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Honours Dissertation

New York City's Societal Influence on the Punk Movement, 1975-1979

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Contents

Introduction

‘Fear City’ and the Creation of a Scene

New York’s economic situation in the mid 1970s saw unprecedented levels of austerity imposed upon the city and, as a result, contributed to the creation of what the historian Dominic Sandbrook described as ‘a terrifying urban Hades’.[1] Swathes of New Yorkers were riled by the closure of libraries, hospitals and fire stations and had their anger compounded by subway fare hikes, the abolition of free public college education and severe cuts to public service employment; a total of sixty three thousand public servants, ranging from teachers to police officers, were put out of work.[2]

The drastic economic measures implemented by Mayor Abraham Beame as part of the conditions of New York’s federal financial bail out contributed significantly to a rise in crime and societal dysfunction across the city. Crime and the sharp decline of morality was tangibly clear to large sections of the city’s residents and law enforcement agencies alike. Indeed, societal conditions were so bleak that police concerns for neighbourhood and public transport safety were conveyed to Gotham day-trippers in a helpful information pamphlet, alluringly titled ‘Welcome to Fear City: A Survival Guide for Visitors to the City of New York’ (figure 1): its publication was certainly justified given the substantial reduction of the city’s police force, an approximated seventy-five felonies per hour and a rapidly rising homicide rate.[3]

New York’s dire societal and economic conditions contributed to a considerable population decrease; eight hundred thousand people, predominantly white and middle class, fled the city

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[1] Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right,* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2007), pp.125-127

[2] Ibid.

[3] Jen Carlson, ‘The 1970s Pamphlet Aimed at Keeping Tourists Out of NYC’ in *The Gothamist,* (September 16, 2013), http://gothamist.com/2013/09/16/the_1970s_pamphlet_aimed_at_keeping.php#photo-1, accessed October 30, 2015; Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell,* pp.125-127

between 1970 and 1980.[4] Although the exodus was an indication of New York's desperate economic and social climate, it opened up living and work space. Cheap accommodation, art space and drinking venues became available which encouraged artists and bohemians, influenced by Andy Warhol and Pop-Art's rise to prominence in the 1960s, to descend upon New York and particularly the Lower East Side district of Manhattan; a diverse area with noticeably high crime levels and subversion.[5]

A central hub in the Lower East Side for such bohemians was the Country, BlueGrass, Blues and Other Music for Uplifting Gormandizers bar; colloquially known as CBGBs. Hilly Kristal, a former US Marine and New York bar owner, was one of those who took advantage of white flight and the subsequent cheap rates available on the Bowery when he opened up CBGB as a venue for live music in December 1973. As the name suggests, Kristal had not initially intended CBGB to become a venue for rock music but it soon become the focal point for the artists, writers and musicians who were disillusioned with a bloated and corporate rock music industry that placed more emphasis upon laser and live animal shows than on the music created.[6]

Kristal's CBGB was dark, dingy and sweaty; a microcosm of the Lower East Side streets that were awash with drunkards and derelicts, or as The Dictators more succinctly put it in their ode to the Big Apple; 'junkies, queens and squares'.[7] Crime, arson, drug abuse, homelessness and prostitution permeated the streets of the Lower East Side and wider New York City, and

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[4] George J. Lankevich, *American Metropolis: A History of New York City,* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp.208-226

[5] Mary Montgomery Wolf, *'We accept you, one of us?': Punk Rock Community and Individualism in an Uncertain Era, 1974-1985,* (North Carolina: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2007), pp.165-168

[6] Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics,* (New York, Free Press, 2001), pp.153-154

[7] Ibid, pp.154-155; The Dictators, 'New York, New York', *Viva Dictators,* (Escapi, 2005): 'New York, New York' did not feature in any studio album or single release but was performed live between 1975 and 1981. It has since been released on a number of The Dictators live and compilation albums. References to bootleg recordings of 'New York, New York' from 1977 and 1978 can be found on The Dictators official website, http://www.thedictators.com/discog.html, (accessed October 30, 2015)

contributed to shaping the lives, image and experiences of many of the region's residents; some of whom set up base camp in CBGBs and went on to create a music scene that became known as punk.[8]

The societal and economic conditions in mid-1970s New York City undoubtedly created a fertile environment for a counterculture to emerge and thrive. Each and every one of the criteria for the creation of a music scene, as set out by Talking Heads founder and front man David Byrne, was met by New York in the mid-1970s; cheap rents (created by white flight), a venue of appropriate size that is willing to allow the performance of new material (CBGB) and a sense of alienation from the prevailing music climate (corporate rock).[9] And if music reflects the venue and the conditions in which it was created, as Byrne also argues, then surely punk's sound and aesthetics were reflections of the CBGB club that reflected the sense of alienation and frustration with the corporate rock industry, the potential for vibrant musical creativity in New York City.[10](figure 2)

Punk musicians, however, were not harmonious in their approach to making music, projecting image or aesthetics. Blondie's pop sensibilities did not sound like Television's art-rock, and The Ramones '1-2-3-4' rock and accompanying ripped jeans, leather jacket image did not sound or look like the funk inspired and preppy Talking Heads. And as the historian Bruce Schulman argues, the scene was not created by a politically conscious collective that aimed to revolutionise the societal status quo like that of the hippy New Left movement in the 1960s or the London punk movement that exploded in 1977; indeed New York punks embraced certain aspects

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[8] Bernard Cohen, *Deviant Street Networks: Prostitution in New York City,* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1980), pp. 29-31

[9] David Byrne, *How Music Works,* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012), pp. 269-277

[10] Ibid, pp.15-18

of the downtrodden nature of their city and society in their music and lifestyles.[11] What emerged from CBGB and the New York punk movement was a collective group of the 'other' whose lives and music were predominantly shaped by the subversive and dysfunctional elements of New York society.

Although Will Hermes asserts that the period between 1973 to 1978 were the 'five years in New York City that changed music for ever', it was between 1975 and 1979 when the punk movement rose to prominence and reached its peak; its life span running alongside Legs McNeil and John Holmstrom's New York based *Punk* magazine.[12] The focus of this dissertation therefore will be on the music, imagery and experiences of punks during the period 1975 to 1979 and how these were both symbiotic with and reflective of wider New York City society. Whilst there has been a plethora of narrative accounts of New York punk, such as the aforementioned *Love Goes to Buildings on Fire* and Clinton Heylin's *The Birth of American Punk: From the Velvets to the Voidoids,* there is a limited amount of scholarly work available on the subject making the links between wider New York society and the emergence of punk. This dissertation will therefore attempt to at least partially fill this historiographical void.[13]

Although the topic also provides wide scope to delve into many aspects of New York life in the 1970s and how they affected the movement, the specific focus of this dissertation will be on three particular strands of society: street deviance, gender and sexuality. Street deviance, namely the sex and drug industries, will be investigated separately and will respectively make up the first

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[11] Montgomery Wolf, *'We accept you, one of us?',* p.167: Schulman, *The Seventies,* p.152

[12] Will Hermes, *Love Goes to Buildings on Fire*: *Five years in New York that changed music forever,* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011); *Punk* magazine initially ran from 1975-1979 but re-emerged in the No-Wave era after 1981

[13] Will Hermes, *Love Goes to Buildings on Fire*: *Five years in New York that changed music forever,* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011): Clinton Heylin, *The Birth of American Punk: From the Velvets to the Voidoids,* (London: Helter Skelter Publishing, 2005)

two chapters of the dissertation. Gender and sexuality, two intrinsically linked strands, will be assessed together in the third and final chapter.

Each chapter will be structured with three questions in mind: Firstly, how did each aspect of society broadly manifest itself in wider New York City? Secondly, how did it affect the lives of punk protagonists? And finally, how was it represented in the imagery and music that punk produced? By addressing each of these questions, the dissertation aims to counter Bruce Schulman's claim that New York punk was merely an anti-corporate rock movement that both grew out of and mimicked a 'politico-musical movement that originally flourished in Great Britain'.[14] Instead, New York punk should be considered as a valuable and reflective social commentary of life in New York City in the mid-1970s.

[14] Schulman, *The Seventies,* pp.152-154

Chapter 1

‘Trying to turn a trick’: The NYC Sex Industry and its Influence on Punk[15]

Fifteen year old Karen Baxter, like many of punk’s protagonists, fled her home town for New York City around Christmas 1974. Within weeks of her arrival from Cambridge, Massachusetts, she changed her name to Carol Blake, added four years to her actual age, fell in love with an East Village pimp and began hustling on Lexington Avenue. After just a couple of months in New York, she was found in the Belmore Hotel on February 22nd 1975, having been strangled to death by a client with a metal chain.[16] Baxter’s death was symptomatic of the illicit sex industry that permeated the streets of New York City in the mid 1970s. In full public view, men, women and transvestites, many of whom were under age, solicited sex on almost every street corner of Manhattan without resident or police intervention.[17] The city was also home to a substantial regulated sex industry where two hundred and forty five licensed sex establishments, ninety of which were situated in Times Square alone, provided services such as adult movie theatres, bookstores, massage parlours and peep-shows.[18]

The city’s sex trade was renowned nationwide, due largely in part to stories reported by the *New York Times* but also as a result of fictional representations on the big screen. Stories of young prostitutes such as Karen Baxter and ‘Gina’, a fifteen year old prostitute who ‘ran away to the bottom of the world’ to be coerced into prostitution by ‘rotten, lowdown, pieces of dirt’ pimps, were commonplace in the pages of *The New York Times* in the mid-1970s.[19] Reports of under age

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[15] The Ramones, ‘53rd and 3rd’, *The Ramones,* (Sire Records, 1976)

[16] *New York Times,* March 5, 1975, p.28; *New York Times,* May 3, 1975, p.45

[17] Cohen, *Deviant Street Networks,* p.XV

[18] Christina Sterbenz, ‘New York Used to be a Terrifying Place’, in *The Business Insider Online,* (July 12, 2013), http://www.businessinsider.com/new-york-city-used-to-be-a-terrifying-place-photos-2013-7?op=1&IR=T (accessed November 20, 2015); Sandbrook, *Mad As Hell,* pp.76-79

[19] *New York Times,* November 16, 1976, p.53

prostitution and seedy street corner pimps in the written media were both fictionalised and made visual in Martin Scorsese's 1976 Academy Award nominated film *Taxi Driver,* in which the lead character, Travis Bickle, attempts to rescue Iris, an under-age prostitute who, like Karen Baxter and Gina, had also been coerced in to selling sex.[20]

Bickle's vigilantism against under-age prostitution in *Taxi Driver* provided a fictitious and violent representation of the prominence of under age sex workers as well as attempted clean ups of the sex industry; attempts that largely failed. Father Bruce Ritter for example, a Franciscan reverend located on the Lower East Side, adopted a less violent vigilante campaign and ran an illegal social services scheme through the mid to late 1970s to provide safe shelter for under-age runaway prostitutes similar to Karen Baxter, Gina and the fictitious Iris. Despite his attempts, the porn industry, bidding for cheap real estate, managed to drive the Church Missionary Alliance out of their six storey accommodation to open up a blue-movie house; an indicator of the power and prominence of a sex industry that had also shut down the symbolic 1976 child led 'We want our City back' protests outside The Show World Center sex arcade on the grounds that it provided economic benefits for areas such as Eighth Avenue in midtown Manhattan.[21] The prevalence of sex and the sex industry in New York City also played a crucial and formative role in the lives and experiences of a host of punk's most prominent figures. As *Punk* magazine editor John Holstrom proclaimed, 'sex was everywhere. You couldn't escape it'.[22]

Jim Carroll, the front man of late 1970s punk outfit the The Jim Carroll Band, first took himself down to 53rd Street and 3rd Avenue on Manhattan's Lower East Side as a young teenager

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[20] Martin Scorsese, *Taxi Driver,* (Columbia, 1976)

[21] Francis X. Clines, 'About New York: A Haven for the Sexually Exploited', *New York Times,* January 18, 1977, p.23; Sandbrook, *Mad As Hell,* pp.76-79

[22] John Holmstrom and Bridget Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012), p.27

on the advice of an old john.[23] Carroll's previous Greenwich Avenue haunt provided him with only moderate business, so he moved to 53rd and 3rd where he was 'offered a lot of money' by older men for a variety of services in a number of different venues.[24] Carroll's early venture down to 53rd and 3rd to earn money as a prostitute was not unique; the industry provided economic opportunities or life experiences for many of punk's participants. Indeed for some, it provided both. Dee Dee Ramone was first spotted by Mickey Leigh, Joey Ramone's younger brother and the Ramones' future roadie, dressed in his signature leather jacket, touting for business in the renowned 'gay-boy hustler spot' of 53rd and 3rd on the Lower East Side.[25] (figure 3)

Dee Dee immortalised his experiences as a rent boy with his self-penned Ramones song '53rd and 3rd'; a track that highlights the clear link between New York street deviance, punk and serious crime.[26] In the song, Dee Dee documents his time spent 'standing on the street' and 'trying to turn a trick' as a rent boy, but, in order to prove his masculinity and most probably his heterosexuality, he took out his razor blade and 'did what God forbade'; stabbing the john who had hired his services. Whether or not Dee Dee's claims of the song being 'autobiographical and very real' are entirely accurate, and that is unlikely given that there is seemingly no supporting evidence of Dee Dee stabbing any kerb crawlers, it does provide an insight into the dangerous and aggressive nature of the industry as well as its influence on punk music.[27]

The prostitution industry was not the only environment where sex and predatory violence crossed paths; either in New York or on the punk scene. Ivan Julian, Richard Hell's co-Voidoid and flat mate, recalled an encounter in which Television manager Terry Ork plied him with him

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[23] A 'john' was a New York term for a prostitute's client or kerb crawler

[24] Jim Carroll quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me*, pp. 216-218

[25] Mickey Leigh quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* pp. 216-218

[26] The Ramones, '53rd and 3rd', *The Ramones,* (Sire Records, 1976); Cohen, *Deviant Street Networks,* p.2

[27] Dee Dee Ramone quoted in McNeil and Mccain, *Please Kill Me,* p. 217

alcohol and 'whatnot' to an extent where he passed out. Julian was awoken by Ork's attempts to pull off his pants and recalled Ork's second attempt at the same act whilst throwing up following the drug and alcohol comedown. Richard Hell's dismissal of the incident in which he said, 'well that's very Terry', was reflective of many contemporary attitudes towards sexual assault in New York, particularly in the punk scene.[28] Whether it was the climate of liberalism, as Dominic Sandbrook argues, that saw illicit sex permeate society or the tolerance and ignoring of street deviance by the city's law authorities, as the sociologist Bernard Cohen argues, assault often went ignored and a number of other examples were demonstrated in the lives and work of punk musicians.[29]

Debbie Harry, Blondie's iconic founding member and front woman, experienced the laissez faire culture of predatory sex first hand. In her 1979 interview with the author Victor Bockris, she openly discussed the climate of sex related crime in New York in the mid-1970s. She explained to Bockris; 'you're trying to get into your car and somebody comes up and tries to steal your purse or something, pushes you down into the car and just tries to rape you. Or one of the checkers carries your bags out to the trunk and brushes up against you'. Bockris went on to ask Harry if she found it surprising how many women she knew who had been raped to which she replied 'No. I guess it's high, but I mean that just's just the story of being a cunt. It's either you get it or you give it, right.'[30]

Harry and Bockris's interview also provides insight into the attitudes towards male assault such as that experienced by Ivan Julian and both agreed that sexual assault crimes were handled badly by the New York police. Bockris explains to Harry that he knows of 'guys who have been

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[28] Ivan Julian quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* pp.357-358

[29] Sandbrook, *Mad As Hell,* pp.76-79; Cohen, *Deviant Street Networks,* p.2

[30] 'An Interview With Debbie Harry' in Victor Bockris, *NYC Babylon: From Beat to Punk,* (London; Omnibus Press, 1998),p.164

raped by guys but they don't complain about it', to which Harry replies 'Guys that get raped are really in trouble. What are *they* going to say when they go to the police. "I've been raped"? The police are just going to laugh the guy right out of the station house. Kick him in the ass a few times'.[31] Indeed, the reaction to male sex attacks is perhaps best demonstrated in Patti Smith's 'Land' from her 1975 debut album *Horses.*[32] The lyrics within 'Land' tell of the story of a young man called 'Johnny' who is sexually attacked by an unnamed man. Smith, in her inimitable poetic style, recites the lyrics, 'The boy looked at Johnny, Johnny wanted to run, but the movie kept moving as planned', then, the song takes a darker turn when 'the boy took Johnny, he pushed him against the locker, he drove it in, he drove it home, he drove it deep in Johnny'. As 'the boy disappeared', the attacker's anonymity was maintained without ramifications, and Johnny reacted to the attack by 'crashing his head against the locker' and 'laughing hysterically', providing an indication that he was both aware of what had happened and the helplessness of his situation: much like Debbie Harry concluded in her interview with Bockris.[33]

Whilst Blondie's debut single, 'X-Offender' further highlights the influential nature of sex and the sex industry on punk music it also demonstrates that the police did not completely turn a blind eye to sex related crime, as Cohen, Harry, and Patti Smith's 'Land' suggest. Initially written by Blondie bassist Gary Valentine about an eighteen year old's sexual encounter with his underage girlfriend and his subsequent arrest, Debbie Harry amended the lyrical content of the song and took on the role of a street corner prostitute who unknowingly hustled a police officer leading to her arrest. As the song progresses, she becomes growingly infatuated with her 'vision in blue', who she believed 'wanted the love of a sex offender'.[34] The tone of Harry's voice becomes

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Patti Smith, 'Land', *Horses,* (Arista: 1975)

[33] Ibid: 'An Interview With Debbie Harry' in Bockris, *NYC Babylon*, p.164

[34] Blondie, 'X-Offender', *Blondie,* (Private Stock, 1976)

increasingly pining after she is incarcerated and, coupled with the policeman's comments that 'law, like wine, is ageless', hints towards the guilty perpetrator being an underage prostitute; much like the one portrayed in *Taxi Driver* by Jodie Foster and literally acted out in real life by Gina and Karen Baxter.

Although prostitution and the sex industry was considered by Sandbrook to be a 'porno plague', it did provide financial aid to the burgeoning punk scene. From prostitution, as in the cases of Dee Dee Ramone and Jim Carroll, to operating the lights at adult theatres, as in the case of Patti Smith's guitarist Lenny Kaye, the sex industry offered employment in New York when there was little else on offer.[35] Indeed, as *Punk* magazine's co-editor John Holmstrom argues, punk groupies were the key financial backers of the bands that formed the foundations of punk and, without their support in a dire New York economic climate, their success may not have been achievable.[36] In particular, prostitution and stripping provided the CBGB groupies, such as Nancy Spungen, Connie Gripp and Pleasant Gehman, with opportunities to make hundreds of dollars per day, which were then invested in their punk musician 'boyfriends'[37]. Eileen Polk, a prominent punk photographer, described how the groupie set earned their money and attempted to attract musicians, saying 'they could afford not to work because they were whores or strippers and made a lot of money. And the way they got these guys interested in them was by being so weird, paying for all their drugs, and paying their rent'.[38] For example, Connie Gripp's methodology for earning money and capturing a punk boyfriend followed Polk's description of groupie behaviour almost to the word. Dee Dee Ramone acknowledged the pivotal financial role, sustained by the sex

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[35]Tom O'Dell, *Punk Revolution NYC: The Velvet Underground, The New York Dolls and The CBGBs Set,* (ABC Entertainment: 2005): Lenny Kaye discusses how he took up temporary employment at an adult theatre in New York following Patt Smith's fall from a stage and her subsequent withdrawal from touring.

[36] Holmstrom and Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* p.27

[37] Ibid; Montgomery Wolf, *'We accept you, one of us?',* p.177

[38] Eileen Polk quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* p.184

industry, that Connie played in his life and career despite bringing him 'close to death a few times' by slashing him with broken bottles (which somewhat supports Polk's claims of groupie weirdness), Dee Dee retrospectively explained that 'she kept me alive. No one else did. I had all that responsibility - I had to play every night - and no one gave a damn if I had a place to live, or if I had any dope, or if I had anything to eat. Connie did. She was all I had'.[39]

The sex industry undoubtedly had significantly negative consequences on New York society between 1975 and 1979. As proved to be the case in the story of Karen Baxter, in the Ramones song '53rd and 3rd' and from the experiences of Debbie Harry and Ivan Julian, serious crime such as homicide and rape were, as Cohen claims, side effects of tolerated street deviance.[40] However, the industry also markedly shaped the punk scene. It provided rich subject material, as demonstrated in 'Land', 'X-Offender' and '53rd and 3rd', and also shaped lives, experiences and imagery: Dee Dee's hustling outfit of ripped jeans and leather jacket for example became synonymous with New York punk. The sex industry also underpinned the punk scene financially. Although often dangerous, prostitution and the wider sex trade provided punk musicians and their associates with economic opportunities in which proceeds could be used to both house and feed the movements protagonists. Those proceeds would also be invested in other essential punk dietary needs.

[39] Dee Dee Ramone quoted in McNeil and McCann, *Please Kill Me,* p.269

[40] Cohen, *Deviant Street Networks*, p.2

Chapter 2

‘All I see is little dots’: The NYC Drug Industry and its Influence on Punk.[41]

By the mid 1970s, New York had been inundated with drugs, and in particular cheap and impure heroin.[42] In 1975, almost one hundred and fifty-thousand drug users names had been recorded on the New York’s Narcotics Register and the city’s authorities estimated there were a further fifty-thousand ‘hidden’ users across Manhattan.[43] And, according to the New York City Health Department, a considerable six hundred and fifty people per year died in the mid-1970s as a result of heroin overdose.[44] In the Bronx and Harlem, the notorious crime syndicate, the ‘Purple Gang’, distributed illegal narcotics on an industrial scale; its thirty full time members and eighty associates sold their wares to a considerable market, and often served their buyers and competitors with an added dose of violence.[45] Other gang families such as the Gambinos, Geneveses, Colombos and Lucheses flooded New York with drugs and, as punk protagonist Richard Hell remembered, ‘drug-dealing gangs ruled the districts’ where Puerto Rican teenagers acted as their runners.[46] Citywide efforts to clamp down on drug related crime and widespread drug abuse were often undermined by police corruption. The case of police officer Robert Ellis, who testified in court against fellow officers who failed to officially register confiscated heroin and fifteen

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[41] Talking Heads, ‘Drugs’, *Fear of Music,* (Sire Records, 1979)

[42] Blanche Frank, ‘An Overview of Heroin Trends in New York City: Past, Present and Future’ in *The Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine,* Vol.67, Nos.5 and 6, (October/November 2000), pp.341-344

[43] Ibid.

[44] Peter Kerr, ‘Growth in Heroin Use Ending as City Users Turn to Crack’, *New York Times,* September 13, 1986

[45] *New York Times,* December 16, 1977, p.A1, D12. The *Times* reported that the Purple Gang murdered and dismembered at least seventeen people in drug related gang warfare.

[46] Ibid: Richard Hell quoted in Barry Spunt, *Heroin and Music in New York City,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.74; Richard Hell quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* p.265

thousand dollars worth of drug money from the drug dealer Luis Pagan's Lower East Side apartment, being just one example.[47]

The drug trade, like the sex industry, had increasingly grown through the 1960s and by the mid 1970s had seemingly taken hold of large sections of the city and its residents alike and, perhaps unsurprisingly given rock music's long held traditions of hedonism, the downtown punk scene was far from immune from the narcotics influx. Although the Lower East Side was already an established heroin stronghold, the narcotics historian Barry Spunt argues that it became arguably the most prominent drug centre in the United States during the mid to late 1970s.[48] The 'Loisaida' and the surrounding East Village were both similarly affected by drugs, which the writer Christopher Mele attributes to the 'physical and social decline and severely limited economic alternatives' in the area, whilst the historian Judith Halasz argues that cocaine and heroin use was 'visibly woven into everyday life'.[49]

Subsequently, it was no coincidence that the punk scene centred around this area, and as the New Yorker and punk singer John Joseph recently suggested in an interview on British radio, the punk movement in New York 'was built around drugs'.[50] This chapter will argue that the rebellious nature of the punk movement and the potential to be 'cool' pushed participants towards heroin and other drug abuse but the widespread availability of narcotics across the city, coupled with the other societal factors that Mele mentions, suggests that drug use was, in the words of

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[47] *New York Times,* July 3, 1977, p.1, 33

[48] Spunt, *Heroin and Music,* p.74

[49] Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate and Resistance in New York City,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000): 'Loisaida' is a 'Spanglish' term used by Mele for the Lower East Side: Judith Halasz, *The Bohemian Ethos: Questioning Work and Making a Scene on the Lower East Side,* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2015), pp.89-90

[50] John Joseph. Interview with Sam Walker. *What Goes On Here*, BBC Radio 5*,* April 03, 2016 available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b075swls, (accessed April 04, 2016): John Joseph fronted 1980s hardcore punk band Cro-Mags but discusses his life experiences of the 1970s punk scene during the interview

Richard Hell, 'probably pretty inevitable', both for him and many young New Yorkers alike.[51] Indeed, drug use within the punk movement was certainly symptomatic of what was going on in wider New York. Richard Hell, Johnny Thunders, Dee Dee Ramone and Handsome Dick Manitoba (who incidentally described heroin as 'the best drug ever') were just a few of punk's most notorious users during the period 1975-1979, and they all have discussed the influence of drugs on their lives, their music and on the Lower East Side where, according to The Dead Boys guitarist Cheetah Chrome, 'life became a constant chase for drugs'.[52]

Richard Hell in particular has spoken candidly of his experiences with drugs in New York and on the punk scene, and has vividly described the popularity of drugs as well as the nature of buying and selling drugs on the Lower East Side.[53] Hell described how 'whole local blocks, in the course of a year or two, morphed from dwellings into darkness into drug hives. Hordes of junkies shipped money under hallway doors in abandoned buildings' as well as how it was 'very, very popular to be a junkie on the Lower East Side. In the morning you would see people lined up, like for a hit movie - in a line fifty feet deep'.[54] Hell himself ended up as one of New York's two hundred thousand users, and as his reliance on heroin gradually increased, his addiction became one of the key factors in his exclusion from seminal CBGB punk band Television after the band's front man Tom Verlaine had his patience exhausted by Hell's volatility whilst using.[55]

Having left Television, Richard Hell joined forces with Johnny Thunders and Jerry Nolan, both formerly of the New York Dolls, to form the Heartbreakers. All three were committed drug

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[51] Richard Hell quoted in Spunt, *Heroin and Music,* p.74

[52] Dick Manitoba quoted in Spunt, *Heroin and Music,* p.75; Cheetah Chrome quoted in Spunt, *Heroin and Music,* p.84

[53] Spunt, *Heroin and Music,* p.74

[54] Richard Hell quoted in Spunt, *Heroin and Music,* p.74: Richard Hell quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* pp.261-263

[55] Clinton Heylin, *The Birth of American Punk: From the Velvets to the Voidoids,* (London: Helter Skelter Publishing, 2005), p.286

users, and similarly to Hell, Thunders and Nolan have reflected on their usage and the prevalence of drugs in mid 1970s New York. Although Thunders reflected on his drug use in a manner that points more to the rebellious nature of rock and roll than a reflection of the wider New York drug industry, saying he 'was having a real good time, taking drugs and playing rock and roll', his band mate Jerry Nolan certainly nodded towards the cheap and highly available nature of drugs in the city as an influential factor of his drug use.[56] Nolan explained how heroin 'was always around… practically for free. After a while, you inevitably begin to try it'.[57] With the band all using heroin, it became equally as inevitable for the group to write about drugs in their music.

Although The Heartbreakers were not the first New York band to write about heroin (most notably The Velvet Underground released 'Heroin' on their 1967 album *The Velvet Underground & Nico)* they released two of the most significant punk, drug-related songs: 'Chinese Rocks' and 'One Track Mind'.[58] Unlike the Velvet Underground's 'Heroin', and Talking Heads' 1979 song 'Drugs', both of which described the actual process and physical experience of using, both 'Chinese Rocks' and 'One Track Mind' give an insight into the social consequences of drug use in mid-1970s New York. 'Chinese Rocks' was primarily written by Ramones bassist Dee Dee Ramone in conjunction with Richard Hell in 1975 after the pair, in the words of Hell, had 'hung out for a year or two, mostly to cop dope'.[59] Dee Dee Ramone had initially presented the song to his own band but The Ramones rejected it on the grounds that they did not want to perform or record a song that was so unapologetically and unironically about drug culture, and was therefore

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[56] Spunt, *Heroin and Music,* p.77; Heylin, *Velvets to the Voidoids,* p.202

[57] Jerry Nolan quoted in Heylin, *Velvets to the Voidoids,* p.202

[58] The Velvet Underground, 'Heroin', *The Velvet Underground & Nico,* (Verve records, 1967); Talking Heads, 'Drugs', *Fear of Music,* (sire, 1979); The Heartbreakers, 'Chinese Rocks', *L.A.M.F,* (Track, 1977); The Heartbreakers, 'One Track Mind, *L.A.M.F*, (Track, 1977)

[59] Richard Hell quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* p.265

subsequently taken on by Hell and The Heartbreakers who were more keen to use it.[60] The lyrics to 'Chinese Rocks' predominantly revolve around the song title, a New York euphemism for heroin, and provide an insight into both Dee Dee Ramone and Richard Hell's reliance on the drug, as well as painting a picture of the less than glamorous lifestyle of a heroin user:

'I'm living on a Chinese Rock
All my best things are in hock
I'm living on a Chinese Rock
Everything is in the pawn shop
The plaster's falling off the wall
My girlfriend's crying in the shower stall
It's hot as a bitch, I shoulda been rich
Now, I'm just digging a Chinese ditch'[61]

'One Track Mind' provides further similar insight into The Heartbreakers reliance upon heroin. The repetitive use of the lyric 'I got a one track mind' coupled with 'I got tracks on my arm, tracks on my face' presents an image of the band members being totally committed to the drug and almost comatose through its use.[62]

Although the sense of regret and melancholy in the lyrics of both songs was not particularly matched by the semi-celebratory tone of the recorded music, they did however provide a somewhat autobiographical forecast of how the lives of the authors and performers of the songs would be negatively affected by heroin; as well as other notorious users of the drug. Richard Hell has spoken of his depression during the period 1975-1979, and has attributed the worsening of his mental health to the drug problem he developed during this time.[63] Whilst Hell eventually managed to quit his addiction, the co-writer Dee Dee Ramone continued to use heroin throughout the period and thereafter and subsequently died in 2002 as a result of overdosing on

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[60] McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* pp.266-267

[61] The Heartbreakers, 'Chinese Rocks', *L.A.M.F,* (Track, 1977)

[62] The Heartbreakers, 'One Track Mind, *L.A.M.F*, (Track, 1977)

[63] Heylin, *Velvets to the Voidoids,* p.286

the drug.[64] However, perhaps most infamous was the death of British punk Sid Vicious, who like many hundreds of other New York residents, died of a heroin overdose in a Chelsea hotel room in February 1979, having just been released on bail following the drug-induced murder of his notorious punk groupie girlfriend Nancy Spungen.[65] Indeed, the *New York Times* reported that Vicious died wearing an 'I Love New York' t-shirt; somewhat ironic considering it was New Yorkers The Heartbreakers that had introduced him to the drug that killed him during their 1976 British tour.[66] (figure 4)

Whilst heroin was the drug of choice for many New Yorkers and punks alike, other substances were also abused during the period. Despite the Ramones rejection of Dee Dee's self-penned heroin song 'Chinese Rocks' on the grounds of it being inappropriate, they recorded a number of songs about using inhalants and being high. 'Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue', 'Carbona Not Glue' and 'I Wanna Be Sedated' were three songs recorded by the Ramones between 1975 and 1979, all of which dealt with different aspects of life as a New Yorker.[67] The first song is made up of only four lines, is just over a minute and a half long and encapsulates the free and easy attitudes towards substance abuse as well as emphasising the rebellious nature of punk in terms of kicking back against overly long and bloated corporate rock songs:

'Now I wanna sniff some glue
Now I wanna have something to do
All the kids wanna sniff some glue
All the kids want something to do'[68]

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[64] John Pareles, 'Dee Dee Ramone, Pioneer Punk Rocker, Dies at 50', *New York Times,* June 7, 2002

[65] *New York Times,* February 3, 1979, p.24

[66] Ibid; Spunt, *Heroin and Music,* p.79: Glen Matlock, the original Sex Pistols bassist, recalled that 'there hadn't been heroin on the scene until the Heartbreakers turned up'.

[67] The Ramones, 'Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue', *The Ramones,* (Sire, 1976); The Ramones, 'Carbona Not Glue', *Leave Home,* (Sire, 1977); The Ramones, 'I Wanna Be Sedated', *Road To Ruin,* (Sire, 1979)

[68] The Ramones, 'Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue', *The Ramones,* (Sire, 1976)

The boredom expressed within ‘Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue’ can also be seen and heard in ‘Carbona Not Glue’; the lyric, ‘my brain is stuck from shooting glue, I’m not sorry for the things I do’ particularly emphasises the rebellious nature of punk.[69]

In summary, New York’s drug industry was both infamous and growing in the 1970s. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers had experience with drugs and hundreds died each year as a result of narcotics misuse. The Lower East Side in particular was a hotbed for heroin, and given rock and roll’s long held traditions of hedonism and attraction to drugs, it was perhaps an inevitability that punk became synonymous with heroin between 1975 and 1979. Many of the protagonists lives were affected: some more negatively than others. Drugs and wider substance abuse became a major reference point within punk song lyrics and often encapsulated both the rebellious nature of the movement and the New York’s almost ubiquitous drug culture. Artists such as Richard Hell and Dee Dee Ramone drew on their personal experiences with narcotics and transferred these into song form, providing a long lasting representation of the New York drug culture to their listeners.

[69] The Ramones, ‘Carbona Not Glue’, *Leave Home,* (Sire, 1977)

Chapter 3

‘Rip Her To Shreds’; Gender and Sexuality in NYC and Punk.[70]

Radical feminism in New York City flourished in the late 1960s and reached its peak in August 1970 when the Women’s Strike for Equality saw an approximated fifty thousand women march down Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue demanding nationwide equality in jobs, education and politics.[71] The Class Workshop, The Feminists, The New York Radical Feminists and the New York Redstockings were just some of the feminist organisations that flourished in late 1960s and early 1970s New York City and some of their lofty aims were achieved, but, as the historian Alice Echols asserts, the movement had significantly declined by 1973 having ‘become so absorbed in its own internal struggles’.[72] The failure to incorporate young women into the movement post 1973, which both Echols and the renowned feminist writer Betty Friedan attributed to an apathy amongst a new generation of women who took improved gender equality conditions for granted, further contributed to the fragmentation of the New York women’s movement as the 1970s wore on.[73] And, although second wave feminism achieved significant improvements, the movement failed to make considerable inroads against male violence towards women, its representation in pornography and, as Echols argues, particularly misogynistic pornography.[74]

The climate for male homosexuals in New York was equally as volatile and fragmented throughout the 1970s. In 1978, legislation aimed to grant homosexual equality rights was rejected by the city council for the eighth consecutive year, somewhat unsurprising given that the gay

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[70] Blondie, ‘Rip Her To Shreds’, *Blondie, (Private Stock, 1976)*

[71] Alice Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p.186*:* Betty Friedan, ‘Feminism Takes a New Turn: Feminism Feminism’, *New York Times,* (18 November, 1979), p.SM10

[72] Echols, *Daring To Be Bad,* p.198

[73] Ibid*,* p.293; Friedan, ‘Feminism Takes a New Turn’, *New York Times*, p.SM10

[74] Echols, *Daring To Be Bad,* p.294

community had no acknowledged homosexual representation on the legislative council.[75] Although gay liberation had strong roots culturally, particularly on the night life scene in the New York discos, the gay community was disjointed and unorganised in fighting for equality; much like the feminist movement that was unable to attract and maintain support in the same period.[76] According to LGBT activist and author Larry Kramer, gay people in New York were not ready for equal rights on the grounds that they had not fought hard enough for them and spent too much time 'at the baths or the discos, tripping out on trivia'.[77]

Both the limitations and achievements of second wave feminism and the inequality experienced by the gay community were clearly manifested throughout the punk scene between 1975 and 1979. This chapter will argue that the rise to prominence of several women within the punk rock industry was reflective of wider improved opportunities for women but also that internal wrangling between the female protagonists (typically centred around courting male punks attention), failure to make significant inroads into the misogynistic elements of the scene and the lack of women self-identifying as feminist in the period was also reflective of the limitations of the women's movement. It will also argue that New York's hostile attitude towards homosexuality was prevalent in the punk scene, with a number of examples of homophobia demonstrated.

In 1976, Chris Stein, Blondie's guitarist and songwriter, sent photographs of his band-mate and partner Debbie Harry posing in a *Punk* t-shirt to the magazine's writers after Blondie had received very limited attention in the first two issues of the publication. According to Stein, the stills were evidence that the band should have received more attention and, having considered the photographs of Harry, *Punk* magazine agreed with Stein's assessment and used the images to sell

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[75] Larry Kramer, 'Gay Power Here', *New York Times,* December 13, 1978

[76] Legs McNeil quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* p.343: Legs McNeil was quoted as saying 'gay liberation had really exploded. Homosexual culture had really taken over'.

[77] Kramer, 'Gay Power Here', *New York Times,* December 13, 1978

their merchandise; complete with a 'Hubba Hubba' caption.[78] Subsequently, Harry appeared across the centre pages of *Punk* magazine's fourth issue in a tight fitting t-shirt, tiny briefs, stilettos and a mechanical glove, tagged with the headline '*Punk* playmate of the month' and accompanied by the subtitle 'sexiest chick on the New York underground rock scene'; the magazine's readership were simply told to 'Just look at the pictures.'[79] (figure 5). The next two pages were also dedicated to Harry. Again, she wore little clothing and, most significantly, Blondie's music failed to get a mention (though Harry did appear with a Gibson electric guitar in place of the briefs and t-shirt to hint at some kind of musical involvement).[80] At face value, *Punk's* publishing of the images certainly corroborated the music journalist Lester Bangs's interpretation of Debbie Harry as being 'just a piece of meat like the rest of them'.[81]

Much like the London punk scene, which British author Lucy O'Brien described as 'not necessarily woman friendly', misogyny manifested itself throughout the New York punk movement between 1975 and 1979, as well as the wider city.[82] As previously discussed, Debbie Harry assessed the sexual climate for females in New York as one of 'either you get it or you give it' and, despite the efforts of second wave feminists to combat the perpetuation of female sexual imagery for consumerist purposes, objectification was rife.[83] Having used Debbie Harry's image to sell t-shirts and magazines with adverts and centrefold spreads, *Punk* also used provocative or

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[78] Holmstrom and Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* p.47

[79] *Punk,* Issue 4, July 1976 in Holmstrom and Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* pp.71-94

[80] Ibid.

[81] Danny Eccleston, 'Blondie: Success and Sexism' in *Mojo,* (March 20, 2014), available at http://www.mojo4music.com/12874/blondie-success-sexism/, (accessed February 08, 2016)

[82] Lucy O'Brien, 'The Woman Punk Made Me' in Roger Sabin (ed.), *Punk Rock: So What?,* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.194. O'Brien discusses the impact of women in British punk and asserts that they were primarily 'treated as novelty, decoration and not as serious contenders' whilst being marketed as 'disco dollies' or 'raunchy rock chicks'; much like Debbie Harry and Niagara on the New York scene.

[83] 'An Interview With Debbie Harry' in Bockris, *NYC Babylon,* p.164: J. Zeitz, 'Rejecting the Center: Radical Grassroots Politics in the 1970s: Second-Wave Feminism as a Case Study' in *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (October 2008), pp. 679

marketable images of other female punk protagonists to further their product; Destroy All Monsters front-woman Niagara also had column inches dedicated to her in the form of a centrefold spread with emphasis again placed on sexual style over musical substance, and Talking Heads bass player Tina Weymouth was also used to market *Punk* t-shirts with no accompanying musical information.[84]

Punk magazine's relationship with gender issues was both complex and inconsistent. Although on the one hand the publication appeared to objectify women such as Harry and Niagara, it also gave opportunities to punk women to discuss their music, publish their writing and photographs. Mary Harron was a prominent writer for the magazine from the outset and conducted reviews and interviews with bands and artists throughout the 1975-1979 period and Anya Phillips's photography was similarly prevalent across several issues of *Punk.*[85] The magazine also printed extensive interviews with Patti Smith, the poet Theresa Stern and Edith Massey, lead singer of Edie and the Eggs, in issues two, four and fourteen respectively; although such interviews still represented a small minority considering the publication stretched over four years.[86]

Indeed, in *Punk,* it was clear that musical integrity rarely went hand in hand with overt sexual imagery or 'beauty'. It was simply one or the other. In the case of Patti Smith, *Punk* used live performance imagery to supplement the four page interview in Issue Two which discussed her poetry, music and influences; a complete antithesis to the Debbie Harry coverage in Issue Four,

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[84] : *Punk,* Issue 17, May/June 1979 in Holmstrom and Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* pp.325-334; Holmstrom and Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* p.161

[85]Holmstrom and Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine*

[86] *Punk,* Issue 2, March 1976 in Holmstrom and Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* pp.31-37: *Punk,* Issue 4, July 1976 in Holmstrom and Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* pp.71-94: *Punk*, Issue 14, May/June 1978 in Holmstrom and Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* pp.235-256

who had posed provocatively and received no further coverage.[87] Smith's imagery in *Punk* was reflective of her album covers, *Horses, Radio Ethiopia* and *Easter,* (figure 6) in that she appeared to be androgynous and made no attempt to exude sexuality or 'femininity' in the way that Harry and Niagara did.[88] But was Smith's embracing of what the writer Simon Hattenstone described as 'boyish insouciance' and 'breast-clutching, armpit-hair flaunting poses' a necessity for a female to make headway in the music industry, to be taken seriously as an artist and not just be the piece of meat that Lester Bangs alluded to?[89]

The Los Angeles based punk writer and musician Alice Bag argues that the 1970s American punk scene saw women embrace feminist principles and deliberately blur the lines of sexuality and gender, as Smith did, in order to force confrontation with stereotypes on what it meant to be feminine.[90] Patti Smith however has recently distanced herself from such notions of fighting against misogyny and stereotyping, saying 'I have no problem with a man being first place. I know who I am. If a man would need to be in first place, what of it?'.[91] Although Smith's feminist militancy may have softened over time, this reflection hardly points to a confrontational or radical stance. Smith has not been alone in distancing herself from feminism during the punk movement either. Tina Weymouth of Talking Heads similarly dismissed the notion that a feminist agenda was influential in the New York punk movement, stating that

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[87] *Punk,* Issue 2, March 1976 in Holmstrom and Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* pp.32-36

[88] Patti Smith, *Horses,* (Arista, 1975): Patti Smith Group, *Radio Ethiopia,* (Arista, 1976): Patti Smith Group, *Easter,* (Arista, 1978)

[89] Simon Hattenstone, 'Patti Smith: Punk Poet Queen', in *The Guardian,* May 25, 2013

[90] Alice Bag, 'Work That Hoe: Tilling the Soil of Punk Feminism' in *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory,* Vol. 22, Nos. 2–3, (July/November 2012), pp.233–238

[91] Simon Hattenstone, 'Patti Smith: Punk Poet Queen', in *The Guardian,* May 25, 2013

defining herself as a feminist during the mid 1970s would have been 'to rob myself of my actual work, which was not at all about feminism'.[92]

The 'man is king' notion that Patti Smith at least retrospectively had no problems subscribing to played out on a wide scale throughout the punk movement and undermined the feminist cause fought by the previous generation of women. The in-fighting and squabbling between some of punk's leading women almost invariably revolved around men; primarily through battles for 'romantic' attention but also as a result of band member appropriation. Tensions between Debbie Harry and Patti Smith initially simmered in December 1974 when Smith persuaded Blondie guitarist Ivan Kral to defect to her band, and then animosity between the two escalated in Spring 1975 when Fred Smith left Blondie and joined Television.[93] Chris Stein name checked Patti Smith as having 'helped (to) coerce Fred away from us' whereas Harry went one step further saying 'I may be paranoid but I think that whole clique wanted to destroy us'.[94]

However, most of the tensions between females were more primitive, and centred around courting male attention; fully in line with Patti Smith's 'man is king' assessment. Three punk 'kings' in particular emerged as the main focus for female attention: Richard Hell, Johnny Thunders and Dee Dee Ramone, who Eileen Polk described as having a 'tortured "I need to be saved by a woman" look. And all the women fell for it'.[95] That statement, however, did not exclude Polk herself who openly admitted to being 'really attracted to Dee Dee Ramone', described him as 'really cute' and subsequently created animosity with Connie Gripp, Dee Dee's on and off girlfriend.[96] Tensions between the pair eventually spilled over into all-out violence

[92] Stephen Dalton, 'Talking Tom Tom Club: Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth Interviewed', *The Quietus,* available at http://thequietus.com/articles/06579-tom-tom-club-interview, July 14, 2011, (accessed February 01, 2016)

[93] Clinton Heylin, *Velvets to the Voidoids*, pp.160-161

[94] Ibid.

[95] Eileen Polk quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* p.354

[96] Ibid, p.265

after Gripp found Dee Dee and Eileen Polk drinking together in an Eleventh Avenue bar, and when Polk suspected Gripp was about to launch an attack, she took pre-emptive and comprehensive action. Recalling the event, Polk said, 'I just got her down on the ground and started punching and kicking her. I wouldn't let her get up. Once she was down, I made sure she was down. And I made sure she didn't touch my hair'.[97] And Connie Gripp did not reserve her animosity solely for Eileen Polk. Having caught Dee Dee and notorious punk scene groupie Nancy Spungen in bed together, she took revenge in a more passive aggressive fashion by stealing a collection of silver dollars from Spungen's pocket before selling them on to buy heroin.[98] And groupie infighting did not just revolve around Connie Gripp. Sylvia Reed (née Morales) also recalled how *Punk* photographer Anya Phillips was 'getting madder and madder' at her and 'really couldn't get over' Morales's developing relationship with proto-punk and her future husband Lou Reed, despite the fact that Phillips was in a semi-relationship with Richard Hell.[99]

The animosity and division that was so prevalent on the punk groupie scene was immortalised by some of the music produced, and in particular by Debbie Harry and Blondie. Both 'Rip Her To Shreds' and 'In the Flesh' from Blondie's eponymous debut album dealt with themes of bitchiness between women in the punk scene. In a recent interview, Harry explained that 'Rip Her to Shreds' was a 'composite piece' about females around the scene and although she did also acknowledge that it was as much of a self-critical analysis as it was a criticism of other women at the time, the song reflects the adversarial nature of women on the punk scene and indeed the wider notion of infighting in the feminist movement.[100] In the song, Harry adopted a

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[97] Ibid, pp.265-266

[98] Ibid, p.269

[99] Ibid, pp.352-356: The explanation behind the term 'semi-relationship' is owing to Anya Phillips obsession with Richard Hell which often went unreciprocated depending upon Hell's mood and circumstances. Eileen Polk, quoted in *Please Kill Me,* explained how Phillips 'would cut her wrists over him' but Hell 'didn't really care that much'.

[100] Debbie Harry interview with Kyle Anderson, *Entertainment Weekly,* May 22, 2014. Available at http://www.ew.com/article/2014/05/22/blondie-stories-behind-songs, (last accessed April 1, 2016)

seemingly spiteful tone, where the lyrical content was made up of cynical and biting criticisms of other women:

She's so dull, rip her to shreds,
Yeah she's so dull, come on rip her to shreds
'Oh you know her, "Miss Groupie Supreme",
Yeah you know her, "Vera Vogue on parade",
Red eye shadow, green mascara! Yuck! She's too much'.[101]

Rather than aiming for female solidarity, as Lucy O'Brien argued was necessary for women in the punk movement, Harry focussed almost solely upon division and frivolous oneupmanship within the song, demonstrating genuine animosity and disunity.[102]

The insecurities of women in their relationships, demonstrated so acutely by Connie Gripp and Anya Phillips, as well as the 'man is king' notion were also documented in Blondie's 'In The Flesh'.[103] In this song, also from the 1976 album *Blondie*, Harry adopted a more fragile tone of voice than the more venomous tone in 'Rip Her To Shreds'. Harry's lyrics focus on a relationship in which the female protagonist is both competing for and separated from a male love interest in New York. When Harry meets her male acquaintance with another woman on the Lower East Side, her female adversary tells Harry, '"Hands off this one sweetie, this boy is mine"' and in doing so clearly demonstrated the nature of paranoia and competitiveness between women over male attention.[104]

Whilst the feminist movement was fragmented and women had mixed experiences in punk and wider New York, so too did homosexuals. Although the notion of 'man is king' limited women's influence in punk, it did not necessarily elevate gay men to equal status of 'king' either. Indeed, the very word 'punk' had negative and often homophobic connotations. The poet William

[101] Blondie, 'Rip Her To Shreds', *Blondie,* (Private Stock, 1976)

[102] O'Brien, 'The Woman Punk Made Me' in Sabin (ed.) *Punk Rock: So What?*, p.194

[103] Blondie. 'InThe Flesh', *Blondie,* (Private Stock, 1976)

[104] Ibid.

S. Burroughs, who resided on the Bowery in the mid 1970s and significantly influenced Patti Smith's work, associated the term 'punk' with 'someone who took it up the ass', whilst his biographer and associate James Grauerholz saw it as a 'derisory word for a young, no-count piece of shit'.[105] Similarly, Peter Crowley, the music director at Max's Kansas City, took issue with the naming of *Punk* magazine in a letter to John Holmstrom and Legs McNeil, and explained to the editorial team that punk was a 'prison word meaning the boys who give up their asses to the "wolves"'.[106] Crowley's letter to *Punk* was also littered with terminology such as 'queers' and 'faggot', although given Crowley also operated out of Mother's, a notorious New York gay bar, it is unlikely that his comments should be taken as being derogatory.[107]

However, the adoption of the term 'punk' and the ambiguity over terminology such as 'queer' and 'faggot' caused significant tensions within the movement itself. As Holmstrom and McNeil had taken on the term 'punk' for their magazine title, they faced some criticism from gay rights advocates. Firstly, McNeil faced accusations of homophobia from sections of punk's gay community after asserting that 'being gay doesn't make you cool' and further exacerbated the issue by retorting with what he described as a deliberately obnoxious response of 'fuck you, you faggots!'.[108] McNeil rebutted initial claims of homophobia as 'ludicrous' but when music journalist Lester Bangs began to spread rumours that *Punk* was going to expose a 'gay mafia' that he deemed as being prevalent on the New York punk scene, the magazine lost significant support from the underground community.[109]

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[105] William Burroughs and James Grauerholz quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* pp.259-260

[106] *Punk,* Issue 3, March 1976 in Holmstrom and Hurd (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* p.50

[107] Ibid.

[108] Legs McNeil quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* p.343

[109] John Holmstrom quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* p.344-345

The ambiguous relationship between *Punk,* the wider punk scene and homosexuality also played out at infamous event in CBGB and further provides significant insight into New York attitudes towards gay tolerance. During a Wayne County performance at CBGB in early 1976, the transvestite glam-punk artist was subject to what she perceived as a prolonged verbal homophobic attack from The Dictators's front-man Dick Manitoba. County, known permanently as Jayne from 1979, recalled how she kept hearing 'drag queen, fucking queer!' from the same voice in the audience, which unbeknown to her was coming from the Dictators singer Manitoba.[110] When County saw Manitoba approach the stage, she feared attack and took pre-emptive action by thrusting a microphone stand into Manitoba's shoulder, causing serious injury to the Dictators singer which resulted in her arrest.[111] Whilst this was an isolated incident in CBGB, it certainly points towards an uncertain and fearful climate for homosexuals in New York during the 1970s. The fact that County resorted to such drastic pre-emptive measures to protect herself gives an indication of the hostile atmosphere prevalent. County's placement in a special police cell, safe from criminals who shouted homophobic abuse at her, gives further indication of the dangers for openly gay men in 1970s New York.[112]

The punk scene between 1975 and 1979 was certainly reflective of gender and sexuality issues in wider New York City. Much like second wave feminism awarded new opportunities to women, females in the punk movement also had the chance to rise to prominence. However, misogyny was still rife. *Punk* magazine perpetuated female sexual imagery and prominent music journalists such as Lester Bangs still considered women to be little more than eye candy. Again,

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[110] Jayne County quoted in McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* pp.339-341

[111] Heylin, *Velvets to the Voidoids,* p.185; McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* pp.341-343: Although character witnesses for Manitoba suggested that the heckles were done with irony and affection as The Dictators had been supporters of Wayne County, the alleged homophobic incident resulted in The Dictators being barred from Max's Kansas City, as were acts that were associated with them.

[112] McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me,* p.342

much like the feminist movement was fragmented, so too was the female collective on the punk scene. Few prominent punk women openly identified as feminists and instead concentrated their efforts on fighting amongst themselves, usually over punk men and therefore perpetuated the 'man is king' notion. Whilst women continued to fall foul of that notion, voluntarily or otherwise, so too did homosexual men. Whilst gay liberation was embraced and celebrated in some quarters, hostilities remained, both politically and socially. The failure of the gay community to press for equal rights allowed homophobia continue. The use of language and terminology became ambiguous, with some quarters embracing terms such as 'queer' and 'punk' and others still perceiving the terms as homophobic. The uncertainty of who was pro or anti-homosexual caused significant tensions within the punk movement and tainted acts like The Dictators as well as *Punk* magazine in the eyes of the gay community.

Conclusion

‘New York City Really Has It All’: Punk as a Social Commentary[113]

Throughout the dissertation, three questions have been considered in assessing New York City and its relationship with punk. Firstly, what was happening in New York during the period 1975 to 1979? Secondly, what kind of effect did New York’s societal factors have on the lives of those people who rose to prominence in the punk movement? And finally, how was this evidenced? To satisfy the dissertation’s hypothesis that New York society had a profound influence on the emergence of the punk subculture, that the movement was not simply a rebellious youth rallying against the uninspiring and bloated corporate rock music industry of the early 1970s as Schulman argued, all questions posed must be satisfactorily answered.

To answer the first question, New York society between 1975 and 1979 was clearly dysfunctional. When the city’s authorities issued the ‘Welcome to Fear City’ pamphlet in 1975, they provided the clearest admission that New York was not functioning. Crime was tangible in the form of street robbery and widespread arson attacks, whilst prostitution, the wider sex trade and drug abuse all interlinked and were often further entrenched by gender and sexual inequality. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorker’s left the city as a result of these conditions between 1970 and 1980, but some of those who stayed, or even migrated to the city to benefit from the cheap rents that subsequently were available, convalesced around the burnt out or abandoned warehouses and residencies that were left behind.

With this in mind, the second question can also be satisfied. As the writer Elizabeth Currid states, ‘in the late 1970s…New York’s cheap rents, abandoned warehouses, and horizontal, ambiguous relationships across art and culture gave rise to the true establishment of New York’s

[113] The Ramones, ‘Sheena is a Punk Rocker’, *Rockets to Russia,* (Sire, 1977)

creative art scene'.[114] Punk was a pivotal part of that creative art scene, and it came about under the influence of the societal factors previously mentioned. Prominent punk lives were certainly shaped by New York street life. Firstly, the sex industry provided employment opportunities for a number of the protagonists. Jim Carroll, Dee Dee Ramone, Lenny Kaye, Connie Gripp and Nancy Spungen were just some of the most prominent members of the subculture who earned money from the sex industry, either legally or illegally, and had their experiences shaped as a result of the city's burgeoning trade. The negative and often violent aspects of the sex industry, such as the murder of young prostitute Karen Baxter, also affected the punk scene. The rape culture that Debbie Harry described in her interview with Victor Bockris (a culture that was perpetuated by misogynistic attitudes across the city) was also symptomatic of New York's sex industry.

The prevalence of drugs on the streets of New York also had an influential affect on punk protagonists. Punks made up a small minority of the city's estimated two hundred thousand drug users but a sizeable majority of punks invested wholeheartedly into the city's growing drug industry, often using the profits earned from the sex industry to buy their wares. Richard Hell, Johnny Thunders, Dee Dee Ramone, Connie Gripp and Nancy Spungen were just a few of the most famous New York punk names to develop drug habits during the period, and three of those would eventually suffer similar fates to the many hundreds of New Yorkers who died in the mid-1970s as a result of heroin.

The misogynistic 'man is king' environment that was only partially successfully challenged by second wave feminists in the early 1970s also affected punk women. The partial success came in the form of widespread opportunities for women to succeed within punk music, and writers such as Mary Harron certainly benefited from those opportunities. With the

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[114] Elizabeth Currid, *The Warhol Economy: How Fashion, Art and Music Drive New York City,* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 34-35

widespread presence of the sex industry across New York, it was perhaps inevitable that women within the punk movement would be subject to misogyny and belittlement. Debbie Harry, Tina Weymouth and Niagara were celebrated by *Punk* magazine but primarily because of their appearance rather than their musical achievement and although Patti Smith's gained critical recognition, she deliberately adopted an androgynous image and openly admitted to subscribing to 'man is king'. Indeed, to be celebrated both aesthetically and musically appeared almost impossible.

However, it was not only women who experienced inequality during the period 1975-1979. Homosexuals were denied equal rights politically in New York and hostilities seamlessly transferred into the punk movement. Homophobic terminology, including the very word 'punk', caused significant tensions. Although terms such as 'queer' and 'faggot' were often embraced by homosexuals, the context in which those terms were used by heterosexuals was often ambiguous and subsequently resulted in *Punk* magazine being labeled as homophonic and Dick Manitoba hospitalised after being seriously injured by Wayne County who perceived The Dictators' front man verbal jousting as a pre-cursor to a violent attack.

Each of these New York societal influences were also clearly demonstrated in punk music and imagery thus satisfying the third and final question posed. The New York sex industry was commented on by both The Ramones and Blondie, who retold personal experiences of the nature of sex in New York with '53rd and 3rd' and 'X-Offender' respectively. Similarly, the Ramones and the Heartbreakers recorded their autobiographical drug and substance abuse experiences with songs such as 'Chinese Rocks', 'One Track Mind' and 'Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue'. The fragmented nature of the feminist movement was also put down on paper and vinyl by Blondie, with songs such 'Rip Her To Shreds' and 'In The Flesh" providing an account of the animosity between punk women on the scene. Whilst artists recorded songs to provide social commentary of

life in the city, *Punk* magazine also recorded the nature of New York living in their seventeen issues between 1975 and 1979. As well as reporting on the latest music releases, the magazine printed articles, interviews, photographs and images that contained contentious language and sexual imagery that encapsulated the dysfunctional nature of New York City in the mid to late-1970s.

In summary, New York City society forged the punk movement, it created a fertile environment for the subculture to flourish and grow. And, subsequently, punk music and imagery should not be dismissed as a short-lived, almost kitsch-like phase of American music. Nor should it be considered merely as an uprising against the stale music industry that pre-dated it. Indeed, on closer inspection the punk movement provides historians with a significantly valuable social commentary on New York's living conditions and dysfunctional society in the 1970s. Perhaps the most apt conclusion to this hypothesis is a return to the words of The Dictators:

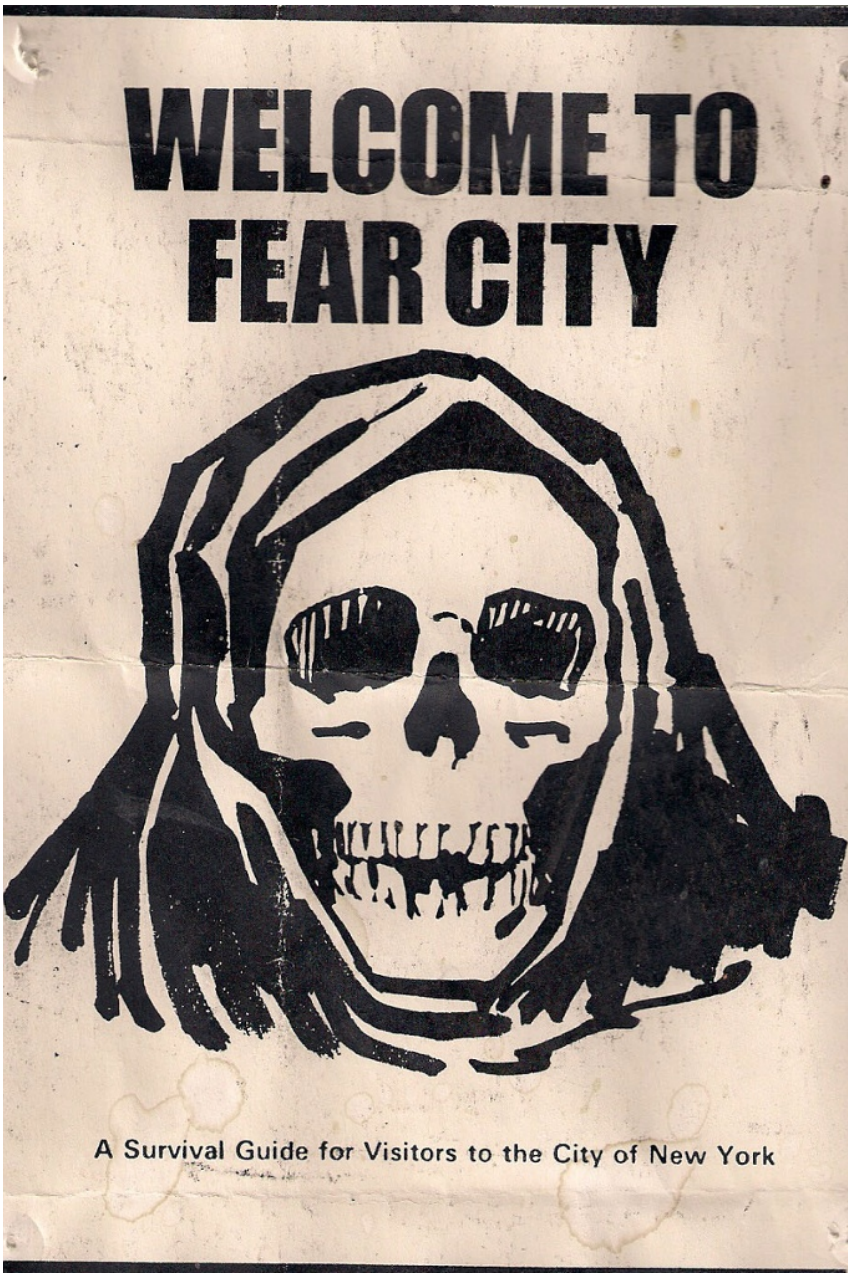
'I live in the City,
I breathe dirty air,
I ride trains with b-boys,
Junkies, queens and squares'[115]

Those four lines perfectly encapsulate the mood, conditions and, most importantly, the symbiotic relationship between New York and punk between 1975 and 1979.

[115] The Dictators, 'New York, New York', *Viva Dictators,* (Escapi, 2005)

Appendices

(Figure 1): 'Welcome To Fear City'. The New York authorities released a tourist pamphlet in 1975 warning of the dangers of life in the city.



Photograph via Jen Carlson, 'The 1970s Pamphlet Aimed at Keeping Tourists Out of NYC' in *The Gothamist,* (September 16, 2013), http://gothamist.com/2013/09/16/the_1970s_pamphlet_aimed_at_keeping.php#photo-1, accessed October 30, 2015

(Figure 2): The Ramones performing at CBGB, the microcosmic New York bar and music venue in 1976

Photograph via *Hollywood Today*, November 30, 2010, available at http://www.hollywoodtoday.net/2010/11/30/cbgbs-talking-heads-ramones-more-in-film-about-the-sainted-club/, (accessed September 29, 2015)

(Figure 3): Front cover of *Punk,* Issue 3: The Ramones street life image was forged on the avenues of New York and subsequently created an image for the city's punk movement.

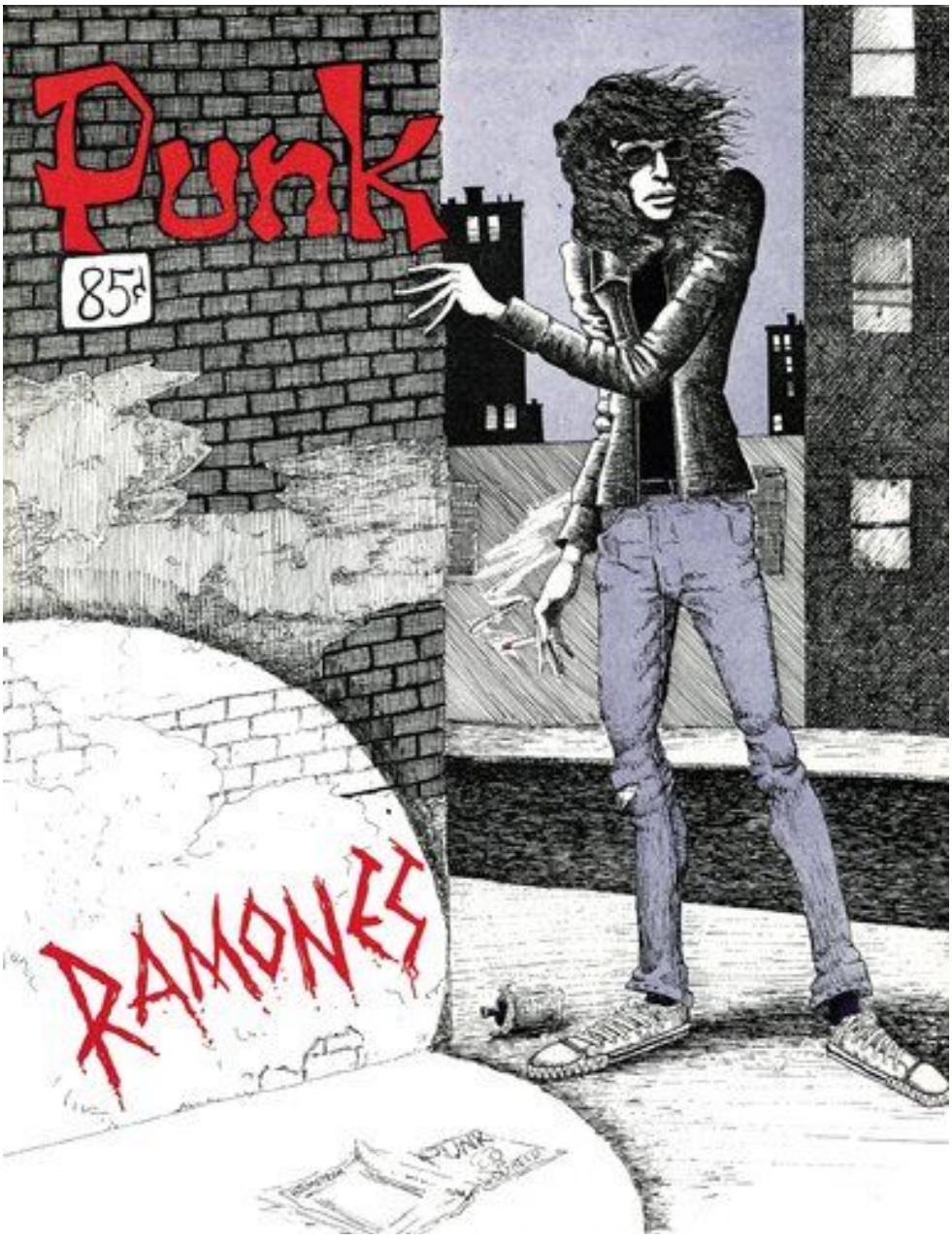


Illustration by John Holmstrom in *Punk,* Issue 3, April 1976, in John Holmstrom and Bridget Hurd, (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012), p.49

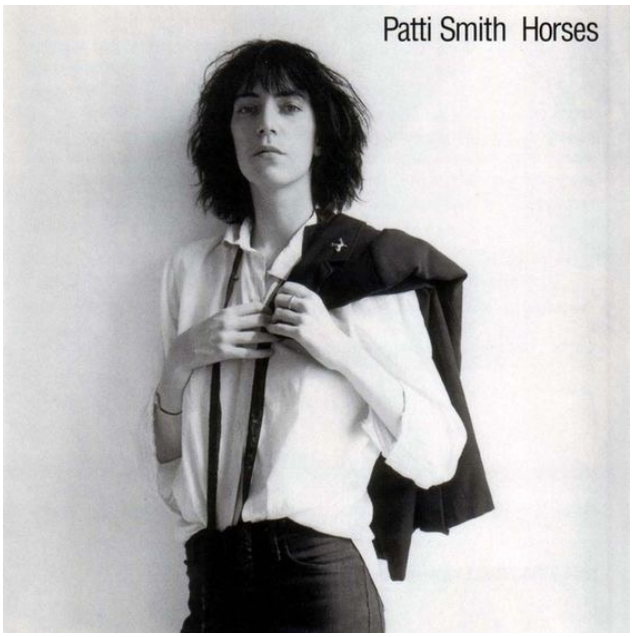
(Figure 4): Image of Richard Hell, Johnny Thunders and Sid Vicious in 1978. All three men had their troubles with heroin, with both Vicious and Thunders subsequently dying of drug related incidents.

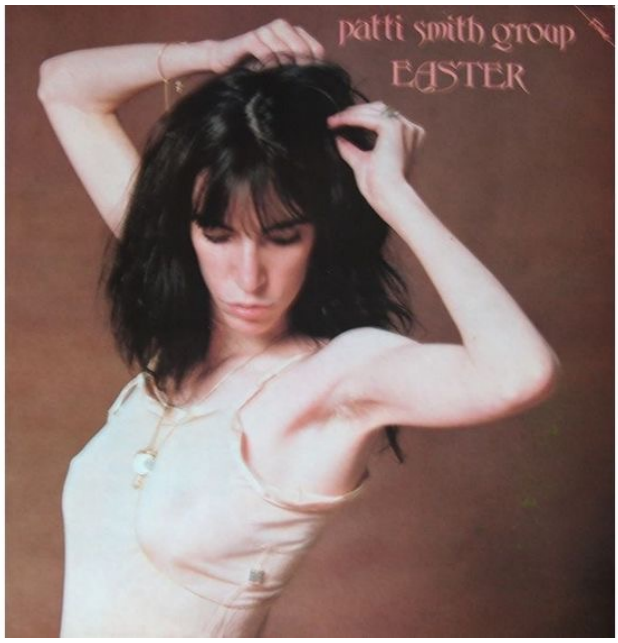
Photograph by Eileen Polk, in Legs McNeil and Gillian. McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, (London: Abacus, 1997)

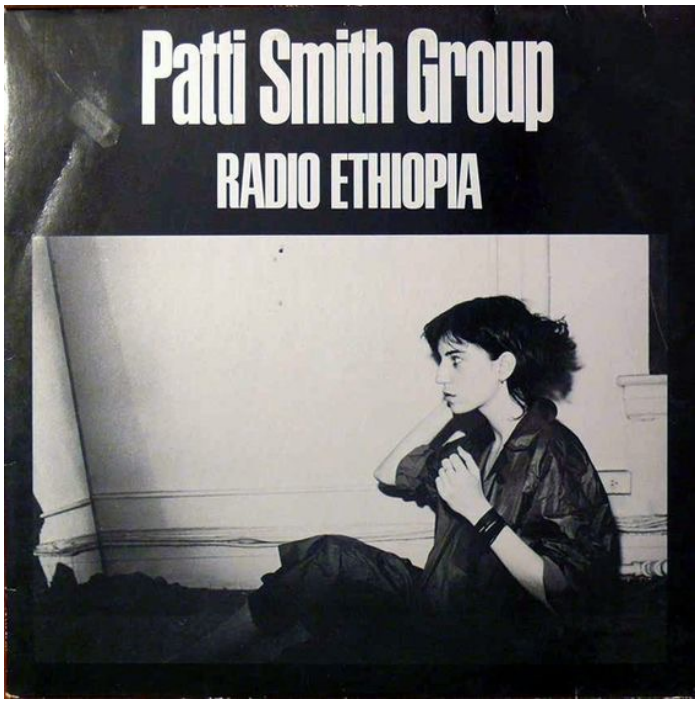
(Figure 5): Debbie Harry centrefold image from *Punk,* Issue 4. *Punk* significantly focussed on Harry's sexuality rather than Blondie's music throughout the publication's lifespan. This image was signed by Harry and had the caption '*Punk* playmate of the month' alongside it.

Photograph by Chris Stein, in *Punk,* Issue 4, in John Holmstrom and Bridget Hurd, (eds), *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine,* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012), pp.84-85

(Figure 6): Patti Smith album covers. The three album covers encapsulate Smith's androgynous image.







Photographs by Robbert Mapplethorpe. Patti Smith,, *Horses,* (Arista, 1975); Patti Smith Group, *Radio Ethiopia,* (Arista, 1976), Patti Smith Group, *Easter,* (Arista, 1978)

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