Blank Generation" was written by Richard Hell in 1975 when he was playing with elevision but was never officially recorded as a Television song. Recorded as a emo in January 1976 with the Heartbreakers, released as an EP on Ork Records 1 November 1976 with the newly formed Voidoids, and rereleased on the 1977 lank Generation LP the song captured and gave voice to the emptiness that made unk possible. The song begins like this:

I was sayin let me out of here before I was even born—it's such a gamble when you get a face it's fascinatin to observe what the mirror does but when I dine it's for the wall that I set a place.

I belong to the blank generation and I can take it or leave it each time

I belong to the _____ generation but

I can take it or leave it each time.

the missing word, is, as Hell has suggested, an opportunity as well as a void. Thich is to say, Hell's work in Television, the Heartbreakers, the Voidoids, and subquently has always been informed by a sly, resigned humor. "Blank Generation" as, in part, a riff on the 1959 Rod McKuen (using the pseudonym "Dor") and be McFadden single "The Beat Generation," which parodied the emerging "beat" mmunity. While this fact is often relegated to a footnote or an aside, the relation-ip between the punks and the beats is significant. For, in their rejection of the ppies, the punks and the United States especially—had turned to the fifties, to e detached cool of Marlon Brando (the subject of an article in the very first issue Holmstrom's and McNeil's *Punk* fanzine) and the films of Nicholas Ray (like bel Without a Cause—and Ray had provided a blurb for Television in 1974: "Four ts with a passion"). In a New York Times Magazine article (titled "This Is the Beat eneration") that helped popularize the term, John Clellon Holmes wrote:

The origins of the word "beat" are obscure, but the meaning is only too clear to most Americans. More than mere weariness, it implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw. It involves a sort of nakedness of mind, and, ultimately, of soul; a feeling of being reduced to the bedrock of consciousness. In short, it means being undramatically pushed up against the wall of oneself...

But the wild boys of today are not lost. Their flushed, often scoffing, always intent faces elude the world, and it would sound phony to them. For this generation lacks that eloquent air of bereavement which made so many of the exploits of the

ideals, and the laments about the mud in moral currents, which so obsessed the Lost Generation, do not concern young people today. They take these things frighteningly for granted. They were brought up in these ruins and no longer notice them . . .

So it is a generation with a greater facility for entertaining ideas than for selieving them.

Holmes was also a novelist. His 1952 book *Go* was published in England as *The Beat Boys*, with these words branded on its cover: "America's Teen-Age Jungle and a Searing Story of Youth in Search of Kicks." In a 1978 conversation with Victor Bockris and Susan Sontag, Hell said that "I want to encourage in my songs... that feeling of being an adolescent throughout your whole life, of rejecting the whole idea of having a self, a personality." This rejection—which denied the hippie idea of finding yourself—drew on the Beats' cool detachment and seemingly apolitical rejection of social mores. And the beat sensibility informed how many of the rock critics approached punk, as well. "Wire dredges up images of Kerouac and Ginsberg—beat poetry," Ira Robbins wrote in 1978, "short fragments of impressions set to music. In 1953 the accompanying instrument would be bongos. 1978 bongos have six strings and make lots of noise. They have volume. They have lots of loose ends and rough edges. They be Wire."

But what motivated the "blank generation" more than anything was the desire to make something new, and the most significant difference between punk in America and punk in England was the starting point. The British impulse, epitomized by the Sex Pistols, was to destroy, and indeed punk became notorious in America largely because of the Sex Pistols' antics. The American impulse, on the contrary, was to assume simply that the slate was clean: a tabula rasa. There was less fury—at least until hardcore—in part because America had already destroyed itself. Nixon had resigned, the war in Vietnam was over, major cities had pockets of ruin and were on the verge of bankruptcy. There was nothing to destroy because there was nothing to destroy.

[Richard Hell quoted in Victor Bockris, "Susan Sontag Meets Richard Hell," in *Beat Punks*, New York: Da Capo, 1998 [1978], p. 198; John Clellon Holmes, "This Is the Beat Generation," *The New York Times Magazine*, November 16, 1952, pp. 10–11; Ira Robbins, Wire: *Pink Flug, Trauser Press*, April 1978.]

Bloody Chamber, The

A collection of short stories by Angela Carter published in 1979. The stories took as their starting point the old myths, fairy tales like Little Red Riding Hood, Beauty and the Beast, and Bluebeard. They are shocking and beautifully told; far more than feminist "corrections" to the originals, they suggest deeper levels of terror that

d Jim Reilly. The back of the album shows a "letter" from Chrysalis to Gordon gilvie (who managed the group and cowrote many of their songs) that reads,

Dear Mr. Ogilvie

Many thanks for sending your tape which I have been given careful consideration.

Whilst we feel there is some potential within the material, we feel at this present time we are not the company to be able to assist you in furthering your recording career.

In the meantime, may we wish you the very best of luck in the future.

reminds you of Charles Bukowski, of the hilarious, endless letters of reprimand m various anonymous supervisors in *Post Office* (you wonder why movie versions Bukowski's books are never half as *funny* as the books themselves). The music is an and bright. You know Stiff Little Fingers were a "political" band, but as with art, the truth is more complicated. What are the politics of clean production: ere are spaces between the instruments in which you maneuver. In "At the Edge" nich has got to be one of the greatest underappreciated punk songs, but you st wait until :38 to understand why), they sing, "Here's your room and here's ir records," and the song lifts into a melody as glorious as one of the cloudy am sequences in Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*. And then there are the great rhymes that ne so fast, as if shot out of the barrel of a gun: "I've got no time to talk about it II your stupid hopes and dreams / Get your feet back on the ground son / It's ms that count not football teams."

On songs like this and on "Tin Soldiers," Stiff Little Fingers offer up fast melos and then subvert them just as quickly. They are always building a wall of sound simultaneously taking it down. There is—dare it be said—a Thatcherite econy to the songs that cools them off just as they are heating up. In "Tin Soldiers" comes near the 2:30 mark, when the boys count out, Ramones-like, "one, three, four" but then proceed to pull back and offer up an almost art-rock ar solo.

Or take "Gotta Getaway," a song for falling in love. A darkened room, the cer of LED lights, the sound of distant footsteps, unanswered cell-phone calls use your hands are all over each other, the shape of furniture against your bodthe bass line beginning at :24 that makes you wonder, and then glorious guitar es at :44, and then those opening lyrics, "You know there ain't no street like ie / to make you feel so alone."

MATE ANTITUDE LICETOR

Non Compos Mentis was a band from Dallas, Texas, consisting of the brothers Caldwell and David Hill. They recorded just a handful of songs, none of them much known. So to discover these songs is a thrill, and the fact of their obscurity is sad but also gives you hope because human beings create such marvelous things. "Ultimate Orgasm" (1980) is a fierce and melodic song about, you know, suicide. "You don't need a girl, you don't need a boy / you don't need any miracle toy," the lyrics go, and there is the sleeve cover showing the woman with the gun to her head. The ending sounds like haunted metal. But better still is the B-side, "Twist the Blade," which explodes the usual categories (punk, post-punk, pop punk, etc.) and rattles around in your brain like a marble. This song too ends weirdly, like a machine revving up to explode. There are a few other scattered songs too, like "Quick to Compliment" and "Six Feet Under," but that first single from 1980 is so sharp that you feel the music zooming out of one decade and into another.

"Normals"

This, from a 1977 article about punk fashion:

Desiree Hunt of Hollywood came to the Whisky in a white silk shirt, black satin gloves ("I'm an expensive punk"), keychain earrings, heart-shaped glasses, jeans, black boots and a swastika pin attached to her neck scarf . . . "The swastika doesn't represent a thing about the past," she insists. "It's just something to shock the normals."

[Marylou Luther, "Shock Chic: The Punk Persuasion," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1977 p. E1.]

Nostalgia

Out of the disorder of the seventies came a barely disguised longing for the past. Was it a real or an imagined past? It doesn't matter. In movies of the "new Hollywood" this nostalgia was most obvious: American Graffiti, The Godfather, Chinatown, The Long Goodbye—a look backward, the past as an escape from the escapades, disasters, and high dramas of Vietnam, Watergate, the Saturday Night Massacre, U.K. unemployment, heat waves, racial violence, stagflation, the energy crisis, bussing violence, the Patty Hearst kidnapping, wage and price controls, the Pentagon Papers, Roe v. Wade, the New York City blackout, the Jonestown mass suicide, Three Mile Island, and the Iranian Hostage Crisis. Was it any wonder that the sources of punk were



Nostalgia in the punk era: New Musical Express, 1975

so deeply historical (Marlon Brando in the fifties, early British Invasion music, Phil Spector girl groups, fascism) as to be nostalgic?

Bands like the Ramones endured, but, remarkably, without "evolving" in the same short-lived Nuggets-type groups—disintegrated before their meaning became static enough to acquire the burden of predictability. Punk transformed that nostalgize other "failed" sixties bands—like those collected on Nuggets—had not survived long way that survivors from the sixties (the Beatles, the Stones) did into action of two basic sorts. Bands like the Sex Pistols-modelled on the often albums, synthesizer-free albums, etc.) seemed predetermined and inevitable. Bu their forays into diversity and experimentation (i.e., concept albums or thematic Searchers, Freddie and the Dreamers, the Merseybeats, and others—had everything Bob Dylan had become perfectly clear: They were established so fully that even ity. By 1975, the meaning of the Beatles, or the Stones, or Pink Floyd, Queen, or to do with the fact that they failed, in terms of the music "business" and longetive the release of the Ramones' first album. Fascination with certain sixties bands—the the emerging New York underground/punk music scene, a full five months before in November 1975, in the same issue as Charles Shaar Murray's extensive profile of "Remember Those Fabulous Sixties?" the New Musical Express asked on its cover

Punk's fuel was nostalgia, borne of the absurd and terrible circumstances of the seventies. By the mid-eighties, when the incoherence and contradictions of the sixties and seventies had been resolved under the banner of conservatism, punk had already gone through its hardcore phase and had itself become an

"Not exactly what you would consider melodic"

In January 1977, roughly seven months after the release of the Runaways' first alburr and two months after the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the UK" was released as a single the following letter to the editor appeared in the Los Angeles Times:

I'm concerned over Robert Hilburn and Richard Cromelin's article involving Kim Fowley and his all-girl/bad-boy music group, the Runaways. Why do worthless bands with nothing to say and musical arrangements not exactly what you would consider melodic attract publicity while good musicians are starving for deserved recognition? I'm not saying that the article wasn't well written but I'd rather that you spend your time concentrating on people who have something to offer the music world. You better get someone down [in] the typesetting room. The man keeps substituting the letter p for the j in junk rock. —J. P. Spain, Sepuiveda

In fact, there is more than an element of truth in the letter: The Runaways, charming as they were (*Oh boy, here it comes. I knew he hated The Runaways. —Ed.*), really did not have much to say and were lacking in melodic hooks. But that, of course was precisely the point. The cool detachment of the Runaways was in direct opposition to the earnest feminism of the late sixties and early seventies, when gender became—it had too, of course—no fun. The Runaways put the fun back. And they were not, exactly, melodic.

[J. P. Spain, "Punk Rock as Junk Rock," Los Angeles Times, January 16, 1977, p. T2.]

"Notes on the New American Cinema"

Before there was the DIY, underground, amateur movement that came to be called punk in music, there was something similar in cinema, the ideas of which were articulated in a journal called *Film Culture*, founded in 1955 by the Lithuanian-born filmmaker and writer Jonas Mekas. Among his many essays that championed the spirit of independent filmmaking, "Notes on the New American Cinema," from 1962, is the most forceful and accidentally predictive of a similar wave that would sweep music approximately ten years later. Two quotes:

Dan Drasin. Burton Brothers

In Sunday (1951), Dan Drasin's uninhibited camera, zooming in and out and around the action, caught the clash between the folk-singers and the police in New York with an immediacy and aliveness seldom seen in the documentary film or television. Drasin was greatly assisted by his ignorance of certain professional techniques which would have hampered his freedom. He came to cinema com-

1975), where open spaces suggest a sort of blank terror, and where the human form itself is the alien element. In an issue of *Stop! Magazine*, John Holmstrom said this:

Road Warrior is the first film to capture the real essence of punk... An underlying theme in this movie is the war between the hippies and the punks. The punks, led by Humongous and starring Wes, want the gasoline that the hippie tribe is hoarding. They kill and rape any hippies they meet up with, they torture them and burn them and get what they want. The hippies live in an armored compound that protects their school busses and gasoline, and wear long hair and robes. Mad Max saves a hippie to pick up some free gas, then joins the tribe after the punks kill his dog.

In truth it is just a movie, made by the right people at the right time. All meaning is imposed later, by writers like me.

[John Holmstrom, "Punxploitation!," Stop! Magazine #5, Dec/Jan, 1982/83, p. 14.]

Rocket from the Tombs, four sentences about

Periodically, listening to Rocket from the Tombs, who made music in and around Cleveland, Ohio, in 1974 and 1975, you feel like a knife fight has broken out in your speakers. If you happen to be listening to them while sitting in your basement, in the dark, or in a small shady barn on a farm in France, or in a train speeding across the high plains, you are forgiven if you flinch. And if you wonder, about two minutes into "30 Seconds over Tokyo"—which is hands-down the very best song by any group mentioned in passing or written about in depth in this entire book—if you wonder how in the world it is possible that such catastrophic music can mean so much to you, then you are not alone in wondering. David Thomas, Peter Laughner, Craig Bell, and Gene O'Connor ("Cheetah Chrome") recorded more than ten songs on tape, including "30 Seconds over Tokyo" and "Ain't It Fun," songs that pointed toward a future that punk would never reach because it became aware of itself too soon, which is the fault, really, of no one, except that you wish that punk had not clarified everything so quickly.

Rocket from the Tombs, two songs by

1. "Ain't it Fun": If there's any pop song that merits an entry with no words, this is it. However:

Recorded live—one of twelve tracks—to tape on February 18, 1975, at the

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According to band member Craig Bell, "We recorded it in our rehearsal I on West 4th St. It was a large space, maybe 20×50 , which suited our p poses considering the volume we played at."

The most heartbreaking moment of the song happens at the 3:11 mark Laughner, in a genuine plea that wipes out any lurking traces of irony, la "Oh God."

And then there is this:

Ain't it fun when you jus jus jus jus jus just can't find your tongue You stuck it way too deep inside of something that really stung

The song is confounding in other ways. For one thing, it suggests that (and, later, grunge) was, at its heart, an extension of the blues, fuele postmodern nihilism and speed that transformed its simple chords and tive lyrics into a teenage howl. Listening to "Ain't It Fun," it's no surprist the night before he died—at age twenty-one—Laughner would record, parents' home, an acoustic tape that contained numbers by Robert John.

Was punk's lament the result of a sort of pampered white alienationposed to the dirt-poor alienation—a potent result of racism—that chaized the great Black blues tradition? I suspect this is a question that punwould rather not ask, or else would dismiss as irrelevant. And yet, one can but wonder: Is something like "Ain't It Fun" borne out of a luxury that alienation to the status of art? Against the "Yeah, so what?" that you mithinking right now let me say this: It does matter. The slow guitar solos ong sample an American past that is impossible to ignore.

"Amphetemine": The sad thing about this song, sung by Peter Laughner, you hear your own possible demise in the five minutes and twenty-seven se that it takes to unfold. It is one of the best rock songs ever written, an recorded live in Cleveland on July 24, 1975, at the Piccadilly Inn, and the people talking and laughing in the background. It's hard to tell what this s trying to become: There are such moments of tenderness: "I was standing ledge of the bridge / staring down into the water's edge / it rolled back and it rolled away / don't know why that I feel this way / you got to come on / you got to come on down." But that's not ho song begins. It begins over the din of background conversation: "Take the player for a ride / he's never once been satisfied / thinks he owes some kidebt / it'll take him years to get over it." The drums come on like machine clearing the way for the push of guitars, and then a breather with delicate work, and then more vocals, and then a fiery and short guitar solo, and to

You wrote this entry on two separate occasions—separated only by about fifteen months—yet they seem decades apart. The first paragraph: Your children are still children. They love you as Dad. The forest behind your Michigan house is dying. The second paragraph, on a bitterly cold night in March 2008, your children in their rooms, older now, Barack Obama looking like he will be the Democratic nominee. Do they still love you as Dad? Yes and no. It's good, of course, that they no longer love you as they used to love you. Right? They should love others more than you. You hope this for your children—that they will detach. This is the right and proper thing for them to do. But this song makes you miss them. You never met Peter Laughner. For all you know, he was a jerk. You don't like to romanticize celebrity, even minor celebrity. That's why you hate rock concerts. You worship at no man's feet. No woman's. You want to be the one cheered, not the one cheering. And yet Laughner's voice on this song and those beautiful last fifty seconds transport you away from such bittersweet thoughts.

Rockwell, John

Although not as well known as Lester Bangs, James Walcott, Richard Meltzer, Robert Hilburn, and other critics who wrote about punk as it was emerging, John Rockwell contributed pieces to *The New York Times* in the mid-seventies that provided widespread national exposure to the scene. His writing also conferred a strange sort of legitimacy to some of the emerging bands—not that they wanted or needed such a thing. In the column "The Pop Life," as well as in many feature articles, Rockwell delineated the tremendously fuzzy and not-yet-defined contours of New York's underground music. In March 1975—a full eight months before Charles Shaar Murray's "Report on the Genus Punk" in the November 1975 issue of *New Musical Express*—Rockwell mentioned CBGB in the context of the "seedy little club[s]" that Patti Smith was playing at the time. "Patti Smith," he wrote, "must see herself as some sort of alien muse who has come down and captured the essence of the stylized punk defiance that is at the heart of rock music."

The following month, he described Lou Reed's image of "unstable, android-punk indifference." Rockwell was the first to mention the Ramones in the *Times* in May 1975, nearly a full year before the release of their debut album, and several months before James Walcott's piece "Ramones: Chord Killers" in the July 21 issue of *The Village Voice*. "The Ramones, a young rock quartet from Queens, have been playing here and there recently (at CBGB's earlier this week), and it's a lot of functions is yet another group in what has become a fixed New York pattern: black.

But what the Ramones offer is nonstop energy (based on double-time guitar strumming), a few clever hooks, and sudden, stop-and-start endings to their songs. For all their underground image, this is a band with obvious commercial potential."

In some ways, of course, it doesn't matter who the "first" New York journalists to cover the punk scene were. What's strange is the beautiful collision between punk's defiance and anarchy, and the staunch traditionalism of "the gray lady." Rockwell's prose was not as electric or impressionistic as that of Bangs and others, and it is precisely this disjunction between the anarchy of what he describes and the stylistic conservatism of *The New York Times* that transforms his articles into instances of jittery formalism. Art history is littered with stories of writers and artists and filmmakers who have produced their best and most shocking work not in total freedom, but rather within constraints, sometimes self-imposed. The discussion of punk within the constraints of *The New York Times* (as opposed to, say, *Creem*) produced a sort of supercharged tension. In Rockwell's columns, Lou Reed was Mr. Reed, Martina Weymouth was Miss Weymouth, Tom Verlaine was Mr. Verlaine. When this proper approach collided with the implied anarchy of punk, the result was a form of static that, like punk, was a small act of liberation.

[John Rockwell, "Patti Smith Plans Album with Eyes on Stardom," *The New York Times*, March 25, 1975; John Rockwell, "Lou Reed Concert at the Felt Forum Both Good and Bad," *The New York Times*, April 28, 1975; John Rockwell, "Speculation About Rock Spectacles," *The New York Times*, May 16, 1975, p. 24.]

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aints

The first album by Australia's the Saints is almost too good to be punk. Released in 1977, (Im) Stranded is, at its core, a fifties-style album disguised as punk. Formed in Brisbane in 1974, the Saints' early lineup included Chris Bailey, Ed Kuepper, Kym Bradshaw, and Ivor Hay. Early footage of the band from Australian television shows why they never really fit in with the emerging punk scene in the United States and the United Kingdom, as the band tears through "(I'm) Stranded" with barely any physical movement at all, as Bailey—laconic, bored looking, with cigarette in hand—comes off as a thinner version of David Thomas from Pere Ubu. But there is a radicalness in the anti-performance of it all, as if to underscore the fact that the music is fierce enough: Why create a spectacle on stage when the music is spectacle enough?

summer of 1977, they were interviewed in Gun Rubber, a Sheffield fanzine: scene was already hardening into its own strict categories of sound and style. In the they opened for the Ramones and Talking Heads at the Roundhouse, the punk By the time the Saints arrived in the United Kingdom in June 1977, where

Me: What do you think of the tour so far? And of the New Wave scene?

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Ed: The reception so far has been 50/50, some really great audiences and some too involved in fashion, which is superfluous. not so good like tonight. I think the New Wave thing has lost a lot, it's got

Me: You're not fashion conscious at all?

Ed: No, we don't care about all that, we play this music because it's what we've always played and we don't care who likes us, just because we've been named as a "punk" band doesn't mean that we're going to start dressing the part.

thought, was the absolute epitome of rock and roll . . . mostly done in the Fifties That sort of music, I thought, had never been really surpassed." with the likes of Bo Diddley, Eddie Cochran, Chuck Berry and people like that per has said, "but I think in a strange sort of way, my main influences was stuff so much as recuperating its lost energy. "It wasn't recognized at the time," Kuepthe Ramones, the Saints did not see themselves as breaking with the past musically made in June 1976, when it was recorded and mixed in about five hours. As with it themselves. They're what rock 'n' roll's all about. They move-fast, loud, very like the Ramones, but they're no take-off." According to Ed Kuepper, the single was Mark P. wrote that "this single is a brilliant effort. The Saints recorded and released They had received early positive reviews of their first single. In Sniffin' Glue,

album was a theory of something darker and fiercer than punk, in its adolescent now, in retrospect, is that the rock industry had no place for a song like that whose of-time destruction of "30 Seconds over Tokyo" and how the best punk songs are of punk disappear. "Nights in Venice" is even stranger; it reminds you in its end not humans, are playing the instruments, and all your theories about the "meaning alone" begins "(I'm) Stranded," and the song never lets up. You feel as if machines, violence, could ever imagine. doom-struck sound could not be recuperated by the marketplace. The Saints' first not necessarily the shortest ones. The song builds to annihilation, and what is clear ties as much as love it. "Like a snake calling on the phone / I've got no time to be In truth, the Saints—especially on their first, and best, album—assault the fif

Mary Perry, Sniffin' Glue: The Essential Punk Accessory. London: Sanctuary, 2000. loe Matera, Australian Guitar, 2004; Mark P., "Stranded with the Saints," October 1976, in [Ed Kuepper interviewed in Gun Rubber, August 1977, p. 11; Ed Kuepper interviewed by

expression of theory. They answered questions in deceptively simple band without guitars. A band that never released a record. Their i A punk band (Synth-punk? Punk-ELO? Techno-punk?) out of Los Ang (there was an earlier incarnation called the Tupperwares) until t Tomata du Plenty, Tommy Gear, K. K. Barrett, and Paul Roessler. From a 1977 interview with *Slash*:

Tomata: I would just say we make sounds

Slash: What will happen to Johnny Rotten?

Slash: Are you a "musical" band? Tomata: When he makes some money he'll probably get his

Gear: I personally don't like music per se

From a 1979 interview with New York Rocker

NYR: Or go video-disc.

recordings. That may be the standard in the future. TG: I don't know. It would be real exciting to release video be

From a 1979 article by Jon Savage:

Tomata: I think advertising is more exciting than the pro-

a week at Target Video doing promotional videos," Jon Savage wro mances, the Screamers performed not so much for the camera as tember [1978] saw them up north in San Francisco, Oakland to be sound, they are likely to remind you of nothing, except maybe Pe As documented by Target Video in the late seventies, in both live a in the YouTube era, that their work has the potential to reach unsu before music and video were linked together for mass audiences, i they seem to have sprung from some strange, undiscovered garden. In stage presence, they are likely to remind you of Devo or 7

edits; there is none of the fast cutting that would come to charac of fear!" Tomata screams. Most of the video is one long take be if you strayed too far. "Wow! What a show! One-hundred-and-t in 1978, "122 Hours of Fear," which recalls, distantly, Rocket f its distracted audience. More frightening yet is "Eva Braun," a "30 Seconds over Tokyo," is a soundtrack to the B-horror movie th The most remarkable of these are two videos filmed at Targo