, all the British Punk groups took from the Ramones four square, distorted classicism. That was it, no deviation for a year or so. For a few months, this was the template: leather jackets, skinny leg trousers, thundering drums, bass playing that never ventured from the root note, a guitar distorting so much that the harmonics were flying everywhere, with a bug-eyed singer shouting slogans in your face[viii].

Rock music had been stripped back to an essence. But this could only be a short-lived phenomenon, as this back-to-basics style became an emotional and artistic straitjacket. And the nihilistic rejection of everything became a prison. 'I think its something you can only do when you're about seventeen' says Ed Kuepper, the guitarist for the Saints. 'But you make a decision that you want to survive, and do other things with your life'.

The choice was clear: to remain in the straitjacket or to open out. Most of those involved chose the latter course. Punk's great success had been to give a generation a sharp focus. That resulted in the free interplay of ideas and attitudes between a huge diversity of people, who would never normally have met each other. After 1977, as the ties that had bound them began to disintegrate, the leading players returned to what had fascinated them in the first place.

The years immediately after 1977 were an extraordinary time musically, as the energy of Punk diffused through pop culture. This was fuelled by the structural innovation that is perhaps Punk's greatest legacy: the boom in totally independent record production

and distribution. There had been independent labels before Punk of course, but the Buzzcocks' "Spiral Scratch" EP gave rise to both an ideology and an aesthetic.

The idea was to bypass the major record labels and to put out records by yourself, assisted by an emerging chain of independent record shops around the UK – which in turn were boosted by the near blanket bans of the Sex Pistols' "God Save The Queen".[ix] The new breed of independents worked in the same way as the young writers creating the fanzine boom. If you put something out yourself, you have total control, so why not do something different?[x]

By early 1978, when the Sex Pistols found they could take it no further, the energy of the first phase was running out. In the UK, Punk had become a commercially identified style – also called New Wave - that was becoming obsolete. The sharp end of Pop and Rock turned towards electronica and what would later be called Post Punk: music that admitted elements from black music - Dub Reggae, Funk, and even the despised Disco.

In the US, the incredible success of the soundtrack to "Saturday Night Fever" turned Disco into an industry and consumer sensation. Punk was totally lost in the glare. With such negative associations, even cheerleaders like Sire Records sought to rebrand Punk as New Wave, power pop or even 'the new Rock'n roll'. Most first wave US Punks never got deals, leaving a whole generation of great groups – like the Weirdos and the Sleepers – under-recorded.

During 1978, some of the original CBGB's artists made the charts, like the Patti Smith Group (top twenty with "Easter") and Talking Heads (top thirty with the Brian Eno produced "More Songs About Buildings And Food", by which time, it could be argued, they did not sound Punk anyway. The real commercial breakthrough came when Blondie went disco with "Heart Of Glass", which went to number one in spring 1979 – the start of a long hit-making career.

Confined to small local scenes, the energy of classic Punk congealed into hardcore, and went underground during the 1980's – the years of SST Records and the fanzine Maximum Rock'n Roll. Like Carrie at the end of Brian dDe Palma's film, however, Punk reappeared with a vengeance – and a metallic twist – in 1991 with the success of Nirvana, whose breakthrough album harked back to the Sex Pistols both in its attitude and its title: "Nevermind".

At their commercial peak – around the time that "In Utero" was released in summer 1993 - Nirvana were just like the Sex Pistols had been in 1977: a big, bad, noisy Rock group who refused to play by the rules and who had developed this wild, electric

mythology. Nobody knew what they were going to do, nobody knew how they would react. Which kept things interesting, even if it was very hard on those concerned – and an impossible high wire act to sustain.

Nirvana were also the last generation to have a direct, experiential link with seventies Punk. Born in 1967 – and so at the peak age of influence at 13 in 1980 - Cobain had been intimately involved with the hardcore, defiantly independent subculture that had developed throughout the US during the eighties, and he had bought into one of its most persistent – and perhaps pernicious – tenets: that to succeed was to fail, and that to fail was to succeed.

However that double bind had been woven into Punk at its very beginnings. If you deem yourself worthless, how does it feel when you do become worth something? The problems of integration faced by Punks were many and varied, and would take – in some cases, decades - to work out. But that is outside the remit of this story. For something that flared very brightly and very briefly – as it was designed to – Punk has left an indelible legacy[xi].

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[i] The quotes in italics are taken from the following songs, in order:
1,2&3, Iggy and the Stooges, 'Search And Destroy' from "Raw Power" 1973
4: Iggy and the Stooges, ' from "Raw Power" 1973
5: Mott The Hoople, 'All the Young Dudes', 45 1972
6&7: The Saints, 'I'm Stranded', 45 1976
8: Pere Ubu, 'Heaven' 45 1977
9: Pere Ubu, '30 Seconds Over Tokyo', 45 1975
10: The Ramones, 'Blitzkreig Bop', from "The Ramones", 1976
11: Patti Smith Group, "My Generation" live version, 45 1976

[ii] The main sources for this section are: various slang dictionaries, including Tom Dalzell, "Flappers 2 Rappers: American Youth Slang" (Merriam-Webster 1996) and John Ayto, "Oxford Dictionary of Slang" (Oxford University Press 1999); the John Holmstrom and Legs McNeil interviews were done during the research for "England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock", (New York St.Martins 1992); plus a thorough reading of early seventies Rock magazines and fanzines like Who Put The Bomp, Fusion, Creem and Rolling Stone (USA); Zigzag, Creem and Let It Rock (UK). A collection of Greg Shaw's pioneering work for Mojo Navigator and Who Put The Bomp has been published as: "BOMP: Saving the World One Record At A Time", by Suzy Shaw and Mick Farren (American Modern

Books, 2007). For more general info, access the Rock's Back Pages library of music journalism going back to the sixties and type 'punk' into their search engine: www.Rocksbackpages.com

[iii] The main sources for this section are: Roman Kozak, "This Ain't No Disco: The Story of CBGB" (Faber and Faber 1988); Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, "Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk" (Grove Press, 1996); the interviews with Richard Hell, Mary Harron and Legs McNeil were done during the research for "England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock" (St. Martin's 1992); and Punk issue 1 January 1976, published December 1975. Those wanting to delve further should turn to individual band biographies, ie Dee Dee Ramone with Veronica Kofman, "Poison Heart: Surviving The Ramones" (Fire Fly 1997). For Arthur Rimbaud, see Jon Savage, "Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture 1875-1945" (Viking, 2007), Chapter 2, 'Nationalists and Decadents', and Graham Robb, "Rimbaud" (Picador 2001).

[iv] Kuepper's overdriven guitar sound drove the Saints like a runaway train. Formed in Brisbane during 1973, they recorded their first 45 – the blistering "I'm Stranded" during summer 1976, and their classic first album of the same name in early 1977. That summer, they had a Top Thirty hit with "This Perfect Day", perhaps the most nihilistic record ever to make the UK charts. For evidence of their raw power, check out this youtube clip of them live in April 1977:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9dzTUYsGU0

[v] The sources for this section: Jon Savage, "England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock and Beyond" (St.Martin's US 2002). The quotes from Adam Ant, Glen Matlock, Steve Jones, John Lydon, John Ingham, Mary Harron, Marco Pirroni and Ed Kuepper all come from the interviews done during the research of "England's Dreaming". The music press material, from "Sounds" in particular, and the newspaper headlines come from materials collected in the England's Dreaming Archive, held at the John Moores University, Liverpool.

[vi] The sources for this section: the quotes from John Holmstrom, David Thomas, Claude Bessy, V.Vale, John Lydon and Legs McNeil come from the interviews done during the research of "England's Dreaming". The quotes from the radio consultants come from "England's Dreaming", and were from contemporary magazines. For the history of LA punk, there are two great books: Barney Hoskyns, "Waiting For The Sun: Strange Days, Weird Scenes, and the Sound of Los Angeles" (St Martin's US 1996), Chapter 8 'The Decline of the West', and Brendan Mullen (with Don Bolles and Adam Parfrey), "Lexicon Devil: The Fast Times and Short Life of Darby Crash and the Germs" (Feral House 2002). For San Franciscan Punk, see James Stark, "Punk '77: an inside look at the san Francisco Rock'n roll scene, 1977" (RE/Search Publications 1999). All twelve issues of "Search and Destroy" have been reprinted by RE/Search Publications, 20 Romolo Suite B, San Francisco CA 94133.

[vii] For a definitive account of Pre-Punk and the influences on Punk, see Johan Kugelberg, "No More Jubilees – Punk Before Punk" in Ugly Things, Issue 26, Winter/Spring 2008.

[viii] The whiteness of this was obvious, and helped to restrict Punk's commercial acceptance – in a pop economy still dominated by blackamerican dance music. It also got the Punks mixed up with politics – an involvement which they had sought thanks to state-of-the-nation songs like the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy In the UK" and the Clash's "White Riot". After the rising British fascist party, the National Front, sought to coopt Punks (they were encouraged so to do by the fact that several early Punks had worn swastikas in a highly successful attempt to be obnoxious) both these groups made explicit anti-racist statements. Johnny Rotten went public with his love for Dub Reggae, while The Clash headlined a huge Anti Racist Carnival held in April 1978.

[ix] The Sex Pistols record was banned by the BBC and all commercial radio outlets; it was banned by chainstores and kept off the number one spot, it now seems clear, by high level music industry

interference. The independent stores – like Rough Trade in London – were among the only places you could buy it.

[x] Since the late seventies, the independent idea has since crossed the boundaries of genre and generation. Almost every successive pop and Rock style has been fuelled by the thrill of reducing the gap between having an idea and getting it out there: Rap, early Chicago House, Grunge, and dance music of all types – Jungle, Grime etc.

[xi] Sources for this section: the Legs McNeil and the Ed Kuepper interviews comes from "England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock". For more info re the independent labels, see Discography, "England's Dreaming" and the many discographies of Punk and Post Punk – for instance: Henrik Bech Poulsen "'77: the Year of Punk and New Wave" (Helter Skelter 2005).