



# HIT\$VILLE UK

## PUNK IN THE FARAWAY TOWNS

**An exhibition by Russ Bestley, PhD research student in Graphic Design at London College of Communication**

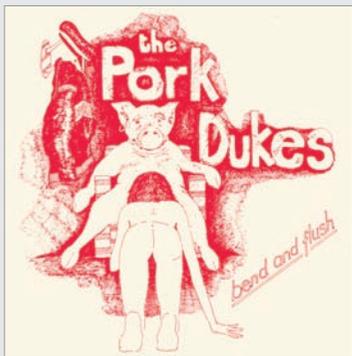
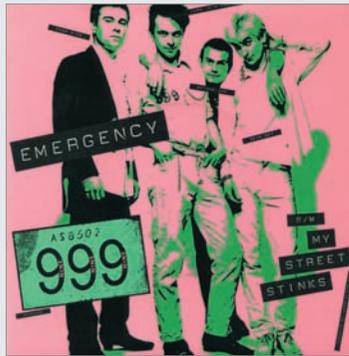
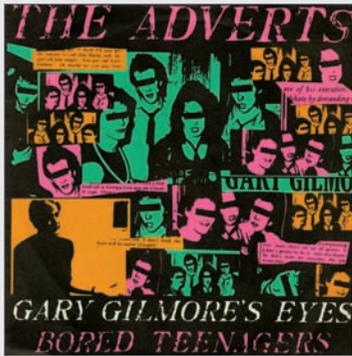
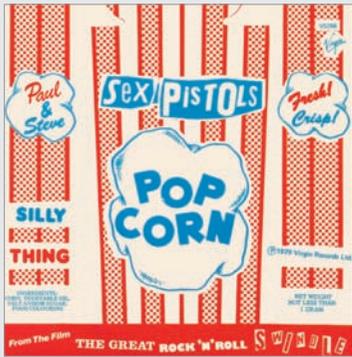
**If you're going to reminisce, then you need to do it properly**

This exhibition shows a small selection of the work conducted by Russ Bestley over the past five years in relation to his PhD research project on the graphic languages of UK punk between 1976 and 1984. It provides a retrospective display of UK punk rock record sleeve design, in order to show new perspectives on the development of graphic styles and regional variations in punk identity away from the metropolitan centres, and beyond the 'key' designers of the period who feature in a range of art and design histories.

The central objective is to build an alternative historical viewpoint on the graphic identity of UK punk which questions and repositions currently accepted arguments, whilst celebrating the range of lo-tech and innovative approaches to the design of record sleeves, often by self-trained and DIY producers. In contrast to displays of selected material from punk graphic design, the aim is to show a broad spectrum of punk and punk-related sleeves from across the UK, allowing a more detailed, and more complex, story to be told.

### **The Prole Art Threat**

Historical accounts of UK punk have seldom given recognition to the Second Wave of independent production of punk records beyond London and the major metropolitan centres, nor have the graphic strategies employed by sleeve designers been seriously documented and analysed. This project explores the relationship between punk's prime movers and those inspired to take up the challenge to produce their own versions of the genre. As such, it sets itself in opposition to the majority of mainstream historical accounts, and aims to offer a more inclusive alternative based on a broader range of participants



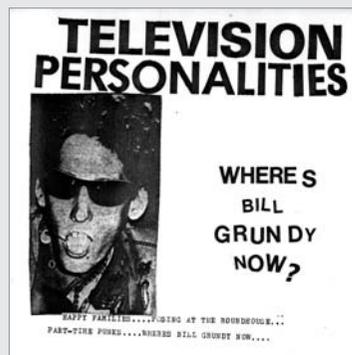
and artefacts. The aim is to show the ways in which iconographic elements provided subcultural codes that participants in the punk movement could recognise as symbolic of the developing new sub-genres of UK punk. The sleeves are mapped stylistically, geographically and chronologically to show the evolution of a range of distinct design strategies. Through the categorisation of a broad selection of examples, links between visual codes employed by sleeve designers and the often self-regulated stylistic factions of the bands and audiences themselves can be articulated.

The exhibition encompasses a broader timeframe than that which is usually associated with UK punk, covering the period from 1976 to 1984 – from the First Wave of UK punk to the regional diaspora of the Second Wave, and new interpretations of the musical, visual and political aspects of punk within the early 1980s Third Wave. The artefacts are also mapped regionally, allowing for an interpretation of the development of local stylistic approaches (the North and South West of England were, for instance, prominent in the development of Third Wave punk styles), and relates the sleeve artwork to the development of particular sub-genres of UK punk which had political and cultural significance, particularly within a local framework.

### Research methodology

In parallel with the definition of punk sub-genres, and the mapping of sleeve designs regionally across the period in question, a series of analytical methods were applied in order to deconstruct common design strategies employed in the production of UK punk sleeves. While record sleeve design could be said to be at the less formal, or 'artier' end of graphic design, it is important to note that it is closely related to branding, packaging and identity work, and that the recognition of visual codes by an intended audience is extremely important to the record's success. The project is also intended to

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highlight the development of punk styles across the regions of the UK, and to offer a critical perspective on a range of commonly accepted punk histories which are based solely in the major city centres of London and Manchester. A range of alternative methods are employed to display regional variations in graphic design and the development of particular visual styles over a period of time. These methods include the production of both print-based and interactive visual matrices which allow the comparison of graphic devices across a range of sleeves, together with a typology based on specific punk sub-genres as defined and categorised through group allegiance, contemporary music press criticism and marketing campaigns. The graphic material was analysed through a number of different (independent) approaches, each related to the generic categorisation of both musical and visual styles: the formal properties of the work, natural and conventional signs, the diffusion of generic 'punk' visual codes, and the relationship between visual sub-genres and musical sub-genre definitions.

Russ Bestley, October 2006

Exhibition opening times  
26th October to 7th December 2006  
10am to 4pm, Tuesday to Thursday

Research Gallery  
12th Floor, Tower Block  
London College of Communication  
Elephant & Castle SE1 6SB

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