

## THE DEATH OF PUNK: REINCARNATION OF A "DEAD" GENRE

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Serious listeners of music often talk about their favorite songs and bands in terms of their favorite genres, however, most listeners do not have a clear conception of what it means for a piece of music to be categorized in a specific genre. Genre is a form of classification that most people correlate strictly with "musical style," that is, the way a song sounds. People do not realize that genres today are becoming more like artificial categories defined by the music industry and popular culture to commodify and commercialize music. This popular culture can be summed up to what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," terms the "culture industry." They suggest that culture and its "products," such as music, are being commodified and that "culture as a common denominator already contains in its embryo that schematisation and process of cataloguing and classification which bring culture within the sphere of administration" (7). In this way, genres can be viewed as a branch of the culture industry, being a form of classification that can be managed by culture "administration." Therefore, one can see how culture and genre interact. Furthermore, David Brackett in his article, "Musical meaning: genres, categories, and crossover," suggests how genres are more than musical style: "Genres bring with them connotations about music and identity which may encode specific affective qualities such as 'conformity', 'rebelliousness', 'commercialism', 'selling out', 'art for art's sake'; and may encode a whole variety of social characteristics" (66). This definition further describes a cultural aspect of genre; and qualities like "conformity," "rebelliousness," "commercialism," and "selling out" happen to describe punk rock. These characteristics of punk culture are also characteristics that the punk rock genre contains less and less of today. Music from a culture that grew out of an oppressed working class rebelling against the threats of capitalism's inequality has grown over the years into a commercially successful and popular musical genre that now relies on capitalism. A musical style that was once so simple that "anyone can do it" is now more extravagant and complex. With this in mind, one questions the existence of punk rock on an economic and musical level. Did the genre "die" as it moved farther away from the cultural characteristics that originally defined it? To answer this question, one needs to note the role of the culture industry

in the changes of punk as well as several ways genre can be understood. In "Gothic Music and the Inevitability of Genre," Joshua Gunn suggests that genres are created, maintained, and kept alive by social discourse—the way people always talk about them; thus complicating the idea that genres "die" when cultural connotations are gone. Furthermore, Marina Lobanova in her book, *Musical Style and Genre: History and Modernity*, discusses a perspective on genre that suggests genres naturally change over time. Artists infuse past and present aspects of a genre to create and maintain the future of the genre. With these different views on the classification of music, punk rock can be analyzed from its conception to its state today; and one can come to a conclusion of whether or not "punk" has "survived."

As previously stated, genres are not simply labels depicting musical style; instead, genres are more of a compilation of several aspects of the culture that embodies the music. Brackett suggests, "genres are not defined by characteristics of musical style alone but also by performance rituals, visual appearance, the types of social and ideological connotations associated with them, and their relationships to the material conditions of production" (67). This definition gives a fuller understanding of how genres classify music, and in this sense, genres are a function of the culture that establishes the music, bringing into the genre all the connotations of that culture. Using Brackett's definition of genre, one can see how this is evident in several genres, specifically punk rock. Punk music is not just certain songs that are supposed to sound a specific way; "punk" itself is a culture.

One can say that the punk subculture emerged in opposition to mass culture. "Punks" expressed this opposition formulated in the idiom of punk rock music. The subculture has many ideologies that have always been a form of shock and rebellion, thus it was often viewed negatively. The political ideology most commonly found in punk is anarchism, which is expressed in some songs. Along with this, punks have anti-capitalistic, anti-commercial, and non-conformist views. They have a desire for community and a "do it yourself" (DIY) ethic evident in their performances, in which the performer and audience become indistinguishable (crowd surfing and stage diving was created), and their self-created independent music labels, in which they own the means of production. Stacy Thompson, in *Punk Productions: Unfinished Business*, suggests certain bold fashion styles that promoted "anti-fashion," self-created fan magazines called "zines," as well as punk rock music express all these ideologies (3). Musically for example, punk rock is characteristic of its culture in its

short, simple—mostly three chord—songs and instrumentation. The instruments usually consist of electric guitar with heavy distortion, electric bass, drum kit, and vocals. The songs are typically in 4/4 meter, do not contain any instrumental solos, and have a verse-chorus-verse structure. Songs are relatively this simple in order to promote the DIY aesthetic, that is, it is so simple that “anyone can do it.” Punks do not just listen to the music but also take part in it by “doing it themselves” (11).

In this way, the musical genre epitomized the values and ideals of the punk culture; punk rock clearly follows Brackett’s definition of genre because the music has “the types of social and ideological connotations associated with [it]” (67). Once one sees how genres are more than just musical style—that these are a compilation of many features of a culture expressed through music—one starts to wonder if any genre can still exist once those cultural connotations and ideologies are gone. To answer this question, it is necessary to look at several changes occurring in punk.

Over the years since punk’s inauguration, the musical genre and the culture have moved farther apart; this is typically due to punk music’s move toward commercialism. In his article, “‘Punk’ after the Pistols: American Music, Economics, and Politics in the 1980s and 1990s,” John Charles Goshert suggests that “it is precisely when punk becomes popular culture that it ceases to be punk” (85). Since DIY is a major aspect of punk, one of the biggest problems regarding punk music’s drift from punk culture has to do with economics, specifically the move from independent to major label records by “punk bands,” who in turn, become commercially successful and no longer own the means of production. Goshert argues “to focus a study of punk on such clearly commercially successful supergroups...is to miss what is perhaps the most crucial point about punk: that its tendency is a resistance to working within the usual terms of commercial success and visibility” (85). One then has to question *why* punk shifted to these “usual terms” of commercialization.

In one way or another, music has always been a form of entertainment; according to Adorno and Horkheimer, “the culture industry remains the entertainment business,” therefore music dwells in the realm of the culture industry (Adorno 10). Even though the punk subculture in its conception was meant to be an autonomous culture that broke the norms of mainstream society and owned the means of production, the culture industry still managed to subsume it. In his essay, “The Culture Industry Reconsidered,” Adorno insists that “autonomous” art forms,

“which of course rarely ever predominated in an entirely pure form,” are “tendentially eliminated by the culture industry,” and this happens “with or without the conscious will of those in control” (129). One may note that punk culture cannot be fully autonomous because it is a *subculture* emerging from popular culture and without capitalism and popular culture, “punks” would have nothing to oppose. Furthermore, the punk rock genre, which is the idiom of its culture, is the type of “autonomous” work of art that has overtime been “eliminated” by the culture industry; this may have happened “with or without” punk musicians wanting it too. For example, Thompson cites Fugazi, a punk band from Washington D.C, in an article in *College Literature*, “Market Failure: Punk Economics, Early and Late.” They were very strong in their anti-commercial views, refusing to sell band merchandise; and their music label, Dischord, did not market their bands. However, one tee-shirt cleverly produced and sold in independent and chain stores had written on it: “This is not a Fugazi T-shirt,” with lyrics, “You are not what you own,” from Fugazi’s song “Merchandise,” printed on the back (48). This further demonstrates the inevitability of commodification. Perhaps the reason the culture industry steers punk musicians (and other entertainment artists) towards major labels and popular culture is because the culture industry “had its origin in the general laws of capital” (Adorno and Horkheimer 8). In order to live in a capitalistic society, one can only subsume into the culture industry because according to Adorno and Horkheimer, “not to conform means to be rendered powerless, economically and therefore spiritually—to be ‘self-employed’” (8). Going back to punk ideology then, maybe one way to escape the oppressed working class is not to rebel against capitalism but to be apart of it, otherwise one struggles economically; Adorno and Horkheimer perhaps say it best when they suggest “freedom to choose an ideology- since ideology always reflects economic coercion- everywhere proves to be freedom to choose what is always the same” (17). The punk ideology was “coerced” by the economy to eventually shift toward commercialization and to sameness. In addition, they say that one can make one’s “way in entertainment, if one is not too obstinate about one’s own concerns, and proves appropriately pliable” (7). In punk, the ideology *is* to be obstinate, to resist popular culture and industry—not to conform to society’s norms or how things are produced. However, in the growing capitalistic world, “anyone who resists can only survive by fitting in” (Adorno and Horkheimer 7). If a musician wants to actually earn his living by making music as entertainment for the masses, then being “pliable”

toward popular culture—toward the culture industry—is inevitable. Punk’s ideology and “tendency to resist” now becomes the tendency to be absorbed by the culture industry. This only strengthens Goshert’s argument about punk “ceasing to be punk” as soon as it “becomes popular culture,” namely, as soon as it is “eliminated” by the culture industry. The effects of this commercialization and commodification of punk is evident in some of today’s punk bands as well as punk’s current fans.

In today’s society where the individual is becoming more valued, fans and musicians of something as “individualistic” as punk are becoming more socially acceptable. Probably because punk culture has been absorbed into the culture industry, punks are no longer seen as a major threat to society. Kids who may or may not be interested in punk music or know anything about the culture are attracted to punk fashion—now a trendy commodity with accessories and clothing being mass-produced and sold in stores like Hot Topic. One sees more and more boys with eye make up, people with mohawks, brightly colored hair, studded accessories, military boots, leather jackets, fishnets, torn or “DIY-created” clothing, offensive t-shirts, and other outlandish styles. Adorno may say that this is because “cultural entities...are no longer *also* commodities, they are commodities through and through” (129). This form of “fashion” as a “cultural entity” of punk—which was meant to offend people and go against popular fashion—has now become a popular commodity. As Adorno and Horkheimer put it, “one might think that an omnipresent authority had sifted the material and drawn up an official catalogue of cultural commodities to provide a smooth supply of available mass-produced lines” (9). In this way, punk culture has been reduced to something that one can buy and sell, losing all its original shock and non-conformity. Some “old school” punk members like John Lydon, formerly known as Johnny Rotten of pioneer English punk band, the Sex pistols, may agree. In an article on [contactmusic.com](http://contactmusic.com), dated March 24, 2006, he says, “current punk groups have become ridiculous caricatures of the real thing,” suggesting that punk lost its original rebellious, angry spirit, and has become commercialized.

Commercialization is especially apparent with pop punk band, Green Day. The band’s three members, Billie Joe Armstrong (vocals, lead guitar and lyricist), Mike Dirnt (backup vocals and bass) and Tre Cool (drums) formed in the late 1980s in the underground pop punk Berkeley, California scene. They followed punk DIY ethic by learning their instruments themselves; they were constant performers in the underground club in Berkeley, 924 Gilman Street. Initially, they signed on with an

independent label, Lookout! Records, which released their first two independent albums, *1039/Smoothedout Slappy Hours* (1990) and *Kerplunk!* (1992). After signing on to major label, Reprise Records (a division of Time Warner) and releasing their multi-platinum debut, *Dookie*, in 1994, they became widely popular and were banned from Gilman, being accused of “selling out.” Green Day was no longer “punk” in the eyes of their former friends. In a Green Day edition of the VH1 series, *Driven*, Armstrong’s step brother, Alan Oller said that Green Day “were exiled from the Gilman. It affected Billie a great deal ‘cause they were his friends and all of a sudden he’s an outcast.” To the punk community in Berkeley, Green Day did probably the exact opposite of what lies in the core of the punk culture; instead of resisting capitalism and commercialism, they embraced it, signaling this by signing on to a major label—the key symbol of capitalism. According to Thompson, working with a major label means that “a ‘punk’ band succeeds commercially” and by definition, “punk for itself is never commercially successful” (“Market Failure” 52). Green Day is just one example of many bands that have been accused of selling out to commercial success.

Goshert further implies that because of all these changes, “punk” is hard to define; punk rock exists “in strictly local terms” with local underground, independent bands that practice the DIY method. He continues to say that the term punk “cannot be reduced simply to a musical or otherwise stylistic genre” because the mass media usage of the term “homogenizes” independent punk bands and major label “punk” bands, the latter in which the term does not apply (87). Adorno and Horkheimer may agree with Goshert, summing it up best when they say, “the whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry” (4). Mass culture “homogenizes” punk by “impress[ing] the same stamp on everything” whether a band has an independent or major label (1). All of these factors support the argument that a musical genre cannot be defined as a specific genre once it does not contain the ideological connotations of the culture—major label punk bands cannot be “punk” simply because they “sold out” from punk ideological connotations. As a result, because commercially successful punk bands do not follow the “antiindustry economic ethic” of DIY, and because they “are the very antithesis of a punk business ethic centered around independent production and independent control of music,” some of today’s bands like Green Day are not considered “true punk” (Goshert 86). Considering Brackett’s definition of genre and the state of punk rock and punk culture today, one

can see how punk rock music may no longer exist as a genre; in other words, one may ask whether or not the punk rock genre can still be classified as punk, namely, is punk “dead”?

One may then ask, if punk is dead, what is the genre “punk” that people still refer to and talk about today in terms of music, fashion, and life style? It is apparent that the word “punk” is still used today, and what accounts for this, according to Gunn is that “the creation and maintenance of musical genres is an inevitable consequence of our attempts to understand music and to explain our enjoyment of music to each other” (32). More simply put, genres continue over time because people talk about music and artists with certain adjectives that apply specifically to that genre. For example, one might use the adjective, “raw,” to describe punk music (33). This use of “genre” is also motivated by commercialism. Since the culture industry makes it possible for consumers to buy and sell culture, another “cultural entity” that has become a commodity of culture *is* genre, specifically the punk rock genre. One way that the culture industry is able to disperse punk (or perhaps the term “punk”) into popular culture is of course through advertising. Bands may advertise themselves by selling t-shirts and other merchandise with the band name or logo. Furthermore, similarly to Gunn, Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that what is being advertised are certain words that get “lost in the announcement,” and the more these words are lost, “the more words are debased as substantial vehicles of meaning” (15). This results in words being merely “sign[s] without any meaning,” so that the word “punk” and the adjectives that “describe” it are so “fixed” to the “punk rock” genre that these words become “just a petrified formula”—a set phrase people say without knowing what it means. In another sense, words become “trade-marks” (16). Gunn may agree, stating that “through generic language, music companies are able to draw on the musical expectations of consumers by appealing to conventional generic codes and adjectives” (35). Because punk bands make it possible, through their alliance with major labels, to be commodified (and hence advertised), “what is often being sold and transacted in the marketplace, then...is not music...but generic—and thus linguistic—codes” (Gunn 35). Goshert agrees that “alternative,” “independent,” and “punk” are terms used to market popular culture as a “catchall generic reference” (86-87). Thus, one may note the still ongoing, inevitable shift of punk towards commercialization in the form of mass media use of the name “punk”; as a result, it is important to note who the fans are now that are applying those terms to the music.

Punk fans are no longer the now middle-aged rebels who were present at punk's conception. These "ex-punks" are the ones who consider punk to be "dead." Most of today's fans are adolescents who, for the most part, do not know where punk came from or what it is all about. Adorno and Horkheimer state exactly this when they say, "innumerable people use words and expressions which they have either ceased to understand or employ only because they trigger off conditioned reflexes" (16). These punk "posers" use the terms "punk" and "punk rock" because it is used by the mass media to describe certain bands with a certain musical style. Mass media usage sets off a "conditioned reflex" to label these bands as "punk." The more people do not understand punk or its origins, the less the "linguistic sense" of the word (punk) is "grasped" and the more the word is "firmly linked to the things they denote" (17). Moreover, as Adorno and Horkheimer put it, "there is nothing left for the consumer to classify. Producers have done it for him" (3) meaning that "producers" have conditioned consumers to label certain bands (those that they have predetermined as "punk" themselves) as a "punk band" by using these "words" and certain musical styles (melodies, hooks, etc) as a conditioned stimulus. Besides Brackett's definition of genre that includes a cultural component, he also suggests that "musical style," which describes music in its "sonic form," is "open-ended" enough to refer "to a bundle of characteristics that may be linked to a particular musician or recording and that participate in a socially recognized musical genre" (65). In other words, "musical style," as well the adjectives people use in describing this musical style, is one way music is socially recognized as a genre. Therefore, any poppy, playful, catchy, upbeat, short (adjectives that may describe punk's musical style today) tune labeled "punk" by popular culture (i.e. the culture industry) will also be labeled "punk" by these fans. This, in turn, gives them a somewhat false impression of "true punk." Because average listeners talk about music in terms of genre, "punk" becomes a convenient way to describe songs that are stylistically similar and not used to describe a sound that is representative of a culture. Nevertheless, the genre is still being used; therefore, according to Gunn, punk still exists through the fans that keep it alive by using the term "punk" to express the adjective qualities of the music. Genres are inevitable because adjectives are needed to describe and discuss music; therefore, if "punk" is still used as a term to describe certain music today, then perhaps there is still hope of its existence.

Still, no matter how one defines genre, there is still no doubt that genres are an inevitable way of classifying music into different categories, and with any classification system, there is always going to be some sort of inevitable restriction on how that music is created and heard. One may also see how, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, the culture industry is “no more than the achievement of standardisation and mass production” (1); standardization also restricts how entertainment products are created and heard. In Gunn’s article, Micheal Gira, a goth musician, speaks of punk as a set of “conventions and clichés” in which all punk bands are “stylized” and “imitate each other,” suggesting that punk has lost its artistic value. Gunn points out, however, that this “analogous set of conventions” is called a genre (31). In other words, genres have a way of confining and limiting music to certain “musical clichés,” which to Brackett, brings in the “group stylistic tendencies, codes, conventions, and expectations” of the culture that give genres meaning “in relation to one another at a particular moment in time” (67). Therefore, at least two factors affect the sound of the punk rock genre: one is that genres by definition are standardized into a set of conventions and secondly, punk’s integration into the culture industry has further enhanced this standardization.

Standardization of music and other entertainment products have vast affects on society. The culture industry can manipulate the music fan in order to obtain their ultimate goal—money. Just as words are used to condition consumers to categorize music and relate it to a genre, music itself as a commodity is also made to condition people into liking what is the same. This is done in several ways. Just as in advertising, where “the trick, the isolated repeatable device” has been used as a conditioned stimulus (whether it be a word or image) for the uses of manipulation (Adorno and Horkheimer 15). Adorno and Horkheimer also suggest that “a constant reproduction of the same thing” occurs because “the conformism of the buyers and the effrontery of the producers who supply them prevail” (9). Thus, by repeating the same thing over and over again, the culture industry ensures that consumers will purchase a product since what they have liked in the past is sure to be liked again (hence it is repeated). In other words, “the culture industry that surrounds the masses tolerates hardly any deviation and incessantly drills the same formulas of behavior” (Adorno 134). For example, one can say that most of today’s “punk” (or what mass media terms punk) bands repetitively appeal to the emotions of the audience with predictable lyrics concerning love and friendship—noted in songs by bands Good

Charlotte, Avril Lavigne, Relient K, Sum 41, and the All-American Rejects. People more or less may be attracted to similar bands because “once the trained ear has heard the first notes of the hit song, it can guess what is coming and feel flattered when it does come” (Adorno and Horkheimer 4). The culture industry has successfully found a way to capture the mind of the music fan (also consumer) by appealing to emotions. In this way, “the power of the culture industry’s ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness” (Adorno 133). These bands do not appeal to rationality, intelligence, or questioning the status quo (which is what punk aimed to do), but instead to people’s emotions. One no longer has to reflect on anything because “no independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction” (Adorno and Horkheimer 10). Because of repetition from previous songs and other products, like in advertising, the culture industry has “taught” the audience “what to expect” and “they react automatically.” The more one hears something, the more it gets absorbed and one no longer needs to think about it or question it—it becomes apart of him or her; thus “no scope is left for the imagination” (Adorno and Horkheimer 5). In turn, Adorno argues that people accept this; they fall “for the swindle; if it guarantees them even the most fleeting gratification, they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them” (132). The now nearly mindless audience has very little choice in this matter since the culture industry is mainstream popular culture and therefore, Adorno and Horkheimer make clear that “the man with leisure has to accept what the culture manufacturers offer him” (3). In the long run, the culture industry causes “mass deception” and entertainment turns “into a means for fettering consciousness. It impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves” (Adorno 135). Ironically, this is what the punk culture started rebelling against in its conception. While “punk artists” appeal to the emotions of their fans, at the same time they maintain the upbeat, fast-paced *musical* characteristics of “punk.” This can be due to the fact that genres enforce a certain expectation of sound for it to qualify in that genre. Gunn cites Walser, saying that “although the range of ‘possible interpretations [of a musical text] may be theoretically infinite,’ the fact remains that ‘certain preferred meanings tend to be supported’ by those who claim that a particular musical work fits into a genre” (36). This coincides with the idea that genres, because they are embedded into certain cultural connotations and expectations, limit the way music is heard and produced.

The generic limitations that lead to repetition as well as the repetition that the culture industry creates because of consumers, causes an effect on the producers, that is, the actual bands making the music, stunting their creativity. In the music industry, as well as other forms of entertainment, Adorno and Horkheimer note that “there is the agreement—or at least the determination—of all executive authorities not to produce or sanction anything that in any way differs from their own rules, their own ideas about consumers, or above all themselves” (2). Since the music industry markets “generic codes,” they restrict musical style and creativity. Music, along with every product of the culture industry is “so firmly stamped with sameness that nothing can appear which is not marked at birth, or does not meet with approval at first sight” (Adorno and Horkheimer 5). In other words, the culture industry picks out certain details in songs—a specific melody, rhythm, hook—which are found in every other song, especially songs within the same genre. These “details,” according to Adorno and Horkheimer are just “ready-made clichés to be slotted in anywhere” (4). Furthermore, those bands that want to earn a living making music must, as previously stated, fit into capitalistic tendencies and may be a type of “inferior work” which they say has “always relied on its similarity with others—on a surrogate identity” (7). This means that amateur bands rely on the sound of “successful” acts to duplicate their sound in order to achieve the same success. This is perhaps catalyzed by the culture industry, for “the ossified forms—such as the...hit song—are the standardised average of late liberal taste, dictated with threats from above” (Adorno 9). For example, one can barely distinguish between the sounds of Simple Plan, New Found Glory, and Bowling for Soup—all well known contemporary “punk” bands who share similar musical styles and whose lead singers all have nasal vocals. This “imitation” is most likely the product of major label status and commercialization of the punk rock genre. Adorno and Horkheimer point out that “in the culture industry this imitation finally becomes absolute. Having ceased to be anything but style, it reveals the latter’s secret: obedience to the social hierarchy” (7). In other words, in the “social hierarchy” record label producers would be on top, putting pressure on “punk” bands to limit their sound to something that is known to appeal to a larger audience (more record sales, more money—the effects of capitalism). Therefore, most musicians are under the control of their producers at these major labels who coerce them to create a sound similar to other successful bands whether they want to or not. But granted that the punk bands cited above have a distinct imitative sound of punk

today, one cannot completely say that all punk bands sound the same. If this were true then there would have never been a change in punk music since the 70s in the first place, and the question of whether or not “punk” still exists would not be debated. The question now is what accounts for these changes besides the fact that punk bands became more commercial? In answering this, one must consider the reasons for the changes in punk’s musical style over time.

Music as an art form requires the individual artist to grow and change; however, genres’ limitations do not allow this to happen easily. An artist naturally wants to explore his creativity as an artist by trying new things; thus the musical style of a genre changes with the growth of an artist. One may ask that if the culture industry has control to reproduce the same thing, then how are certain musicians able to create something relatively new? Perhaps the answer is determined by how successful a musical act becomes—the more successful the band, the more money they make, hence the more “freedom” “authorities” from above may give them. One may argue that Green Day then, a successful band for over fifteen years, has more creative freedom in the production of their music. As a result, there comes the growth of a genre, causing “genre crossovers” to be audibly apparent in musical texts. Brackett further explores crossover, stating, “musicians and fans may project varying conceptions of genres at the same time” (67). One can argue that if a genre is crossed over with another, perhaps, if punk was crossed over with another genre, then it cannot be categorized as “punk” anymore. However, Gunn argues that a band can extend generic boundaries, and Brackett in a way similarly states that “a given musical text may belong to more than one genre simultaneously... because the text presents a synthesis that exceeds contemporary comprehension of generic boundaries” (67). The word “simultaneous” and the latter part of the statement are worth noting. Since a song can be considered in more than one genre simultaneously, this means a punk rock crossover can still be considered punk and at the same time something else. Furthermore, generic boundaries grow and extend with the artist, and a musical text with a certain synthesis can expand the genre, perhaps expand the punk genre.

To explain the changing musical styles and synthesis in punk, an analysis of a specific band is useful. Green Day in many ways evolved, changed, and revived punk; they have continued to reproduce a new sound with each record they release, specifically crossing punk with pop. As Rob Cavallo, Senior Vice President of A&C,

Warner Brothers Records said, “[Green Day] now became a broader cultural thing, and it became something that actually crossed over to pop” (*Driven*). Most notable of these sonic changes are the songs “Jesus of Suburbia” and “Homecoming,” both songs off of their newest “punk rock opera” album, *American Idiot* (2004). One may call these songs, as well as the album as a whole, a synthesis of punk, rock (hard, progressive, classic rock), pop, and show tunes among many others. The two songs are more than just a crossover with pop and other genres. The structures of the songs are even comparable to the symphonic form, in which they are broken up into different “parts” analogous to the parts of a symphony. Moreover, paralleling Green Day and punk rock, the symphony as a genre also first started off very simple, then it grew, taking different directions by having more variation in movement structure and increasing instrumentation. Clearly, punk song structure grew with Green Day’s “Jesus of Suburbia” (JOS) transcending the simple verse-chorus-verse structure. With instrumentation, punk and Green Day started off simple and raw with the standard three instruments. Green Day took punk into different directions with instrumentation even before *American Idiot*. Their famous single, “Good Riddance (Time of you Life)” was simple acoustic guitar with string accompaniment in the background towards the last verse. On their 2000 album release, *Warning*, genre crossover was starting to become apparent with punk, folk, and modern rock mixed together. The band experimented with new sounds and more instruments, using the acoustic guitar more and incorporating the saxophone and harmonica. Most notable on the album is a less famous song, “Misery,” which used a lot of very different instruments: accordion, *farfisa* (electric organ), and the mandolin, giving the song a very Mediterranean sound. On *American Idiot*, many of the songs continue to include the saxophone and the keyboard among many other instruments. More parallels are seen in the fact that symphonies embrace the punk ideology of community. Grove states that “the all-embracing tone of the symphony” represented “the emotions or ideas not merely of the individual composer but of an entire community, be it a city, a state, or the whole of humanity.” “JOS” and *American Idiot* have themes reflecting the emotions of a society still feeling the effects of September eleven. Because “JOS” is a type of song completely different from former punk songs, one can hear a sense of synthesis with other genres in the song, even crossing over with the symphonic genre.

When a song does not fit into all the “previously determined adjectives” that categorize it in a specific genre (Gunn 35), one starts to question the song’s validity in that genre. For example, some Green Day fans do not like their “new” sound or consider them punk because it is not the same as before. As previously mentioned, if something is not the same, then one has to reflect upon it and ask himself whether or not he accepts or likes the music. Because pop punk bands are not in a “purist” form of punk, they get questioned about whether or not they are really “punk.” Though some bands are imitators, other bands are innovators, and in this case, Green Day is the latter, certainly challenging the validity of their band as “punk.” However, instead of viewing Green Day as a band who has no ties to punk at all because their sound may be different, perhaps they should be looked at as a band that transcends some of the “musical clichés” that define the punk rock genre. If one considers “punk” music in a strictly “purist” form of the genre, like the members of the Berkeley scene who exiled Green Day for “selling out,” this tends to limit the artist’s individuality and creativity. Perhaps “true punk” is a dated term. True punk never changes and strictly follows certain limits and connotations of the genre; how many times can a reflective person listen to the same thing by the same artists over again? Music would never evolve; thus, instead of thinking of a genre as something stagnant, one should consider it as something more fluid, always changing.

Genres change over time, but they do not completely abandon the ideas of the culture that produced them. Of course because of ongoing changes in punk culture, some of “punk’s” originality and culture is lost in the process, especially through poppy “punk” bands that are labeled punk by the mass media (bands previously mentioned). However, changes that transcend the limits of genre should not be looked at negatively, especially when a band still continues to go back to its “punk” roots, not forgetting what punk is all about. This idea is concurrent with the culture industry as well as art’s natural changing process. Under the culture industry, something cannot be completely new or consumers will not accept it, Adorno and Horkheimer imply that anything new “must conform to the old pattern” (5) and that an overall “constant sameness governs the relationship to the past as well” (9). Lobanova suggests this also. She shows an aspect of genre in which genres change over time but incorporate elements of the past with them: “Past and present, like style and genre, are the intertwining main themes of the present work” (1). Seeing this “regression” in another way, Lydon says today’s punk bands are, “all a load of

wannabes. Rather than go two steps forward, they've gone two steps back" ("Lydon Slams"). If this statement is viewed in Lobanova's terms or under the culture industry, then some of today's punk bands, like Green Day, are doing exactly that—but it is not a negative thing; by going back to the past (earlier punk), certain punk bands help us, according to Lobanova, "understand a great deal of the present" as well as "determine the future of culture" (5).

Going back to Brackett's characteristics of a genre, one can find, by analyzing certain bands, that some of today's punk music still contains elements of the subculture; the connotations of culture are not completely gone despite all the changes in "punk." In many ways, certain punk super groups like Green Day still continue to infuse early punk ideologies with some aspects of the present in terms of punk culture, and as previously examined, punk musical style. This has been evident throughout Green Day's entire career. If one were to compare Green Day's earlier work with some of those of accredited punk pioneers, one can see similarities. Their earlier work in the underground scene accredited them the label of "punk" by their fans and the community of Gilman Street (Thompson 71). Green Day's early songs such as those in *Dookie* and *Insomniac* (1995), are reminiscent of those of the Ramones—a famous pioneer punk band formed in the New York punk scene—with the fast-paced, short, raw, three-chord songs, like their one and a half minute song, "Jaded" on *Insomniac*. Lyrically, songs like "Longview" and "Basket Case" were poppy and silly, like that of the Ramones' "I Wanna Be Sedated" or "Teenage Lobotomy."

Later on, Green Day's lyrical content still continued to infuse earlier punk ideas with more mature and political content on *Warning*. *Warning* was reminiscent of accredited punk band, the Dead Kennedys (DK). The Dead Kennedys put out songs that were mostly political, like "Stars and Stripes of Corruption," with lyrics stating, "The stars and stripes of corruption/Let's bring it all down!/Tell me who's the real patriots/The Archie Bunker slob waving flags?/Or the people with the guts to work/For some real change." Green Day's song, "Warning," went back to that theme, questioning authority, stating, "question everything/Or shut up and be a victim of authority/Warning/Live without warning." The song "Minority" went back to the political ideology of the anarchy of the Sex Pistol's "Anarchy in the UK." Lyrics stating: "I am an antichrist/I am an anarchist/Don't know what I want/But I know how to get it/I wanna destroy the passerby/'Cause I wanna be Anarchy" are synonymous

with lyrics to Green Day's "Minority" stating: "I want to be the minority/I don't need your authority/Down with the moral majority/Cause I want to be the minority."

With the latest album, *American Idiot*, Green Day goes back to their punk roots. Though Green Day may have abandoned the DIY ideology of punk in an economic sense, one can say that the band engaged in DIY with the creation of the album by not trying to align themselves with other obvious "rock operas" like The Who's *Tommy*. In an MTV.com article, "Green Day: Anatomy of a Punk Opera," Armstrong says,

One day we were just sort of messing around at the studio... and we said [to Dirnt], "Write a 30-second song, it doesn't matter what it's about"...So he wrote this 30-second piece and we were all laughing about it...and I said, "I want to do one!" So I ended up putting in another 30-second song, and then Tre ended up putting in another 30-second song. And he's all, "Oh this is funny, it kinda sounds like a rock opera."

Green Day wanted "to do [their] own thing" with the album—not intentionally planning to do an "opera" by following certain guidelines. In the same article, Dirnt says "We felt like we could go anywhere with it," which upholds the "do it yourself" philosophy. They did what was natural in musical development, thus not being bounded by the genre's expectations. The content of the album further continued with the ideologies of punk with political themes and themes of rebellion and anarchy in most of the songs on the album; however, by choosing to do the album as a "punk rock opera," they took punk to another level. Making the album into a narrative connects the songs together and expands the musical form. Sometimes people are so caught up in rebellion and anarchy that they do not think about what the music means or what "punk" means. One may also say that through their lyrics, they have tried to stimulate the minds of those who have been made dull and unreflective by the culture industry. Green Day in a way protects the ideologies of the genre by making the themes of punk into a story that has a moral at the end.

The line becomes blurry as to when Green Day "sold out" as "punk" artists. Is it when they signed on to a major label, thus betraying punk's ideologies? Or is it when their sound started to become different? "Purist" punks often never question this, but they should distinguish when in fact they think Green Day (if they ever had) ceased to be punk. Nevertheless, though Green Day "sold out" to major label, super star status, there are things to consider about their music and its relation to the punk

culture other than DIY economics; they continue to hold on to ideals valued by punks. Thus this further demonstrates Lobanova's idea of genre in which "the composition and recomposition of a genre may appear in a return to an earlier model of it" (181). Green Day has gone "two steps back" in a positive way, in order to maintain and at the same time renew the genre.

Genres naturally change, which parallels how artists individually change over time. To support Lobanova's theory of genre, Gunn also mentions another perspective of genre in which genres maintain their status and inevitability through the constant "associations between past and present musics" (44). He terms this "canonization," which "simultaneously broadens and fixes generic boundaries." Canonization works by appointing "previously recognized bands" as pioneers or "originators" of a particular genre, "so that future musical acts with similar sounds may expand generic boundaries with the legitimate value of *difference*." He goes further to say that genres continue to survive, and generic boundaries expand, if the canons continue to be "negotiated" (42). Therefore, just by the mere comparison of Green Day in the analysis above to pioneers of early punk, like The Ramones, Dead Kennedys, and the Sex Pistols, ensures the survival of "punk" as a genre. Green Day sounds similar, yet they broadened the genre to a certain "difference." However, the debate continues among "punks" to accept and reject current and future "punk bands" based on the generic boundaries of the time. Furthermore, this "time" factor of generic boundaries is evident in the several major punk scenes. Since the changes in the punk genre mixes with the past and present genre, the punk culture also changes in time, integrating the past and present to help us understand "the future of culture." This is evident in the seven major punk scenes that Thompson outlines. She says that three ideologies emerged in the New York punk scene (1974-76): "resisting commercialization, seizing control over the means of production, and fostering collectivity," while the English punk scene (1976-78) was characterized by "interrogating History and the spectacular character of rock music" and "striving toward new constructions of identity." After 1978, other punk scenes "reimagine and rematerialize" these ideals and also add their own. For example, the Riot Grrl scene focused on feminism, while the Pop Punk scene went back to the roots of the New York scene and the Ramones but did not focus as much on things like collectivity (*Punk Productions* 78). Thus, the subcultural punk scenes have changed along with

the music, assimilating past ideologies of the culture *and* the sound with the present culture.

Although the "pure" essence of any genre may be lost amidst the ongoing changes of the genre, it is safe to say that genres like punk survived into the present. Punk is still evident in everyday musical discourse, perhaps being disguised under "indie" (independent) or "alternative" labels, the latter referring to major label punk bands. The growth and evolution of punk has turned a once simple genre into something that can have endless possibilities. By transcending punk "clichés," bands like Green Day have ensured the future of punk, making sure that the genre can be taken into infinite directions. The most important thing is that these punk bands do not forget the core ideologies of the rebellious culture that created punk rock. Even though DIY economics are important in punk desires, "what matters," Thompson suggests, "is not that capitalists channel those desires along lines profitable to them. What matters is that the same core desires continually emerge and are continually becoming desublimated" (*Punk Productions* 77). Even though the "culture industry" manages to homogenize and commodify music and genre, punk is not lost, nor is it dead as long as the same core values and desires are alive in the music and the performances. One can think of it as genre that has been reincarnated only to be embodied in a different and ever changing form.

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