

CALL FOR WRITERS: PopMatters is seeking writers with a passion for computer and video games, as well as:



Various Artists

Appetite for Deconstruction: A Punk Rockumentary [DVD]

(MVD)

US release date: 13 March 2007

by [Chris Robé](#)

[Email](#) [Print](#) [Comments \(0\)](#)

Minor Threat

"Ever get the feelin' you've been cheated?"—Johnny Rotten

On 14 January 1978, audience members eagerly awaited the Sex Pistols' appearance at San Francisco's Winterland Ballroom. The band that had sent England into a collective spasm a mere two years before had now conquered the US. Winterland, the band's first arena concert, signaled punk's official arrival into the mainstream, displacing a decade's worth of jam bands in the process. But even before the last echoes of feedback had dissipated, John Rotten's final words, delivered with Cheshire cat grin and metallic, Cockney inflection—"Ever get the feelin' you've been cheated?"—crystallized into an epitaph for not only the Sex Pistols' first and final arena show, but also for their entire phoenix-like career.

Punk purists often downplay the Sex Pistols' complicated and compromised origins, which shatter the accrued illusion that punk rock simply represents the most genuine form of white, working-class mass-culture to emerge during the post-industrial age.

Instead, bands like The Clash and Gang of Four are normally championed as the true godfathers of the British punk scene, armed with their left-wing politics and angular, non-radio-friendly aesthetics.

Although one does not want to deny the importance of the politicized, anti-commercial aspect of punk rock, the Sex Pistols represent the flipside of the same coin, where punk rock sold out even before it began. Manufactured as a publicity stunt by manager Malcolm McLaren, the Sex Pistols served as his attempt to repackage the youthful rebellion he saw at work during France's May '68 riots into a compact, easily sold item.

Yet the Pistols exceeded McLaren's expectations and control. While the band televised every taboo they could grab hold of—like saying "fuck" on national television and vomiting during an interview – they eventually found themselves, dismayed, on stage at Winterland. It is precisely these two punk traditions—the political versus mindless shock, the anti-corporate versus commoditized power—that collide against one another within *Appetite for Deconstruction*.

The very title of the DVD is an obvious nod to Guns N' Roses' *Appetite for Destruction* (1987). Yet aside from some not-so-clever wordplay that substitutes "deconstruction", the name of the tour the DVD is documenting, for "destruction", the links between a late '80s hair-metal band and the contemporary punk rock scene seem tenuous, at best. But to give the documentary credit, it does not pretend to shy away from a mindless celebration of spectacle as is noted within its opening scene where a motor-croser smashes face-first into a ramp, splitting his chin open. Yet the documentary also has a political mission, or at least so it says.

The Deconstruction Tour originated in 1999 as the brainchild of Dave Pollack, a roughneck alcoholic and promoter with a vision to draw together an international brigade of punk bands to tour across Europe. The tour organizers cast a wide net with a desire to attract youth who normally wouldn't attend underground punk shows. As one punk says, "It's like the WARP tour but without the assholes." Maybe. But the underlying goal of the tour is fueled by a noble intention to familiarize mainstream audiences not only with the sounds of punk, but also its



[POPSHOP](#)
[AMAZON](#)
[AMAZON UK](#)





Ice-T

**Popular Culture
in the Classroom
Teach, Think, Play
Conference**

**March 24-25, 2007
Teachers College
Columbia University
New York, NY**

Featuring:



Taylor
Mali

Art
Spiegelman



Renee
Hobbs

Françoise
Mullen



Danny Simmons

left-wing? politics. *Appetite for Deconstruction* documents the 2004-2005 tour and the mixed results that accompany it.

Many of the bands view their music as intimately political. Anti-Flag, The Slackers, Strike Anywhere, and The Movement announce their politics both between songs and within the lyrics themselves. The Movement summarizes most of these bands' attitude: "We are playing for the Communists, anarchists, socialists, anti-fascists, whatever, everybody who's trying to do something on the left-wing." As a result, the political punk bands see the Deconstruction Tour as a means to generate greater political awareness and collective involvement with various green, anti-global, pro-labor, anti-racist movements.

The problem, however, is the structure of the tour itself. Although politics might be discussed on stage, we do not see any political organization or awareness of it occurring. In the place of booths, speakers, rallies, and events that might harness the initial political awareness aroused during the sets, we watch audience members drink, stumble, smoke, flash, and give the camera the finger until finally passing out. The only spontaneous organization that we witness is The Slackers' construction of a bar. Mostly, we watch BMXers run up and down ramps, skateboarders 360 in half-pipes, and motor-crossers rev their engines as they go airborne. This is not to claim that there is anything wrong with hedonistic excess, but the fact that the documentary wants to justify it under a rhetoric of politics seems delusional at best, and disingenuous at worst.

In many ways, the Deconstruction tour shares an ethos with films like *Jackass: The Movie* (2002) and *Jackass Number Two* (2006). All are cultural heirs of the LA punk-BMX-skateboard scene of the '80s. Yet Johnny Knoxville and his gang seem much more in touch with their inner nihilist than most of the bands of the Deconstruction Tour. The Jackassers disrupt the straight world with their Generation Y "happenings", such as defecating in a store's display toilet, torturing their own bodies by lighting their testicles on fire, and whiling away their time by inventing ingenious household contraptions that catapult them into walls. They are the true inheritors of the Sex Pistols' legend that sees politics as irrelevant and even worse: a bore, and really understand the chant, "No Future", as each stunt pushes them closer towards inevitable incarceration or death.

But in the process, they create a strangely affectionate bond in their mutually recognized alienation as white, working-class youth who have nothing better to do than look for the next cheap thrill together. This is the very bond that also defines the bands of the Deconstruction Tour, but instead of searching for the next prank, they play music. Yet the documentary lamely attempts to obscure this fact by either having interviewees claim that half the audience is composed of women who we never really see or cite political platitudes to justify binge drinking and the random destruction of a hotel room. But the images themselves don't lie: a bunch of working-class white boys are having one hell of a good time together.

The other problem with the documentary, and the tour as a whole, is their ambitious desire to appeal to the mainstream. To do so, the documentary employs a glossy, MTV quick-editing aesthetic. This produces a highly orchestrated and contrived feel as if one had attended a press conference rather than a punk show. The style represents the antithesis of punk's cardinal D.I.Y. mantra of anti-professionalism and spontaneity: "Here's a chord. Here's another chord. Here's a third chord. Now form a band." This problem also translates into most of the bands' music, which sounds remarkably and repetitively similar. If anything, the bands have learned to play all-too-well, as if trained from the same sourcebook. This might help explain the only interesting formal feature of the documentary: it suddenly interrupts various bands' sets with interviews and babble, implicitly acknowledging how dull much of the music is on its own.

However, this is not to say that all the bands of the Deconstruction Tour are a bore. The best bands are the ones that have embraced the musical developments that have occurred during the last 15 years and incorporated them into their sound. The best band by far is the Beatsticks. Both of their songs, "I Don't Care as Long as You Sing" and "Panic", although rather different in terms of style, possess a subtle sense of sound dynamics as they modulate back and forth from crescendo to minimalism. Equally good is Tribute to Nothing's "Breaking Your Fall" which, for some unknown reason, has been relegated to the "extras" section of the DVD. Their complicated rhythms and guitar lines are reminiscent of Unwound. Additionally, the song has an excellent bridge that combines a heavy-metal infused riff with a No Wave spirit of improvisation. Also exiled to the "extras" is Captain Everything's "The Bomb Song" that follows in the line of Green Day with its well-harmonized vocal melodies and snappy rhythms.

But if any band truly catches the punk spirit, it is Mad Sin with their song "Sell Your Soul", a rockabilly-punk extravaganza. Decked out in Mohawk pompadours, leather jackets, leopard spandex, and nose rings, Mad Sin ransacks the rock and punk traditions to create an energy and irony that all the other bands lack. The lead singer seems to care less that he is far too overweight to do the David Lee Roth high-kicks and Mick Jagger chicken-strutting that he attempts. Midway into the song as one guitarist falls to the floor and runs in circles a la Angus Young, the lead singer gets down on all fours as the bassist uses his rump as a foot support

It
C
A
M
R
T
H
L

while planting his stand on the front of the stage. While the bassist engages in a dexterous solo, the lead singer undercuts the moment by ad-libbing the lyrics from The Clash's "Should I Stay or Should I Go?"

By shamelessly tarting-up the punk tradition, Mad Sin most directly addresses the tenuous position that punk skirts on the Deconstruction Tour by drawing commodity and artifice to the forefront of their performance and spitting on the sense of authenticity that most of the other bands uncritically embrace. Thankfully, the DVD's menu separates the band's performances from the documentary proper, so one can highlight the tour's best moments while fantasizing about the possibilities it might have taken had the bands only better heeded Johnny Rotten's departing words.

["Appetite for Deconstruction"](#) MySpace



Appetite for Deconstruction -- trailer

RATING: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

— 12 March 2007

[DELICIOUS](#) [DIGG](#) [REDDIT](#) [NEWSVINE](#)



**all the girls pose
the same for pictures**

advertising | about | contributors | submissions | Hosted by OCS Solutions
© 1999-2007 PopMatters.com. All rights reserved.
PopMatters.com™ and PopMatters™ are trademarks of PopMatters Media, Inc. and PopMatters Magazine.