LCC Graphic Subcultures, MMU and PSN present

Entertainment!
Post Punk, New Wave and Authenticity

18:00–21:00 Thursday 8th May 2014
12:00–19:00 Friday 9th May 2014

School of Design, London College of Communication,
Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6SB

FREE
The nouvelle of vague has in various forms been applied to both pre-punk performers and by proxy to an array of subsequent musical trends starting with the New Romantics and continuing through such genre cul-de-sacs as the New Wave of the New Wave. It is an apposite and alluring prefix for marketeers to imbue a product with contemporary zeal, especially in industries that display an unhealthy preoccupation with being "now." Within the punk context, however, it has served a multitude of purposes. New wave provided a blanket generic with which to bracket what were, in terms of both New York and London traditions, diverse streams of music whose aesthetic kinship could be musical, sartorial or presentational (or, in some cases, none of the above – though they could still apparently be included for not fitting in with their peers in a particularly interesting way). For the industry it was indeed a marketing category and, in some cases, a process of self-definition for artists who were not prepared to fence-sit.

Contemporaneously, things were much less clear. To some audiences Elvis Costello’s 1978 single “(I Don’t Want To Go To) Chelsea” was a legitimate punk artifact, so too the wares of Ian Dury & the Blockheads (profanity always helps) or the Boomtown Rats, despite the funny smell. Retrospectively we can see the join, of course, and accept that the broader-brush definition of new wave is perhaps more appropriate, but it was not ever thus. And we can also note the manner in which punk’s critical stock has risen over time. It was common at one time to posit that Costello and Dury were substantive artists who had “escaped punk’s ghetto” and gained a measure of credibility in the process – whereas now the new wave genre has lost both gravitational pull and a degree of critical respectability.

A similar battle for authenticity played out in the visual representations of new wave material. While early punk displayed a remarkably broad range of graphic and stylistic approaches, the simple process of financial investment, increasing maturity and public awareness of the genre, higher production values, mass production, and the adoption of industry standard marketing and advertising techniques cast a sheen over the rough edges left on display in more low key artists and labels. In short, the shift to a mass market meant the adoption of mass-market aesthetics. After all, a production run of perhaps a few hundred records or posters could just about be handled by hard graft and largely hands-on creative efforts, but a
run of several thousand copies required the machinery of mass manufacturing.

In-house graphic design and production teams at the major labels used industry standard techniques, materials and processes – content was less of a driving force and marketing, styling and visual identities were often handled by design professionals outside of the groups and their immediate circle of contacts. Standard packaging and graphic representation (with a bit of a twist to indicate modernity) abounded.

This isn’t to say that the music, and its visual presentation, was not valid or interesting: the combination of punk’s vital energy and untethered freedom (and investment) brought about experimentalism with the greater artistic drive and marketing power of the independents. These and others similarly replicated the independent labels’ opportunism in tapping into the new collectors market set in motion by the popularity of the new wave. Coloured vinyl, shaped discs, limited editions, collectable sets, alternative formats, free gifts – all became crucial weapons in the battle for the buyer’s heart, mind, and wallet.

**This Is Not A Love Song**

While punk was gathering pace – or dying an early death, depending on your critical position – and new wave was hitting the charts and pumping some life into a previously moribund music industry, music critics and journalists struggled to find an alternative term to apply to another strand of the story as it developed. These groups operated beyond what was by now seen as ‘traditional’ punk (how brief that flame had burned in the UK – within eighteen months of the Summer of ’76, many critics were banging the last nail in punk’s coffin), but were still too new, too left-field, too edgy or simply too uncommercial to sit comfortably under punk’s old guard and the contemporary aesthetic experiments, increasingly successful DIY artists and the difficult to define avant-garde. It also cast a critical shadow of authenticity over that elite set, segregating them from the muddy past of punk’s old guard and the contemporary commercial mainstream of the new wave.

**Post-punk groups** drew upon the creative spirit of the early years together with the eclecticism of the DIY punk scene, while reaching out to other genres and styles for creative influence. Funk, jazz, reggae, dub and even the previously off-limits blues and disco genres were raided and fused with punk attitude and style – or perhaps simply reinterpreted with a combination of naivety and musical ineptitude to result in something new and unusual that was struggling for an identity, and a name. The catch-all post-punk term, then, was an attempt to draw a line around regional punk interpretations, hybrid aesthetic experiments, increasingly successful DIY artists and the difficult to define avant-garde. It also cast a critical shadow of authenticity over that elite set, segregating them from the muddy past of punk’s old guard and the contemporary commercial mainstream of the new wave.

British designers such as Malcolm Garrett (Buzzcocks/Magazine/the Members/the Yachts/999) and Peter Saville (Factory Records, Joy Division, New Order) were at the forefront of a new post-punk visual aesthetic that reflected the stylistic changes going on in the music. Saville helped shape a visual identity for Factory Records that was modern and classically cool at the same time, forging a crossover visual style that impacted on fashion, magazine, branding and identity design throughout the 1980s.

Post-punk styles also tapped into the spirit and experimentation of the DIY and independent scene, and a new graphic minimalism was embraced by groups such as Public Image Ltd, Wire, XTC and the Gang of Four, and by labels including Factory, Malicious Damage and Radar Records. Designers helping to shape a new graphic language included Bob Last (Fast Product), Mike Coles (Killing Joke and Malicious Damage Records), Vaughan Oliver at 4AD, and Alex McDowell and Neville Brody at Rocking Russian.

In 1977, and clear dividing lines ensued, readily observable in graphical and musical content. The truth is far more elusive. We know, for example, that McLaren had intended to use the term new wave for his movement but was dissuaded from doing so by wiser counsel. We equally know that the term punk was applied to a generation of New York musicians much earlier in the piece. These ranged from Blondie – for many the definitive new wave band – to Television – led by a man who took his name from a French symbolist poet. Both groups bore little musical or presentational comparison to the nascent London set. We can begin with accepting therefore that the transatlantic constructs of what ‘punk’ was were radically divergent from the outset, and the same is true of new wave.
Pistols before the summer of 1977, and other major labels were taking note: while the new movement was gaining a huge amount of media and public attention (always a good thing in an industry obsessed with reinventing itself on a regular basis), the grubbier elements and negative associations of the product needed to be kept at arm’s length from the brand image of the corporation. A sense of edginess and danger had been a staple element in the marketing mission of rock ‘n’ roll since its inception – but now there was a feeling that some parental control was necessary to ensure the security and future of the family.

Other artists self-chose the term new wave to distance themselves from some of punk’s more disagreeable aspects, notably gobbing. Or, for the more career-minded, its perceived transitory nature and lack of avenues for advancement within the traditional music industry structure, where doors were being closed rather quickly by nervous executives desperate for a return to the safe confines of AOR and easier listening.

The greatest schism was in America, where the battle lines became more entrenched. The fascinating example here came courtesy of The Knack, a featherweight pop-rock band whose ‘new wave’ affectations backed by huge industry spend led to chart-topping albums and the irksome ‘My Sharona’. In the eyes of detractors, they represented a betrayal of the punk spirit and a neutering of its message – particularly when creative and adventurous punk scenes were emerging in several cities across the US. San Francisco conceptual artist Hugh Brown, who had designed the Clash’s second album cover (itself a record that prompted a rich dialogue about punk authenticity) headed a campaign that inverted Capitol’s ‘Get The Knack’ slogan. His ‘Knute The Knack Sack’ incorporated badges and photographs, alongside t-shirts bearing the Knute The Knack legend that would be worn by members of Squeeze, Patti Smith’s group and others.

Another San Francisco resident, Jello Biafra, took the premise one step further. Asked to attend the March 1980 BAMMIE Awards as a token punk band to prove the magazine’s hip credentials, Dead Kennedys took to the stage in white shirts emblazoned with a prominent ‘S’. Expected to play their ‘hit’ ‘California Über Alles’, they abruptly halted, Biafra’s stage oratory crystallising the punk community’s objections to its mealy-mouthed cousin, new wave. They then proceeded to play a pastiche of ‘My Sharona’ with the words changed to ‘My Payola’ and unveiled skinny black ties (a fashion garment synonymous with the Knack, and new wave generally). When unfurled these conjoined with the ‘$’ on their shirts to form a dollar symbol.

Punk and new wave may have ended up with a messy divorce, but for some years it was a shared journey, with many artists flitting between or sharing affiliations with both. Like its hipper cousin post-punk, new wave has been retrospectively redefined and narrowed to fit a neat and precise historical framework, placing it even more firmly within the corporate stereotype that it initially set out to oppose.

“Please don’t use the term new wave,” Damian O’Neill of the Undertones once stated to an author who had mistakenly applied the phrase. “We were punk”. The group still claimed brotherhood with that tradition when they were peddling Derry’s take on Motown. But that rather illustrates the inadequacies of the category in terms of musical description. For artists like the Undertones, new wave was a brand to be suspicious of; lacking in authenticity and complicit with major label connoits (it is interesting to note, for example, that ‘new wave’ was not a term that generally lent itself adjectively to DIY or independent releases).

Punk, in shorthand, represented an ‘attitude’. That attitude, however, could present a threat to the parent company image, if it wasn’t handled correctly and the wilder elements of the new artistic progenies brought to heel. EMI and A&M both had their fingers burnt by the Sex Pistols before the summer of 1977, and other major labels were taking note: while the new movement was gaining a huge amount of media and public attention (always a good thing in an industry obsessed with reinventing itself on a regular basis), the grubbier elements and negative associations of the product needed to be kept at arm’s length from the brand image of the corporation. A sense of edginess and danger had been a staple element in the marketing mission of rock ‘n’ roll since its inception – but now there was a feeling that some parental control was necessary to ensure the security and future of the family.

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FACT 10 + 4 — FACTORY RECORDS
JUNE '79

FACT 10 — UNKNOWN PLEASURES
The first album by Joy Division.

FACT 5 — ALL NIGHT PARTY
Single by A Certain Ratio.

FACT 6 — ELECTRICITY
Single by Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark.
JULY '79

FACT 11 — ENGLISH BLACK BOYS
Single by X-O-Dus.

FACT 12 — TIME GOES SO SLOW
Single by The Distractions.

MAYFAIR · BIRMINGHAM
MON. 23rd OCT.
SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES
SPIZZOE · THE HUMAN LEAGUE
DOORS OPEN 7.30 · TKTS £1.50 IN ADV. FROM MAYFAIR BOX OFFICE, 99
BULLRING CENTRE, BIRMINGHAM. VIRGIN RECORDS. CYLINDER SOUNDS.
and the Skids, while US based major label
edition coloured vinyl versions of singles
Banquet. Virgin also offered limited
as Small Wonder, Chiswick and Beggars
followed by other independents such
hence vital chart returns. They were soon
few weeks following a release date and
discs – reflected in strong sales in the first
such as ten inch albums and oddly shaped
picture sleeves and alternative formats
limited edition coloured vinyl releases,
releases. Stiff saw the potential for
who had started to produce ‘alternative’
success of independents such as Stiff
a punk collectors’ market, following the
recognise the business potential for
1978 and 1979. The majors were quick
entries became far more familiar between
be marketed by the major labels, chart
become broadly accepted and could
Once punk and new wave music had
was a tactic that helped propel the group
their early singles and albums adopted
successes between 1979 and 1981, and
WEIRD GIMMICK. You’ll like it!”.
declaring “This white vinyl single has a
“Sweet Suburbia” even included a sticker
sleeve for the second single by the Skids,
four different sleeves, each featuring
an individual member of the band, and
corresponding coloured vinyls. The
The UK Subs managed to achieve a
UK based major label
A&M tapped into the trend with releases
the Dickies, the Tubes, Squeeze and
The natural conclusion of this marketing
initiative saw the second pressing of the
Lurkers debut release issued in red, white
and blue vinyl versions. The fourth single
by Generation X, “King Rocker”, featured
four different sleeves, each featuring
an individual member of the band, and
corresponding coloured vinyls. The
sleeve for the second single by the Skids,
“Sweet Suburbia” even included a sticker
declaring “This white vinyl single has a
WEIRD GIMMICK. You’ll like it!”.

The trend for coloured vinyl was also
initiative saw the second pressing of the
issue became ultimately more collectable.

Although the marketing strategies
based on limited editions and coloured
vinyl proved initially very successful,
the inherent conflict with what could
be seen as punk ideology did lead to
criticism from both punk bands and
audiences. Stiff Little Fingers even
insisted on a clause in their contract with
Chrysalis Records that all releases by
the group would be on black vinyl and
standard 7-inch and 12-inch formats.
The trend for coloured vinyl also
saw a reaction from both the
guitarist Neale Floyd wrote an open letter to the
Fair Deal column in national music paper
The relationship between group and label
was resoundingly soured when guitarist
The shift in the late 1970s and early
people became a point of contention within the
Anarcho Punk sub-genre, saw a decline
in their career, and the reflection of this
appreciation within their sleeve graphics was
almost inevitable – as was the adoption of
similar graphic styles by a range of

Contemporaneously, others within the
punk community, following the rise and
fall of the compact disc, have increasingly
returned to the limited edition coloured

Instead of deliberate visual codes with which to
denote austerity and a ‘back to basics’
approach. Crass had already adopted a
policy of plain black clothing and white
stage lighting as a marked shift away
from colourful punk stereotypes early
in their career, and the reflection of this
approach within their sleeve graphics was
almost inevitable – as was the adoption of


The Art of Punk
Russ Bestley & Alex Ogg
1716
MAGAZINE
rhythm of cruelty
London College of Communication Graphic Subcultures and Manchester Metropolitan University in association with the Punk Scholars Network

Entertainment! Post Punk, New Wave and Authenticity

Thursday 8th May 2014
Post Punk and New Wave Graphics Exhibition Private View

6:00pm Design Panel Round Table
Russ Bestley (Chair) / Rob O’Connor (Stylorouge design) / Bill Smith (Polydor: the Jam, the Cure designer) / Marco NFT (the Gaggers, No Front Teeth Records)

7:30pm Design Panel Interview
Malcolm Garrett (Assorted Images: Buzzcocks, Magazine, the Members designer) in conversation with Richard Boon (Buzzcocks manager)

Friday 9th May 2014

12:00pm Registration and Refreshments
Post Punk and New Wave Graphics Exhibition

2:00pm Punk Scholars Network
Dr. Pete Dale (Manchester Metropolitan University): I’m the Man with the Jigsaw Feeling
Dr. Alastair Gordon (De Montfort University): ‘I’m More Punk than You!’ – Subcultural Theory, Distinctions of Authenticity and the Everyday Punk Self
Guy Mankowski (University of Northumbria): Pop Manifestos and Nosebleed Art Rock: What was the point of Post Punk?
Prof. Martin James (Southampton Solent): Archiving No Wave: Authenticity as Artifice

4:15pm Music Panel Round Table
Alex Ogg (Chair) / Sean Forbes (Wat Tyler, Hard Skin) / Nicky Tesco (the Members) / June Miles-Kingston (the Mo-dettes) / Nicky Forbes (the Revillos, Pork Dukes)

5:15pm Music Panel Interview
Paul Harvey and Pauline Murray (Penetration) in conversation

6:00pm Audience/Fan Panel
Pete Dale (Chair) / Rich Cubesville (One Way Ticket to Cubesville fanzine) / Jonny Wah Wah (Rebellion Festivals) / Eugene Butcher (Vive Le Rock magazine)

For enquiries contact
r.bestley@lcc.arts.ac.uk or P.Dale@mmu.ac.uk