Punk is… “Depending on who and where you are, “punk” can be a lifestyle; cosplay; design element; powerful ideal; lazy cliché; magical realism; badge of authenticity; pantomime social movement; withering mockery; ironclad conviction; lucrative career; vow of slovenly poverty; incubator of brilliance and/or mediocrity; rite of passage; riot of violence; ferocious hokeyness; suicide hotline; sales category; community glue; license to wallow; mass catharsis; a refuge for smart people and/or playground for dumb people; boisterous escapism; marketable nostalgia1; belligerent incompetence; self-satire (intentional or otherwise); assault on falseness; or adult-sized, psychic diapers that can be worn until death” (13).

Punk tried to crack the code of the music industry; hardcore never had that option. It would have been absurd for any major label to sign—or any radio station to play—loud, violent bands made up of loud, mentally ill people who gleefully “sang” about every possible taboo (15).

The headlining band played loud, aggressive music. At some point during their set, I shifted my gaze from stage to crowd. No one moved. No one did anything. I found myself surrounded by blank faces. Now it was the audience who were bluffing, and bluffing badly. I found myself wondering if music fans had always been so disengaged, if my own emotional investment in bands had blinded me to this mass disinterest. It was spooky… I can remember those earlier emotions, the way live music was like fresh Squeezed juice to the canned concentrate of a recording. But I can no longer feel them (20).

Audiences were (and are) part of punk’s sales pitch (20).

It is martial yet joyous, and oddly sensual. It looks like sexy propaganda. This book is full of good-looking young men striking poses for each other’s enjoyment (22).

Where do the ladies stand with all this sexy stuff? There are so few it’s hard to know (22).

“The generation of women in punk (13–30, mostly) are the hardest working, most ardent feminists/humanists I’ve ever met,” writes Schwartz. “Most women I know are not just dealing with their oppression as females, but also as people. This is a step beyond the liberation and feminism our mothers (bless them) fought for.” (22).

The tangible lures of eighties hardcore (photography, fashions) gave way to fuzzier bait, things like “community” and “communication” and “release,” all concepts peripheral to the theatrical art at the heart of the music (23).