

Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung Study Guide

**Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung by Lester
Bangs**

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Plot Summary

This book is a collection of essays by the renowned rock critic Lester Bangs that spans almost his entire career from 1970 right up to his death in 1982. These essays are primarily rock criticism, but they are not strictly limited to that. Bangs eschews the traditional method of criticism where the critic is a passive observer and interjects many personal details into the text.

Throughout the book it becomes clear that Bangs believes rock and roll should be about passionate emotion instead of musical virtuosity. When Bangs is still in his teens he finds this sort of simplistic but emotional rock in bands like Question Mark, the Mysterians, and the Count Five. Somewhat later, Bangs embraces the Velvet Underground and Iggy Pop and the Stooges. Bangs makes the Velvet Underground's lead singer Lou Reed his personal hero. By the end of Bangs' career, he is mostly devoted to punk bands like Richard Hell and the Voidoids, the Ramones, and the Clash. In most cases, the members of these bands were not incredibly talented musicians, but Bangs finds something more authentic in them than the more stylized bands such as Led Zeppelin that dominated the 1970s.

A whole section of the book is devoted to Lou Reed and Bangs' conflicted relationship with him, and this remains a source of constant discussion up to the very end of the book. Bangs eventually decides that Reed is no longer his hero and has become a child with a drug problem. However, Bangs still admires much of the music Reed produces after this, going so far as to at least halfway seriously declare one of his albums that was widely considered unlistenable to be the greatest album ever made. Despite all their arguments, Bangs believes Reed never meant him any harm and did a huge favor to him by telling him the truth.

As much as this book is about music, it is also about Bangs himself. Bangs documents many of his exploits, sometimes within his rock criticism but sometimes in stand alone essays. Most of these stories involve the use of a great deal of alcohol and illicit drugs. Even more frequently, Bangs discusses his romantic and sexual frustrations. Bangs portrays himself as very unlucky in love. To Bangs the point of most of these stories is how a person deals with the pain of existence.



Two Testaments

Two Testaments Summary and Analysis

This book is mostly a collection of music reviews by Lester Bangs, one of the most famous rock critics to ever live. Bangs goes beyond music, however, to describe many of the most intimate details of his life.

The essay "Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung" is written from the point of view of a ninety-year-old man (likely meant to be an older version of Bangs himself) explaining an alternative history of rock and roll to his grandchildren. The old man begins the story by explaining how great music was in 1965, in particular the Yardbirds. The Yardbirds were a British rock band that launched the careers of guitarists Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, and Jimmy Page and by the end of the 1960s transformed into Led Zeppelin. Bangs makes it clear that he does not believe this was a positive development by having the old man tell his grandchildren about Page being assassinated at a show in 1973, which is two years after the article was actually written. Bangs also bemoans the turn popular music took towards spirituality and politics in the late-1960s, preferring instead the rawer sounds of the middle part of the decade.

While the essay starts off as a story about the Yardbirds, the narrator quickly changes the subject to Count Five, a band he considers to be derivative of the Yardbirds. At first, the narrator agonizes over buying Count Five's album "Psychotic Reaction" because it is mediocre, but he eventually comes to love it as one of the best albums he ever heard. Bangs compares the experience of listening to such an amazing record to a first orgasm as they are both incredibly transformational. The narrator claims that Count Five released four other albums aside from "Psychotic Reaction" and explains the merits of each and how other rock critics reacted to their grungiest album, "Carburetor Dung." However, none of these later albums ever existed. This deception is likely a method for Bangs to compare himself with the "Rolling Stone" critic Jon Landau who dismisses "Carburetor Dung" and Bangs' magazine "Creem" for positively reviewing similar albums. The narrator concludes the chapter by saying that some people become famous in their own time while others are remembered later, which is likely how Bangs saw himself and "Creem" in relation to Landau and "Rolling Stone."

The second essay in the book is a review of Van Morrison's second album "Astral Weeks." Bangs writes that when it was released in 1968, he was in a very bad emotional state, and the album became a major source of hope even as the dreams of the 1960s were crashing down. Bangs marvels at Morrison's ability to take a simple phrase and repeat it until it becomes something beautiful. While Bangs is confident that "Astral Weeks" is a masterpiece, he also hesitates to describe its meaning because it is too mystical to be easily explained.

Bangs spends almost half the review on the song "Madame George," which Bangs believes is about a transsexual man who cannot find love although Morrison denies it.



Bangs argues that the song challenges the listener to love people for their failings and fragility, which Bangs believes is destructive because a person would absorb all the pain he encounters. Bangs is suggesting that love is a very dangerous thing because it makes people vulnerable to the universal pain of life.



Blowing It Up, Part One

Blowing It Up, Part One Summary and Analysis

In "Of Pop and Pies and Fun," Bangs defends the band the Stooges and, in particular, their front man Iggy Stooze (also known as Iggy Pop). Other critics say that the Stooges were musically simplistic and their lyrics, along with Pop's stage show, juvenile. Bangs admits as much, but argues that the Stooges' music and show were a natural reaction to the chaos of the late-1960s. Furthermore, rock bands had become pretentious and many of them deserved to get pined in the face as Alice Cooper had at a recent show. Rock crowds had become convinced that bands were supposed to be objects of worship when in fact they were no better, and may in fact be worse, than their fans. Bangs argues that Pop's onstage antics such as jumping out into the crowd breaks down this wall between musician and listener, which leads to a healthy interaction between the two. This behavior combined with the intentional simplicity of the Stooges' music makes a more authentic and enjoyable rock and roll than the vast majority of what more popular acts are doing.

In the essay's second section, Bangs' digresses to explain some of the recent history of music. Bangs explains that the simplistic rock of groups like Question Mark and the Mysterians and the Yardbirds transformed into arty bands like Led Zeppelin instead of developing a free style as Bangs believes they should have. According to Bangs, this style had already been developed by jazz musicians in the 1950s, but few rock musicians wanted to pick up on it. The major exception in Bangs' eyes was the Velvet Underground, but as the 1960s drew to a close almost no groups were left to drive the style forward. The Stooges stepped into this void, and Bangs' believes they were able to do so because they barely knew how to play their instruments, so they had not learned many bad habits. Bangs also finds this musical illiteracy truer to the true form of rock and roll, which is naturally adolescent.

After establishing their place in rock history, Bangs proceeds to review their second album "Fun House." Bangs admits that on the first and second listens he hated it as being just repetitive noise. However, after listening to it a third time, Bangs discovers that while it is musically loose, there are no loose ends. It is also complex enough to warrant multiple listenings. Bangs appreciates the transition of Pop's voice from an imitation of Mick Jagger on the previous album to a unique voice like that of Bob Dylan or Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground. Bangs rates the first half of the album, especially the "relentlessly driving" "T.V. Eye," much more highly than the second half. However, he writes that he even warmed to "L.A. Blues," which he first dismissed as so much noise. Bangs concludes that like all great acts, the Stooges are making jokes to their listeners that play off all their darkest fears and fantasies.



Blowing It Up, Part Two

Blowing It Up, Part Two Summary and Analysis

The essay "James Taylor Marked for Death" begins with a discussion of the British band the Troggs, best known for their hit "Wild Thing." Bangs writes that the band derived its name from the word troglodyte meaning, in this case, caveman. Less plausibly, Bangs claims that the name was inspired by a group of British youth who were actually living in caves at the time of the band's formation, which leads Bangs to wish that the band would have inspired a caveman movement in America. Bangs deeply admires the Troggs for making both incredibly sexual music but also surprisingly innocent love songs. Thinking about the band's songs, sends Bangs into a lengthy discussion of some of his adolescent sexual exploits, which is likely meant as a tribute to the power of the Troggs' music. Following this, Bangs praises the song "Give It to Me" because he believes it reflects a democratic sexual relationship where the man is concerned with giving the woman an orgasm. This stands in contrast to Bangs' earlier reference to the Troggs as a chauvinist band.

Bangs moves on to discuss "Wild Thing," which he praises as a song that forced listeners to go out and live life instead of just being passive. According to Bangs, while "Wild Thing" was a celebration of rock and roll, too many songs are tributes to it. Bangs blames this on the narcissism of the Baby Boomers, who in the 1960s believed their every act was of great importance, which caused the music and the musicians to become too serious. This leads Bangs to question whether a song as simple as "Wild Thing" could be made anymore, and he determines that it could only be made somewhere unexpected like Arizona or Detroit. Bangs argues that it is also harder for an outsider to break into mainstream, but once a group have attained stardom, they do not need to do anything except be stars, which leads them to treat their fans with contempt. The worse examples of this Bangs calls I-Rock because it is entirely self-absorbed. I-Rock's main representative is James Taylor, who Bangs fantasizes about murdering. Bangs argues that in order to make rock and roll good again, musicians have to stop trying to respect older styles, realize that rock is just a joke, and play music appropriate for a party.

Section three of the essay begins with a discussion of the Troggs' song "66-5-4-3-2-1," which Bangs believes is a countdown to sexual penetration. Bangs argues that the subject is hard to discern because of radio censorship. Bangs then moves on to "I Just Sing," which leads him into a fantasy of Troggs' lead singer Reg Presley living out the lyrics. Presley takes his girlfriend to the drive-in, where she attempts to break up with him, but then he gets high with her, and they make love and stay together. In Bangs' fantasy the girl still ends the relationship with Presley but just as the Troggs are becoming famous.

Bangs begins the essay "Do the Godz Speak Esperanto" by discussing ESP records, which he believes is the most underground record label in the country. Bangs writes that



he was first attracted to the label by the 1960s psychedelic band the Fugs, but they quickly left the label. Because he believed in the label, Bangs purchases a record by the Godz, which he argues is so bad that it "gets stars for lousiness" (Bangs, pp. 85). Bangs believes the Godz are great musicians because although they cannot play well, they enjoy making the sounds they do for their own sake. Although Bangs finds the Godz' second album, "Godz Two," somewhat more conventional than the first, he enjoys observing their maturation process and compares them in this respect to the Velvet Underground and the Stooges. However, Bangs believes their third album, "The Third Testament," is a complete descent into acid-rock cliches. Bangs concludes that even if they are never able to rediscover their originality, the Godz' music changed the world.



Creemwork—Frauds, Failures, and Fantasies Part One

Creemwork—Frauds, Failures, and Fantasies Part One Summary and Analysis

In "Chicago at Carnegie Hall, Volumes I, II, III, & IV" Bangs mocks this album as being better as several pieces of plastic than as a work of music. Bangs claims that it sounds just like Chicago's studio albums except with long and pointless solos. Bangs also realizes that it will be immensely popular, which he laments.

In "Black Oak Arkansas: Keep the Faith" Bangs admits that he liked the band's first album when he first heard it. Bangs argues that "Keep the Faith" is far too serious and could be used to make people immune from Communist torture and brainwashing.

The essay "White Witch" recommends the album because the band are all sexually-frustrated "dorks," who sound better than Black Oak Arkansas and Deep Purple. However, it is difficult how seriously Bangs' is in making this recommendation.

Bangs begins the essay "John Coltrane Lives" by describing a recent practice session with his band and discovering an alto saxophone in the apartment, which reminds him of John Coltrane. Bangs attempts to play the saxophone but can only make a terrible screech. Still, Bangs takes the instrument home with him and dreams of playing it beautifully. When Bangs starts playing the saxophone the next day, it causes a dispute with his elderly landlady. Eventually the landlady leaves, but when Bangs starts playing again with his band mates, she returns. This time, Bangs, inspired by Coltrane, refuses to stop playing and chases her back to her apartment with the saxophone. He is then arrested by a police officer who lives in the building and charged with assault.

In "The Guess Who: Live at the Paramount," Bangs asserts that "The Guess Who is God" (Bangs, pp. 112). Bangs explains that the first time he saw the Guess Who live he was offended by their most famous song "American Woman," but he then realized that it was exactly their willingness to offend their audience that makes them so great.

In his review of James Taylor's "One Man Dog," Bangs surprisingly defends the album. Bangs writes that it is easy to listen to and does not attempt to be anything more than simple songs about his dog, his love, and his neighborhood.

In "The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies" Bangs complains that television stations do not play enough old horror films, which he considers rock and roll movies. Bangs then writes an imagined *Los Angeles Times* article from 1976 detailing an uprising against television stations. The rebels who seize the stations play all manner of different content, but one station in Los Angeles attempts to play every movie ever made. Bangs writes that he appreciates these terrible



old horror movies because they are fun and good taste is just a restriction meant to keep people from enjoying themselves. The worst, which in this case means best, of all these movies for Bangs is "The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies." Bangs then proceeds to describe the plot of the film, which is almost completely incomprehensible and seems to consist of many musical numbers. Bangs wonders if the music was written for the movie or the other way around. Bangs is completely aware that the film is pointless and silly, but he finds immense pleasure in it anyway.

Bangs begins "Jethro Tull in Vietnam" by describing how popular the band Jethro Tull has become without the benefit of a radio single. Bangs writes that the band's drummer Barrie Barlow claims that the band has no influences and is completely original, which Bangs finds arrogant. Furthermore, Bangs believes the lyrics on their new album, "Thick as a Brick" are self-righteous. However, Bangs does allow that the band puts on an amazing stage show, which is all that is needed to be successful at this point. After playing an album of Vietnamese folk music, Bangs believes it sounds exactly like Jethro Tull and claims to travel to Saigon to meet with President Thieu to discuss the discovery. In this imagined exchange, Thieu tells Bangs that he does not like Jethro Tull because it is frozen in time like Vietnamese folk music.



Creemwork—Frauds, Failures, and Fantasies Part Two

Creemwork—Frauds, Failures, and Fantasies Part Two Summary and Analysis

In "Screwing the System with Dick Clark" Bangs describes his meeting with the longtime "American Bandstand" host Dick Clark. Bangs marvels at Clark's ability to speak off the cuff and appreciates his opinion that the current generation of young people are very conformist despite their claims to originality. Clark tells Bangs that glam rock, which Bangs refers to as fag-rock, is mostly just a show to shock people, and it will pass. Still, Clark does not see bubblegum pop returning to prominence. Clark concludes that he will be around because he does not take stands on what is good or bad music but just promotes popular music.

In "Slade: Sladest" Bangs tells about hearing this album at a dinner party, and it leading him and others to harassing attendees at a Masons function. Bangs considers this behavior to be in keeping with the attitude of Slade and makes the album worthwhile. Bangs writes the latter half of the review in an imitation of a British cockney accent.

"My Night of Ecstasy with the J. Geils Band" begins with Bangs and the staff of Creem trying to figure how to cover the J. Geils Band concert. During the interview with the band, they invite Bangs to write on stage at the concert as they play the encore. When Bangs actually attempts to do this, he types nothing but gibberish and feels ridiculous about the experience.

"Johnny Ray's Better Whirlpool" is a review of a David Bowie concert, which Bangs believes was just an attempt by Bowie to appropriate black culture. Most of the opening acts at the concert, like Luther Vandross and Ava Cherrt, were black. Bangs is unimpressed with Bowie's new music and even less so with his stage show. Bangs goes so far as to compare Bowie's performance to a Vegas show with black people for props.

In "Barry White: Just Another Way to Say I Love You" Bangs recounts attending a Barry White concert and coming away very bored with his performance. In his review of White's new record, Bangs marvels that he has found yet another way to sing the word "love," but this is not meant as praise as Bangs concludes by comparing White's love songs to rape.

Bangs begins "Kraftwerkfeature" by arguing that the natural progression of rock and roll is to turn over to machines as the German electronic band Kraftwerk has done. In Bangs' interview with Kraftwerk, he asks the band if at a certain it is as if the machines are playing them instead of the other way around, and the band agrees. Kraftwerk also claims that they are one of the first truly German bands since World War II, and they

take their inspiration from mechanical nature of the German language and the machines of German industry.

In Bangs review of David Bowie's album "Station to Station," he claims that unlike other critics he never accused Bowie of attempting to be black on his previous album "Young Americans." However, this is a key example of Bangs' tendency to change his mind as that is precisely what he accused Bowie of in the essay "Johnny Ray's Better Whirlpool." Bangs defends "Station to Station" as Bowie's finest album to date because even if the lyrics are still pretentious, it is an amazing guitar album.



Slaying the Father

Slaying the Father Summary and Analysis

In the first excerpt from Bangs' "Untitled Notes on Lou Reed, 1980," Bangs praises Reed for creating music with the Velvet Underground that was both physically and mentally stimulating.

In the essay "Let Us Now Praise Famous Death Dwarves" Bangs lists a number of ways in which Lou Reed is unique with the most important being that he is willing to be interviewed again by Bangs even after reading the first one. Bangs writes that Lou Reed is his hero because "he stands for all the most fucked things that I could ever possibly conceive of" (Bangs, pp. 171). Bangs and Reed begin their interview by combatively insulting each other and Bangs claiming Bowie imitates Reed, while Reed dismisses Iggy Pop as being derivative. This leads to an argument over stimulants. Bangs then asserts that Reed's music is about decadence, which Reed denies. At the conclusion of the interview, Bangs comes to believe that Reed is simply a child and is no longer his hero.

At the outset of "How to Succeed in Torture Without Really Trying," Bangs claims that this is not another round of fighting with Lou Reed. Bangs proceeds to discuss Reed's album "Metal Machine Music," which is all noise music, and is disliked by almost everyone except Bangs. In their interview, Reed tells Bangs that he thinks the album is one of the best things he has done, but it should have been released with a disclaimer. Bangs tells Reed that "Metal Machine Music" is authentic but a terrible career move. Reed claims that there are numerous layered allusions to classical music in the album, but Bangs does not fully believe him. Reed then proceeds to tell Bangs that there are frequencies that can be used as a weapon and some of them are on the album. Two days following the interview, Reed calls Bangs and tells him he is glad "Metal Machine Music" was released without a disclaimer and that his fans should be grateful for it. Bangs concludes the article arguing that whenever Reed makes good music almost no one likes it, but everyone likes his terrible music.

"The Greatest Album Ever Made" is a list of seventeen different reasons Bangs likes "Metal Machine Music." Bangs believes it is the ultimate evolution in using feedback, it is a great way to treat a hangover or clear your mind, and a great weapon against landlords. It is also an album inspired by amphetamines, which Bangs jokingly advocates as a way to solve all the world's problems. Bangs maintains that the album is like the musical version of a horror movie in its effects on the senses and emotions. Finally, Bangs believes that "Metal Machine Music" is the most masculine album Reed has ever made, making Bangs feel more powerful.

In the second excerpt from "Untitled Notes on Lou Reed, 1980," Bangs suggests that there is a powerfully violent tendency in Reed's music, which Bangs appreciates.



Slaying the Children, Burying the Dead, Signs of Life Part One

Slaying the Children, Burying the Dead, Signs of Life Part One Summary and Analysis

In "Iggy Pop: Blowtorch in Bondage" Bangs reviews a recent performance of Pop at the Palladium, which he says was excellent. However, Bangs writes that Pop's highly physical performance hints at Pop's isolation. Bangs describes a 1974 Stooges concert in Detroit where Pop was beaten up by a biker in the audience and then had death threats made on the band from the biker gang. Bangs wonders if such a maniacal performance does not reveal a deep sickness in Pop as well as his audience. Bangs concludes that Pop's performances are so authentic that they are the most alive things he has ever seen but also some of the most terrifying.

In "I Saw God and/or Tangerine Dream" Bangs decides to get intoxicated on cough syrup and attend a Tangerine Dream with a laser show at Avery Fisher Hall in New York City. Bangs describes the crowd as crude and somewhat stupid. While the concert bores Bangs, most attendees are transfixed by it. As Bangs is leaving, he imagines the other attendees as homeless "shopping bag ladies," suggesting that he views them as pitiful and possibly mentally ill.

In "Where Were You When Elvis Died" Bangs writes that it is hard for him to see Elvis as tragic because he took his fans for granted and became very secretive yet powerful, which causes Bangs to liken Elvis to the Pentagon. Bangs describes hearing the news and telling some Latin men about it who did not seem to care. This indicates to Bangs that rock is no longer the one dominant style of music. Bangs contends that Elvis' main contribution to music was his overt sexual energy, which eventually spilled over into the 1960s. Bangs concludes that Elvis was the last musician that everyone loved and that musical culture will continue to fragment further.

"Peter Laughner" is an essay written on Laughner's death. Laughner was a friend of Bangs as well as a rock musician and writer. Bangs writes that whenever he was with Laughner they were both intoxicated almost the entire time. Laughner was told by a doctor to stop abusing drugs but continued to do so. Bangs eventually tells Laughner that he is killing himself to imitate Lou Reed and Tom Verlaine of Television. Bangs believes that Laughner bought into a rock culture that celebrates death, and Bangs concludes by denouncing that culture. Bangs admits in the essay that he has some of Laughner's death obsession, which seems somewhat prophetic as Bangs died of drug related causes about four years after this essay was written.

"The Clash" is a lengthy, three-part essay Bangs wrote for a British music journal in 1977. At the beginning, Bangs argues that rock had turned bad in 1968 and mostly continued to decline since then. However, the advent of punk rock in 1976 brought forth



a number of bands which made buying records interesting again, but still none of these bands really seemed to care about anything until the Clash. Bangs believes the Clash are the only punk band with strong convictions about making a better world, which makes them more interesting than other punk bands. Once on tour with the Clash, Bangs finds British punk fans to be far more gentle than they are rumored to be in America. Bangs is also pleased to discover that the Clash practice what they preach by talking to their fans and even letting them stay in their rooms. After the second show Bangs watches, he returns with the band to the hotel where they get into a food fight and their manager lights Bangs' hair on fire. Bangs begins to believe that the Clash and this tour are really everything that rock and roll has always promised but never delivered. This feeling is reinforced when Bangs tells lead singer Joe Strummer the last two shows had been below expectations and Strummer wishes Bangs had said something earlier, revealing an honesty Bangs finds refreshing.

Bangs begins part two by describing how lately he feels foreign in America but feels at home right now in England. Bangs then accompanies the Clash to a disco, which reminds Bangs of everything he hates in America. Bangs soon discovers that the band members do not have groupies, which just adds to Bangs' opinion that they really believe in the values they preach. Even though his three days on tour with the Clash are over, Bangs decides to stay on longer because he is enjoying his time so much. Bangs writes that the audiences are almost solely there for the Clash, so opening band Richard Hell and the Voidoids mostly get ignored or spit upon, despite being very good in their own right. When Bangs talks to Clash fans, they never mention politics even though the Clash are known as a political band. After the show, Bangs and the band run into some Teds, an English subculture that attempts to maintain the style of Edwardian England. Bangs finds the Teds interesting as a group backed up to extinction by British society, which Bangs sees as a symptom of societal illness.

Section three of the essay begins with a quote from the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg about the level of hypocrisy in America. This quote sets the stage for a scene that Bangs suggests makes the Clash hypocrites. After a show, the band's driver Mickey gets into a fight with a young fan because the fan stained his jacket, and while Mickey verbally and physically attacks the fan, the Clash (and Bangs) do nothing. Bangs realizes that when the Clash get into food fights or wreck hotel rooms, it is working people like the fan who have to clean up the mess. Bangs confronts the band about what happened, and at first they write off as good fun but eventually do feel bad about it. Still, if the Clash continue to grow in popularity, Bangs knows that they cannot remain as close to their fans as they are presently. Bangs concludes that punk represents the possibility that if people are given the freedom to do what they want, they will do something interesting in good, and he saw a great deal of that while traveling with the Clash, even if it was overshadowed by one ugly incident.



Slaying the Children, Burying the Dead, Signs of Life Part Two

Slaying the Children, Burying the Dead, Signs of Life Part Two Summary and Analysis

In "Richard Hell: Death Means Never Having to Say You're Incomplete" Bangs argues that Richard Hell's style of punk rock is necessary because he still feels things in a world where most people do not. Bangs writes that Hell feels a need to implode because of the frustrations of communicating in this world. Bangs quotes Hell from a 1976 interview saying that he only feels comfortable in his sleep and that he laughs because his emotions have died. Bangs likes Hell's music, but is disturbed by the profound sadness he sees in Hell's music and personality. In their interview, Hell tells Bangs that he deeply resents being thought of as a poser by other critics. Furthermore, Hell affirms the importance of both self-hatred and narcissism in music. Hell believes self-hatred is important because it forces people to find something important about living, and narcissism allows person to reinvent himself and become his own hero. According to Hell, this ability of a person to remake himself is the message of "Blank Generation," his most popular song. Hell asserts that habit is all that keeps him from committing, which leads Bangs to condemn this destructive attitude and affirm life along with Hell's genius at diagnosing its problems.

"Growing Up True Is Hard to Do" is a review of the Bob Seger album "Stranger in Town." Bangs contends that while the album is lyrically honest like most of Seger's work, it is just like everything else on the radio musically. Bangs attributes this to Seger "selling out," but is not sure he can blame him because Seger has worked so hard over the years.

Bangs tackles the issue of racism in punk music in the essay "The White Noise Supremacists." Bangs is surprised by the level of racism in punk because it seems to be a music about renouncing power and being different instead of using power against people who are different. One of the few black musicians in the punk scene is the Voidoids' rhythm guitarist Ivan Julian, and he tells Bangs that people always seem to find ways to divide and hate each other. Bangs rejects the idea that punk is fascist because some bands used symbols like swastikas, insisting that this use was almost always for pure shock or irony. However, Bangs realizes that he used to say words like "nigger" frequently as a way of attacking what he saw as hippie and liberal pretension, but he has come to regret it. Bangs argues that a stronger form of racism started to form in the 1970s as rock moved from its blues roots to being an almost completely white music. Bangs recounts a recent incident when he referred to a band as "niggers" in front of a black couple, and it makes him feel trapped between bigotry and liberal guilt, both of which he despises. Bangs concludes that punk crossed the line into outright racism some time ago, but people keep crossing it because they think it is fun.



In "Sham 69 Is Innocent!" Bangs recommends the new album by Sham 69, a British punk band whose fans are reportedly very violent. Presumably in an imitation of the anger and energy of Sham 69's music, Bangs rants about a number of different issues and ends every sentence with an exclamation point.

In "New Year's Eve" Bangs complains that the holiday just raises people's expectations for the future to an unreasonable level. Bangs believes that things cannot get better as they must either stay the same or decay, so New Year's Eve must always be a bad night. Bangs then proceeds to recount the happenings of the past thirteen New Year's Eves. Most of the nights involve Bangs consuming a cocktail of drugs and alcohol and attempting to have sex but usually ending up sexually frustrated. On the previous year's New Year's Eve, Bangs met three different women but did not end up having sex with any of them. Bangs argues that every person has done things just as degrading on New Year's Eve before and will again this year because everyone is mad that they keep getting older but still did not accomplish everything they wanted to in the last year.

In "Otis Rush Mugged by an Iceberg" Bangs wholeheartedly recommends Rush's Cobra recordings from 1956 to 1958. Bangs admits that the themes of the songs are standard in the blues world, but he insists that the guitar work is powerful enough to carry the album.

"Thinking the Unthinkable About John Lennon" is Bangs' ruminations on Lennon's 1980 death. In it, Bangs rails against many of Lennon's fans who insisted that he was something more than human. Bangs writes that many of those mourning for Lennon are actually mourning for a time period, the 1960s, that is passed and cannot come again, and so in some sense are mourning for themselves.

In a "Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise" Bangs attempts to explain why some people like certain kinds of noisy music. Bangs suggests that some people enjoy it precisely because others do not. Bangs then lists what he considers to be some of the better noise songs and albums including "L.A. Blues" by the Stooges, "Metal Machine Music" by Lou Reed, and "Vincebus Eruptum" by Blue Cheer who are often considered the first heavy metal band.



Unpublishable Part One

Unpublishable Part One Summary and Analysis

"Fragments, 1976-1982" is a series of random notes Bangs wrote on a variety of subjects. In two of them, Bangs writes about he and his friends hate answering the telephone. Bangs describes himself as more social than most of his friends, who all seem almost completely isolated, but not by much. For instance, Bangs relates the anxiety caused by a simple trip to a convenience store. One of the shorter pieces seems to be a pep talk Bangs wrote to convince himself that he was not yet old at thirty. In the last short piece, Bangs urges readers to read authors who respect them and think for themselves.

At the beginning of "Notes on PiL's Metal Box, 1980" Bangs wonders if Johnny Rotten's (also known as John Lydon) music is justified as the record of a ruin civilization or if it's just juvenile nastiness. Bangs suggests that it does not matter because his new band PiL's latest record "Metal Box" expresses exactly how lonely Bangs, even if he does not like that feeling.

In an excerpt from the 1980 essay "All My Friends Are Hermits" Bangs describes desperately wanting to have sex with a woman in an extremely primitive setting. Bangs wants to have sex with her surrounded by death as a rebuke to death itself.

In "Review of Peter Guralnick's *Lost Highway: Journeys of & Arrivals of American Musicians*" Bangs writes that the book is a chronicle of musicians who in many ways were destroyed by their dreams. Bangs describes the book as being marked by a certain "cultural schizophrenia" especially when it comes to race. In many cases, music was the only thing that united the races whether it was country or rock and roll. Bangs explains that the process of writing the book has made Guralnick no longer wish to be a rock star because of how the music business often destroys musicians.

In the excerpt from Bangs' "Notes for Review of Peter Guralnick's *Lost Highway*, 1980" Bangs begins by focusing on Sun Records owner Sam Phillips. Guralnick was obsessed with Phillips like many young people would be obsessed with the president or a sports hero, and Bangs believes Phillips had the powers of a shaman to bring out what was inside a person, for good or evil. Guralnick attempts to justify Phillips' decision to switch almost exclusively to white musicians after recording Elvis Presley, but Bangs thinks he is just sticking up for his hero. Phillips claims that a person can be a rebel without being an outcast, which Bangs believes applies to Presley but only because he was a supernatural force. Bangs claims that rock and roll's power does not come from musical talent but from the American instinct to constantly move. Bangs then engages in a rather lengthy fantasy about eating pills out of Presley's dead body or actually eating part of the body itself to become Presley. As Presley, Bangs cannot imagine anything he could actually do except possibly shoot something on one of his televisions. Bangs can do nothing as Presley because his fans imposed too many expectations on him. Given the

stream of consciousness style and long paragraphs, it appears Bangs wrote this chapter under the influence of stimulants.

In an excerpt from the 1981 "Scorn Papers" Bangs takes issue with the East Village Eye, which has claimed both Richard Hell and John Holmstrom, who illustrated Ramones albums, both invented punk. Bangs claims that he invented punk but stole it from someone else who stole it from someone else and so on. The point Bangs is trying to make is that it is pointless to get bogged down in who created a musical style because they all have influences.

The excerpt from "Women on Top: Ten Post-Lib Role Models for the Eighties" Bangs derisively mocks Andy Warhol's book "a," which according to Bangs merely consists of a transcript of several of Andy's friends sitting around talking while under the influence of stimulants. Bangs spends most of the essay writing in a similar style, which is almost totally indecipherable.



Unpublishable Part Two and Untitled

Unpublishable Part Two and Untitled Summary and Analysis

The excerpt from "Maggie May" is a fictional piece of work that was inspired by the Rod Stewart songs of the same name. The excerpt begins with an unnamed male character remembering meeting an older woman in a bar in London. He is bored with girls his own age who all seem to be anorexic, which he finds unappealing, while this woman is a good deal larger but not quite fat. The two return to the woman's apartment and have extremely passionate sex. After having sex, they lie together and kiss until they become aroused and once again have sex, which Bangs describes as a religious experience.

When they wake up the next morning, the man asks the woman her name, which enrages her and leads her to kick him out. Both spend the day distraught over the incident. The following day, the woman goes to a bar to get drunk and possibly prostitute herself as she is broke, and the man searches for her in every bar he can find. When he finds her, she again rebukes him. The man eventually realizes that the woman was correct in that he treats all women poorly.

The woman becomes an even worse alcoholic after her last encounter with the man but then runs into a former lover. Talking with him causes her to resolve to sober up, stop prostituting herself, and get a normal job. The two run into each other randomly on the street one day and go get tea together. The young man apologizes to her once again and asks her to go to the movies with him on Friday, which she accepts. When he arrives at her apartment for the date, they both ask what the other sees in them. He answers that he sees soul in her. She answers that she is desperate and he reminds her of herself. They realize they both hate all the same things, but they both like sex.

As their relationship progresses, the woman realizes that she has become more of a mother than a lover to the young man. This is a direct reference to the lyrics of "Maggie May." She cannot go on being his mother, so she draws up a list of options which include killing herself, killing him, or simply disappearing. She decides that none of the plans alone will work, so she utilizes a variety of tactics to get him to leave including drinking again, having group sex with the Hell's Angels, drugging him and having him seduced by prostitutes. Still, by the end of all that he still wants to be with her. She only manages to get rid of him by getting him into a rock band which makes him famous. He writes a song about her, which becomes his biggest hit and supplies her with a regular check.

Although a note at the beginning of the story claims that it is not meant to represent any real individuals, it reveals a fairly strong dislike and disrespect for Rod Stewart on Bangs' part.



The excerpts from Bangs' "Untitled Notes" is divided into three separate sections. In the first, he argues with an imaginary interviewer about his excitement on purchasing a non-existent Rolling Stones record called "Sucking It in the Seventies." Bangs claims that the record is deliberately bad, but it confers on whoever buys it a higher status with obsessive Rolling Stones fans. The second excerpt reiterates Bangs' idea that rock and roll's greatness does not come from the music being technically great. Almost every band that is now thought of as great was originally criticized as terrible musicians, but since no one thinks from themselves, once the status of greatness is conferred by someone in authority it lasts forever even if no one actually listens to the music. In the final excerpt, Bangs briefly rehashes his disputes with Lou Reed and writes that Reed did him a huge favor in the 1975 interview by telling him that he used to be a good writer but was now just posing.



Characters

Lester Bangs

Although this book is not really about Lester Bangs, Bangs places himself at the center of almost every essay, so he is the most important person in the book. Bangs' most important quality is his passion for music. For Bangs, music, especially rock and roll, has the potential to create true feelings of love, belonging, and community. However, Bangs believes that this potential is very rarely realized, so he is constantly cynical about any person or group who blithely promotes such a sentiment. The music Bangs likes best is that which is powerfully emotional regardless of its technical skill.

Consequently, Bangs has a tremendous appreciation for the music of Lou Reed both with the Velvet Underground and in his solo career. In Bangs' early years, Reed serves as his hero, but Bangs later renounces Reed and the whole idea of heroes. Bangs is also not just a rock critic, he is also a musician himself with a couple different bands mentioned throughout the book. Bangs' criticisms are not always consistent, and he seems to see little problem in changing his opinion of a musician or group.

Although music is the center of Bangs' universe, it is not the only thing with which he occupies his time. Bangs is a frequent drinker and drug user and does not seem to feel the slightest bit of shame about the fact. Bangs also frequently presents himself as socially awkward, especially with women. This leads Bangs to be frequently lovelorn and sexually frustrated.

Lou Reed

Lou Reed is the lead singer of the Velvet Underground and also a successful solo artist. Reed is the most frequent subject of Bangs' writing. Bangs perceives Reed as one of the greatest musicians ever because, among other reasons, he plays music he knows very few people—perhaps even no one—will like. Bangs believes Reed created music that was authentic and both physically and intellectually stimulating. Reed is also presented as a drug addict for most of the book with stimulants being his drug of choice. Bangs believes this drug use eventually causes Reed to become irritable and childish. Bangs also writes that Reed is homosexual but also that he had a wife at one time. When the two meet for the first time in the book, Reed argues with Bangs and plays him music against his will. Bangs argues that Reed's music is about decadence, but Reed says that is only true of a very small percentage of his songs. In his album "Metal Machine Music," which consists almost entirely of feedback and noise, Reed maintains that there are numerous references to classical music, but Bangs does not believe him. Reed alternates between respecting his fans and not caring what they think about his music. Bangs suggests there are strong violent undertones to Reed's music.



The Clash

The Clash were an English punk group that formed in the late-1970s. Bangs believes the Clash became successful because they were the first punk group who had strong convictions for something instead of just embracing nihilism. Musically, Bangs appreciates the Clash's incorporation of reggae into their musical style. Bangs writes that the members of the Clash are extremely likable in person and that they treat their fans extremely well, going so far as to let some of them share their hotel rooms. In his initial encounters with the band, Bangs believes that the Clash holds out promise to finally meet the Utopian ideals of rock and roll because they practice what they preach about equality both sexual, racial, and between fans and musicians. The band also frequently engages in practical joking like getting into food fights after their shows. Bangs also writes that the Clash, lead singer Joe Strummer particularly, are very directly honest not to be rude but just to communicate effectively. Although Bangs originally harbors a notion that the Clash can serve as a model for society, an incident in which their driver verbally and physically assaults a fan while members of the Clash sit by rattles this faith. Bangs believes that popularity must eventually destroy the intimacy of their performances and interaction with fans.

Richard Hell

Richard Hell is an American punk musician and the lead singer for the band the Voidoids. Before the Voidoids, Hell played in both Television and the Heartbreakers. Bangs believes that Hell is one of the few people left who still has feelings by the late-1970s, but Hell is mostly tormented by these feelings. Hell has an affinity for the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and extremely dark literature. Critics other than Bangs sometimes describe Hell as something of a poser because of the way he dresses and the fact that he changed his name. Hell is deeply offended by these claims and defends his style on the grounds that being able to remake oneself in whatever image one likes is an essential part of rock and roll. Hell claims that this is the message of the Voidoids most popular song "Blank Generation," which is often interpreted as song about despair or nihilism. Hell argues that as an artist he has to simultaneously embrace self-hatred and narcissism. Self-hatred is necessary to create authentic emotional music, and narcissism is necessary because it allows the musician to have the courage to believe in his music. Hell claims that adolescence is the most important phases in anyone's life. Finally, Hell asserts that the only thing that keeps him from himself is pure habit, which Bangs believes is an extremely immature attitude.

Question Mark and the Mysterians

Question Mark and the Mysterians were a psychedelic rock band in the mid- to late-1960s best known for their song "96 Tears." The band's music is relatively simple, but Bangs believes it is a great example of rock and roll because of how powerfully emotional it is. Bangs also appreciates their music because it does not attempt to be about anything of great social significance such as the Vietnam War or civil rights.



Iggy Pop

Iggy Pop is the lead singer of the Stooges and later a successful solo artist. Bangs believes Pop makes some of the rawest music ever created and respects him tremendously for it. Furthermore, Pop does not even have a good voice by traditional standards but manages to put so much emotion into his vocals that it compensates for his lack of natural talent. Pop is also famous for his onstage antics such as jumping out into the crowd or cutting himself with a broken bottle. Bangs believes that in part this helps break down the wall between audience and musician, which is a good thing. However, Bangs also detects a deep sense of pain in Pop's mad performances.

David Bowie

David Bowie is a solo rock musician and one of the biggest musical acts of the 1970s. Bangs believes most of Bowie's sound is derived from Lou Reed and Iggy Pop and the Stooges, which Reed denies. Bangs absolutely despises most of Bowie's early music and with the release of "Young Americans" even claims that Bowie is attempting to become black. (Bangs later denies making this assertion.) However, Bangs deeply appreciates Bowie's album "Station to Station" for being human and its melancholy sound.

Elvis Presley

Elvis Presley was the single most famous rock musician in American history. Bangs believes that Presley revolutionized rock and roll not through his music but through his obvious sexuality, which Bangs believes changed American culture from the 1950s to the 1970s more than any other small group of musicians or other cultural icons put together. Presley's influence looms so large that Bangs compares him to the Pentagon. Presley died in 1977 and Bangs believes this was in part because he was driven mad by his own fame. When everything Presley did was met with adoration, the only left for him to do was die.

Van Morrison

Van Morrison is an Irish soul singer who recorded the album "Astral Weeks" in 1968. This album means more to Bangs than any other because it brought him through one of the darkest periods of his life. Bangs believes the album shows a great pain in Morrison but also an ultimate redemption in that pain. Bangs argues that after Morrison explored the depths of pain in human existence, he had to turn to lighter material, which explains much of his later work.



Count Five

Count Five were a psychedelic rock band from the mid-1960s best known for their song "Psychotic Reaction." Much like Question Mark and the Mysterians, Bangs believes Count Five represents the best of rock and roll simplicity. In his essay discussing the band, Bangs also describes four albums by the band that never actually existed.

James Taylor

James Taylor is an American folk rock musician. In many ways, Taylor's extremely serious music represents everything that Bangs hates. In one of his essays Bangs even jokingly threatens to kill Taylor. However, Bangs gives a somewhat positive review of Taylor's album "One Man Dog" because it lacks pretension.

John Lennon

John Lennon was a member of the the Beatles, the most popular rock group to ever exist. Along with Paul McCartney, Lennon was the primary song writer and lead singer for the group. Bangs believes that like Elvis Presley, Lennon became trapped in his own fame and other people's expectations of him. This is why Lennon retreated from public life in the latter half of the 1970s.

Andy Warhol

Andy Warhol is widely considered to be one of the first pop artists. During the 1960s he also financially supported the Velvet Underground. He later wrote a novel "a," which Bangs describes as consisting of nothing more than a transcript of some of Warhol's friends sitting around talking while using stimulants. Bangs mocks this book by attempting to imitate its style.

Peter Laughner

Peter Laughner is a personal friend of Bangs who dies of acute pancreatitis brought on by drug and alcohol abuse. Laughner is also a rock critic and musician. Bangs watches Laughner descend into the depths of drug addiction and eventually tries to remove Laughner from his life to prevent becoming as self-destructive as him. Bangs argues that Laughner destroyed himself in an attempt to imitate his heroes like Lou Reed, but Bangs believes this was extremely foolish.



Objects/Places

New York City

This is where Bangs lives for most of the latter part of the book and where a large chunk of his interviews take place.

Southern California

Southern California from Orange County up to Los Angeles is where Bangs grew up and lives for much of the early part of the book.

Detroit

Detroit is where Bangs during the middle of the book. It is also where many garage rock bands like the Stooges first got their start and Bangs believes it to be a musical mecca.

CBGB

CBGB is the legendary New York City club where most of the original punk and New Wave like Richard Hell and the Voidoids bangs first performed.

Olympia Stadium

Olympia Stadium is located in Detroit and is the location of a Barry White concert Bangs attended.

Michigan Palace

The Michigan Palace is a venue in Detroit where Iggy Pop and the Stooges played their last concert.

Avery Fisher Hall

Avery Fisher Hall is a concert hall in New York City where Bangs watches a Tangerine Concert and laser show.



Derby

Derby is the town in England where Bangs first meets the Clash to write a lengthy article on the band.

Berlin

Berlin is where Lou Reed lived when he recorded the album of the same name.

Sun Records

Sun Records is the legendary record studio in Memphis that first recorded musicians such as Elvis Presley, Howlin' Wolf, and Jerry Lee Lewis.

London

London is the setting for Bangs' fictional story based on the Rod Stewart song "Maggie May."

Themes

The Ideal of Rock and Roll

Music is the most important thing in the world to Bangs, and rock and roll is his favorite kind of music. However, he does not like all, or even most, of what is labeled rock and roll. For Bangs, rock should not be overly complicated because it is not the technical skill of the musician that determines the quality of a rock song as it is in jazz. In fact, Bangs often embraces bands that lack technical skill or even proficiency because they are forced to rely solely on their emotion to make great music. Furthermore, Bangs enjoys watching bands progress from unskilled to skilled as they mature.

According to Bangs, a rock song should focus on passionate personal emotion. This is why Bangs dismisses hippie music that has overt political themes and most of the art rock of the 1970s. Bangs believes these themes make rock too pretentious and serious. However, Bangs somewhat contradicts himself later when he argues that the reason the Clash are so good is because they are the first punk band to stand for something outside of nihilism, but Bangs does not see the Clash as pretentious because they practice what they preach. Bangs believes that rock and roll is ultimately about freedom and the natural American inclination to move constantly.

Equality Between Audience and Musician

Perhaps Bangs greatest hatred is the separation of the audience and musician. Bangs believes extremely popular bands like Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones have walled themselves off from their fans and therefore reality. This causes their music to become pretentious and boring. It also causes their fans to perceive them as something more than human and form a cult of personality around them. This leads to a vicious cycle where the audience becomes increasingly accepting of anything a group puts out no matter how bad, and the band puts out worse and worse music because the fans buy it anyway. Ultimately, the fans revere the musicians almost as gods, while the musicians view the fans as sub-human because they cannot respect people who view them as gods.

Bangs explains that the solution to this problem was music that did not emphasize technical skill but raw emotion because then anyone could play it. Bands like Iggy Pop and the Stooges were a key example in this regard. The Stooges' stage show was also helpful in breaking down this wall as Pop diving out into the audience encouraged interaction between fans and musicians and not just passive acceptance on the audience's part. Punk rock was the boldest step forward in eliminating barriers between fan and musician and Bangs sees the Clash as the best examples of it within punk. Bangs shows the Clash constantly meeting with fans and even letting them share their hotel rooms. However, when Bangs sees the band's driver verbally and physically



assault a fan, Bangs realizes that at a certain point of popularity the separation between musician and fan is inevitable.

Rock and Roll as Utopia

Bangs constantly holds out hope that rock and roll can lead to a better world, although he is very cynical about the actual prospects of that happening. First, for Bangs rock and roll is about freedom to do what one pleases. In Bangs' interview with Richard Hell, he seems to approve of Hell's idea that rock and roll allows a person to become something of his own making. Second, according to Bangs rock and roll should mean equality of many different kinds. The most obvious of these is between musician and audience, which is why he dislikes so many large bands like Led Zeppelin and celebrates bands interact with the audience like the Stooges. However, Bangs also believes this extends to racial and sexual equality as well. Bangs is deeply dismayed when he finds a streak of racism running through the punk movement because he originally thought punk music was first and foremost about the right to be different. Bangs also appreciates the Clash more when he learns that they do not randomly sleep with groupies and treat women like objects in general.

The Clash is the group that comes closest to realizing Bangs' rock and roll utopia, but even they eventually disappoint him. Bangs witnesses the Clash's bus driver assault one of their male fans while the band does nothing to stop it. This leads Bangs to conclude that no matter how well intentioned the group, eventually the pressures of the music business will eventually reassert some kind of hierarchy.



Style

Perspective

Bangs is simultaneously a huge fan of rock and roll, a rock musician himself, and one of the most relentless critics of the genre. Bangs was born in Escondido, California in 1948. His father died when he was five years old after which his mother became a devout Jehovah's Witness. It is possible that Bangs' writing was influenced by this religious faith as it often exhibits a certain sincere righteousness although never about traditionally spiritual topics. Bangs published his first review in 1969 when still only twenty years old. It was a highly negative review of the Detroit rock band MC5's first album published in "Rolling Stone." The review reveals two things about Bangs' style of criticism: he tends not to like almost anything on the first listen, and he is more than willing to change his mind as evidenced by the fact that Bangs grew to love the MC5 and even become personal friends with its members.

In 1973, "Rolling Stone" publisher Jann Wenner banned Bangs from the magazine for disrespecting musicians in his reviews. Bangs took a job with the magazine "Creem" where he stayed through most of the 1970s, but his resentment towards Wenner and "Rolling Stone" is noticeable in his writing after that point.

Bangs prefers music that is simple, straight to the point, and highly emotional. Bangs will attack almost any music that is slickly produced or technically excellent but lacking in passion. Finally, Bangs is able to tolerate far more feedback and noise in the music he listens to than most people.

Tone

Bangs' tone is highly combative throughout most of the book. When dealing with a band he does not like, Bangs is often insulting. He frequently refers to the members of Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones as stupid, for instance. Bangs also jokingly suggests that he will kill James Taylor if he ever has the chance just because he cannot stand to hear another one of his songs. Even when Bangs interviews his primary musical idol, Lou Reed, he cannot help becoming embroiled in a heated argument. Bangs does not even spare himself, as he often exposes his own inadequacies and frustrations, many of them sexual.

However, there are occasions when Bangs can be gracious and sympathetic towards his subjects. Despite their tortured relationship, Bangs still idolizes Reed, going so far in one of his notes as to write that he would perform fellatio on him because his impact on society was that important. Bangs is also very respectful to the Clash when he writes a long article about them and even admits to liking them all very much on a personal level. Finally, Bangs sometimes attempts to place himself in the shoes of deceased

musicians such as Elvis Presley and he usually finds that they were doomed by their own fame, which is a very sympathetic take.

Structure

The text is divided into seven separate sections, which are themselves divided into shorter chapters. Aside from the first section, all the rest are in chronological order. The first section, Two Testaments, consists of two longish essays, which are considered to be among Bangs' best work. The second essay in this section is a fairly straight forward review of Van Morrison's album "Astral Weeks," but the first essay is told from the perspective of Bangs as an old man in the future and describes a number of albums that never existed. The second section consists of three essays from 1970 to 1971, two of which were published in "Creem," but this was before Bangs wrote for the magazine full time. The third section consists entirely of pieces Bangs wrote for "Creem" and covers the time period when he worked there full time. The third section also shows Bangs branching out from just music reviews to autobiographical stories and wider cultural commentary. The fourth section consists only of Bangs' writings on his musical idol Lou Reed. Part five are articles written after Bangs left "Creem." Finally, parts six and seven mostly cover material that was never published in Bangs' lifetime. These pieces are mostly notes on full length articles but others are parts of uncompleted books and also an attempt at fiction.



Quotes

"Instead of singing about taking tea with Mary Jane and boppin' yer dingus on ol' Sweet Slit Annie it was Help Me God I don't know the meaning of life or I believe love is gonna cure the world of psoriasis and cancer both and I'm gonna tell the people all about it 285 different ways whether you like it or not. And Why is there war well go ask the children they know everything we need to know, and Gee I sure like black folks even if my own folks don't and endless vinyl floods of drivel in similar veins." (pp. 9)

"It wasn't until much later, drowning in the kitschvats of Elton John and James Taylor that I finally came to realize that grossness was the truest criterion for rock 'n' roll, the cruder the clang and grind the more fun and longer listened-to the album'd be." (pp. 10)

"So perhaps the truest autobiography I could ever write, and I know this holds as well for many other people, would take place largely at record counters, jukeboxes, pushing forward in the driver's seat while AM walloped you on, alone under headphones with vast scenic bridges and angelic choirs in the brain through insomniac postmidnights, or just to sit at leisure stoned or not in the vast benign lap of America, slapping on sides and feeling good." (pp. 13)

"Van Morrison is interested, obsessed with how much musical or verbal information he can compress into a small space, and, almost conversely, how far he can spread one note, word, sound, or picture. To capture one moment, be it a caress or a twitch." (pp. 22)

"But the beautiful horror of 'Madame George' and 'Cyprus Avenue' is precisely that the people in these songs are not dying: we are looking at life, in its fullest, and what these people are suffering from is not disease but nature, unless nature is a disease." (pp. 24)

"The Stooges music is like that. It comes out of an illiterate chaos gradually taking shape as a uniquely personal style, emerges from a tradition of American music that runs from the wooly rags of backwood string bands up to the magic promise eternally made and occasionally fulfilled by rock: that a band can start out bone primitive, untutored and uncertain, and evolve into a powerful and eloquent ensemble." (pp. 45)

"What all this posturing and fake glamour results in is a vast detachment and cynicism on the part of the artists. Since it's impossible to have respect for an audience that'll take just about anything you care to dish out, and the impassive demeanor is so central to the role, a general numbnose is all that can be expected." (pp. 70)

"What profiteth a Godz if he gain the world and lose his loon-lunging soul?" (pp. 91)

"Wouldn't you be offended by this Canuck creep coming down here taking all our money while running down our women? Sure you would! Until you realized, as I did, eventually, that this kind of stuff is exactly what makes Guess Who great. They have absolutely no



taste at all, they don't even mind embarrassing everybody in the audience, they're real punks without even working too hard at it." (pp. 113)

"I would suck Lou Reed's cock, because I would also kiss the feet of them that drafted the Magna Carta." (pp. 167)

"Lou Reed is my own hero principally because he stands for all the most fucked up things that I could ever possibly conceive of." (pp. 171)

"Which is why it's just a little bit harder for me to see Elvis as a tragic figure; I see him as being like the Pentagon, a giant armored institution nobody knows anything about except that its power is legendary." (pp. 212)

"I will not forget that this kid killed himself for something torn T-shirts represented in the battle fires of his ripped emotions, and that does not make your T-shirts profound, on the contrary, it makes you a bunch of assholes if you espouse what he latched onto in support of his long death agony, and if I have run out of feeling for the dead I can also truly say that from here on out I am only interested in true feeling, and the pursuit of some ultimate escape from that which killed Peter, which is all I truly know of his life, except that the hardest thing in this living world is to confront your own pain and go through it, but somehow life is not a paltry thing after all next to this child's inheritance of eternal black. So don't anybody try to wave goodbye." (pp. 222-223)

"I want to fuck death, I want death to know that it ain't shit, I can lick it, because what I am holding in my arms right now and am about to carry into the bedroom and to which I will deliver up my body and soul deep in the center of her bell, the center of her, I'm serving notice right now is the final and absolute inarguable rebuttal that shoots death down forever!" (pp. 317)



Topics for Discussion

Does Bangs' taste in music change over the years?

What are Bangs' opinions on race and how do they change from his earlier writings to his later writings?

What is the significance of Lou Reed and his music to Bangs?

Why is Van Morrison's "Astral Weeks" the most significant album for Bangs?

What are the key elements of good rock and roll for Bangs?

What is Bangs' opinion of the use of feedback, noise, and machinery in music?

How should a rock band relate to its fans according to Bangs?

What is the purpose of rock and roll for Bangs?

What is Bangs' basic outlook on life?