**Russ Bestley**

**Biography**

Dr Russ Bestley is Reader in Graphic Design at the London College of Communication, specialising in popular music, in particular alternative scenes and subcultures. He has co-authored a number of books, including *Visual Research* (AVA Bloomsbury 2004, 2011, 2015), *The Art of Punk* (Omnibus Press 2012), *Up Against the Wall* (RotoVision 2002) and *Experimental Layout* (RotoVision 2001) and has contributed articles to publications including *Eye*, *Zed*, *Emigré*, *The National Grid*, *360º*, *Street Sounds* and *Vive Le Rock*. He is co-editor of the academic journal *Punk and Post Punk*, and a member of the international Punk Scholars Network.

**Abstract**

***“I Tried to Make Him Laugh, He Didn't Get the Joke…” –* Comedy and Humour within the Punk Subculture**

Descriptions and definitions of punk – the subculture, music, fashion, lifestyle and language – inevitably revolve around stereotypes and generalisations, the commonly received conventions of the provocative, political or subversive. The use of humour in punk – lyrically, within musical phrasing, song construction and live performance and in the graphic language of punk sleeves, fanzines and posters – is often overlooked. This paper seeks to outline the ways in which humour – through rhetorical codes and strategies including satire, pun, hyperbole, sarcasm, exaggeration, parody, repetition, self-deprecation, profanity and the embrace of the absurd or ridiculous were and are central to an understanding of punk language and practice.

Punk embraced humour from the outset – whether in the form of the cathartic release brought about by breaking taboos and social mores (and saying the unsayable), or in the use of irony and invective as means to provoke and question positions of authority and power. Ironic parody and pastiche were played out in lyrics, dress, interviews, artwork and even musical form. The ability to mock, to question and to undermine through satire, wit and innuendo helped to develop new forms of punk critique and dialogue, with a lasting impact both within and outside of the subculture. Humour also embraced punk – in the way that establishment forms of comedy took punk’s media storm as a catalyst for commentary and a supposedly ‘easy’ target for ridicule – though many were to discover that, given punk’s internal predisposition for self-mockery and irony, the subculture was a difficult target to hit.