This man’s name is Kevin Michael Allin, better known to punk rock as G.G. Allin. G.G. Allin’s concerts, if one can call them that, were definitely one of a kind; what many would call a full-on shock-fest. If you’re familiar with G.G. Allin, then you probably know where I’m going with all this, but if you don’t ... just wait ’till I get to my second point. True, most of his shows, did not last much longer than 15 minutes because either the venue would not allow it to continue, Allin was sent to the hospital, or the police would show up. But there is something to
be said for such behavior. As we will examine, Allin himself had a very well thought out reason for his performances. Through the use of Ryan Moore’s article titled “Postmodernism and Punk Subculture: Cultures of Authenticity and Deconstruction” from the (July?)2004 The Communication Review, we will gain a better understanding of what the punk subculture represents and how Allin’s performances stretched beyond everyone’s boundaries. We will first, outline Ryan Moore’s method, second, we will apply it to the acts of G.G. Allin and examine Allin’s rhetoric to better understand the beliefs and social demands he requested, while thirdly we will examine the critical implications for such behavior and the dismissal of it by the mass majority.

Moore defines the postmodernism age as the fragmentation of pop culture. Music, film, television, fashion, and literature, if it could be characterized as a mainstream product, then postmodernism sought to splinter it into a collection of ideas and differences. Moore argues that punk affirms this desire by carving a new niche of expression and “responds to [...] postmodernity in two [...] ways.” He refers to these as the culture of deconstruction and the culture of authenticity.

The first, the culture of deconstruction, he describes as having a similarity between postmodernism and punk attitude, performance, and style. For example, the tattered clothing, held together with safety pins and crazy mohawk hairdos were a way for the lower classes to ironically thumb their nose to the upper echelon, and any negative media which resulted was a reflection of the future of the downfall of society. Their belief was that if the upper classes wanted the separation from lower classes, and wished for them to live in squalor, then the lower class would show them what it would look like. Hence, wearing a dog collar as a necklace would be considered punk, since it was a way of showing how the upper class held a monetary buffer between themselves and the lower class. Thus, the punks took to “consummating themselves as the empire’s degenerate offspring.”

The second response to postmodernity is through the culture of authenticity. Moore describes this as a quest for independence from mainstream culture and renouncing the prevailing “hypercommercialism.” This is done to weed out the fake and disingenuous “posers” and as an effort to establish a solid base for what it meant to be punk. Moore states that, “Whereas the first response to postmodernity appropriates signs, symbols, and style for the purposes of shock [...], the second attempts to go underground and insulate punk [...] from the superficiality of postmodern culture.” Moore feels that many of the punks, in an effort to validate their music and culture, tried to revolt
against the mainstream and promote a DIY (Do It Yourself) attitude, which adds to that culture’s street reputation. In short, it makes them hardcore.

So what do you do when hardcore punks say you’re too hardcore, even for them? Perhaps no one was more hardcore punk than G.G. Allin. Many purists claim that rock and roll is nihilism at its purest form, and punk was the most nihilistic subgenre of rock. But most everyone agreed that no punk was more nihilistic than G.G. Allin. Allin exhibited some of the most vile acts ever performed on stage. Backed by his band, The Murder Junkies, Allin would regularly smash the microphone into his face and head, consistently chipping his teeth and squirting blood onto the audience. Almost without exception, Allin would perform in the nude, or at most in a soiled jockstrap. He was known to physically assault anyone during his shows, including members of his own band. Receiving oral sex on stage was common practice for Allin, and, as if that wasn’t enough, Allin would constantly take laxatives backstage before the show and then defecate on stage, smearing a mixture of fecal matter, blood, urine, and semen on himself, and ultimately throwing it on the audience members. As one fan noted, “the only safe place at a G.G. Allin concert, was behind G.G. Allin. He couldn’t see you there.”

And so the connection seems simple enough. Allin certainly had disdain for the elite in the American social structure, and this plays directly into the culture of deconstruction as framed by Moore’s article. The revolutionary ideals of deconstruction which were held by the punk subculture at the time were evident in Allin’s performances, making the link between Moore’s article and Allin a perfect fit, but it is Moore’s second element, the culture of authenticity which requires more attention.

Allin believed that by making rock music aggressive, he was turning into what it had once been. When Elvis first performed on the Ed Sullivan Show, it was seen by many to be vile and disgusting, however, many saw it as liberating. During the 1960s, when mainstream music had become filled with bubble gum sounds, The Rolling Stones pumped life back into the spirit of rock and roll by exhibiting seemingly antisocial behavior. By today’s standards, a Rolling Stones concert is almost a family outing. The Sex Pistols of the late 70s picked up where previous bands had left off, again disgusting their audiences, much to their own delight. But G.G. Allin took this idea to a new level. Allin firmly believed that someone should return rock music to the arena of antisocial behavior, and the more he looked for that someone,
the more he realized that it was himself. Viewing his antics with a dark humor about them, he set off to create a circus, with himself as the main act. The music, was often a second thought.

At the same time, just as Moore has described in his article as the culture of authenticity, this behavior was exhibited to keep punk away from the mainstream attention. According to an interview in Chic magazine, Allin believed that, “Rock and roll has completely sold out to the corporate.” He furthers this by stating, “They're trying to either censor rock and roll, or they're trying to put away the nonconformist.” So devoted to the idea of staying on the lunatic fringe, Allin was perhaps made most famous for his declaration of a promised on-stage suicide. In addition to this promise, Allin assured his fans that he would forever remain on the outskirts of popularity by stating, “Let me tell you one thing: The police, a prison guard, or any member of society will never find me acceptable, because when that happens I'll kill some mother.” All moral judgments aside, I think punk rock would be hard pressed to find someone willing to commit murder to keep from being called a sellout. Allin openly embraced the disgust many held for him. His slogan, of sorts, became known as “Hated in the Nation.”

Having examined Moore’s concepts and applying them to G.G. Allin, what implications can be seen? When viewing punk through the scope of Moore’s article, it is obvious that Allin is a representative of the culture of destruction, as is evidenced by his performances and music within the punk culture.

Moreover, Allin’s body of work did, indeed, help in authenticating a fragmented genre of expression, thus making him also an example of the culture of authenticity. But this is where Moore’s article stops short. Allin’s performances transcend what even Moore would probably consider authentic. By performing such shocking concerts, Allin was drawing a line in the sand which he dared anyone to cross, and by crossing that line, it entitled one to call himself punk. Attending a G.G. Allin show was like a badge of honor among punks, because it meant that they were willing to go to the greatest lengths to prove how truly hardcore they were.

The irony is that Allin put such an emphasis into his culture of deconstruction and authenticity, that he appealed to many in the mainstream. Allin, who appealed to many true punks, also appealed to a larger mass audience of non-punks who simply wanted to see the train wreck. Many spectators wanted to see what Allin would do next and just how far he would take things, thus creating the first of the pop-punk bands, albeit based on the very fabric of deconstruction and authenticity. Allin’s behavior shows the
hypocrisy of many of the movements within punk; the idea of moving people away from a subculture by performing shocking acts is counterproductive, since it inevitably attracts many of the same people the punk movement is trying to avoid. Much like pushing the waves of the ocean away, more water will always come to fill the void.

On June 27th, 1993 after starting a riot at a New York club, G.G. Allin fled from the scene, nude and narrowly escaping police. That night, Allin died from a drug overdose. He ended his life, not in the way which so many of the punk culture insisted that he would, but instead, he died like a rock star, the epitome of the very thing he was trying to avoid. While many might call G.G. Allin a disgusting human, others insist he is an artistic vanguard. Either way, the full effect of his actions are only now being realized because of a retrospective look at the origins of modern punk. Through the examination of Ryan Moore’s article, the application of this article to musician G.G. Allin’s performances, and reaching conclusions about both the reasoning behind the punk subculture and seemingly antisocial behavior, we have gained a further understanding of the social unknown. Allin’s stance was an assault on the powerful, and was a rally cry to the powerless to enable themselves to become free of the sociological structure set forth. As Allin himself put it in his infamous Rock and Roll Manifesto: “It CAN be dark and dangerous again. It CAN be threatening to our society as it was meant to be. [...] And with me as your leader, it will happen. I am ready to lead you, my allies, into the real Rock 'N' Roll underground. Let's get started.”