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# AMERICA UNDER CONSTRUCTION

BOUNDARIES AND IDENTITIES  
IN POPULAR CULTURE

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## "Social Distortion"

### The Rise of Suburban Punk Rock in Los Angeles

*Dewar MacLeod*

In December 1976 the Sex Pistols appeared on Thames Television's *Today* show and "became a household name in just under three minutes" by swearing on live television. Punk rock, until then a small, subcultural phenomenon, brought on a moral panic which swept the U.K. through tabloid, television and airwaves. As one punk remembered, "Before then, it was just music: the next day, it was the media." Punk rock unleashed "the repressed hysteria of a nation" and, according to some punks then and critics since, the media onslaught broke "for ever the fragile Punk unity. . . . Ambition replaced friendship, stupidity intelligence as the groups queued to strike the simple, brutal poses required by reporters." Worst of all, hordes of new punks were spawned in a moment, destroying forever punk's exclusivity. Every bored teenager was now a punk.<sup>1</sup>

By developing a mythology of the mass media conversion of subcultural signs into "mass-produced objects," punks and their first chroniclers have attempted to freeze a moment of pure punk, of the true punk identity or experience. In so doing, they embrace a definition of punk which suits their purposes and simply inverts how the mass media, in particular the tabloids, presented punk in terms of a moral panic. By fixing the moment of punk they give punk a purity that it never had and deny punk a history. This paper will describe that history, a history which takes off at precisely the moment when supposedly every disaffected teenager is transformed into a punk. This

history brings the story to the United States, where a mutant offspring of punk called "hardcore" developed in the suburbs of Southern California. Importantly, the transplantation and transmutation of punk from the streets of London to the housing tracts of Orange County occurred via the institutions of the dominant media.<sup>2</sup>

This is not a story of declension or corruption, of what Dick Hebdige calls the "diffusion and defusion" of a subculture. Rather, the emergence of hardcore punk rock illustrates the impossibility of studying a subculture without attention to its interrelationship to the dominant culture. Cultural production and media representation are dialectically intertwined, to the point that "reality" and "image" are, if not identical, inextricable. In this paper I will examine the particular responses of the dominant media to hardcore in the U.S. and of hardcore punks to media representation in order to explore the ways one can write the history of the relationship between cultural production and media discourses.<sup>3</sup>

From its inception London punk was part media hoax. Its politics were to be played out within the mainstream media, not against it as the dominant politics of rock (as either folk or art) had defined itself since the 60s.<sup>4</sup> Punk attempted to explode mainstream culture from within its own institutions. The major record companies scrambled to sign up punk bands in England, and the punks scrambled to sign up with the labels. The Sex Pistols were as much a media creation as the Monkees, and an attempt to destroy rock from within and play the game of media distortion for fun and profit: "Cash from chaos" as Malcolm McLaren, Sex Pistols' creator and manager, was fond of saying. The politics of punk was confusing and open to interpretation, but dominated by the tone of irony. For the Pistols, X-ray Spex, Buzzcocks and others, fun and irony made it impossible to take any statement at face value. "All claims are suspect." "All crimes are paid." There was a continuous tension between taking advantage of the system and threatening the system by turning it against itself.<sup>5</sup>

Punk rock as a social phenomenon came to this country from England via the mass media.<sup>6</sup> In June 1977, NBC aired a news report on punk rock in London, a violent and nihilistic threat to civilization.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the explicitly negative message intended by the

producers, an alternate theme was picked up: something exciting was happening in London called punk rock. In Los Angeles and San Francisco, musicians, artists, writers and performers were already starting to gather in out of the way nightspots for experimentation during this period. Now they had a name to call themselves and a way to unite as a subculture. Participants in both the L.A. and San Francisco scenes cite the NBC report as influential in bringing like-minded people together and giving them a sense that they could make something larger than their own individual efforts, that there could be in fact a "scene." One early L.A. punk remembered the documentary as critical:

The NBC executives will probably never realize what a crucial role they inadvertently played in the development of the California Punk scene. Suddenly kids were strangle-dancing and madly pogoing into each other at shows. It was done with a sense of self-deprecating humor. The new punk kids, adorned in safety pins, bondage gear, dozens of buttons advertising their favorite group, and monster makeup, were now madly bashing into each other.<sup>8</sup>

A San Francisco participant declared, "The documentary made Punk a movement."<sup>9</sup> Over the next couple of years the Los Angeles and San Francisco scenes were, arguably, the most vibrant locales for the U.S. punk subculture. Only after the NBC News report were these embryonic subcultural scenes self-identified as "punk."

While the NBC report attempted to bring the British tabloid's moral panic to the states, the tone of most U.S. press coverage was distanced and seemingly objective, not outraged. It set punk within a number of traditions, in order to situate and explain. If, in England, punk became a mass culture phenomenon in the aftermath of the *Today* show incident, in the U.S. punk was still a distant, alien, and usually ultimately tame piece of exotica. Punk concerned teenage style, attitude, and rebellion—like Elvis—with a dash of working class protest in England thrown in. In general, U.S. press coverage added an element of smug superiority that this was some decadent old world aberration, especially as punk was so closely tied to the "celebration" of the Queen's jubilee.<sup>10</sup>

While social coverage of punk tended to be dismissive, musical coverage slowly increased, although not until the 1990s would punk be seen by critics as within the mainstream of rock 'n' roll. The California musical scenes which had coalesced in the aftermath of the NBC news report were small but thriving by the time of the Sex Pistols final performance in January 1978 in San Francisco.<sup>11</sup> The Los Angeles *Times*, for example, paid the local punk scene increasing attention over the next few years, with the *Times*' main rock critic Robert Hilburn offering in early 1978 what he called "A Positive Perspective on Punk."<sup>12</sup> Reviews were usually favorable, or at least accepting of punk in general, even if Hilburn had some reservations about punk's "vital, but narrow sound."<sup>13</sup> Punk was still seen as a marginal phenomenon within rock 'n' roll, and the *Times*' reviewers generally only wrote about the occasional shows at mainstream and accessible locations such as the Whiskey-a-Go-Go, an established rock club in the heart of Hollywood on the Sunset Strip. They avoided the Masque—the main club on the L.A. punk scene—and the other hole-in-the-wall clubs and halls where most punk shows (and the most "subcultural") were performed. Further, the *Times*' coverage consistently promoted the poppier, more accessible, new wave bands over the more raw, hard and angry punks.<sup>14</sup>

Shortly after the L.A. punk scene began to thrive, a few scattered punk bands began to spring up in the suburbs, coming into the Hollywood area to play at clubs such as the Masque or the Whisky. The insular L.A. scene was generally uninterested in outsiders, but made this known more through snobbery than through violence.<sup>15</sup> The bands that came into Hollywood from the suburbs, such as F-Word, the Crowd, and the Flyboys, opened the door to a radical shift in punk rock, not just locally but internationally. Punk was about to go suburban, fittingly in the L.A. area, the city without a city. And with the emergence of hardcore, the media perception of punk in the United States would change equally dramatically.

The first suburban hardcore punk rock record was recorded in 1978 by a band called, aptly enough, the Middle Class—"Out of Vogue" an ironic ode to mass culture.<sup>16</sup> The front cover photo depicts a mundane Southern California suburban scene: two young girls stand in the middle of a street, surrounded and almost dwarfed by the still life of a

housing tract with Big Wheels, a basketball backboard, and a VW bus in a driveway. The music on the disc tells a different story. The sound is more raw, harsh, and abrasive—and ten times faster—than anything previously recorded. It is the sound of rage unleashed. In the same year Black Flag from the South Bay L.A. County area of Hermosa Beach also released their first single, "Nervous Breakdown." On the B-side the song "Wasted" situates them firmly, if ironically, in Southern California beach culture with the lyrics "I was a hippie, I was a burnout, I was so fucked up, I was so screwed up, I was so heavy man I lived on the Strand . . . I was so wasted."<sup>17</sup>

With these two singles, hardcore was born. Hardcore emerged first in the suburban towns of the Valleys and the South Bay area in Los Angeles county and in the coastal and nearby towns of Orange County, California—in opposition to the hip, elitist Hollywood scene.<sup>18</sup> Hardcore appropriated a musical form—punk—which seemed to strip rock 'n' roll down to its basics and then stripped it down further. Hardcore was faster and louder even than punk itself, with songs often no more than a minute long. Setting its protest solidly in American suburbia, hardcore removed the urban working class and artistic connotations from punk. While suburbia had always been essential to punk, as the place to leave and destroy, now suburbia was subject to attack from within. Black Flag and the Middle Class did not abandon their suburban neighborhoods, they sat at the center of growing music scenes which came to them and which they fostered. Young, mostly white and male, and broadly middle class hardcore punks began to gather at hardcore venues throughout the suburban sprawl for performances by such bands as the Circle Jerks, the Adolescents, and the Minutemen.

Part of this suburban shift relates to the peculiar geography and demographics of Southern California. Many of the communities just outside of L.A. were by the 1970s better called "exurban" or "postsuburban," as geographers and social critics have recently claimed.<sup>19</sup> The towns of the South Bay and Orange County are built not only as residential suburbs to the central city of L.A. (and they are that) but also around local industries connected to aviation, the military and information. For bored teenagers, though, this new type of

psycho geography represented the worst combination of suburban exile with post-urban desolation. In like areas throughout the country, then the world, hardcore punk scenes spread rapidly in the early 1980s.<sup>20</sup>

Fittingly, hardcore took off in the year of Ronald Reagan's presidential election. Where British punk, and even early California punk, had been generally directed against the liberal welfare state, hardcore attacked Reagan, the moral majority, and the rising militarism of the American state. More than one hardcore band sang a song called "World War III."<sup>21</sup> The politics of hardcore punk are difficult to generalize about—ranging from the nationalist libertarianism of a band called Code of Honor to the joke fascism of Fear to the anarchism of everyday life of Black Flag. Most were, if vaguely, leftist/anarchist and directly anti-authority. What united them more than a political label, though, was their disdain for the institutions and lifestyles of mainstream U.S.A. Hardcore often took the world more literally than much punk did. The politics were not meant to be as indecipherable, the style as incomprehensible. While certainly some hardcore bands embraced the humor and irony of early punk, generally the lyrical, musical, and stylistic message was more straightforward. The liner notes of one compilation album explained in 1982 that hardcore punk was,

digging its way into every suburban high school in the U.S. . . . Today's Hardcore is the most dominant, the most obvious scene in the American music underground. Hardcore is intense, honest American music; burning red, white and blue images confronting specific American problems.

Things are bad. America is falling apart; the economy is collapsing. . . . American culture desperately needs to confront American problems.

. . . Fuck Authority. I hate war and I hate big business and I'm glad that other people feel the same way. Isn't it great that not all teenagers are sucking bongs on the way to play Pac-Man at some sick zoo of a shopping mall? . . . <sup>22</sup>

### "Social Distortion"

The writer linked critiques of Reagan and the Pentagon, with Pac-Man and shopping malls: that is, mass culture. Hardcore punks opposed fundamentally that mass culture which they sat at the center of in suburbia.<sup>23</sup>

Hardcore punk, though, soon was to become a part of that mass culture. A variety of films, television shows and press reports introduced hardcore to a widening audience. Science fiction and exploitation films such as *Road Warrior* (1981), *Class of 1984* (1982), and *Return of the Living Dead* (1985) were among the first to adopt the hardcore punk style of leather, spikes, chains and mohawks. The independent films *Suburbia* (1983) and *Repo Man* (1984) adopted the hardcore punk attitude and setting for offbeat narratives which simultaneously sympathized with and exploited hardcore. Television weighed in most forcefully with exposes, as hardcore punk made ideal fodder for newsmagazines, audience participation talk shows, and cop shows. In 1982 the crime dramas *CHiPs* and *Quincy* each devoted an episode to the hardcore scene which, they alleged, corrupted youth, destroyed families, and caused violence throughout middle America. The same year the *Donahue* talk show invited hardcore punks and a group called "Parents of Punks" to debate the causes and consequences of hardcore. Jughead Jones, of Archie comics, went undercover as a punk for the school newspaper. *People* magazine brought the hardcore dance "the slam" to readers across America. And Sergeant Rick Hunter, played by ex-pro football player Fred Dryer, went undercover in a blue mohawk to infiltrate a hardcore punk gang led by a biker played by ex-pro football player John Matuszak.<sup>24</sup> The mass media images of hardcore punk were predictably designed to increase ratings through their depictions of the exotic and threatening (though usually containable) subversive other within. For a brief moment punk became in this country an available signifier of decay, disorder, and villainy.

A key document, at least for hardcore punks in Southern California, was a long expose written in June 1980 in the L.A. *Times* by Patrick Goldstein describing a hardcore scene rife with violence, vandalism, self-mutilation, and clashes with police. Punk violence was blamed mostly on organized suburban and beach-area hardcore gangs

whose destruction was wreaked both outside the clubs and in—particularly on the dance floor. Punks, Goldstein wrote,

...don't just dance anymore. They mug each other.

It's part of a new 'dance' craze called the Slam, whose popularity, especially with organized gangs of punk youths, has led to numerous incidents of violence at many area clubs.

The accounts of senseless violence, vandalism and even mutilation at some area rock clubs read like reports from a war zone.<sup>25</sup>

Hardcore punks responded to these encounters with mass culture with anger. Where the NBC documentary on British punk was remembered almost with fondness by early punks, the *Times*' article on violence in punk was blamed for misrepresentation. As the hardcore punk writer Shredder remembered a few years later:

This freely exploited and made media-meal out of the suburban Punk scene, citing that punks (especially Orange County kids) were criminal, vicious, and dangerous. Naturally this drew a whole new wave of fungus out of places too placid to even be suburbs, who read "Punk rock" as "drawing blood."<sup>26</sup>

Articulated here are a number of the themes hardcore punks would express regarding the mainstream media. The media brings not only distortion, but unwanted exposure (Hebdige's "diffusion and defusion"). The combination of distortion and exposure threatens to destroy the subculture by inspiring police repression and public outcry. At the same time as the subculture seems on the verge of ruin, however, it grows because the media exposure brings in people who do not necessarily share the values of those already there, but who respond instead to the ideology presented in the dominant media report.

When punk rock was seen as a largely British phenomenon by the dominant media in the U.S., its authenticity as a subculture could be undermined in a number of ways—through domestication, mainstreaming, historicizing, and outright dismissal. The dominant media fit punk into other discourses, of rock 'n' roll, the exotic and alien, or teen rebellion, etc. In addition, of course, the dominant media could attack punk rock directly, reviling it; but this was neither

necessary nor plausible in this country as it was in England, and the NBC news report was the exception. With the emergence of hardcore punk rock in the early 1980s, however, punk became a homegrown social product, and thus a potential direct threat to the social order. The dominant media, from the music press to film to various forms of television programming, in response combined direct attack with incorporation or cooptation. This response, ironically, often indirectly allowed for the authenticity of the punk subculture, by isolating and defining it; hardcore punk was presented as "real" by the media. Ironic also was the fact that hardcore punks in the U.S., unlike their British forbearers, took no joy in the media notoriety.

Hardcore punks carried their protest against media misrepresentation, and against society in general, in their songs but also in "zines," small, home-produced, noncommercial, underground periodicals. Punk zines were usually hand- or type-written, and xeroxed or printed cheaply (although a few had a more glossy, "professional" look). Zines were a form of participation in the punk subculture, not simply chronicles or fan documents. According to Stephen Duncombe, a sociologist studying zines,

The underlying ethic of zine culture is a participatory one, or a culture of "do-it-yourself".... This ideal of participation offers a bold challenge to a society which is based in a large part on consumption....

[Zines] embody a mode of production in which the producer keeps control ... and where the divisions between those producing and those consuming are blurred as these two groups come together—loosely—in a community of equal participants.<sup>27</sup>

Punk zines, like punk performance, broke down the barrier between performer and consumer. As such, zines, as much as records and shows, were critical sites for the production of punk culture. In zines, hardcore punks could connect with other punks and control what and how they spoke without fear of distortion.<sup>28</sup>

In zines and songs hardcore punks, unlike the Sex Pistols before them, protested vehemently that they were being misunderstood and exploited. Punks cared so much how the dominant media represented

them that hardcore punk became thoroughly suffused with the mass media and mass culture<sup>29</sup> which became the base line opposition. Hardcore became defined as what it was by what it was not.

The creation of false images and interpretations of hardcore by the dominant media troubled punks for a number of reasons. First of all, these images reinforced in hardcore punks' minds how the media represented the corporate dictators of everyday life—Pac-man and shopping malls. This critique had already been expressed by punk in England and L.A. In London Poly-Styrene of X-ray Spex ironically embraced an artificial, media-created identity, singing "I wanna be instamatic/I wanna be a frozen pea/I wanna be dehydrated in a consumer society."<sup>30</sup> And Darby Crash of the early L.A. punk band the Germs sang in "Media Blitz": "I've got television/I've got supervision/No decisions for you . . . /Don't steal your eyes off the TV screen/ . . . Take an injection from the mad machine."<sup>31</sup> Hardcore punks extended these references to media manipulation in order to distinguish themselves from the "mass-produced minds"<sup>32</sup> of middle America, thus solidifying a hardcore punk identity. Punks stand outside of the system of control, and, as one hardcore punk wrote, "The new system of control is the MEDIA."<sup>33</sup>

Mass media images of hardcore also misled parents and other authorities, thus creating more trouble for teen punks. Unlike earlier punks, hardcore punks had a surprisingly sustained desire to be properly understood, if partly so they wouldn't be harassed as much, more perhaps because they wanted their rebellion to be approved of, they wanted to be accepted. Hardcore punks explained as patiently as they could what they believed in, why they dressed the way they did, what slam dancing was, and so on. They often compared themselves favorably to heavy metal fans—particularly in regard to violence—to explain that they were not so bad. Further, they would try to make clear that the cause of their punk rebellion was social decay, not personal failure.<sup>34</sup>

In the zine *Maximum Rockroll*, a major chronicler of and participant in the hardcore punk scene since its first issue in 1982, the dominant media's representation of punk was a major theme for several years. This zine addressed social and political issues much more

explicitly than most hardcore zines and from a fairly consistent left-wing perspective, but it has been easily the most influential zine in hardcore since its inception. The zine, though vilified by many, has provoked responses from all who were active in hardcore.<sup>35</sup> *Maximum Rockroll*'s second issue contained a long article entitled "Media Distortion" by the writers Jerod Poor and Noizebush. Presenting the twin arguments that the media distort everything by selling news as entertainment, and that the media distort punk rock in particular, the writers raged against the media representation of punk in the news coverage of the death of Sid Vicious, "the notorious CHIPS episode," local "Hour Magazine" style punk fashion reports, and newspaper coverage of punk violence and vandalism. They were angriest at how the media had pigeonholed punk and its meaning:

So the media already knows what we look like, and exactly how we think, and for some reason or another they decide to confirm their decisions and actually interview some "Punks." Armed with notepad they seek out stereotypical people to interview. Posers and weekend warriors and rednecks with haircuts all mimicking what they've been spoon fed by their TV's, saying exactly what the so-called reporters want them to say.<sup>36</sup>

This article started a stream of responses that continued for at least two years in the letters, articles, scene reports, and even band interviews in *Maximum Rockroll*. Over the next several issues there appeared: a long article on the *Quincy* punk rock episode, a long letter to the president of NBC regarding the distorted media coverage of punk, and numerous letters to the zine venting anger at the dominant media. In addition, each issue contained such minor but constant reminders of the influence of the mass media as clippings from syndicated advice columns, real and fake advertisements, nationally distributed comic strips, and articles from mass market magazines: all sharing a misunderstanding of hardcore punk rock.

Hardcore punks objected most strongly to the violent stereotypes. A member of Poison Idea, a Portland, Oregon band, argued in an interview, "I don't know what's with the media. If punks weren't represented as total munster (sic) lowlife who only want to kill, then

more kids would become aware. As it stands, it's the ultimate evil to be into hardcore."<sup>37</sup> Not only did these exaggerated depictions foster and facilitate police crackdowns, with the media acting as the ideological supporter of the state apparatus, but they gave the wrong impression to youth as well—other youth who might be attracted to punk for all the wrong reasons. The dominant media image of hardcore threatened the survival of punk by repelling parents and other authorities and by fanning violent, ignorant morons into the punk scene. One hardcore punk blamed a clash with police at a club in Los Angeles on what he called "video punks".

[Th]e confrontation started with some "punks" who were outside of the concert, these (sic) wasted assholes had the strong urge to be real "punk", because they saw it on TV that that [s] how punkers acted. So they threw bottles at passing cars. . . . These people are the people who were watching *Quincy* one week and slam dancing the next.<sup>38</sup>

This clash of representations of hardcore punk became a battle over meaning and authenticity. Punks felt that, as a subculture, hardcore deserved exclusive rights to the words and images it created or appropriated. Thus the mohawk haircut became the property of hardcore punks. The word "punk" must now mean only what punk rockers wanted it to mean.<sup>39</sup> The negative image of hardcore punk in the media gave punks a rallying cry, an identity. But the identity was not as earlier punks had, of "we are your worst nightmare, we are worse than what you see on the tv"; it had become instead "we are not what they show on tv." As one writer hoped in reporting on a group of hardcore punks' calm reaction to an incident of police harassment: "Maybe we opened a few eyes amongst the police there who were expecting everyone to act like the caricatures they see on *Chips* or *Quincy*."<sup>40</sup>

The "media blitz" practically forced a redefinition of hardcore as a positive movement, rather than negative, nihilistic or negating.<sup>41</sup> In opposing the media representations, hardcore punks cared about what the media said so much that they felt the need to argue. They could neither ignore nor provoke, as the British punks had earlier, they had to insist on not being what the mass media said they were. The media

coverage, while issuing a threat to exclusivity, also placed "real" hardcore punks in a very exclusive and authoritative position. Punks who were not what the media represented were exactly that: not what the media represented: that was their identity. True hardcore punks were not Johnny-Rottens-come-lately with a fresh cut mohawk. They came to hardcore organically, through their experiences in dysfunctional families and conformist suburban environments. But having an identity established on a negative—not what the media represented—almost forced punks to establish an explanation based on a positive statement. And the different meanings of positive conflated. The syntactical term "positive," referring to the inflection of the statement, was translated into a moral valuation: a positive contribution to society. What we are doing is not bad like you say, then it must be good . . . . The media ignores the "positive side of punk," missing the fact that "there's something constructive in what we're doing."<sup>42</sup> Distancing oneself from the various mass media depictions of hardcore qualified one as an authentic hardcore punk rocker.

True hardcore punks were, thus, united by their universal disavowal of the punk stereotype perpetrated by the dominant media. They were not new wave trends, they were not violent suicidal muscleteads, they were not morons. But the real problem was that some of them were: some people hanging out in the punk scene were new wave trends, some were violent muscleteads, some were morons. Many "real" hardcore punks blamed the media for bringing in the un-true punks.<sup>43</sup> One writer in an anarchist zine was arguing already in October 1981 that hardcore was dead, that a punk rock show in Southern California was like every other teen scene: "There were some punks there, but overall it was mostly football players and a few cheerleaders. . . . The crowd was like every other crowd at every other high school party. The fashion was slightly different but the mentality the same." The writer praised the music, saying hardcore bands in Orange County were still producing "the best punk music in the world," but the philosophy of punk was dead with "star adoration creeping in." Punk had been irreversibly cooped by the media, "and it is quickly becoming the hippie movement of the eighties: it may catch on with more, but only in a watered down form."<sup>44</sup>

The mass media threatened hardcore punk's exclusivity. If British punk was polyglot and heterogeneous, hardcore was explicitly not, with more rigid fashion and behavior codes. Whereas London and L.A. punk had fostered weirdness and flamboyance to accompany its menacing tone, hardcore evolved a more stripped down fashion of black leather boots, torn jeans, sleeveless t-shirts, and metal spikes and chains—a costume more suited to the easier policing of the subcultural borders. Violence and gang activity were explicitly recommended by a few as a method for keeping latecomers out.<sup>45</sup> Hardcore punk would lose its authenticity if it became too big, too accessible, or intertwined with the organs of the dominant media.<sup>46</sup>

Worst of all for hardcore punks was that the boundary lines between real punks and video punks and actors as punks were increasingly difficult to maintain. The problem, ultimately, was that hardcore punks could not prove that the media stereotypes were wrong. The dominant media could, after all, find those stereotypical punks to interview. The "real" hardcore band "Teenage Head" appeared in the movie *Class of 1984*. "Real" punk bands provided the soundtrack for *The Return of the Living Dead*. And, if the dominant media sometimes got the fashion and behavior of hardcore wrong, well so did some "real" punks. One writer's condemnation of the *Quincy* show highlights the difficulty of separating subculture from dominant culture:

[I]n between all the punk caricatures, it was apparent that part of the crowd in the show consisted of people from within the actual punk scene who were paid as extras. I would like to believe that at least the people who read this mag would have more strength of conviction than to sell out their scene for a few quick bucks.<sup>47</sup>

The problem with this analysis comes out most when the writer discussed how the punk characters appeared to have been modeled on the punks who were interviewed in the documentary on the Southern California scene *The Decline of Western Civilization*,<sup>48</sup> showing "the same air-headed lack of intelligence." Here the difference between documents collapses, as "real" punks in a sympathetic documentary representation, provide the model for punk "caricatures" in the mass media. Did *Quincy*, then, get it all too right, by copying "real" hardcore

punks from a documentary? It is impossible to say that these were not "real" hardcore punks, after all. And the problem is compounded when critics and historians desire to get to the "real" punk as much as any "real" hardcore punk does.

The mass media dispersion of punk did not simply water down or destroy punk, it brought punk rock to the attention of many more people, and it facilitated the transformation of punk, for better or worse. As a result of the discourse, punk changed, in many ways. Punks created increasingly varied hybrids and subsets of punk, both as a musical form and a social movement. Hardcore began speedcore, the punk-metal musical fusion. Out of one strand of the hardcore scene came "straight edge" punks dedicated to non-violence and clean living. By the 1990s, hardcore punk would be acknowledged as a major influence on numerous platinum selling bands, and hardcore punk bands would sign their first major label contracts. The mass media encounter with punks in the early 1980s did not destroy punk, it destroyed any attempt at punk "authenticity." While challenging and threatening punks' own ownership of the music and message, the dominant media also allowed and forced the simultaneous growth and fragmenting of punk. Whether that is a good thing or not depends on what kind of punk you are.