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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "NO WAVE" AS A POST-WAR POPULAR MUSIC GENRE

Master's Thesis

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,
using only the sources listed in the bibliography.

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INTRODUCTION

Popular music is an exceptionally complex and broad field. Its history is not long—basically it originated after World War II—but within a few decades it developed into a large amount of genres. Many of those genres were extremely successful after they had emerged and then ceased sooner or later but did not disappear completely; they rather either evolved into a different genre or re-appeared later in a form of certain revival.

One of these genres was punk, which appeared in the mid-1970s in a form of a movement or a youth subculture. It arose in the United States and quickly spread to the United Kingdom where it became a true national mania. In this thesis I intend to speak about a subgenre of punk called No Wave which—in contrast to punk—is entirely restricted to America and within it to New York City. No Wave does not at all belong to the best-known and most popular genres, even though it is—if mentioned at all—usually identified as "influential". In an attempt to examine it thoroughly, one would soon realize that the genre is left quite unnoticed by encyclopedias and essayists or probably mentioned in just a few sentences ("a short-lived but influential music and art scene"[1]).

Therefore, I find it a primary objective of this work to present a detailed analysis of the No Wave genre. The work will be divided into three chapters. To the first aim—the characterization of No Wave—I will dedicate the first two of them. I believe that the No Wave genre can be fully understood only within the frame of the genre of punk, therefore the punk movement in general will be explained.

In the first chapter it will be done in the context of popular cultures of the post-war era. The term "youth subculture" and its connection with popular music will be discussed. I will present a history of punk as a subculture with all its relevant aspects. I will trace the musicians whose work and performing activity were of considerable importance for forming

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[1] "No Wave." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_wave>

the genre of punk. I also intend to explain both the term "punk" and "No Wave" linguistically, since the genres' names imply their characteristics, too.

In all the subchapters that will deal with those ideas I will be working within the geographical borders of "western" popular music in general, however, after I will focus on the genre of No Wave, I will have to turn my attention to the artistic scene of New York City, since it is the only place where No Wave musicians were active. In the 1970s New York attracted many artists (not only musicians) who made it a very creative environment. A great deal of artists were active not only in popular music but in visual arts, too, and some of them gave rise to No Wave. I will present cameos of the most important of them.

Since the punk movement is generally connected mainly with the United Kingdom, I find it desirable to dedicate one subchapter to a short comparison of American and British punk. Interestingly, although being imported there, punk took firmer roots in Great Britain; that is also why the situation in Britain should be mentioned.

To be able to fully elaborate the chapter, I will work with sources that will include mostly books dealing with "sociological" aspects of the punk movement. As punk was a phenomenon more significant in British rather than American popular cultures, it is a topic definitely more interesting for British authors, whose field of study is—quite naturally—limited to the United Kingdom. An invaluable source of information to me was Iain Chambers' *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Popular Culture*. Books on American punk are rather sparse. An interesting essay by Bill Osberby is to be found in Roger Sabin's anthology *Punk Rock: So What? (The Cultural Legacy of Punk)*, in which the author presents persuasive arguments regarding the origin of punk in the United States. As far as the No Wave genre is concerned, there is no specialized study available to me. An important resource for me will thus be the internet. Since No Wave has been rather neglected by scholars, generally speaking the thesis should therefore contribute to the existing view of popular music of which No Wave and American punk rock in general are significant but largely omitted parts.

The second chapter will be examining the position of No Wave within the context of the post-war popular music. I will discuss the origin of No Wave and punk as musical genres, that is I will try to find their roots in the preceding genres of popular music and I will also define them more closely by means of determining their differences from other genres.

I will present the main characteristics of a rock-and-roll song structure that defines the basics of rock music well up to the present day. In the following subchapters I will give examples of particular musicians that contributed to the development of the new genre; it will be necessary to look for them both in America and Britain, since many artists were popular in both countries.

The view of the first two chapters will be mostly "historical". I will search for important events and persons in the history of popular music that served as an inspiration for subsequent artists. Thus, the principal method used will be empirical; I will proceed from what is known about the attitudes of the artists and especially from what can be derived from their music.

The other important object of the thesis will be elaborated in the concluding (third) chapter. Here I will try to find out whether it is legitimate to call the No Wave genre "influential". I will try to take an account of what influence it had on subsequent genres of popular music and whether it is traceable in contemporary music. I will define the most important aspects of No Wave and its most important contributions it made to the development of popular music.

While discussing the contemporary popular music, I will pay special attention to New York; its 1970s music scene was quite unique and it will be interesting to find out whether it has survived in at least a few characteristics. I will subject contemporary musical groups of the New York scene to a critical analysis and identify common features of music produced by them and the No Wave groups. Only after this is confirmed, it is possible to call the genre truly influential.

The sources I will base chapters 2 and 3 on will mostly include audio recordings made by the particular artists. As for No Wave, it is primarily the *No New York* compilation album which includes compositions by four bands that may be considered the most important for the genre. Otherwise, most No Wave bands' discographies usually include only a few singles and probably a compilation CD released in recent times gathering virtually all material recorded by the particular band. Nowadays, the process of recording and releasing an LP is much easier for a band, therefore the contemporary bands' production of records is more prolific. On the other hand, most today's bands have been active only for a short time and their discographies usually include no more than two or three albums.

Information will be looked for also in various encyclopedias and—of course—the internet, as scholarly resources in this field are rather sparse, which was already mentioned above. A possible exception is Dave Laing's book *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock*, which includes a sophisticated insight into the basic structure of punk songs.

On the whole, the thesis should accentuate a specific musical genre fairly unknown to wide audiences and identify its potential of influence. Currently it is often omitted on the one hand and regarded as important and influential on the other, which is a rather confusing disproportion; in this thesis I intend to make the situation more comprehensible.

1 THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF NO WAVE

The style of No Wave is usually connected with and described as a subgenre of punk. The punk movement is then widely understood as an important youth subculture of the late 1970s which has had a major impact on both culture and music. In this thesis I want to discuss the role of No Wave in this process and examine those perspectives which see the genre as a significant milestone in the history of music. Therefore I want to submit the culture of punk to a thorough research in which I will attempt to define the term "subculture" and find the position of No Wave within its borders. Thus, in this chapter culture as such will be an elementary field upon which the topic of the thesis will be discussed.

1.1 Aspects of Subcultures

A subculture can be readily defined as "a group having social, economic, ethnic, or other traits distinctive enough to distinguish it from others within the same culture or society" or as "the cultural values and behavioural patterns distinctive of [such group]"[2]. It is obvious that such groups have always existed but it was only in the 2nd half of the 20th century—with the establishing of modern sociology—that they became a topic of numerous discussions. On the other hand it is not only that scholars are now interested in what they were not before; the fact is that—at least regarding popular culture—post-war social history is a history of various subcultures.

Popular culture will be the very field for this thesis since it is going to deal with a genre of "popular music", which has also become an important issue of past decades. There have been countless books and essays on popular culture and popular music that dealt with them from various points of view. On the other hand, popular culture and its subcultures are very hard to describe, be it because we miss a detached point of view with which we can

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[2] "subculture." Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). 2007. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/subculture>.

perceive history (popular culture is part of our very presence) or because it is somewhat natural to subculture to resist description.

The other important aspect of popular culture that should be mentioned is that it has very much to do with an extensive phenomenon called "youth cultures". The term "youth" is very much connected with popular culture and just as popular culture, youth is quite a new but widely discussed topic in sociology. "'Youth' appeared as an emergent category in post-war Britain [and other western countries], one of the most striking and visible manifestations of social change in the period. 'Youth' provided the focus for official reports, pieces of legislation, official interventions."[3]

Thus, we will deal with punk as popular youth subculture. It is also a subculture that has drawn much attention. Dick Hebdige in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* maintains that "[t]he word 'subculture' is loaded down with mystery. It suggests secrecy, masonic oaths, an Underworld."[4] I believe that punk is an excellent example of all these suggestions. It is a style of living, clothing and—above all—music. A style that is very distinct in its resistance to "mainstream culture". No Wave then—at least when music is concerned—took things to extremes.

In the following paragraphs I will discuss the origins of punk (or No Wave as the case may be) and I will also make a brief comparison between the style in America and Britain because I believe it will help understanding this specific youth culture better.

1.2 The Roots of Punk

Tracing the history of punk and popular music in general would be a long journey back in time. Nevertheless, I believe that what made music "popular" was its availability. Only after music started to be recorded was it possible for people to be so close to the authors

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[3] Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, Roberts, 1976: p. 9
[4] Hebdige, 1979: p. 4

and performers. The music became readily available and as result readily popular with huge masses of people. This is what distinguishes contemporary popular music from music produced before the rise of recording devices (which need not be limited to what we call "classical" music).

1.2.1 The Premises of Popular Music

Thus, the history of modern music is connected with the history of sound recording and reproduction devices: Edison's invention of phonograph in 1877, the beginning of mass production of shellac records in 1898, the introduction of vinyl as the most common substance for making records in the 1940s with the development of the 33 ⅓ rpm format[5] in 1948. At about the same time another playing format was established: smaller (7-inch) discs with a rotation speed of 45 rpm. These were called "singles" because they usually held a single song on each side and as such they were very important because they allowed buying at a cheap price a favourite song from a radio. If we add the building of the first electric guitar in 1932, we get perfect grounds for the rise of mass entertaining and mass music industry that began with rock-and-roll in the 1950s. The rock-and-roll music (which itself is based on black rhythm-and-blues) laid the foundations of future popular music. The line-up of a rock band has never changed and the music business still relies on selling singles and albums. That is why I found it necessary to explain the history of the possibilities of recording music.

1.2.2 The Post-War Changes

On the other hand, the facts that have been just mentioned are only a technical part of profound social and economical changes that took place after World War II. It was a period

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[5] The speed of rotation for shellac records was standardized in about 1910 at 78 revolutions per minute (rpm). The new material—vinyl—enabled using of narrower grooves in the discs and slowing down the rotation along with maintaining (or rather even improving) the sound quality of the reproduction. The discs were thus able to carry longer recordings and that is why they were called long-playing records or LPs. Two sides of a vinyl disc offered approximately 35–45 minutes of recording, which also became a standard length of a pop-music album which contained usually about 10 songs.

that gave a meaning to the term "teenager", a period during which a specific teenage culture was born. These changes led to reassessment of established values; the "[t]raditional middle-class virtues of hard work, moderation and thrift […] became an anachronism during the 50s and early 60s as American capitalism prioritised consumption and immediate gratification. The burgeoning middle-class suburbs (whose population surged from 21 million in 1950 to 37 million by 1960) saw the rise of a lifestyle that consciously embraced a world of hedonistic leisure and conspicuous consumption"[6]. Youth culture and youth consumption were inevitable consequences. Probably never before in history young people had had so much money and free time to spend. The images of American consumer society constituted of leisure, pleasure and carefree fun were symbolised by teenagers. The ideals of American lifestyle were epitomized by myths of abundant teenage fun. These myths and these images were also stereotypes that were both enjoyed and lampooned by the punk movement of the 1970s .

1.2.3 Punk as a Reaction to Hippy Era and Glam Rock

Twenty years after the term "rock-and-roll" was coined, rock music had already established its solid position as an inseparable part of youth culture. Starting with the hippie culture, it was common for the musicians to comment in their songs on political and social issues; music thus became part of political course of events in a broader sense. The hippie culture along with subsequent glam rock music formed a starting position for punk to the intent that punk adopted an exactly opposite standpoint. I find it important to be familiar with these two cultures in order to understand the values of punk. The hippies and glam rock fans were idealistic, which is what the punks despised most. Hence, let us have a brief look at what they protested against.

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[6] Osgerby, 1999: p. 157

1.2.3.1 The Hippie Culture

The hippie movement originated during the 1960s in the United States and soon influenced people in the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries. The hippies rejected established institutions, criticized middle class values and embraced certain aspects of non-Judeo-Christian religions. They advocated the sexual liberation and promoted the use of psychedelic drugs which they believed were able to expand human consciousness. They were also setting up specific communities in which they tried to live their lives according to the values they adopted.

The hippie movement was idealistic and utopian but it inspired millions of young people, many of whom ran away from their homes and joined the "flower children" as the hippies called themselves. Many of them came from middle class backgrounds and had no "objective" reason for leaving their families. It was quite a widespread problem and was reflected in music and films, too: at least the Beatles' song *She's leaving home* or Milos Forman's film *Taking Off* can serve as examples. This film also depicts the other side of the situation: runaway children had their functioning families to return to. In the film *Hair* by the same director, when an "exemplary hippie" George Berger gets in difficulties, he sees his parents to ask for money and has no trouble getting it.

The punks simply did not fit into this order. They rejected the hippies' elevated philosophy and adhered to the reality of life, they advocated authenticity and the rough substantiality of the world. While the cultural centre of the hippies was in sunny California, the first punk bands arose in East Coast urban areas (the Ramones, the New York Dolls) or other industrial cities such as Detroit (the Stooges, the MC5). In Britain the punks formed from working class youths grouped together round the pub-rock bands (the 101'ers, the Gorillas) being inspired by the mod subculture.[7] They shared their working class descent and

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[7] Hebdige, 1979: p. 25

exasperation of middle class values with the skinheads, though skinheads' subculture is based on their class affiliation, while punks wanted to "belong to nowhere".

1.2.3.2 Glam Rock

Glam rock (or glitter rock) musical movement began in Britain in the early 1970s. It soon got to the United States where it attracted a lot of fans. It acquired the name "glam" (or "glamorous") because it "celebrated the spectacle of the rock star and concert. Often dappled with glitter, male musicians took the stage in women's makeup and clothing, adopted theatrical personas, and mounted glamorous musical productions frequently characterized by space-age futurism."[8] In fact they were doing the same thing as the hippies—they were escaping reality, which at the time was the Vietnam war.

1.2.4 Protopunk

In contrast to those bands, there were other musicians who came from different position. Martin Rev of one of the first punk and probably the first No Wave band Suicide said about their origins in 1971: "We couldn't even afford to escape, to dress up that well [as the glam rock performers] […] Our nature wasn't to escape. It was to bring the sure absurdity and injustice and harm of what we felt reality was. Punk was really not about escaping anymore, it was about finding a place for ourselves in this order."[9] Music produced by musicians that in the late 1960s and early 1970s felt similar way is often referred to as "protopunk". This term is prevailingly used only in relation with American artists. The situation in Britain is a bit different even though there are artists that may fall under the term protopunk—we should not forget at least the Who and probably also the Kinks. However, it seems more suitable to devote a different subchapter to British trends that evolved into punk.

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[8] "glam rock." Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 2007 <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9110274>
[9] Martin Rev, the documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)

The examples of American protopunk musicians will be the MC5, the Stooges, the Velvet Underground and Patti Smith. In the following paragraphs I want to discuss the cultural significance of these artists. The cities they came from—Detroit, Chicago, New York—all belong to north-eastern urban areas of the United states, which seems significant in contrast to the California-based hippie movement.

1.2.4.1   The MC5

The MC5 got together in 1964 in an industrial city of Detroit—"MC" stands for "Motor City", "5" represents simply the five members of the band. The name was invented by Rob Tyner, lead singer and frontman of the band, who at that time was a beatnik "deeply involved in Detroit's hipster and left-wing political scenes"[10]. The MC5 relied on energetic performances compiled of speedy and rebellious songs. Their fans often compared the effects of the concerts to "the delirious exhaustion experienced after a street rumble or an orgy"[11]. Such an experience was definitely very much different from the esoteric performances of the hippies.

In 1968 they recorded live their first album, *Kick Out the Jams*. The album well reflects the atmosphere of the show and contains songs that are considered "protopunk classics". It also contains a cover of a song by John Lee Hooker called "Motor City is Burning". Hooker wrote the song shortly after the Detroit riot of July 1967, which began as a raid executed by the police at a "blind pig" after hours drinking club but ended up with five days of rioting when 43 people died, 1189 were injured and over 7000 arrested.[12] Hooker wrote a blues protest-song in which he complains about black people's ordeal that cannot be changed but the MC5 made it highly political, specific and offensive. Vocalist Rob Tyner opens the song with a shouted sermon: "Brothers and sisters I wanna tell you something. I

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[10] The MC5 Gateway. <http://makemyday.free.fr/mc5.htm>
[11] McLease, Don. *Kiss the Sky*. 2005, cited at Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MC5>
[12] *Detroit Riots – 1967*. <http://www.67riots.rutgers.edu/d_index.htm>

hear a lot of talk, by a lot of honkies, sitting on a lot of money, telling me they're high society. But I let you know something—if you ask me, this [meaning the crowd] is a high society!" This "obsessive individualism"[13] is also what punk will be about. The MC5 also change a number of Hooker's lines; in the second verse Hooker sings: "It started on 12th and Clairmont this mornin' / I just don't know what it's all about. / The firewagon kept comin' / but the sniper just wouldn't let 'em put it out." However, the MC5's version is: "It started on 12th and Clairmount that morning / it made the pig cops all jump and shout. / The fire wagons kept comin' / but the Black Panther snipers wouldn't let them put it out." The songs closes with several exclamations: "Let it all burn! Let it all burn!" No glam rock band would ever be so violently political.

1.2.4.2   Iggy and the Stooges

The Stooges are often seen as a seminal punk band. They were formed in 1967 in Detroit and drew attention with wild and raw performances, similar to those that would make famous the British Sex Pistols a decade later. In the same way the Stooges' leader, Iggy Pop, was "Johnny Rotten of the sixties". He was an "eternal misfit [and] saboteur of all conventions", when on stage, he was "contorting his shirtless torso, letting out primal screams, rubbing peanut butter and raw steaks over his body, gouging his skin with broken glass, diving into the crowd, all while the Stooges played raw, basic rock."[14]

This "theatrical violence"[15] served as an inspiration for the punk performers. So did Iggy Pop's refusal to respect the audience, too. On the *Metallic KO* album we can hear him baiting and abusing the audience, encouraging them to do their worst which they proceed to do.

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[13] Hebdige, 1979: p. 28
[14] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 772
[15] Chambers, 1985: p. 131

Thus, the Stooges were punks ahead of time. In an age of glam rock super groups and peace and love promoted by the hippies they made rock dirty and dissonant with nihilistic lyrics that became an example for punk writing. The Stooges "harsh urban American music […] passed virtually unnoticed in the 1960s but was later destined to take on such importance"[16], which can be just as well said about the previously mentioned MC5 or the subsequent Velvet Underground.

1.2.4.3   The Velvet Underground

The band formed in 1965 in New York. This place "—increasingly the symbol of the modern city in crisis and breakdown—offered, with the music of the Velvet Underground, a bleak alternative to the open optimism of California's budding counter-culture. As a dark, isolated voice, oblivious of utopian release, the music of the New York group seemed destined to be only aware of the fragile prospects of defiance and snatched comforts in the 'mean streets' of the eastern metropolis."[17]

The Velvet Underground belonged to the New York art scene as they acquainted Andy Warhol who became their manager. He employed them as a component of his travelling multimedia show *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* for which they provided musical part. Warhol's influence on the Velvet Underground's music was minimal (his producing their first album consisted in his giving them absolute freedom of what to play), but with him the band became a part of a highly influential environment, the centre of which Warhol formed. His art—not only his pictures but also his films and his general approach to the method of creating—was revolutionary. It consisted of long series of one repeated objects (considering pictures it could be e.g. a soup can or a super-star portrait) or one repeated sequence (in his films it would be e.g. performing a kiss or a chew). In the same way the Velvet Underground's music consisted of long portion's of creaky and monotonous music. It was

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[16] ibid.: p. 224
[17] ibid.: pp. 129-130

"stripped down to metallic guitar rhythms, electric 'noise' and inhuman vocals"[18]. The epic songs narrated about drugs ("I'm Waiting for the Man", "Heroin"), sexual deviances ("Venus in Furs") and sexual absurdity ("Lady Godiva's Operation"). Taken all together, the band's image resulted in a "sleazy, East Coast, urban sound"[19] on account of which they are called "the fathers of punk"[20].

1.2.4.4 Patti Smith

It is not always easy to determine an exact borderline between protopunk and "real" punk. Patti Smith is one of the cases. However, the Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll called her "remarkably influential" and her first single (*Hey Joe*, 1974) a release "[that] may be the first punk-rock record". In addition, she "[claimed] the rock-musician-as-shaman role previously reserved by males"[21].

"Hey Joe" is a cover of a classic that was famed by Jimi Hendrix. Smith added a spoken introductory monologue and the last verse in which she addresses Patty Hearst, a granddaughter of publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst, who joined the Symbionese Liberation Army, an American terrorist group by which she was initially kidnapped. B-side of that single, "Piss Factory" describes the helpless anger Smith felt when she was working on a factory assembly line—again a theme that goes well with punk working-class ideology.

Patti Smith is close to the aesthetics of punk in an "American way". Her music is not so radically raging as that of Sex Pistols but she has much in common with the U. S. alternative of punk and—as we will see—No Wave style. As many No Wave artists she started her career practising arts other than music: she was painting, writing, carrying out spoken-word poetry and doing performance art. She brought a feminist, intellectual and poetic insights to American punk music; which are themes that can hardly be found in its British

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[18] ibid.: p. 130
[19] ibid.: p. 131
[20] *Urban dictionary*. <http://www.urbandictionary.com/>
[21] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 904

counterpart. On all accounts, she has been a tremendously influential musician, representing the "American street angst"[22] that was formalized by later bands.

1.2.5 The Roots of Punk in Great Britain

In the United Kingdom the situation was different. Different subcultures formed there and it seems that they always turned into very strong aspects of society. The teddy-boys, the mods, the skinheads—there were no such groups in the United States. Even punk, that—as was explained using the examples of the above stated musicians—originated in America, acquired its most profound and lucid form in Britain.

Studying youth subcultures in Britain is probably a more diversified problem than it is in America. The young British seem to be more enthusiastic when embracing ideologies that are brought along with new musical styles. They then start to understand those ideologies on their own whereas Americans tend to stay fans of music above all. Also, the tastes of the British quickly change as they grow older and that is why the subcultures in Britain are almost exclusively youth. As Simon Frith puts it:

"[M]usic is integrated into youth cultures in Britain in ways that it isn't in America. […] America has and adult music audience of a sort unknown in Britain, where, throughout the 1970s, people still stopped buying new records at the age of twenty-five. America has a visible rock generation, weaned on rock 'n' roll and still serviced by new music as it moves into affluence and parenthood. The contrast between audiences is obvious in the music press. America's *Rolling Stone* has grown with its readers, its consumer tips becoming steadily more middle-aged. The British music papers, by contrast, are written for an ever-changing audience of the same teen age."[23]

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[22] Chambers, 1985: p. 229
[23] Frith, 1987: p. 10

I find this important if we are to understand the difference between American and British punk. Punk in America was essentially based on music from which it arose as a part of "rock-and-roll" in general. On the other hand in Britain punk is partly an imported artefact that was brought to London with a contribution of Malcolm McLaren who witnessed the punk scene in New York and then introduced it in the U. K. as a manager of the Sex Pistols.[24]

Thus, the roots of punk music are to be found in American rock. However, there were musicians in Britain who played their role. Two band's names were mentioned in the introductory paragraphs to "Protopunk" subchapter. Some of their songs show the same tendencies that we could have found in protopunk music: minimalism, roughness and aggressiveness. Since I am going to dedicate a special chapter to the context of music, I will now try to find ideological aspects of punk in the music of the Who and the Kinks.

1.2.5.1 The Who

The Who were "the godfathers of punk […] [t]hough technically they were Mods"[25]. The band was initially formed in 1963 and within a few years they became the spokesmen of the generation of the 1960s just as Sex Pistols were spokesmen of their generation. It is actually pointed out by probably their biggest hit song called "My Generation". It clearly expresses raw rebelliousness of young people: "People try to put us down / just because we get around". It is often maintained that Pete Townshend, the Who's guitarist and songwriter, was inspired by an event that happened to him in 1964. Queen Mother had had his Packard hearse towed away from a street because her husband had been buried in a similar vehicle and it reminded her of him during her daily drive through the neighbourhood.[26] I believe punks would like this story because it represents the "establishment fustiness"; it well corresponds with the Sex Pistols' lines: "God save the queen / she ain't no human being". And just as the

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[24] Marcus, 1993: p. 49
[25] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 1062
[26] *Amazing Journey: The Life of Pete Townshend*. <http://www.townshendbio.com/>

punks were enthusiastically individualistic, the song stresses *my generation* and it does not matter that in this song the protagonist of the generation stutters.

1.2.5.2   The Kinks

The band that was part of the so called British Invasion (an influx of British performers to the United Stated; the most famous of them were the Beatles) had its biggest success with the song called "You Really Got Me" (1964). It sounded harsh and dirty and is hailed as one of the first punk songs. It "was rougher and more aggressive than even the Rolling Stones or The Animals […]. With their long hair, wild sound and suggestive name, the Kinks were causing controversy and commotion across the country."[27]

Even though the Kinks did not have a punk-like look at all (they were mods, basically), their style and behaviour can remind of later famous punk bands. The group "acquired a reputation as cheerfully boozy live band; Kinks performances were known for messy musicianship and onstage arguments between Ray and Dave Davies [lead singer and guitar player, respectively], while Ray clowned with limp wrists and sprayed beer at the audience."[28] Adding some violence and audience-oriented offences, we would get a punk concert.

1.3 The Emergence of American Punk

In the above paragraphs I have tried to outline the history of music that preceded the rise of punk in the second half of the 1970s. We saw that the impetus was given by mainly American bands that formed in late 1960s and early 1970s. These bands may be labelled either protopunk or punk since the borderline is quite obscure. However, in 1976 a New York City rock club CBGB became a regular venue for musicians that formed what we now know as New York punk scene. This scene was highly important for subsequent evolution of rock

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[27] *The Kinks – the Band 1963 – 1970*. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A11690994>
[28] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 533

music. It was witnessed by Malcolm McLaren to whom it was an inspiration when he started to manage the Sex Pistols. The New York punk music scene was also the place where No Wave was spawned. This subchapter called "The Emergence of American Punk" will be therefore devoted to that scene.

The scene is characterized not only by its music. First of all, the term it acquired should be explained.

1.3.1 The Origin of the Term "Punk"

When the word "punk" started to be used as a description of a certain music style in the 1970s, it was not new but rather proceeded from the way the style was perceived, just as the terms "rock-and-roll", "teddy boy" etc. I believe it will be interesting to look the word up in a dictionary so that we are aware of all its meanings.

The 1828 Webster's Dictionary available on the internet[29] defines the word "punk" as "a prostitute; a strumpet". Its 1913 edition has more details:[30]

> **Punk** (?), n. [Cf. **Spunk**.]
>
> **1.** Wood so decayed as to be dry, crumbly, and useful for tinder; touchwood.
>
> **2.** A fungus (Polyporus fomentarius, etc.) sometimes dried for tinder; agaric.
>
> **3.** An artificial tinder. See **Amadou**, and **Spunk**.
>
> **4.** A prostitute; a strumpet. [Obsoles.] *Shak.*

Interestingly, it offers three meanings that have nothing to do with today's conception. Only the fourth option states—similarly to the 1828 edition—that punk means a prostitute, it is obsolescent and was used by Shakespeare.

During the 20th century the first meaning has been retained—it is an alteration of *spunk*; the other changed to mean a tough person. The 1970 *Webster's New World Dictionary*

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[29] "punk." *The ARTFL Project*. 2007 <http://machaut.uchicago.edu/websters>
[30] ibid.

offers the following definition of *punk*: "[Slang] **1.** a young hoodlum **2.** anyone, esp. a youngster, regarded as inexperienced, insignificant, etc. *–adj.* [Slang] poor or bad in quality"[31].

The contemporary version of the on-line dictionary[32] has two entries for the word as a noun, one of them being the derivation from *spunk*, while the other states:

1 *archaic* **: PROSTITUTE**

2 [probably partly from ^{3}punk[33]] **: NONSENSE, FOOLISHNESS**

3 a : a young inexperienced person **: BEGINNER, NOVICE**; *especially* **:** a young man

  b : a usually petty gangster, hoodlum, or ruffian

  c *slang* **:** a young man used as a homosexual partner especially in a prison

4 a : PUNK ROCK

  b : a punk rock musician

  c : one who affects punk styles

As far as etymology is concerned, according to the Webster's dictionary, the origin is unknown. Dictionary.com states: "Origin: 1590–1600; of obscure orig.; the sense development is appar. 'prostitute' > 'catamite' > 'hoodlum'"[34].

For the mere purpose of comparison I find it useful to look the word up in a British dictionary; the 1974 *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines: "**punk** /pʌŋk/ *n* **1** [U] (US) partly decayed wood; rotten wood used as tinder. **2** (colloq) worthless stuff; rubbish: *He talked a lot of ~.* **3** [C] (sl) worthless person. **4** (attrib; sl) worthless; rotten: *It was an absolutely ~ party.*"[35]

[31] "punk." *Webster's New World Dictionary*. Second Concise Edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970. p. 605

[32] "punk." Merriam-Webster OnLine. 2007 <http://www.webster.com/>

[33] that is the above mentioned spunk or touchwood

[34] "punk." Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). 2007. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/punk>.

[35] "punk." *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. London: Oxford University Press, 1974. p. 690

It is quite obvious that when the word was used in the early 1970s for specific musicians, it meant a hoodlum; the music they produced thus was hoodlumish, thuggish, villainous. Comparing to music and style of any other previous youth subculture, the simile was quite successful. It could also bear a meaning of an inexperienced person, since punk musicians lacked any musical education and sometimes even the abilities to play musical instruments.

There is a general agreement among relevant sources that the first appearance of the word "punk" in music journalism was made in a 1970 essay *The Punk Muse: The True Story of Protopathic Spiff Including the Lowdown on the Trouble-Making Five-Percent of America's Youth* by Nick Tosches in the *Fusion* magazine.

In 1971, a music critic Dave Marsh coined the phrase "punk rock" in his "Looney Tunes" column in the May issue of *Creem* magazine. In the article he wrote: "Culturally perverse from birth, I decided that this insult would be better constructed as a compliment, especially given the alternative to such punkist behaviour, which I figured was acting like a dignified asshole."[36]

One of the first uses of the term "punk rock" can also be found in the liner notes for the 1972 compilation album *Nuggets: Original Artyfacts from the First Psychedelic Era, 1965-1968*, written by Lenny Kaye, who would later become the guitarist for the Patti Smith Group. Kaye uses the term to refer to the 1960s "garage rock" groups, as well as some of the darker and more primitive performers of the psychedelic rock. Besides, the album itself—or rather the groups included in it—had a major influence on the punk movement that was to explode later. The term "punk" was also used by the No Wave band Suicide, formed in 1971, to describe themselves. "Punk Music" was what their flyers advertised for.[37]

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[36] DeRogatis, 2000: pp. 118-119
[37] The documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)

Still, the new movement—now ultimately grouped around the CBGB club—could not be sure of its name. Hilly Kristal, CBGB founder and owner, called it "street rock".[38] By 1975, the term "punk" was used to describe acts as diverse as Patti Smith, the Bay City Rollers, and Bruce Springsteen.[39] It was finally codified only after a new magazine, *Punk*, was launched in January 1976. It was started by John Holmstrom, who was studying cartoon at the school of Visual Arts in New York, and Legs McNeil, who joined him there in September 1975. McNeil described the birth of the magazine as follows:

"John had this definite attitude: he wanted to call it 'Teenage News', which I thought was really stupid. I said to John: 'Why don't we call it *Punk*'? We were driving and John said, 'I'll be the editor'; our friend Jed said, 'I'll be the publisher'; and they both looked at me and said, 'What are you going to be?' 'I'll be the resident punk.' It was all decided in two seconds. On TV, if you watched cop shows, *Kojak, Beretta*, when the cops finally catch the mass murderer, they'd say, 'you dirty Punk'. It was what your teachers would call you. It meant that you were the lowest. All of us drop-outs and fuck-ups got together and started a movement. We'd been told all our lives that we'd never amount to anything. We're the people who fell through the cracks of the educational system."[40]

According to Holmstrom, the name "punk" was originally chosen for its potential to shock: "Punk was a dirty word at the time. Us putting Punk on the cover was like putting the word fuck on the cover. People were very upset. It was controversial."[41]

I believe the name the movement got well describes the attitude and the style of its representatives. It should be noticed though, that the term needs not to be by all means derogatory and contemptuous. Osgerby points out that "the tone of *Punk* [magazine] was

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[38] *The History of CBGB & OMFUG.* <http://www.cbgb.com/history1.htm>
[39] Savage, 1991: p. 131
[40] McNeil, cited in Savage, 1991: p. 131
[41] Holmstrom, cited in Osgerby, 1999: p. 162

always tongue-in-cheek rather than belligerent. *Punk* was packed with satirical stories and snippets, goofy cartoons and spoofs of teen-mag photo-strips"[42].

Thereby, we get on to other side of punk, different from political rage and antagonism against the old generation values. It is the irony that forms an important part of American punk, existing in music of such bands as the Ramones. The next subchapter will be dedicated to the issue.

1.3.2 Satire and the Dictators

Bill Osgerby in his essay *"Chewing out a rhythm on my bubble-gum": The teenage aesthetic and genealogies of American punk* demonstrates that the roots of punk music have to be searched for not only in the different ideology of the protopunk bands like the MC5 or the Stooges, but also in the surf music and bubblegum pop of the 1950s and 1960s. He explains that "the surf scene was a defining moment in the evolution of American teenage mythology" which was an "adolescent […] utopia [that] would be revisited in the 70s, bands like the Dictators and the Ramones reconstructing it partly in celebration and partly in camp parody."[43]

Apart from that, punk resembles the surf music groups not only in a way that it is ironical about them, but also in the way the music originated. The place where surf was getting its shape was a garage—"that abiding signifier of homely suburbia [which] was the place where aspiring guitar legends thrashed through their rehearsals—thus 'garage' became a sobriquet for the crude and raucous sounds"[44] that characterised also the protopunk and punk bands. Among others, a band that deserves mentioning are the Kingsmen and their 1963 hit "Louie, Louie", by many hailed as punk rock's cornerstone. Few of these bands made it to regular concerts; some of them were revisited on the above mentioned album *Nuggets:*

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[42] Osgerby, 1999: p. 162
[43] Osgerby, 1999: pp. 158-159
[44] ibid.: p. 159

Original Artyfacts from the First Psychedelic Era, 1965-1968 that—as has been pointed out—was of certain importance.

On all accounts, the surf and bubblegum bands (including the Archies and the Monkees, both being fictional groups introduced in TV series and both being also garage groups) brought in pop hits distinguished by a accentuated rhythm and catchy melodies. What is significant in this place is that these bands were "built around the simple images of sweet-toothed candy, zany cartoons and comic book romance [...which was...] the purest manifestation of the American teen aesthetic. And it was from here that punk's pop sensibility drew many of its motifs and reference points as it elaborated a theatrical parody of the mythologies of teenage suburbia."[45]

Rock in the mid-seventies was in a specific crisis. The 1960s gave rock an uneasy task to deliver radical messages but in the seventies there was nothing radical to say—especially after the Vietnam war was at an end. Music found its new mode in irony. It seemed to be inevitable, because "once rock had ceased to believe in its own sales pitch, irony was the only honest stance."[46]

The pioneers of punk's satire on the teen mythology were the Dictators, a New York City band formed in 1973. They were probably the first band to utilize their sensibility of surf and bubblegum pop. Their first album, 1975 *Go Girl Crazy!*, glorified a "world of hangin' out, hamburgers and 'B' movie schlock"[47] and arguably may be one of the funniest records that have been witnessed by rock music. In songs like "Weekend" they caricatured the American teen idyll—"Oh Weekend / Flashing rock and roll guitars / Cruising in my daddy's car / I'll do my homework in the bar"—and satirized the teenage notions: "Oh Weekend / Time to go a bit insane / Beating up the kids from Spain/ I'm tired of this social change". They put themselves in the place of a "standardized" teenager and defined his standpoints:

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[45] ibid.: pp. 159-160
[46] Harron, 1988: pp. 193-194
[47] Osgerby, 1999: p. 160

"I'm the type of guy / who's into getting high / on a Friday afternoon / So now you know / I'm a regular Joe / and I'll tell you what I like to do […] The fastest car / and a movie star / are my only goals in life". This song—"(I Live for) Cars and Girls"—is accomplished by a simple but definite statement: "Cars, girls, surfing, beer / Nothing else matters here".

With such lyrics the Dictators were a band ahead of time. The American punk scene was immensely diversified but irony and satire. It was an integral part of the *Punk* magazine; its look was to a great extent defined by comic strips. A cover story of the first issue was an interview with Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground, written by John Holmstrom partly in hand-lettered text and partly as a cartoon strip.[48]

Satire and cartoon were a main field also for one of the most important bands of New York punk scene—the Ramones.

1.3.3 The Ramones

The group—one of the many that are regarded the first punk band—was formed in 1974 in New York. As with the Dictators, the Ramones both hailed and despised the ideals and myths of America's middle class. They took the Dictators' cartoon-like parody of American teenage culture to new extremes. They borrowed their name "Ramones" from an old pseudonym used by Paul McCartney in the early Beatles days and the band's members used it as their surnames to mock the family groups of the 1950s and 1960s, like the Everly Brothers and the Jackson Five. They adopted an ambiguous image with Beatles-like haircuts, cartoon logo T-shirts and ripped jeans and explicit language. "The Ramones were problematic. It was hard to work out what their politics were. It had this difficult edge, but the most important thing was needling the older generation. Hating hippies was a big thing."[49] And not only that. Their primary goal was to enjoy oneself with making fun of middle-class

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[48] Lawley, 1999: p. 104
[49] Savage, 1991: p. 138

suburban America. "With their tight hooks, simplistic images and raw brevity the Ramones were a nightmare vision of a bubble-gum band"[50]. They presented "a 'cartoon' version both of street culture and American dumbness"[51]. They—and all other punk bands—embraced everything that cultured people detested. In this sense punk resembles Andy Warhol's pop art, mentioned in connection with the Velvet Underground, which was also based on plastic, junk food, B movies, advertising and making money. For punk nothing was sacred.

The Ramones took inspiration for their lyrics from the cheapest of American trash culture. Their songs were short outcries about drugs, crime, schlocky comic books and nasty weirdos. Johnny Ramone—the band's guitar player—sardonically commented: "We wanted to write songs about cars and girls—but none of us had a car and no girls wanted to go out with us. So we wrote about freaks and mental illness instead."[52] In "Beat on the Brat" they plainly repeat: "Beat on the brat with a baseball bat / What can you do? / With a brat like that always on your back". "Now I wanna Sniff some Glue" is a straightforward pronouncement: "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".

With the Ramones the New York punk scene—forming especially around the clubs CBGB and Max's Kansas City—was definitely launched. From now on punk music was ready to expand to the United Kingdom where it became a national mania, whereas in New York City in transmuted into highly diverse forms.

1.4 New York's Fertile Habitat and No Wave

In the film *Kill Your Idols* Lee Ranaldo of Sonic Youth compares 1970s New York to Paris in the twenties, both cities being places where something important was happening. The movement in New York, the history of which has been described in the above chapters,

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[50] Osgerby, 1999: p. 162
[51] Lawley, 1999: p. 104
[52] Johnny Ramone, cited in Osgerby, 1999: p. 164

involved all of the arts, including painting, literature and film. In terms of music a new style of No Wave was flourishing.

"Ideologically", No Wave was part of punk, from which it emerged, but musically it underwent unprecedented changes. So far, I have been tracing the history of No Wave movement in a single line of history but in this place a digression needs to be made. In a way—concerning the origin of the term and also the musical characteristics—No Wave stands in opposition to another genre that also evolved from punk, that is New Wave.

1.4.1 New Wave

New Wave is not an unambiguously defined genre and during the history of popular music several acts have been called so. Its most common usage is connected with a movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s that had its roots in punk rock but took inspiration also from other genres such as pop, disco, funk and reggae. New Wave bands tended toward experimentation, lyrical complexity and more polished production; they were influenced by electronic music, arts and also by their interest in new fashioned styles. Many of them played at the same venues as punk bands, which at the time was in the first place the CBGB club in Lower Manhattan, New York.

In its beginnings the term was not really different from the term punk rock. Both punk and New Wave were perceived as the third movement in rock music. The "first wave" was rock-and-roll of the fifties, the British invasion of the sixties was the "second wave" and the punk movement was the "third wave" or "New Wave".

In fact the term was coined by Seymour Stein, an entrepreneur in the music industry, who needed a term for new bands that got signed to his company, a record label Sire Records. He wanted to distinguish them from the rough punk bands and chose a name "New Wave" being inspired by the French New Wave film movement.

The audience was soon able to make a difference between a sound of the "original punk" band and the New Wave band's sound. Probably the most famous group that fits the label is the Talking Heads, others include Blondie, Television, the B-52's and Devo to name just a few examples.

1.4.2 No Wave—the Origin of the Term

In the same time when the term "New Wave" was coined, different bands emerged in the New York scene. They also came up from the punk movement being inspired by the punk groups but they tried to make their music far more radical. The name that the genre acquired was No Wave.

The term was used for the first time by a "zine" (or a fan magazine) called *No*, which was started in 1977 and called itself in reaction against New Wave bands and their style. The cover article of the second issue was called "New Wave/No Wave" and maintained that "music" was a very loose term, hence it should not be restricted to musicians because anyone can create it. With regards to that article the bands in question started to call themselves "No Wave".[53]

In a way, the negation epitomized by the word "no" is a distinct feature of the whole punk movement. It exemplifies the refusal as "a gesture of defiance or contempt"[54]. In a song called "No Fun" the Stooges declare an end to happy days. The Sex Pistols' "No Feelings" means an end to love and empathy advocated by the hippies. And the same band summarized it all in their most famous slogan "No future!" shouted at the end of "God Save the Queen". The *No* magazine complements this attitude and so does also the No Wave style which extends it from ideology to music.

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[53] Nobakht, 2004: p. 97
[54] Hebdige, 1979: p. 3

1.4.3 The Unique Nature of No Wave

No Wave genre came to certain prominence when a series of benefit performances was organized by the *No* magazine in 1978 with a view of supporting the Artist's Space in Soho[55] which was founded in 1972 to support contemporary artists working in visual arts. Regarding the interest of the magazine, many No Wave bands—settled especially in the area of East Village, New York—were invited. The festival was visited by Brian Eno, an English electronic musician, studio experimentalist and music theorist. He was then shortly on his solo career after he left Roxy Music, a British New Wave band. In 1975 he started a recording company to release his tapes since his main interest consisted in a recording process. At the same time he was exploring the New York punk movement and worked as a producer for the above mentioned Talking Heads, Devo and other bands. After attending the benefit shows, Eno influenced Island Records to finance an anthology LP featuring No Wave bands. At first he wanted to put all the bands from the festival onto the record but eventually ended up with four: James Chance and the Contortions, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, Mars and DNA. Each group was represented by four songs and the album is now considered the decisive record to document the No Wave movement.

The album illustrates that even though the No Wave music has no uniform sound, the bands had an important idea in common: they wanted to make music that reminded of no other band or genre, music that referenced nothing else. If New Wave was characterized by a polished sound, No Wave stands for the complete opposite. The bands seem to be fascinated with an extremist idea: to bring punk rock to the limits of the listenable.

The performances were more that just music; music served only as a means to sell ideas. The idea was making music not for entertainment but to express oneself. As Lydia Lunch puts it: "People started to create music because they had no other choice. It was a sickness within themselves that they had to try to purge through music. The idea was not 'I

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[55] The documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)

want to do music because I can' but 'I have to do music, or I'm going to go insane and hurt myself or somebody else'".[56]

The movement was quite short-lived but influential. Actually, the object was not to exist forever, the object was to make it a statement and be done. Lee Ranaldo says: "It was so overwhelming that you didn't need more."[57]

The definite ground-breaking aspect of No Wave consisted in music and to music I will dedicate the following chapter. In this place I wanted to present the "ideology" of No Wave and punk in general. In order to understand it in full I will bring forward brief information on several artists that were principal to No Wave but also significantly intervened in other fields of art.

1.4.4 People involved in No Wave

No Wave attracted various people from different places and different backgrounds. There was a particular influx of people to New York—many of whom came from art schools—who felt the city as the place where energy was, the sensation being determined by the thriving punk movement.

1.4.4.1 Alan Vega

Decidedly the first No Wave band was a duo named Suicide, formed in 1971. The vocalist, Alan Vega, came from Brooklyn, New York and began his career as a visual artist known for his radical light sculptures—raw, glowing pieces which combined wood, wires, neon lighting and other objects found in the streets of New York. In 1974 he opened a small

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[56] Lydia Lunch, the documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)
[57] Lee Ranaldo, the documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)

gallery or rather an art and music forum in Soho in Lower Manhattan where he initiated "the Project of Living Artists".[58]

The same raw energy that emanates from his sculptures is to be heard also from the music of Suicide which he started with Martin Rev, an electric piano player. Suicide's minimalist music based on repetitive sounds of Rev's keyboard accompanied with a drum machine and Vega's growling vocal helped paving the way for future electronic music. Alan Vega is still active in visual arts and in music too, as is also Martin Rev.

1.4.4.2 Glenn Branca

Glenn Branca's contribution to No Wave involves his bands Theoretical Girls and the Static but his initial field of activity was theatre. In 1971 he graduated from Emerson College in Boston, majoring in Dramatic Arts. His productions were known for their eclectic use of music of manifold styles ranging from classical to rock and also his own compositions. His interests then extended also to playwriting and in 1975 he started (with John Rehnberger) the Bastard Theater. They produced several theatre/music pieces to which they also composed original music.[59]

In 1976 Branca moved to New York where he continued the Bastard Theatre with his friend Jeff Lohn. They soon decided to start a rock band. He says: "Okay, we're on a stage in front of an audience—we can basically use this band as our theatre group."[60] The band's name was Theoretical Girls and it is considered one of the essential groups of No Wave. Theoretical Girls did their first show as a part of a performance art piece by Dan Graham[61], an influential figure—both as a practitioner and a theorist—in the field of contemporary conceptual art.

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[58] *Alan Vega*. The official web site. <http://www.alanvega.com/>
[59] *Glenn Branca*. The official web site. <http://www.glennbranca.com/>
[60] Glenn Branca, the documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)
[61] *Glenn Branca*. The official web site. <http://www.glennbranca.com/>

After Jeff Lohn decided to concentrate on his solo work in 1978, Branca started his other band, called the Static. He used the group as a part of his own theatre work.

Since 1979 his activity has extended to composing instrumental pieces for multiple guitars, described as "rock minimalism"[62] and provided with names, such as *The Spectacular Commodity*, *Dissonance*, *The Ascension* and *Lesson No. 1 (For Electric Guitar)*. The line-up of the "orchestra" included Lee Ranaldo and Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth, an important No Wave band that transformed the No Wave approach into music accessible to broad audiences. Since the early 1980s Branca has been presenting his ideas in a form of "symphonies", as he has been calling his full-evening-length pieces of music engaging a number of instruments. Branca's music is very complex and it seems that neither the term "rock music" nor "classical music" suffice. At any rate, Branca's compositions influenced a large variety of musicians ranging from jazz to rock and modern dance music.

1.4.4.3 Lydia Lunch

Lydia Lunch came to New York in 1975 and soon was integrated into the city's community of artists and musicians. In 1976 she founded a group Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, which was in 1978 put by Brian Eno on the *No New York* compilation album and thus is seminal to No Wave genre.

However, her artistic activity goes far beyond music. She is an author of a number of books, including both poetry and novels. With Nick Cave, also an influential musician, she wrote a book of short stories *Fifty-One Page Place* (1982). She also published several CDs containing her spoken word material.

She appeared as an actress in a number of plays and films; she collaborated e.g. with Vivienne Dick, an experimental and documentary filmmaker who was active in a film culture

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[62] ibid.

that—as the music genre in question—is also called No Wave.[63] Lunch also acted in several films directed by Richard Kern, a "photographer, occasional pornographer, former-filmmaker and video director, […] a man once amicably referred to as the 'Evil Cameraman'"[64], who was part of the underground cultural explosion in East Village, too.

Lydia Lunch, "[t]hrough music, books, spoken word performances, film, video, photography, poetry and a multitude of creative endeavours, […] has proven to be one of the most interesting and daring artists of the current era. […] Defying categorization, Lydia Lunch actively has conquered new territories, and has gained international recognition for the innovative quality of her work."[65]

1.4.4.4   Arto Lindsay

Lindsay arrived in New York in 1975, having spent most of his life in a Brazilian village where his missionary father had built a school.[66] In 1978 he formed a band called DNA, which was included on Brian Eno's *No New York* album along with the Contortions, Mars and Teenage Jesus & the Jerks. The band was also featured in a 1981 film *Downtown 81* which portrayed the art and music scene in East Village starring Jean-Michel Basquiat.[67]

In East Village, Lindsay befriended a number of visual artists who were part of the scene, notably Andy Warhol and above mentioned Jean-Michel Basquiat. Since then, he has included works of many of these artists in his cover arts of his albums. He also collaborated with Rodney Graham, a Canadian conceptual artist to whom sound is an integral part of his works. He curated music and audio art for Carlton Arts Festival in Sao Paolo, Brazil and for the Barbican Centre in London.[68]

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[63] In 1996 Matthew Yokobosky organized a retrospective in New York's Whitney Museum of American Art called *No Wave Cinema, 1978-87*, part of which was formed by Dick's work. See the web pages of the museum: <http://www.whitney.org/>
[64] *Richard Kern*. The official website. <http://www.richardkern.com/>
[65] *Lydia Lunch*. The official website. <http://www.lydia-lunch.org/>
[66] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 271
[67] *The Internet Movie Database*. <http://www.imdb.com/>
[68] *Arto Lindsay*. The official website. <http://www.artolindsay.com/>

Arto Lindsay has been one of the most fertile musicians that came from No Wave. During the 1990s he became one of the most celebrated producers on the Brazilian music scene.[69] His projects merged Brazilian music, jazz, funk, disco and avant-garde. His latest compositions are a fusion of abrasive, intellectual noise with the appeal of sensual, languid Brazilian music.

1.5 A Brief Insight into British Punk

In the United Kingdom the punk scene evolved differently from the U. S. and especially its consequences contrasted the situation in New York. In Great Britain "punk style contained distorted reflections of all the major post-war subcultures"[70] In a highly sophisticated British class system, punks clearly belonged to working class, even though they did not "theorized and fetishized"[71] their position as skinheads did. Punk was an outspoken separation from society.

In a way, punk was imported to Britain by Malcolm McLaren who was in 1974 briefly in the United States, managing the New York Dolls, one of the first punk bands that was still partly connected with glam rock. "I couldn't believe how anybody could be so bad,"[72] he said about them. He was inspired by them when he later put together the Sex Pistols and told them that the more unholy and asocial they would be, the more young people would like them. Punk's "attempt to eliminate the hierarchy"[73], its "deliberate unlearning"[74], its vulgarity and aggressiveness attracted a lot of young people insomuch that it soon got to national headlines. This is where the difference between the U. S. and the U. K. rests. In

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[69] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 271
[70] Hebdige, 1979: p. 26
[71] ibid.: p. 120
[72] Malcolm McLaren, cited in Marcus, 1993: p. 49
[73] Dave Marsh, cited in Marcus, 1993: p. 65
[74] Savage, 1991: p. 82

America, punk never became a nationwide hysteria. It rather stayed in the artistic environs of Soho and East Village in New York City.[75]

British punk lacked an artistic background. It rested in an idea of a new style that rejected all normalized aspects of society. The rejection was manifested by music but more than that by rough vulgarity and clothing style. As Mary Harron maintains: "With punk, the clothes came before the music. It was certainly the first rock movement to start in a boutique."[76] Malcolm McLaren ran a clothes store and it was the place where the Sex Pistols were formed and British punk started, soon noticed by everybody.

None of that can be said about American punk. The bands were making music virtually unnoticed by public and press on a nationwide level. The movement was limited to a certain place (Lower Manhattan) and only very slowly it got to other cities (Los Angeles) where it never earned New York's intensity. Harron argues: "[I]n the Sex Pistols, punk worked as a series of brilliant gestures, confrontations that caused havoc as long as the ideas were still in flux, when no one knew what exactly this was or how to handle it. But when the dust died down and the panic was over, all that was left was rock 'n' roll."[77] In the next chapter I want to show this is not the case of No Wave. It reorganized music completely and even though certainly not all subsequent musicians took from it, it changed the attitudes toward music of a considerable amount of them.

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[75] Another centre—though not so distinctive—was formed in Los Angeles, with prominence of a legendary band called X
[76] Harron, 1988: p. 197
[77] ibid.: p. 204

2   NO WAVE IN THE CONTEXT OF POPULAR MUSIC

In this chapter I am going to explain the No Wave genre from the point of view that seems to be the most convenient for the purpose of its inspection. It is of course music. No Wave was a musical style and even though it had some ideology—one closely connected to the punk movement—its most important influence came in a form of music. It was also music, where it differed from general punk rock otherwise carried out in the same conditions—same time (the second half of the 1970s) and same place (New York City).

As in the first chapter, I find it useful to explain the issue using the same method, that is an empirical research. Thus, I will trace the history of No Wave's ways of expressing and search for instances those history of rock music where the musicians had used the same procedures while creating music. Put in a simplified fashion, this procedure involved first of all deconstructing the general notion of what music is. In this manner, music was apprehended as a very loose term that can have countless forms. The outcome would then be atonal sounds and preference of texture over melody. In the following paragraphs I am also going to find out where we can come across instances of similar attitudes in the music that preceded the emergence of No Wave. But first of all it is necessary to explain the unique nature that popular music acquired in the second half of the 20th century.

2.1 The Significance of Post-War Popular Music

2.1.1 Music in Relation to Youth Subcultures

In the previous chapter the major social and economic changes of the post-war era were outlined. I also mentioned that the 1950s witnessed unprecedented growth of youth subcultures. One of the major aspects that distinguished young people of their parents' generation was music they listened to and were fond of. What is more, to the youth

subcultures music became their ideological means. "Recognised as a social force, music was thought to say things of cultural and political significance, to have a message."[78]

While in the 1950s the prevailing style was rock-and-roll, in the following decades popular music began to be very diversified with each youth subculture having its specific musical genre as a means of expressing and self-identification.

2.1.2 The Genesis of Rock-and-Roll as a Principal Post-War Genre

Decidedly, the form of post-war popular music was established by two major factors: the advancement of sound recording and reproduction devices and the integration of European white and black American music.

I have already mentioned the changes innovations of the recording devices in the chapter *1.2.1 The Premises of Popular Music*. In addition to that, it is necessary to make a brief remark regarding the introduction of magnetic tape to recording studios. The tape brought in not only greater flexibility of the recording process itself but also new opportunities in the process of creating music (the term "creating" seems to be more accurate than "composing" in this context).

2.1.2.1 New Possibilities for Recorded Music

As far as recording is concerned, the advance enabled by the introduction of magnetic tape is obvious. Until about the 1950s, sound was recorded directly onto the master disc, into which the grooves were engraved by a record cutter. Another process followed, during which copies were made for mass distribution. For the musician it meant that the recording was "live" (all parts performed at once) without any possibilities of subsequent modifications. On the contrary, the cheaper and re-recordable tape allowed recording as many "takes" as necessary, out of which the best could be chosen.

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[78] Whiteley, 1992: p. 1

Apart from that, tape allows editing by means of which it is possible to assemble a final product out of many pieces. This feature gradually began to be utilized by musicians for whom the process of recording end editing was part of creating music. Different styles then had different attitudes towards such techniques; it will be made clear in the following text that the musicians of the hippy era developed a special liking for abundant editing and adding special effects to their recordings while the punks of the 1970s preferred rough, harsh recordings representing straightforward authenticity.

2.1.2.2 The Emergence of Rock-and-Roll

In the last paragraph of the previous chapter I cited Mary Harron who remarked that punk music—cleared of ideology it entailed—was nothing but rock 'n' roll. In this context, I should explain what rock-and-roll is and what is its importance for subsequent development of music.

Rock-and-roll evolved in the United States in the late 1940s and became popular in the early 1950s, quickly spreading to the United Kingdom, Europe and the rest of the world. Rock-and-roll itself originated as a combination of black and white music, or rather as black music slightly cleaned up and brought by white musicians to white audience.

In *Urban Rhythms* Iain Chambers gives an example of an "archetypal format employed in commercial popular music"[79] in the 1950s. It is a song by an American singer Johnny Ray "Just Walking in the Rain". Indeed, this song employs the then popular song structure of a thirty-two-bar form, which was commonly used in songs that came from Tin Pan Alley, a group of American music publishers and songwriters who dominated popular music of the United States in the first half of the 20th century. In this form each verse is made up of four sections, in a pattern that may be written down as A-A-B-A, where each section consists of eight bars. Section A is in tonic (or the first degree), section B—also referred to as

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[79] Chambers, 1985: p. 8

"bridge"—is in dominant (or the fifth degree of the scale). Thus, a standard way of illustrating the song's progression in full 32 bars will be:

| I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I |

| I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I |

| V | V | V | V | V | V | V | V |

| I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I |

This is also the case of "Just Walking in the Rain". Chambers states that Tin Pan Alley "had been pouring out thousands of songs employing this structure since the beginning of the century."[80]

In contrast to the thirty-two-bar form is a form of Afro-American tradition, known as twelve-bar blues. It uses three chords—the tonic, the dominant and the subdominant (the fourth degree)—which are employed in various fixed patterns. "Cross Road Blues", a famous song by Robert Johnson, a "grandfather of rock-and-roll", will serve as an example. It is possible to illustrate its progression in the following way:

| I | IV | I | I |

| IV | IV | I | I |

| V | IV | I | I |

This is one of the basic patterns, of course not used by all blues song. There are many variations, even in number of bars, but there is a significant tendency of following the basic progression. This is also the case of lyrics, which are usually in three lines with the first two lines being almost the same (the second usually starts with an interjection) and the third line concluding the verse.

Apart from that, blues songs tend to use hexatonic or pentatonic scales, rather than a "classical" European heptatonic scale. This means that the melody of the song uses only six (or five, respectively) pitches per octave; the most common scale would then be the whole

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[80] ibid.

tone hexatonic scale (C, D, E, F#, G#, A#, C) or another derivation (such as much used blues pentatonic scale consisting of: C, Eb, F, G, Bb, C). Moreover, a blues musician will tend to use bent tones, slurred and uncertain notes and various slides and glissandi that will make a song characteristically Afro-American and very much different from Euro-American music.

The first known twelve-bar blues song dates to 1902, evolving from black gospel, work songs and chants.[81] Since then it spread among both black musicians and audiences, in the early days especially in the Mississippi Delta, hence the name the "Delta Blues". The dominant instruments used were harmonica and, above all, guitar that later became a major instrument in rock music. As a result of a great migration of black workers from south to the northern industrial cities, another form of blues emerged, called the "Chicago Blues". It is characterized by electrically amplified guitars, a bass guitar and a drum kit, sometimes accompanied by other instruments, such as piano or saxophone. This is also a basic line up for a rock group.

Blues was developing in its own way but during the 1930s important changes took place, when white audience began to be interested in this sort of music. A product called "race records"—recordings of black musicians oriented almost exclusively on black customers—started to be demanded by white music fans. Black music was included by radio disc-jockeys to their play lists; at least Alan Freed should be remembered here, who is known for coining the term "rock-and-roll".

Iain Chambers mentions another reason that led to changing habits of the radio stations. It was the raising of fees of the music publishers' copyright association in the late 1930s. "The radio stations replied by setting up their own copyright organisation. But in doing this they were forced to seek their music outside the existing control of Tin Pan Alley. […] Setting up an alternative copyright organisation, US broadcasting opened itself to previously

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[81] Fairchild, 1994: p. 5

excluded sounds, in particular country and western music and, more discreetly, to black music."[82]

The way for rock-and-roll was now well paved. In its earliest form usually called rockabilly, rock-and-roll is a combination of black rhythm-and-blues and white country-and-western styles. In the hands of white musicians, blues was purged, simplified and speeded up. The question what the first rock-and-roll song was is not at all definite. The best candidates are "That's All Right (Mama)" recorded in 1954 by Elvis Presley and "Rock Around the Clock" recorded by Bill Haley in the same year. Both were based on a 12-bar blues progression and both initiated a hysteria among white American youth.

Later on, many musicians followed their steps and upgraded the sound of rock-and-roll. Above all, Chuck Berry should be mentioned, as one of the most influential guitar player, whose riffs are used by rock guitarists up to present day, not excepting punk musicians. He gave the rockabilly songs a standard four-four metre that forms a basis for rock-and-roll dance.

Rock-and-roll music is a core of all popular music of the second half of the 20th century. In the following chapters I will explain its further development until the emergence of punk rock in the middle of the 1970s.

2.2 The Subsequent Development of Rock: the Hippies and Glam Rock

During the 1960s rock music changed considerably. After rock-and-roll had expanded to the United Kingdom, British bands transformed it and created a new style consisting of American rock and European pop music. Above, I used the terms "British invasion" and the "second wave" to describe the music that was brought in a changed form back to America by

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[82] Chambers, 1985: p. 13

bands such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Who and the Kinks. After it had been accepted by the American audience, it was moulded again as a new subculture—called the hippie movement—arose.

In the previous chapter I suggested that the punk movement was a reaction against the hippie era and glam rock. Indeed, the ideology of punk is strikingly different. But the difference consists not only in the "philosophy" but also in music. Thus, I should explain what was the development of rock music during the sixties and in the first half of the seventies, before it was re-evaluated by punk's conception.

2.2.1 Music of the Hippies

The hippie movement was a sophisticated—though utopian—ideology that brought along a philosophy of life wholly different to the values of American middle class. Its elements included pacifist politics, feminism, eastern religions-oriented ethos, ideas of free love and drug use. In addition to that, a purpose of music changed; it was not any more just a means of fun and relaxation—as rock-and-roll. Rather, the recognition was that "rock had grown up and was capable of presenting a strong anti-establishment challenge"[83]. The objective of rock was to help express the general image of the hippie movement.

The inspiration taken from an attempt to imitate the mind-altering experiences brought on by drugs such as LSD resulted in what is know as psychedelic rock. "Psychedelic (acid) rock had first emerged in the summer of 1965 in the Red Dog Saloon in Nevada. […] [T]he fusion of rock 'n' roll, crude light shows and LSD laid the foundation for what was to be known as the 'frisco scene."[84]

Psychedelic rock is a form of rock music, characterized by a slowed-down rhythm, melodies often inspired by Indian sources, lyrics describing dreams and hallucinations, longer

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[83] Whiteley, 1992: p. 65
[84] ibid.: p. 119

duration of songs and lengthy instrumental solos. Pulsing images being projected over a performing group became a widespread practice, too. Just as the effects of LSD are unpredictable, psychedelic rock is unpredictable, too. In the Beatles' "Strawberry Fields Forever" the metre is changing from four-four, to six-eight, three-four and back to four-four. The chord structure and the unexpected usage of chords support the mood of changed consciousness and a dreamy feeling of obscurity. Psychedelic rock often takes advantage of the latest innovations of electronic music, employing distorted, reversed and phased sounds. It utilizes multitrack tape recorders, the advantages of which has been described above.

The resulting music was very "stylish", which was despised by "down-to-earth" punks. The simplicity and crudity of punk music reflected punks' denial of idealism and return back to basics of rock-and-roll.

2.2.2 Glam rock

Glam rock emerged in the post-Hippie era in the early 1970s. It "signalled a return to a presumed 'golden age' of pop, when […] the music basically implied 'fun'. […] It is true that many performers insisted on the basics of pop music, on its beat […], its R & B and soul heritage […], and its lyricism"[85]. The music of glam rock was a mixture of conventional pop songs and hard rock structures. It built on traditional rock-and-roll melodies with a polished sound that could easily address wide audiences. Its choruses consisted of hymnic chants with suggestive melodies that were easy for fans to holler along at the concerts. The music was simple and represented no considerable ideas——neither the hippies' hope for a better world, nor the frantic rage of the punks.

The punk movement refused the artistic character of the hippie music and subsequent progressive rock, but in the same way it refused the slickness of glam rock. What punk looked

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[85] Chambers, 1985: p. 129

for and finally introduced was a raw sound that would represent a raw nature of life. However, principles of such sound can be found in music that predated punk, too.

2.3 The Foundations of Punk Music

In the previous chapter I suggested what ideology of what performers laid the foundations of punk rock. Below, I am going to discuss the same performers' music.

2.3.1 The Garage Groups of the 1960s

Garage rock that was popular in the United Stated in the mid-1960s was later by some critics labelled as the first punk music (see chapter *1.3.1 The Origin of the Term "Punk"*). Indeed, after listening to *Nuggets: Original Artyfacts from the First Psychedelic Era*, one must agree that the garage bands sound harsh and rough—similarly to the 1970 punk groups. In this case, the sound was not deliberate but rather resulted from their amateur origins— many of these groups used to rehearse in the garages and only few of them recorded more than one locally popular single. Their music was based on American blues and rock-and-roll, as well as on the playful pop sound of the British Invasion bands.

Probably the most famous garage band were the Kingsmen with their 1963 hit song "Louie, Louie". The record was a cover version of an older rock-and-roll song written by Richard Berry in 1955. The Kingsmen actually knew the song from different performers, called Rockin' Robin Roberts and the Wailers, who covered the song, too. The famous rhythm structure of the song based on two consecutive bars where the beat rests on first-second-third and second-third quarter notes respectively in fact resulted from an error made by Jack Ely, a lead singer, who unintentionally changed the Wailers' rendition from "1-2-3-4, 1-2" rather to "1-2-3, 1-2".[86] It also made the song faster and as such it became a rock classic.

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[86] Rockin' Rhino Reagan, liner notes for the album *The Best of Louie, Louie: The Greatest Renditions of Rock's #1 All Time Song*. Rhino Records, 1983.

The original mild ballad of Richard Berry was transformed into a wild bluster, consisting of mischievous drums, chaotic guitar and completely unintelligible lyrics.[87]

The "punk" attitude is also represented by the fact that that there is an error left on the record, when the singer starts singing the third verse too soon after the guitar break and then pauses to correct himself. The band did not even bother to record another take. Later punk groups of the 1970s tried to achieve such a "low budget sound", too. This music was very much different from lengthy and costly compositions of psychedelic rock. For future punks, such a simplicity reflected in a much better way a tiresome life in a city. It was a plain bluntness by which they were able express themselves, not a difficult guitar solo modified by electronic effects.

2.3.2 Protopunk

In the previous chapter I used the term "protopunk" in connection with American musicians whose ideology markedly differed from the utopianism of the hippie movement and from carelessness of glam rock. But the performers who fit the term not only were driven by different thinking, they also used different music to help them express their thoughts. Using the same musicians as above as examples, I will outline the main characteristics of protopunk music.

2.3.2.1 The MC5

In contrast to hallucinogenic music of the hippies, MC5's sound was like "a catastrophic force of nature the band was barely able to control"[88]. Their on-stage energy was

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[87] The lyrics even led to an FBI investigation in regard of their supposed obscenity that was to be disguised by a mutter. Allegedly, the whole song was a profanity depicting sex between a man and a woman. Although various "real lyrics" circulated among the teenagers, the rumour was false, with Jack Ely actually singing the same words that were written by Richard Berry: a sailor prides on his girl whom he is going to return to. Nevertheless, the hoax made several radio stations ban the song from their playlists.
[88] Bixby, Robert. *Kiss the Sky*. 2007, cited at Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MC5>

immense and made the group a legend among live performers. That was also why they opted not to record their first album in a studio, but rather during a concert in their home town Detroit.

Kick out the Jams (1969) consists of speedy and heavy rock-and-roll songs loaded with energy. Although it sounds rough on the one hand, on the other it is obvious that the guitars are tightly interlocked, the bass and the drums make up a strong rhythm section and the vocals uncompromisingly support the purpose of the music. The album contains protopunk classics, such as "Rocket Reducer no. 62 (Rama Lama Fa Fa Fa)" and "Kick out the Jams", which is one of the most covered songs ever. The songs are based on easy but powerful guitar riffs and an exclaimed rather than sung melody. John Lee Hooker's "Motor City is Burning" is a version of a conventional twelve-bar blues, which is changed into a harsh punk song. The compositions well fit what we now understand as punk music: fast and loud songs, no or only a few guitar solos and unschooled vocals.

The MC5's second album, *Back in the USA* (1970)—although recorded in studio and thus sounding less crude—is a true prototype of punk music. It consists of short songs built of fast, hard-edged angry guitar rock. It is already music that directly leads to the Ramones, the New York Dolls and other New York bands that formed the CBGB scene).

2.3.2.2 Iggy and the Stooges

The Stooges are considered one of the absolutely most important progenitors of punk. Their music is simple, wild and aggressive. In their early days the Stooges' employed a particularly innovative approach to music. Using various experiments they tried to find ways to produce music without the necessity of musical instruments and recording studios. Iggy Pop incorporated "such household objects as a vacuum cleaner and a blender into an intense wall of feedback that one observer described as sounding like 'an airplane was landing in the room.' Homemade instruments were also incorporated to flesh out the overall sound. […]

There was also a cheap Hawaiian guitar which Iggy and guitarist Ron Asheton would take turns in plucking to produce a simulated sitar drone, while drummer Scott Asheton pounded away at a set of oil drums with a ball hammer."[89] Such experiments adumbrate the work of No Wave musicians. The question was to find new ways to express oneself musically. Whether the piece of music incorporated conventional principles (that is melody), it did not matter.

The song "I Wanna Be Your Dog" from the Stooges' 1969 self-titled debut album is a good example of an early punk composition. The main riff follows the whole song's progress. It is also very simple, consisting of only three chords: G, F#, E. The rough sound of the guitar is accompanied by jingle bells, which gives the song a feeling of comic absurdity. "I Wanna Be Your Dog" has been covered frequently, notably by Sonic Youth on their first LP, where the song acquired a very distinct No Wave mood.

2.3.2.3   The Velvet Underground

The group is one of the first to experiment with rock structures, creating a raw sound, sometimes difficult to listen to. "While their songs were constructed on the same three chords and 4/4 beat employed by most late-'60s rockers, the Velvets were unique in their intentional crudity, in their sense of beauty in ugliness, and in their lyrics. The group's music and stance were of seminal importance to […] the New York Dolls, Patti Smith, […], the Sex Pistols, […], Sonic Youth, […] and countless others of the protopunk, punk, and postpunk movements."[90]

Both leading figures of the group—Lou Reed and John Cale—had received classical training before they formed the Velvet Underground. Cale studied music theory and violin at Goldsmiths College of the University of London, Reed played the piano. After arriving to New York, Cale met and co-operated with a number of influential composers, namely John

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[89] Pouncey, 1995: p. 34
[90] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 1034

Cage, an American composer of what is known as aleatoric music, in which some elements are to be decided by chance.

Experiments form also a significant part of Velvet Underground's early records. One of their first releases was a track called "Loop" which consisted of pulsating audio feedback which ended up in a locked groove[91].

The Velvet Underground's first LP combined raw rock-and-roll with experimental approach of Reed to guitar and Cale to viola. Reed made use of distortion, volume-driven feedback and various non-standard tunings. In the songs "Venus in Furs" and "All Tomorrow's Parties" he played what he called an "ostrich guitar" which had all its string tuned to the same tone (particularly D). Alternative tunings became a "trademark" of a later No Wave band Sonic Youth. Cale used guitar or mandolin strings on his viola which created quite a roaring sound when played loudly. Quite often, Cale would also play only one note on the viola sustaining it throughout the whole song. Maureen Tucker, who accompanied the sound with the drums, also used an unusual drum kit. She generally played on tom toms and a bass drum which se had turned on its side and played standing up with drumsticks or sometimes even mallets. Occasionally she also experimented with the rhythm, changing the rock-and-roll standard to a non-syncopated beat, such as in "I'm Waiting for the Man". This approach will be used by punk musicians, as will be explained further on.

The fundamental idea was to search for alternative ways of producing sound in music. In 1975 Reed released a famous double-LP called *Metal Machine Music* which consisted entirely of guitar feedback[92] played at different speeds. On the original LP, each side of the discs lasted around 16 minutes with the forth side ending in an endless locked groove. The album is now considered an early example of what is known as noise music and together with

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[91] A locked groove on a usual LP record is a terminal silent loop that keeps the needle from drifting into the area with a paper label. However, sound can be recorded into this groove, creating an infinite audio loop.
[92] If a guitar is placed in front of a powerful amplifier and a string is plucked, the feedback from the loud-speaker causes a vibration of the strings, thus creating an infinite sound.

the generally experimental sound of the Velvet Underground it constitutes the foundation of later endeavour of No Wave.

2.3.2.4 Patti Smith

Smith's music represents the other side of punk movement. In the early 1970s, "painter-turned-poet and sometime playwright […] Patti Smith began to set her poems to the electric guitar backup of erstwhile rock writer Lenny Kaye."[93] Already with her debut album—*Horses* (1975)—she brought a feminist and intellectual take to punk music, which later made her one of rock-and-roll's most influential musicians. On *Horses* classical 1960s rock is sometimes blended with jazz and soul but the outcome is radical in a punk way. The listener's attention is engaged already by the first track—"Gloria"—which is a cover of a classic song by a Northern Irish garage band Them. It is famous for its consisting of just three chords that are repeated in the same pattern throughout the whole song. Smith wrote completely new lyrics—retaining only the chorus—in which she adumbrated the forthcoming punk movement.

Other songs show more sophisticated arrangements and technical proficiency that contrasts to punk bands' focus on minimalist amateurism. Thus, the general approach of the Patti Smith Group would later lead rather to forming a more intellectual branch of punk movement called New Wave, which was defined by bands such as Television and the Talking Heads, that is Patti Smith's fellow CBGB musicians.

2.3.3 British Bands

The term "protopunk" is usually not used in connection with music in the United Kingdom. However, there definitely were bands that preceded the punk movement and that were cited as influential by American punk bands.

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[93] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 904

2.3.3.1 The Kinks

The Kinks, one of the bands of the British Invasion, set a standard in the mid-1960s for rock-and-roll. Their early hits, "You Really Got Me" and "All Day and All of the Night" "paved the way for the power chords of the next decade's hard rock."[94]

In fact, the song "You Really Got Me" is considered the first hit song that is built around power chords. Power chord—in music terminology—is a bare fifth or diapente, which means that such a chord is a dyad, that is it consists of only two tones, the first and the fifth degree of the scale. Theoretically, such a chord is actually not a chord since a chord should consist at least of three tones. A power chord omits a major third or a minor third of a basic major or minor chord, respectively. Therefore it cannot be determined whether a power chord is a major or minor one and fits both. Because of its heavy sound and because in rock music it is usually played on electric guitar with distortion, it is called "power". Power chords are most strongly associated with the overdriven electric guitar styles of hard rock, heavy metal and of course punk rock.

The Kinks "You Really Got Me"—released in 1964—uses both power chords and distorted guitar and thus is more adult than early songs by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. It is based on a simple riff using just two power chords, F and G. The influential distortion sound of the guitar was created by Dave Davies, the guitarist, who sliced the cone of his amplifier with a razor blade.[95] Such a "home made" technique resembles an unprofessional musicianship of punk and especially No Wave performers, who searched for methods of creating noise and incorporating it into music.

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[94] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 532
[95] *You Really Got Me. The Kinks*. Music News. <http://www.rollingstone.com/news/story/>

2.3.3.2 The Who

During their career The Who experimented with a number of genres and sub-genres, starting as a Mod band, then composing rhythm-and-blues songs, pop music, psychedelic rock, New Wave and even funk. However, their early years' sound made them one of the progenitors of punk music. Bass line on "My Generation" represents one of the first uses of regular non-syncopated playing that would be later frequently employed by punk bass guitarists. They used to use simple but memorable riffs that became an inspiration for punk rock guitar players.

In their concerts, the Sex Pistols used to perform a cover of the Who song "Substitute" which they also recorded in a studio and released as a single. The Ramones recorded the same song on *Acid Eaters* (1993), an album of covers which is a tribute to their early musical influences.

Also the song "I Can't Explain" has been covered many times and served as an inspiration for many groups. The intro guitar riff was cited by the punk band Clash, in an unchanged form in their song "Guns on the Roof" and slightly modified in "Clash City Rockers".

2.4 Punk Rock

In the second half of the 1970s punk was already not only a distinct genre but it stood apart from everything else. Its stripped-down music and thought-provoking lyrics gained a specific fan base. It was in New York and especially the CBGB club where the new movement was born. "In music and sheer pop energy, New York is far and away the new mecca"[96].

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[96] Greg Shaw, cited in Savage, 1991: p. 157

2.4.1 Main Aspects of Punk Rock

Ramones and other groups started to play fast and short songs that were aggressive on the one hand, but also funny and witty on the other. They denied the previous development that led to psychedelic and progressive rock[97] and used just the basics of the rock-and-roll music—its rhythm, its pace, its dynamics. Johnny Ramone, the Ramones' guitarist, put it: "We're playing pure rock 'n roll with no blues or folk or any of that stuff in it."[98] The Ramones "played dumb. '1-2-3-4!' bass-player Dee Dee Ramone shouted at the start of every song, as if the group could barely master the rudiments of rhythm."[99]

Punk's returning to the fundamentals is a generally accepted notion. Tom Carson, an occasional music writer, maintains that punk musicians "had defined the music in its purest terms: a return to the basics which was both deliberately primitive and revisionist … a musical and lyrical bluntness of approach"[100].

Calling punk "primitive" results from lack of importance of virtuosity, which is characteristic for many punk bands. In the context of lengthy instrumental solos of progressive rock and experimenting with electronic sounds and post-recording editing of psychedelic rock, punk employed the basic rock-and-roll line-up, strictly depending only on guitars and drums.

Dave Laing in *One Chord Wonders* notices that punk's return to basics of rock-and-roll should not be understood as punk bands taking inspiration from early rock-and-roll performers of the 1950s. Music of that time involved a range of lead instruments; in addition to guitar it was also saxophone and piano, while punk rock in most cases sticks to guitars only. Moreover, the punk guitarists' techniques resemble rather the playing of the 1960s musicians than their predecessors. Thus, the direct inspiration for punk performers has to

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[97] A term applied to music that combines rock formats with elements of classical music or jazz. It tends to be carefully composed and sophisticated in form.
[98] Johnny Ramone, cited in Laing, 1985: p. 26
[99] Savage, 1991: p. 90
[100] Tom Carson, cited in Laing, 1985: p. 59

sought in bands that I mentioned above: the MC5, the Kinks, the Who. Punk guitar is full of effects based on distortion and feedback, on the contrary the 1950s players used a rather plain and clear tones.

The using of these effects also helped the bands to express their ideas. When distorted sounds replaced virtuosity, the message was obvious: anyone can create music and anyone can make a record. It is not "them" any more, now it is "us". "If progressive rock saw itself as skilled labour of an artistic type (comparable to a potter or an illustrator), punk saw itself as self- expression where skill or virtuosity carried with it a suspicion of glibness. Too much concern with the forms of musical expression could lessen the impact of the substance of the thing expressed."[101]

2.4.2 Solos in Punk Rock

The attitude just mentioned can be explained on an example of instrumental solos. In psychedelic rock soloists acquired as much importance as vocalists and occupied as much space and time. In addition, a solo often introduced new musical ideas into the composition and divided it into two separate parts (or even more parts when other instruments than guitar were employed to play the solo). Punk rock is characterized by a very much contrasting approach. In this case, the role of a solo (if present at all) is to repeat a musical aspect that was already stated. Laing presents three forms of a punk instrumental solo: it can be "either a riff or chord sequence which moved from the background to the foreground during the instrumental break, a set piece sequence of single notes emphasizing the tempo of the piece or (typically on slower tunes or ballads) an 'atmospheric' solo underlining the emotional tone of the singing."[102]

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[101] Laing, 1985: p. 60
[102] ibid.: p. 61

Solos consisting of the song's basic riff or a sequence of chords were often used by the Ramones. Their debut album contains no guitar solo made of independent picked melody; always just a sequence of chords is played repeating either the introduction or a chord pattern used in the verse or the chorus. The Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the UK" is an example of a simple sequence of single notes that eventually become a guitar solo. It consists of a progression (made of only four tones) repeated four times and closed with an improvised messy conclusion.

Examples of what Laing calls an "atmospheric solo" are sparse in punk rock. It usually highlights the melody line or enhances the mood of a rock ballad; since punk shows little concern with melodies or ballads, it does not make much use of such "atmospheric solos". Possible example may be found in the song "Oh Bondage Up Yours!" by the X-Ray Spex, "one of the few bands in British punk rock's first wave with a memorable female vocalist"[103]. Laura Logic's saxophone playing reminds of the 1950s American jazz/soul saxophonists and thus is in opposition to Poly Styrene's screaming-like singing.

2.4.3 Rhythm in Punk Rock

Another important characteristic of punk rock is its attitude to rhythm. Laing suggests that probably the most important feature rock-and-roll music derived from black rhythm-and-blues is syncopation. In rock it is revealed by means of emphasized second and fourth beats in a standard four-four metre. "Syncopated rhythms […] accentuate the 'off beat' and in doing so draw the listener into the music to 'supply' the 'missing' first and third beats either mentally or physically, through hand-clapping, nodding or dancing."[104] Thus, while traditional rock metre can be transcribed as 1-2-1-2, punk rock has a tendency to accentuate every note of the beat, which could be illustrated as 1-1-1-1. A perfect example is an

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[103] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 1088
[104] Laing, 1985: p. 61

introduction to the Sex Pistols' "Holidays in the Sun" which begins with regular rhythmic hand-clapping followed by a bass drum adopting the same rhythm. Such a beat is rarely achieved in full, many punk recordings rather contain elements of both cases. However, Laing maintains that a "pogo" dance originated as the only suitable dance to music in which every note is stressed. Since in punk rock syncopation is drowned in such a most simple rhythmic pattern, the dancers have no other choice but to jump up and down with the only possibility of flailing their arms around.

Elements of both "standard rock" and "punk" rhythm are usually both present in a single song, distributed among the instruments. Traditional rock-and-roll syncopation is maintained by the drums, while the bass and rhythm guitars form a non-syncopated line. Occasionally, also the drummer may change the drumming pattern and follow the playing of the guitars. In the majority of cases, the non-syncopated rhythm is kept by bass guitar. The bassist usually plays a continuous and regular sequences of single notes that contradict as well as complement the drumming. "Arthur Kane of the New York Dolls and Sid Vicious were perhaps the 'purest' of punk bass players in that they went furthest in the repetition of notes of the same pitch for as long as possible."[105] The continuous bass line was emphasized by the rhythm guitar, the distorted sound of which created an unbroken wall of sound quite different from clearly defined chords played by rock-and-roll musicians. Punk rock may thus appear formless; such a sensation is supplied with a fast 4/4 beat which in punk music seems to be omnipresent.

2.4.4 Punk Vocals

Speaking about music of the punk movement, the style of singing has to be mentioned, too. Punk vocals often sounded to a great extent nasal with the singer screaming the lyrics rather than singing them in a usual way. The objective of a singer was to deliver a message,

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[105] ibid.: p. 62

which often dealt with issues from real life such as government, crime, frustration and other social problems. The vocals were urgent, restless and impatient, which contributed to short timings of the songs.

On all accounts, punk rock redefined the music scene. Beginning with the Ramones in the United States and the Sex Pistols in the United Kingdom, music became harsh, raw and provocative. However the main principles that define music remained intact. In the following subchapter I will discuss the music of No Wave that adopted a wholly different approach to music in itself.

2.5 No Wave

The No Wave genre came to some prominence with the release of the album *No New York*. Listening to it is quite a different experience that listening to any other conventional rock record, including punk music. This results from the basic idea of No Wave, which is to question music as such. No Wave was "a conscious attempt to reconstruct, to resignify, pop music."[106]

The groups on *No New York* did not sound the same; what connected them was rather the urge of trying something different. *No New York* "wasn't using the rock clichés"[107]; it was a naked representation of a new movement that developed in New York City. On this account I find it useful to present a short description of each band represented on the album.

2.5.1 James Chance and the Contortions

The Contortions open the *No New York* anthology. Their "'punk funk'—an edgy, atonal fusion, incorporating funk, free-form jazz, and punk intensity—was a pervasive strain

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[106] Chambers, 1985: p. 196
[107] Michael Gira, the documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)

in New York City dance music"[108]. James Chance was a saxophone player whose idols were jazz musicians such as John Coltrane, Albert Ayler and Phaorah Sanders. He is one of the examples of free and avant-garde jazz styles influence on the New York punk scene. He fits the transition between punk and modern American jazz. In this regard, No Wave—"this obscure sub-genre of punk and avant-garde composition—is a vital part of modern jazz."[109]

Contortions' debut LP—*Buy* (1979)—derives form funk, jazz, disco and other genres. In "I Don't Want to be Happy" they use a four to the floor beat[110] combined with atonal organ riffs and slide guitar creaks. Chance adds angry and aggressive vocals, creating an unusual but impressive musical experience. "The Contortions took the genre [of jazz] toward an interesting frontier that many players are still exploring and experimenting with."[111]

2.5.2 Teenage Jesus and the Jerks

No New York's four tracks by Lydia Lunch's band Teenage Jesus and the Jerks very much contrast the previous Contortions. Their languid pace, Lunch's chants shrieked in a monotone and completely dissonant guitar make the song even more distant from traditional rock music. Lydia Lunch explains that even though New York's punk bands had created interest for her to do music, she personally wanted to do "something far more radical than even that"[112]. Consequently, the attempt of Teenage Jesus was to disregard the influences that led to forming the band and try to take music beyond what Lunch saw as the traditionalistic aspects of punk rock.

Many songs of Teenage Jesus were shorter than one minute with the show not exceeding a quarter of an hour. However, their frenzied performing gained them a renown

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[108] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 162
[109] MacLaren, 2005. <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/>
[110] A rhythmic pattern in which the bass drum falls on each beat of the measure in the four-four metre. Four to the floor beat was popularized by disco music in the 1970s and was later utilized especially by dance music genres, such as house, techno and others.
[111] MacLaren, 2005. <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/>
[112] Lydia Lunch, the documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)

probably even surpassing that of other No Wave bands. With their compositions they pushed the limits of music probably further than a majority of other No Wave acts. Jim Sclavunos, the band's bass player called it a "short brief aggressive outburst of anti-music"[113]. Both him and Lunch continued to apply themselves to music after Teenage Jesus and the Jerks disbanded and are now considered one of the most important figures of the American "indie" genre.

2.5.3 Mars

Mars is probably the least well known band from the *No New York* compilation. They got together through a chance meeting in 1975 and soon started rehearsing. They covered a number of song by the Velvet Underground and other New York bands changing them into abstract compositions musically quite distant from the original versions. In fact, China Burg and Nancy Arlen, Mars' guitarist/vocalist and drummer, respectively, had never played their instruments until the first rehearsal.[114]

Such an approach typifies the whole No Wave scene: music is a means to express oneself and as such is not dependent on one's musical abilities. Also, it should not be restricted to sound produced by musical instrument. In the song "Hairwaves" the instrumentation is supplemented with a noise of bad reception of a radio.[115] Generally, the songs are characterized by squeaky vocals, non-standard drumming and dissonant guitar completely abandoning classic chord-based playing. In 1977, rock critic Stella Doon wrote: "To the uninitiated, Mars may sound like listening to a laundromat magnified. That's because every instrument is making a sound, but who is making which sound? Instead of one direct sound or beat the music travels in at least 3 different directions, speeds of rhythm making a totally orbital sound, one that never really enters the ear instead spinning around the head. At

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[113] Jim Sclavunos, the documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)
[114] *Mars*. No wave pioneers—official page. <http://www.myspace.com/marsnowave>
[115] ibid.

times it sounds like tortured children singing in 7 different tongues."[116] Mars' music is hard to listen to, but on the other hand, it is a good illustration of No Wave's endeavour.

2.5.4 DNA

Glenn Branca maintains that DNA is the band that truly represents the sound of No Wave.[117] The members of DNA fronted by Arto Lindsay focused on making unique and unusual sounds rather playing the instruments in a traditional manner. "Radically challenging rock conventions, [DNA's] tightly structured songs, some of them under 30 seconds long, used neither fixed rhythms nor standard harmonies, and the three instrumental parts were usually independent and clashing."[118] Lindsay's guitar was absolutely atonal, often untuned, Ikue Mori's drumming consisted of irregular rhythms; in fact this Japanese woman joined the band as a drummer having no drum kit and with no experience with the instrument. The vocals—also done by Lindsay—were "difficult enough to decipher lyrically that it [became] another instrument, either as frantic as his guitar terrorism or as rhythmic as Mori's percussion."[119]

Lindsay explains: "I thought about sort of rearranging the basic building blocks of music […], even though I didn't know how to play chords and didn't really have much of a notion of song structure."[120] He then describes DNA's music as "very homemade" and "very labour-intensive". Jazz critic Clifford Allen maintains that "their influence […] has been felt in many punk groups since, but the fact that two-thirds of this group [Lindsay and Mori] went on to illustrious places in contemporary composed and improvised music make DNA important, if somewhat odd branch of the tree."[121]

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[116] Stella Doon. 1977, cited at *Forced Exposure*. CDs and LPs distributor.
<http://www.forcedexposure.com/artists/mars.html>
[117] The documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)
[118] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*, 2001: p. 271
[119] Allen, 2004. <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/>
[120] Arto Lindsay, the documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)
[121] Allen, 2004. <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/>

2.5.5 The Significance of No Wave

In the previous subchapters I have tried to show that even though punk rock brought a number of changes into rock music, the punk bands were basically still composing blues-derived songs. As Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth puts it: "In a way bands like the Sex Pistols weren't really destroying rock-and-roll even though they maybe wanted to; they were still playing Chuck Berry chords."[122]

In contrast to this, No Wave bands' aim was to completely forget about what contemporary popular music developed from. They did not want to create music they could hear from other bans. With such an approach, the No Wave groups were not concerned about technique and musical skills. They tried to search for new means, based on which music can be composed, or maybe rather constructed. In the first chapter I also tried to show that the new attitudes were possible because of New York's milieu. Lee Ranaldo maintains that the No Wave movement formed in a certain "vacuum" free of any interest of media or record companies which enabled the evolution of new ideas.[123]

"Theoretical Girls, DNA, and the 'No wave', were exploring a post-punk soundscape which involved laying sound over sound to produce 'noise' music and to abolish those barriers ('music'/'noise') that punk had initially put so much in crisis. […] [T]his development has turned to the task of revealing the internal conditions of musical labour. Employing sets of frequently jagged syntheses—guitar and bass riffs, electronic noises, obsessive percussive rhythms, the incongruous 'word salads' of many of the lyrics—the scaffolding of the music is put on show. […] The listener is either drawn into following the

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[122] Thurston Moore, the documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)
[123] The documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)

productive play of the construction or else repelled by the naked joins and clashes of the collage."[124]

Basically, the No Wave bands did not hesitate to use anything that made noise. It is the idea of bringing noise into music that is one of the most important contributions of No Wave to popular music. Beginning with the No Wave genre and in some respect with punk rock in general, new aesthetics in music were established which instigated what is now referred to as noise music. The importance of No Wave regarding subsequent development of music will be the topic of the next chapter.

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[124] Chambers, 1985: pp. 196-197

3 THE INFLUENCE OF NO WAVE UPON

THE SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENT

OF POPULAR MUSIC

In the previous chapters I attempted to present the main characteristics of No Wave in order that the generally not very well known genre could be fully understood in the context of the development of popular music. In this chapter I want to examine what influence it had in the subsequent history of popular music. As before, I will focus on rock music that—as its name implies—is up to the present day still based on the basic features of rock-and-roll, the music of which was explained in chapter 2. I will try to find musicians in the post-punk history of music whose work may be specified as being influenced by ideas of No Wave.

It has been stated that the originality of the No Wave genre rested in refusing melody and harmony as basic resources of creating music. No Wave musicians made use of atonal sounds and all kinds of noises. They were probably not the first to do so in the history of music but they were arguably one of the most important artists that brought such aesthetics to popular and especially rock music.

3.1 Sonic Youth

Sonic Youth came from the New York No Wave scene to become "the avatar of noisy, underground guitar rock."[125] In its beginnings the group based its musical approach on the No Wave genre but contrary to other No Wave bands they—in their nearly three-decade history of existence—gained considerable popularity and a status almost of a legend.

Sonic Youth formed in 1981; at the time the guitarists—Thurston Moore and Lee Ranaldo—performed with Glenn Branca's electric guitar ensemble and the bassist Kim Gordon was a recent UCLA's art school graduate. Sonic Youth's first drummer was Richard

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[125] *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll,* 2001: p. 912

Edson who quitted after the band's first record was released and turned to acting; among others he appeared in Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* and Oliver Stone's *Platoon*.

Sonic Youth is famous especially for its unique way of playing the guitars. Moore and Ranaldo use a large number of unconventional tunings many of them developed for one certain song only. Sometimes their guitar may have a screwdriver or a drumstick jammed between the strings and the fretboard, serving as a "third bridge" and creating sounds that may resemble bells, chimes or harp. The drumstick may also be used instead of a pick to slide on the strings producing a continuous wall of squeaky sounds. Their guitar techniques are derived from "non-playing" of Arto Lindsay, Lydia Lunch and other No Wave guitarists and blended with traditional rock riffs and usage of power chords.

This is also where an answer to a question about the band's popularity rests. Sonic Youth is definitely the only No Wave band that made it to commercial success—even though their songs incorporate a lot of noise and "unlistenable" sounds. To understand this, we have to understand what sources of inspiration are to be found in Sonic Youth's music. Their music stems from early No Wave approach but they transformed the experimental compositions into long-established song structures based on clearly defined verses and choruses. No Wave bands fully abandoned the idea of "architecture" of rock-and-roll that consists of tones joined to form a melody out of which a verse or a chorus is built up. On the contrary, Sonic Youth restores rock-and-roll basic building blocks but puts it together using typical No Wave methods.

Of course, Sonic Youth's style has changed during the years and their work slowly becomes more "listener-friendly". Yet the band has never waived experimenting with sound. In 1997 Sonic Youth established its own record label (called SYR for Sonic Youth Records) for a series of experimental and mostly instrumental releases, including the 1999 *Goodbye 20th Century* which contains tracks originally written by avant-garde composers such as

George Maciunas, a founding member of the Fluxus community of artists, minimalist Steve Reich, and above mentioned John Cage.

In 1998 Sonic Youth released an experimental EP *Silver Session (For Jason Knuth)* on a single-purpose label SKR (for Sonic Knuth Records). Its eight tracks consist entirely of guitar feedback—similarly to Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music*. But Sonic Youth again transformed what Reed had left untouched into a structured album, thus drawing near to the listeners' requirements. In the liner notes, Thurston Moore explains: "[We] turned every amp we owned on to 10+ and leaned as many guitars and basses we could plug in against them and they roared […] Of course we recorded the whole thing and a few months later we mixed it down into sections, ultra-processing it to a wholly other 'piece'"[126]. They occasionally edited the recorded material into loops and added a drum machine. The result is very much experimental just as No Wave recordings; on the other hand its sound is more polished and possibly may find more listeners.

In 2005 Sonic Youth's album *Daydream Nation* (1988) was chosen by the American Library of Congress to be included in the National Recording Registry that is being established to "maintain and preserve sound recordings that are culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant"[127]. The Registry consists of recordings that include e.g. a 1938 radio broadcast of Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) and Neil Armstrong's remarks broadcast from the Moon. The list, that currently comprises 225 recordings, states: "Sonic Youth are renowned for a glorious form of noise-based chaos. […] On *Daydream Nation*, their breakthrough album, the group's forays into outright noise always return to melodic songs that employ hypnotic arpeggios, driving punk rock rhythmic figures and furious gales of guitar-based noise."[128] It is precisely this

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[126] Thurston Moore, liner notes for the album *Silver Session (For Jason Knuth)*. SKR, 1998.
[127] *National Recording Preservation Act of 2000*. Available at
<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h106-4846>
[128] *The Full National Recording Registry*. National Recording Preservation Board of the Library of Congress.
<http://www.loc.gov/rr/record/nrpb/nrpb-masterlist.html>

repeated "foray into noise" and "return to melodic songs" that is the most important contribution of Sonic Youth to popular music. In such a way they helped spreading the ideas of No Wave to wide audiences.

3.2 The 1990s Grunge Music

Grunge was a musical phenomenon that defined rock music of the 1990s. Although it partly stemmed from the 1980s heavy metal, its other source was also extremely important. It was punk, on which grunge was based musically and—contrary to heavy metal—also "philosophically". Grunge bands manifested their punk mentality and attitudes, while their music drew from punk's raw sound, dissonant harmonies and fast tempos.

Grunge's sound also incorporates the sound of many bands of the 1980s that came up from punk rock, such as—apart from Sonic Youth—the Pixies and Dinosaur Jr. While the Pixies are characterized by combining punk rhythms, surf rock easiness and catchy melodies; the sound of Dinosaur Jr. is distinguished by extensive use of feedback and distortion and chaotic guitar solos. Other important source were the Wipers, a punk band active in the eighties and the nineties. All these bands use noisy guitar sounds as a vital part of their music.

In the early 1990s, grunge exploded into a mania. Apart from music, it affected clothing and general aesthetics, too, which was also influenced by punk style. Grunge music expresses disillusion with the society, its state and its prejudices. Both grunge musicians and fans were associated with "Generation X" and "slackers"[129], terms that have much in common with the punk generation's social status.

Musically, grunge is a result of the previous development of rock music. Apart from that, it typically incorporates many noisy sounds that become an integral part of songs and

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[129] "Generation X" in the context of the 1990s United States represents a generation of mostly teenagers that is characterized by nihilism, scepticism and a loss of trust in future and traditional values. Similarly, a "slacker" is characterized by apathy, lack of motivation and effort, usually resulting in unemployment, which however is understood as a "virtue" and "philosophy".

stage performances. Many grunge songs are either introduced or concluded by electric guitar noise that may be totally uncontrolled and that may result in hitting the guitar against the floor and even smashing it. It is necessary to mention, that the destruction of musical instruments as a part of a live performance has a tradition that began much earlier than with grunge music. Pete Townshend of the Who is one of the most famous and arguably one of the first artists to make the smashing of guitars part of his performance. The process is not only visually impressive but as the guitar remains plugged into an amplifier it causes accidental sounds and noises that need to be recognized as part of the music.

Out of many grunge musicians, Kurt Cobain of Nirvana was noted for wild and noisy guitar technique. The CD version of Nirvana's ground-breaking album *Nevermind* (1991) is concluded with a lengthy hidden track consisting for the most part of harsh guitar noise and vocals closer to a hoarse shout than to singing. This song became a typical conclusion of many Nirvana's performances and as such it served as a means to explore the possibilities of producing noise. Depending primarily on pure chance the song's timing might have stretched to tens of minutes, possibly ending with all instruments destroyed.

Grunge musicians thus contributed to further integration of noisy elements to music. It is done especially by using short sections of guitar noise that are included to a song that is otherwise based on a typical rock-and-roll "architecture". Atonal sounds are not the basic building blocks of the song—as is the case of No Wave—nor are they the main characteristic of the song's overall sound—as is the case of Sonic Youth. They are used to emphasize and modify a song's progress at certain points. Noise is a means to detach oneself from mainstream culture, yet the music's general nature makes it possible to address large amounts of young people.

3.3 Contemporary Bands

The rock music scene of New York City has never ceased; however it has never been so fruitful since the end of punk rock in the early 1980s. Recently, there has been a revival of "indie" rock in New York distinguished mainly by the international success of the Strokes. New York's revived garage rock boom is documented e.g. on the *Yes New York* (2003) compilation album, its name being an allusion to the paramount No Wave record *No New York*.

Apart from that, it is possible to find a number of bands whose music is based on an interest in sound texture and experimenting with noise. As many of them name Sonic Youth as their example in making music[130], it is possible to consider the No Wave scene in general as their source of inspiration. Of course, the music is now quite different; many of those groups make use of electronic devices, thus the range of possible sounds is wider than it was in the case of No Wave bands that prevailingly used only standard instruments (the experimenting involved especially guitar). Also, the development music made in the 1980s and the 1990s is to be heard in current New York bands' music. It is impossible to decide whether any of them will be found important for the development of popular music in future, however in the following paragraphs I want to briefly discuss at least a few of them.

3.3.1 The Liars

With their first album, *They Threw Us All in a Trench and Stuck a Monument on Top*, 2001, the band classed itself into the dance-punk scene of New York. Dance-punk is a style that can be traced back to James Chance and the Contortions and their "punk funk", a style that blends disco and funk with punk bluntness of expression. However, the Liars underwent some stylistic shifts, resulting in the band's last album, *Drum's Not Dead*, 2006,

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[130] The documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)

characterized by distinct drums, often distorted by various effects pedals, and atmospherically-sounding guitars.

What is common to all their work is the exploitation of noises. They are usually produced using electronic devices the sound of which is further distorted, edited and played in loops; all this is often accompanied by an industrial sound of a drum machine. The guitars might be used as percussive instruments, too. The sources of the sounds are limitless. The song "Read the Book that Wrote Itself" from the band's second album, *They Were Wrong So We Drowned*, 2004, is "merely the sound of pencil swiftly scribbling on paper over a thunder beat and ghostly monkish vocals"[131] The "instrumentation" of "There's Always Room on the Broom" from the same album is fully based on static; the electrical scrunches are edited into a rhythmic pattern that can serve as an instrumental accompaniment.

Thus, the Liars extend the possibilities of music which is no more dependent on melodies and harmonies only. What is left is a rhythm and a backing formed of a sound texture, which is an approach already utilized by dance genres such as techno but is rather uncommon in rock music.

3.3.2 Black Dice

Black Dice formed in 1997 in Brooklyn, New York. Originally the band based its music on conventional song structures but within a few years the members shifted their emphasis to an open-ended experimenting with sound. While listening to Black Dice's records, one has to wonder about the definition of music. Their compositions may employ neither melody, nor harmony, nor rhythm. They are based on unruly noisy sounds, usually produced by electronic devices, that are organized into harsh, yet listenable structures.

"Black Dice aren't playing music. These aren't songs. This isn't as simple as a change from B to D, a finger moving down to another note on the fret board, a chord change, no

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[131] Turner, 2004. <http://www.playlouder.com/feature/+liars/>

matter how swamped in effects and feedback it is. This is sonics; sounds that have been extracted from tiny electrical boxes, or the human voice box itself, then twisted apart, re-wired and tampered with until that pulsating ringing suddenly becomes metallic birdsong, reverberated non-beats, panning drill sounds that stop…stutter…then are washed over with fragmented noise."[132]

In their search for a new sound, Black Dice use outdated electronics and unconventional instrumentation with an emphasis on signal processing which provide a broader range of sound to work with.[133] With such a highly experimental approach, the band is able to transcend the restrictions of a single genre and take from "indie" rock, psychedelic music and ambient electronic music.

3.3.3 Flux Information Sciences

"Flux's music is schizophrenic in the extreme, with violent dynamic schisms, bizarre, angular rhythms, and bursts of noise and violence that abruptly shift into weird, brief passages of cerebral, vaguely menacing soundscapes."[134] Michael Gira, a leader of a No Wave band Swans, adds: "Their crude, brazen energy […] reminds me of when I first moved to NYC in 1979 and saw the Contortions at Max's Kansas City."[135]

Flux Information Sciences' music is based on an industrial sound structured into metallic textures. Tristan Bechet, the group's singer, mentions a metal stamping factory of the neighbourhood, the rhythms and sounds of which are—according to him—amazing and phenomenal. He says: "It's directly related to this electrifying, ruthless, merciless city that we live in [that is New York]."[136] In addition to that, the band makes usage of the musical practice of the 1980s such as hand-clapping produced by primitive drum-machines, music

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[132] *Black Dice Interview*. <http://dot-alt.com/blackdice_int.html>
[133] *FatCat Records: Balck Dice*. <http://fat-cat.co.uk/fatcat/artistInfo.php?id=54>
[134] Gira, 2000. <http://www.younggodrecords.com/prodtype.asp?PT_ID=75>
[135] ibid.
[136] Tristan Bechet, the documentary film *Kill Your Idols* (2004)

known from Atari computers video games and synthesizer sounds that probably sounded old-fashioned already at that time.[137]

Thus, in their music they combine two aspects. Cheap toy-like synthesizers and effect pedals represent the pop culture, the disco idyll of the seventies and eighties. The way they use these elements and blend them with heavy industrial music is a reference to the No Wave approach, which searched for ways to change all conventions, to re-interpret them to the point of destruction. Flux Information Sciences' music is industrial and dehumanized on the one hand; on the other it is funny and amusing in its enjoyment in popular culture clichés. The noises are a means of carrying the information that nothing is as simple as it may seem and that the band's attitude must be understood as ambiguous.

3.4 Noise in Music

3.4.1 The Futurists

It has been already mentioned that No Wave artists were not the first to incorporate elements of noise into music. Already in 1910s, with the Futurist movement, early attempts were made to equalize noises with traditional music. Luigi Russolo, an Italian painter and composer, is usually considered the first noise music theorist.

In 1913 he published a manifesto entitled *The Art of Noises* (L'arte dei rumori) in which he presented his ideas about noise that "triumphs and reigns supreme over the sensibility of men."[138] To Russolo noise is the accomplishment of evolution and relates to the invention and expansion of machines. He called the new musical style "bruitism" ("le bruit" is French for "noise") and stated that after having been moved by Beethoven and Wagner, "[n]ow we are satiated and we find far more enjoyment in combining in thought the noises of

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[137] Khalid, 2001. <http://atlanta.creativeloafing.com/gyrobase/Content?oid=4000>
[138] Russolo, 1913. <http://www.thereminvox.com/article/articleview/117>

trams, backfiring motors, carriages and bawling crowds than listening again to, for example, the 'Eroica' or the 'Pastoral'."[139]

Russolo also constructed several instruments, called "intonarumori", specially designed to produce noises. There were a number of varieties of the intonarumori, named according to the sound each variety produced: howling, thunder, crackling, exploding, gurgling, buzzing, hissing etc.[140]

The approach of Luigi Russolo and the whole Futurist movement was not at all accepted by general audiences, nor did it have any direct followers; on the other hand it has to be seen as a pioneering effort that reappeared later in the 20th century.

3.4.2 Post-War Initiative

It is possible to regard "noise music" as an autonomous genre with its own complex history and examples of its manifestations around the whole world; in this place I want to mention only three authors that might have had influence on rock music, at least in the sense that their work was well-known among musicians.

3.4.2.1 John Cage

John Cage has been already mentioned in connection with the Velvet Underground and Sonic Youth. Apart from aleatoric music and probably his most famous composition *4'33''* (1952), which in three movements consists of 4 minutes and 33 seconds of perfect silence, he is also noted for non-standard use of musical instruments, using record players and radios as instruments and composing music for percussion such as flower pots, dustbins and others. Of course, such compositions employ noises as equivalent elements. In fact, *4'33''* is

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[139] ibid.
[140] Saggini, 2004. <http://www.thereminvox.com/article/articleview/116>

meant as allowing the listener to concentrate on sounds otherwise disregarded—those emitted by the audience in a concert hall, noises of the street etc.[141]

Cage's work and ideas were quite popular; their influence on music of the Velvet Underground and other experimenting rock musicians is incontrovertible.

3.4.2.2   Steve Reich

Steve Reich is best-known as a pioneer of minimalism, which is based on repetition of small units of music. In addition to that, some of his procedures either incorporate or result in various types of noises. In "process music" a composition arises from a process—such as in *Pendulum Music* (1968) which is a piece of music produced by letting a microphone swing freely above a loudspeaker it is connected to. The outcome is repeated feedback which is the actual composition. The piece was recently recorded by Sonic Youth for their *Goodbye 20th Century* album. Steve Reich is perceived as one of the composers who "altered the direction of musical history"[142].

3.4.2.3   Boyd Rice

Boyd Rice began experimenting with sound in the 1970s. To produce sounds, he used in his performances e.g. an electric shoe polisher or the "rotoguitar"—a guitar played by air flow from an electric fan. The idea was to subject the audience to walls of abrasive, pulsing noise, just below the threshold of pain. Rice is considered as having a fundamental influence on the genre of "noise music".[143]

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[141] *John Cage Database*. A website dedicated to John Cage. <http://www.johncage.info/>
[142] The Guardian, cited at *Steve Reich*. The official web site. <http://www.stevereich.com/>
[143] *Boydrice.com*. Boyd Rice's official web site. <http://boydrice.com/>

3.4.3 Punk Aesthetics and Its Legacy

Punk music brought different views to popular music. The punk ethic was closely tied with anti-consumerism which brings along a do-it-yourself attitude towards music (and not only it) in a sense that everyone can produce it. Thus, the borderline between the creator and the consumer is blurred. The do-it-yourself attitude has to be understood in connection with the above mentioned ideas of elements of noise in music. When music can be made by non-musicians, it acquires a distinct "home-made" sound, which is very much different to the recordings produced in professional studios.

Consequently, punk aesthetics bring along a variety of new conceptions, such as fanzines, lo-fi, cassette culture etc., which define a large part of contemporary popular music (they are connected especially with the "indie" rock). It has been stated above that fan magazines—the fanzines or zines—helped to form the punk and the No Wave movements: they gave names to them, the *No* magazine organized an important festival that was essential for the *No New York* album.

Lo-fi, or low fidelity, is a term that is used in contrast to the term "hi-fi", or high fidelity, which is used by audiophiles to refer to high-quality reproduction of sound by top reproducing devices. Lo-fi recording usually contains technical errors, distortion of sound, hum and background noise. Owing to general punk attitude, many punk bands made such errors a substantial goal of their music. The definite conclusion was the No Wave music. In case of No Wave, lo-fi, distortion and noises of any kind were the essential means of expression.

Cassette culture is another consequence of the punk and the do-it-yourself aesthetics. During the 1970s compact audio cassettes and cassette players became a relatively inexpensive means to record and duplicate music. Such music—of course lo-fi in sound—was easy to distribute among fans (for example by the medium of fanzines). The culture was apprehended as an opposition to mega-stars of the 1980s and their glamorous image.

If we are to examine and summarize the influence of No Wave upon subsequent development of rock music, we have to see it in two ways. The genre of No Wave set a wholly different attitude through which music is observed. The existing basic "architecture" of rock music is disregarded and a song is composed using unprecedented approach to instrumental and vocal parts. Such an approach results in music rich of noisy sounds, which had been incorporated into other musical genres before, but it was No Wave that probably helped paving the way for noises to be introduced to rock music. Moreover, new music scene seems to be forming in today's New York which directly takes from the No Wave approach, however it is too soon now to guess at its importance.

The other way of influential character of No Wave comes along with the nature of the punk movement in general. Punk brought a new ethic to rock music, according to which it is not the perfection of sound and star-like appearance that matters, but the expressivity of utterance, the meaning and the self-interpretation, which can be presented by means of a lo-fi recording on a cheap audio cassette but is of greater significance than a polished but shallow pop show. Consequently, there was a considerable interest in the "indie" rock genres which in the 1990s resulted in situation when many independent musicians—namely the grunge bands such as Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Alice In Chains—became genuine pop-icons. Contemporary rock music seems to be more sceptical on the one hand, but more open to any sources of influence on the other.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have presented an examination of the No Wave genre of popular music. It was treated as a subgenre of the broadly defined genre of punk. Punk was a movement of quite considerable significance; it represented not only music but also a certain social attitude.

I divided the work into three chapters. Since punk is considered not only a musical genre but also a genuine subculture, it was dealt as such in the first chapter. I defined the term "subculture" and then traced the origins of the subculture of punk. They were found in the post-war social changes that took place in the 1950s when the rock-and-roll music originated. In the following subchapters I followed the evolution of punk music and attitudes in the sense of changing approaches towards society. Since my main topic is music, I tried to see the changes from the point of view of active musicians rather than their fans. In this manner, not the masses of people being absorbed by a new movement but rather the inspiring initiators (that is the performers) were examined. Finally, I focused on the No Wave genre that is quite specific in the sense of its geographical field of activity. It was formed in the late 1970s in New York City, to which many artists had moved, including not only musicians but also visual artists. Therefore I called New York a "fertile habitat" which gave birth to an interesting and quite innovative musical style called No Wave.

The music of No Wave was treated in the second chapter. I followed an approach similar to the first chapter, that is I looked for the roots of music of No Wave and punk in general as they appeared in work of particular performers. I found the origins of punk rock in the genre of rock-and-roll which is the basic recourse of popular music as such. The music of rock-and-roll later developed into other genres, including the psychedelic rock and glam rock, to which punk rock was a counter reaction. Punk strived to revive rock music in its pure form as it existed during the rock-and-roll era.

In this context the originality of the No Wave genre emerged, since No Wave performers based their approach on rejecting the previous development of popular music and

employing wholly different ways of composing songs. I focused on a few groups that seem to be the most important for the genre and identified common features of their music. It became evident that the most important feature of No Wave music is the element of noise that is incorporated into the compositions of all No Wave artists.

The concluding chapter was intended to find out whether the ideas brought in by No Wave were viable and had its followers. In the beginning, this was set as an objective: to verify the view of those encyclopedias and authors that see the genre as "influential". In chapter 3 it was affirmed that various noisy sounds had indeed found their way to popular music. In this context the role of Sonic Youth was emphasized as a connecting link between No Wave and contemporary rock music.

However, the role of No Wave must not be overestimated considering the fact that elements of noise already existed in other musical genres. In this place the early attempts of the Futurists were mentioned together with the post-war experimental music of John Cage, Steve Reich and Boyd Rice. Their compositions also included noisy sounds and as there was a general interest in musical experiments in the sixties and the seventies, the influential potential of No Wave must not be conceived as unique.

Also, a few contemporary bands were discussed that seem to directly take from the ideas of No Wave. For example, in music of Black Dice noises represent basic "building blocks" of which songs are composed. Black Dice's compositions sometimes lack both melody and harmony, as well as rhythm. Contrary to the music of No Wave, contemporary bands use mainly electronic devices to produce the noisy sounds, which is a practice already known from dance genres but rather unusual in rock music.

All the groups mentioned come from New York; there seems a definite musical scene to be forming in today's New York City, similar to the scene of the late 1970s that gave birth to both No Wave and punk in general. However, as popular music has become globalized, local scenes are now probably less important than they were in the 1970s. Therefore saying

that New York has a significant music scene would be a mere guess. It is also too soon to guess at the bands' importance for the future development of popular music. On the other hand, the music that these bands produce is quite original which I believe is worth considering. The globalization of popular music that has just been mentioned contributed to certain uniformity of rock music that can be observed all over the world; under these circumstances it is not pointless to emphasize a performer characterized by a different approach.

In the last subchapter I attempted to discuss the legacy of No Wave and punk in general. I believe it rests in turning the attention to independent musicians and performers that are less oriented towards perfection of sound and more focused on expressiveness. It was the "authenticity" that punk called for, that is unpolished sound in music and unrestricted wording of lyrics. There was a significant interest in independent artists—or the performers that fall under the term "lo-fi"—in the post-punk era that culminated in the 1990s with the grunge mania, with the result of making the "indie" genres part of the mainstream. On all accounts popular music became more open to any sources of inspiration. Nowadays new possibilities of music are usually searched for in what is called "world music"; in this thesis I wanted to show that there are innovative approaches to be found in the traditional field of rock music, too.

In the Introduction I defined the object of the work as examining the supposed influential nature of the No Wave genre. I believe that the thesis—especially its third chapter—showed that there was a certain influence indeed, that No Wave had on subsequent popular music. However, the genres that came from No Wave will probably never become glorified by general audiences and widely discussed by scholars. In this sense I would regard the relevant parts of the thesis as having covered what I would consider generally neglected ground.

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