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PUNK IN THE

FARAWAY TOWNS

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HITSVILLE UK: PUNK IN THE FARAWAY TOWNS

Russell Bestley

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During the punk years, I was lucky enough to live near one of the premier independent record shops, Small Wonder in Walthamstow, London. Every time I visited, there would be a new exhibition of art - by which, I mean the owner festooned the walls with the latest seven-inch record sleeves. He'd also play the new sounds very loud, which meant his 'gallery' had a soundtrack. It was all very mesmerising, and on a Saturday the shop would be packed with adolescents like me, not buying very much, but standing there half-deaf and gawping like zombies.

Russ Bestley's Hitsville UK: Punk in the Faraway Towns revives that sense of (small) wonder, but isn't just an exercise in nostalgia. It makes a case for seven inch sleeves as a signifier of a point in history when DIY took over a significant sector of popular culture, and when art was up for grabs. 1976-84 was a period when a scissors-and-glue mentality empowered youths up and down the country to produce sleeves of often stunning originality. The mix of bizarre colours, playful typography, and stitched-together images captured the spirit of the equally DIY records perfectly.

There was also a political element. The phenomenon straddled the end of the Callaghan Labour government and the beginnings of Thatcherism, and had varied agit-prop manifestations (Bestley is not afraid to highlight the far-right elements of punk as well as the better-known left-wing and anarcho-punk scenes). Localised production circumvented the corporations, and as each of the Faraway Towns gave rise to its own version of the Small Wonder shop, so punk became as much about local issues, local politics, even the local pub, as about anything happening down the King's Road ('Sten Guns in Sunderland' was one of the more amusing song titles).

Hitsville UK is thus a riposte to the received wisdom of so many 'top-down' BBC documentaries about punk. It's not about pogo-ing with Malcolm at some legendary Pistols concert in London. It's about how the movement was lived by tens of thousands of teenagers all over the country, and about the bands they loved: the likes of Discharge from Stoke; the Cult Maniax from Exeter; the Prefects from Birmingham; Rudi from Belfast; Johnny and the Self-Abusers from Edinburgh, and the bands that never made it beyond their immediate surroundings such as the Small Mercies from Tunbridge Wells (with one R.Bestley on bass). Southampton itself could boast a clutch of such bands, including Strate Jacket, Catch 22, and the mighty

Catholic Girls. (In due course, the Small Wonder shop in London became a record label, and signed up some of the top regional acts; Bauhaus, from Northampton, the Cockney Rejects from East London and The Cure, from Crawley being the best-known. They declined, however, to sign my band - the rotters.)

There is a graphic design dimension to the show (Bestley teaches the subject at university). But these sleeves were often not 'designed' in any conventional sense. They were about mates deciding upon the most punkish/outrageous/amusing/dumb image, and then adding some typography - often filched from elsewhere or inexpertly lettrasetted on. The sleeves, and the records they housed, were not meant to last, and were not intended to make their creators famous. The ethic seemed to be, in the words of one fanzine from the time, 'Ain't Bin to No Art School' - though, as Bestley shows, some of these lo-fi designers certainly had been to art school, and were more knowing than they let on.

Does this amateur status make the sleeves any less 'valid' than a product that might have come out of a major label and had thousands of pounds spent on it? Does their throwaway-ness make them not worth remembering? Does the regional aspect detract from their appeal or authenticity? I'd argue the very opposite - but, please, take a look and decide for yourself.

Roger Sabin

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HITSVILLE UK: PUNK IN THE FARAWAY TOWNS

Vinyl records seem to hold a deep-seated emotional value for many of us - we can remember where we were, who we were with, and that gut feeling dragging us back in time whenever we hear a particular record, or come across a certain record sleeve. I can remember hearing snippets of the new, outrageous phenomenon of ‘punk rock’ through items on the television news, and seeing the shocked reports in the newspapers (all that spitting, vomiting, swearing and rebellion certainly sounded appealing to a fourteen year old potential punk rocker), though it wasn’t until the beginning of 1977 that I really heard anything of the actual music. I was skateboarding with my brother and some friends, and I remember overhearing the radio in my mate’s back garden - the song was Grip, the debut single by The Stranglers, and I could genuinely describe it as a life-changing moment. I was so impressed, I began to seek out other examples of this ‘new wave’ of music. I ordered the debut album by The Stranglers from my mum’s Freemans catalogue (those were the days...), and I started listening to John Peel on Radio One and Stuart Henry at Radio Luxembourg, discovering new groups and trying to find out more in the music press. Punk grew exponentially during 1977 - in some ways, unknown to me at the time, because so many groups and labels saw the golden opportunity of a bandwagon to jump on - and I began to seek out the music in earnest.

“If you’re going to reminisce, then you need to do it properly”

The Mekons, 1st Guitarist (CNT Records)1982

The first port of call for a budding punk rocker, beyond some very limited radio play and the music press, was the records themselves. Gigs were often centred around London and the major metropolitan centres - early punk tours seldom rolled into town if you lived out in the sticks. Specialist record shops were actually something of a rarity on the high street in the mid 1970s - you were more likely to buy the latest releases from Boots, Woolworths, the Co-Op, or a small electrical retailer like Rediffusion - the same people that your parents rented the television from. Local newsagents also stocked singles - especially those in the charts - and I soon learnt a few techniques for seeking out that prized limited edition punk record on coloured vinyl or in a picture sleeve. The bigger ‘chart’ stores would sell out of their initial batch of punk new releases very

quickly, with subsequent stock often being housed in a plain sleeve or of the (boring!) black vinyl variety (I had my suspicions that the trendy bloke behind the counter in Boots was grabbing all the best stuff for himself anyway). However, if you were prepared to put in the effort, you could be rewarded with the ‘first edition’ record that showed how dedicated you really were to the new movement. I can remember walking miles to out-of-town newsagents on hearing reports that they had singles by the likes of X Ray Spex, The Lurkers, UK Subs or Generation X on pink, red, blue, orange or green vinyl. For that extra special rarity well outside of the charts even more effort was required - such as bunking the train to London to seek out the Dangerous Girls or Mekons single that John Peel had been raving about the week before. It got easier once punk became a national ‘movement’ and record shops began to advertise in the back of the music press - you could buy obscure singles by the likes of Crass, The Tights, Spizzoil, Menace or the Television Personalities by mail order from Rough Trade or Small Wonder. Of course, everyone has their own particular tale to tell of the punk years. Mine include my mum destroying my ticket for a Siouxsie & The Banshees gig at Lewisham Odeon (she’d read reports of race riots and punk Nazis in the News Of The World), burning my bondage trousers in the dustbin (luckily, I managed to rescue the singed garments in order to wear them again - result! Even more punk!), and destroying my copy of the Cult Maniax Black Horse e.p. - which would now, rather amusingly, be worth a large amount of money.

Punk hit the regions in a different way to its impact in the cities. It’s interesting to see how the ‘waves’ of punk activity shifted their geographical centres over time, moving gradually away from London, Manchester or Liverpool and out into the smaller towns and cities of the UK. This includes the locations of bands themselves, as well as their fan-bases: local groups could play to local fans - ‘anyone’ could ‘do it’ - and the ‘subculture’ became so widely popular that many could afford to invest in their own slice of vinyl history, with at least a 50/50 chance of getting their money back through record sales. As punk disappeared back underground in the late 1970s, local DIY scenes were cropping up all over the country, and young punk fans, annoyed at being told that they’d missed the boat and that punk was dead, decided to take control of its legacy themselves, thus ensuring an even bigger, harder, faster, louder New Punk movement would emerge. This time, though, punk was genuinely ‘regional’ in its

market, its origins, and its references: where The Clash had defined the sound of the Westway and had sung about sten guns in Knightsbridge, now groups were rallying against their local council, or the village pub landlord who banned punk drinkers, or the lack of prospects or excitement in their own home town.

This exhibition is both a celebration of the wide range of graphic approaches adopted by punk sleeve designers, and an attempt to redress the balance of recent punk ‘histories’ which focus purely on a short-lived series of events based around the Kings Road and Oxford Street. It is based on the mapping and grouping of a wide range of punk-related seven inch single sleeves across the period 1976 to 1984, and seeks to tell a wider, more inclusive story of the punk years.



FROM THE FIRST WAVE TO THE NEW WAVE

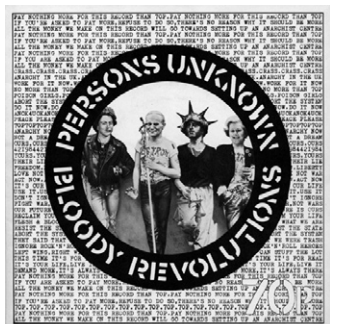
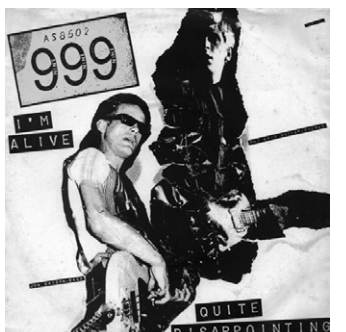
In many of the recent published histories of punk, punk begins and ends in the metropolis, lasting perhaps two or three years (the lifetime of the Sex Pistols as a band, together with the opening up of the movement to record company marketing strategies and the realisation by major labels that punk had strong business potential), then disappears. Although some credit is generally given to secondary groups and locations following in the wake of the London scene, in particular the Buzzcocks and later Factory Records in Manchester and a number of groups around Liverpool, Sheffield or Leeds, these are seldom credited with any local agenda or individual style reflecting alternative approaches to the punk ethos of the capital. Much of the significance attributed to certain locations and individuals also appears to have been given retrospectively: Factory Records, for instance, were not to achieve commercial significance until the 1980s and 1990s with the success of New Order and the Happy Mondays, together with the Hacienda nightclub, which opened in May 1982. There are in fact a great many links and crossovers between the First and Second Waves of UK punk - from the developing London punk scene and gigs further afield by early progenitors such as the Clash and the Sex Pistols to the “punk diaspora”, as Jon Savage has described it. Some provincial bands were able to get a foothold in the new movement through support slots with touring groups and exchanging or sharing gigs - notable among these were the Buzzcocks (who organised two gigs for the Sex Pistols in Manchester, playing as support act at the second), Neon Hearts (who set up their own club in the back room of a pub in Wolverhampton and promoted punk gigs), Suburban Studs (who supported the Sex Pistols in their home town of Birmingham and again in London) and The Prefects (who supported The Clash in Wolverhampton and a number of other dates on the White Riot tour in the Spring of 1977). In this way, gigs were an important feature in both establishing the movement with a wider audience and in gaining recognition for local bands. Later developments in the DIY field in particular, when many groups found a growing market for self-produced records and took up the challenge to start their own labels, saw a growing confidence in the expression of regional, or provincial, concerns. While many of the early punk bands had sung about life in the city, urbanity, boredom and apathy, later bands found a strong enough demand for their work to produce records about particular regions, local scenes, even individuals and rival towns or groups.

COLOURED MUSIC

Once punk and the ‘New Wave’ had become broadly accepted and could be marketed by the major labels, chart entries became far more familiar between 1978 and 1979. The major labels were also quick to recognise the potential for a punk collectors’ market, following the success of independents such as Stiff who had started to produce ‘alternative’ versions and formats of their new releases. Stiff saw the potential for limited edition coloured vinyl releases, picture sleeves and alternative formats such as 10 inch albums and oddly shaped discs - reflected in good sales in the first few weeks following a release date - and were soon followed by other independents such as Small Wonder, Chiswick and Beggars Banquet. Virgin records also offered limited edition coloured vinyl versions of singles by the likes of X Ray Spex, The Members and The Skids, while US based major label A&M tapped into the trend for releases by The Dickies and The Police. The natural conclusion of this marketing style saw The Lurkers’ debut Free Admission Single (Beggars Banquet 1977) issued in 1978 in red, white and blue vinyl versions, while their fourth single, I Don’t Need To Tell Her (1978), came in four different sleeves, each depicting a member of the group - a similar technique was later used by Chiswick Records to market The Damned’s Love Song single in April 1979. Generation X released their fourth single, King Rocker (Chrysalis 1979) at around the same time, with initial pressings in four different sleeves each featuring an individual member of the band, and four corresponding coloured vinyls.

Although the marketing strategies based on limited editions and coloured vinyl proved initially very successful, the inherent conflict with what could be seen as the punk ideology did lead to criticism from both punk bands and audiences, and was savagely parodied in both song lyrics and interviews: the Television Personalities Part Time Punks (Kings Road 1978) included the line “They’d like to buy the O-Level single, or Read About Seymour, but they’re not pressed in red, so they buy The Lurkers instead.” The shift in the late 1970s and early 1980s to a more ideological, austere and politicised punk, especially within the Anarcho Punk sub-genre, saw a decline in the market for alternative formats and coloured vinyl releases and a return to basic black vinyl - often housed within a simple black and white folded sleeve. This can be seen as not only reflecting low cost production techniques on the part of independent labels, but the employment of deliberate visual codes with which to deliberately denote austerity and a

‘back to basics’ approach. Crass had already “...adopted black clothing as a protest against the narcissistic peacockery of the fashion punks” early in their career, and the reflection of this approach within their sleeve graphics was almost inevitable - as was the adoption of similar graphic styles by a subsequent range of Anarcho Punk groups heavily influenced by Crass themselves.



THE PROLE ART THREAT

The independent sector grew strongly between 1978 and 1984, in particular benefiting from the widening market for punk and avant-garde records in the late 1970s. They later successfully captured the early 1980s punk market whilst the major labels turned to the promotion of new styles and a broader audience. A combination of low overheads and the ability to produce short runs of records which were both cost effective and audience-specific allowed the smaller independent labels to operate in this specialist market much more easily than the majors, who relied on mass production and distribution, and a high turnover of their product. Early 1980s punk-specific labels could then tap into a well-established market - notably punks who continued to define themselves as part of the movement rather than adopt a new trend, and those who were interested but had been too young to respond to the First (or even Second) Waves. Riot City, an independent punk label set up by Bristol group Vice Squad and Simon Edwards of local independent Heartbeat Records to release their first record, is a good example: after initially pressing 1,500 copies of the Last Rockers e.p. in December 1980, they found that sales far exceeded expectations, eventually selling in excess of 22,000 copies. The label went on to sign other bands and to gain a strong foothold in the independent market - Riot City eventually released some 29 singles, and 12 albums by a number of different Third Wave punk bands between 1980 and 1984, when they were forced to close following the collapse of their distributor Pinnacle Records. Other labels thrived during this period with the establishment of a firm Third Wave punk fanbase and market for their releases. Both Secret Records (based in London) and No Future (based in Malvern, Worcestershire) had a string of minor chart successes between September 1981 and the end of 1982, releasing singles by Oi-related groups such as Blitz, The Partisans, Red Alert, The Violators and Peter & The Test Tube Babies. The short-lived glossy magazine Punk Lives calculated Oi-related record sales in excess of two million across the sub-genre's first four years, demonstrating a level of commercial success on a par with many First Wave record releases which has subsequently been played down within historical accounts of the movement.

It should also be noted that the visual styles of fanzines and graphic ephemera surrounding punk did not stand still during this period - there is no one standard punk visual language - but did in fact undergo an evolution in terms of both the creation

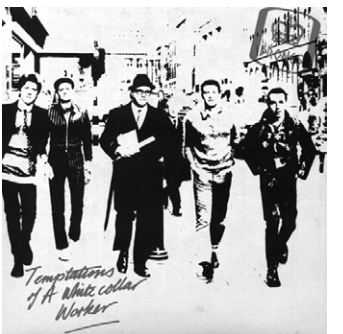
and use of imagery and in typographic style. Techniques for reproduction of a range of punk graphic material also underwent change, partly because independent producers of fanzines and sleeves could build upon innovations and good practice developed by others. The growth of the independent DIY scene in the late 1970s also resulted in graphic design for record sleeves, posters, flyers and fanzines which could be targeted to specific, often small-scale, markets. Many record sleeves could be regarded as strongly non-commercial in terms of the mainstream record market, either in their uncompromising use of text and imagery, or in the hand-made, labour intensive nature of the packaging itself which would be extremely expensive to reproduce on a large scale. The design of record sleeves often involved strategies that, although based on limited budgets, were inventive and sophisticated - incorporating alternative production processes, the adaptation of available, lo-tech materials, and simple printing techniques. Certain design strategies later became established more widely within the field of music packaging and proved influential within the wider practice of graphic design, while many others were ad hoc adaptations of more traditional design skills relating to the branding, marketing and promotion of popular cultural artefacts. It should not be overlooked that the growth in small-scale DIY punk outlets, labels and distributors also helped to establish an effective 'alternative' marketplace, which continues to thrive to this day.

KEY CATEGORIES IN UK PUNK

UK punk was a broad umbrella description, which incorporated a wide range of styles and approaches from the outset, finding some coherence as a distinct punk market developed during the Second Wave before fragmenting once again into a number of opposing and/or inter-related tribal groups during the Third Wave. Although a quite disparate range of potential new sub-genres emerged in the Second and Third Waves of punk, often originated and defined by music critics and record companies, many failed to become widely recognised. However, a number of broad themes and groupings did become accepted by punk bands, music critics and fans, and these categories could be broadly defined as follows:-

- [Proto Punk and Pub Rock](#)
- [New Wave and Novelty Punk](#)
- [DIY, Post Punk and the Avant-Garde](#)
- [Oi and Street Punk](#)
- [Real Punk, New Punk and Hardcore](#)
- [Anarcho Punk](#)

It should be noted that certain of these categories may bear a relationship to UK punk but are not in fact sub-genres of it: groups in the Proto Punk and Pub Rock category might be defined as precursors to punk, which in some cases continued to operate alongside the developing new genre, benefiting from the association in the process. It certainly did no harm for groups such as Dr Feelgood and the Count Bishops when their labels adopted some of the visual styles of the new wave in the packaging and marketing of their records.



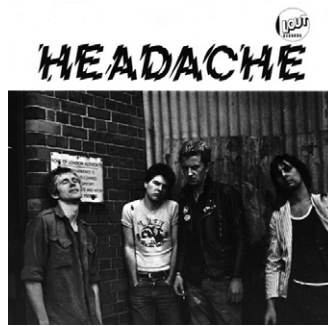
THE PUNK COMMUNITY

From the beginning, UK punk was a fragmented and disparate grouping of distinct musical and visual styles. Many groups were credited with an association to the emerging genre as a way of garnering public and press interest, and the perceived need to build a groundswell of new groups under the punk banner meant that some groups bore associations in quite indirect ways. This is particularly true of those groups who were already partly established on the Pub Rock scene, and who were associated with early independent labels linked to punk, such as Stiff and Chiswick Records. Therefore, although this study is concerned with the definitions of, and distinctions between, a number of emerging sub-genres of UK punk, other related sub-genres, such as Proto Punk (i.e. the Pub Rock and R&B groups operating around the start of UK punk in late 1976 and early 1977) and New Wave (e.g. artists such as Ian Dury, Wreckless Eric, Nick Lowe and Elvis Costello at Stiff Records) are also identified.

One other point, which does require reiteration, is that many UK punk groups were classified within more than one sub-genre, especially during different periods of their careers. When a group first appeared on the scene, many journalists would try to find a place for them alongside those sub-genres already recognised, but once the group became more widely known they might be placed alongside a different set of peers. Also, groups tended to become more proficient, and potentially more commercially viable, over time - so the shift from 'Punk' to 'New Wave', or from DIY to 'Post Punk' was perhaps more the result of a group's natural development rather than self-conscious industry marketing and promotions.

First Wave UK punk can be seen to have been fairly diverse, both musically and sartorially: in terms of this project, sub-genres are limited at this stage to Proto Punk, Punk Rock, Novelty Punk and New Wave. The Second Wave, between 1978 and 1980, saw the emergence of DIY and the Post Punk Avant-Garde, as well as the beginnings of a Street Punk style, while the early 1980s Third Wave led to the division of the movement into fairly clearly defined sub-genres such as Anarcho Punk, Oi, New Punk and Hardcore, as well as the crossover with US Hardcore and the early emergence of Neo-Fascist Punk. These emerging sub-genres of UK punk were defined in large part by the music press and by specific audience groups. Tribal differences became more clearly marked, and strong political,

ideological and even regional factors led to some entrenched positions on the part of bands and labels, and occasionally to direct confrontation between fans of opposing groups.



PROTO PUNK AND PUB ROCK

The roots of UK punk are many and varied, and discourse surrounding the 'true' origins of the movement has thrown up many conflicting arguments. While the influence of musicians in New York in the early 1970s, including the New York Dolls, Iggy Pop, Lou Reed, Patti Smith, Television and The Ramones is often cited, other artists from the UK, such as David Bowie and Roxy Music, are also claimed as the natural lineage into the punk scene of 1976. John Robb's Punk Rock: An Oral History gives a range of opinions from a wide range of individuals involved in the early punk movement, and includes all the above, together with Glam Rock, the late hippie underground, and the London Pub Rock scene. It is certainly arguable that individual punk 'pioneers' were influenced by the music and fashions that had gone before, and the well-documented attitudes of those First Wave artists who gained widespread critical attention have helped to cement a fairly rigid collection of pre-punk artists as inspiration for UK punk's First Wave. A more recent trend in punk history has given greater credit to groups such as Mott The Hoople, Dr Feelgood, Eddie & The Hot Rods and the Pink Fairies as inspirations for punk music and songwriting (including the perceived move away from an Americanised form of Rock & Roll to a more localised English equivalent). It should be noted, however, that the latter development is in part due to the rise in importance of groups such as The Clash and The Damned within punk histories - whereas earlier histories were centred around the Sex Pistols and their immediate entourage, more recent accounts have highlighted the part that individuals such as Mick Jones and Joe Strummer of The Clash and Rat Scabies and Brian James of The Damned played in the development of the early punk scene.

For the purposes of this exhibition, however, Proto Punk examples have been limited to those groups which were cited in early punk reviews - in the music press and in fanzines such as Sniffin' Glue - and those record labels which were to become central to the development of the First Wave of UK punk, such as Stiff and Chiswick. Certain Pub Rock and R&B groups, such as The Gorillas and Eddie & The Hot Rods, featured in early punk reviews, and to a certain extent were categorised within the punk milieu - both groups played at the Mont De Marsan Punk Rock Festival in Bordeaux, on 28th August 1976, and were regularly featured in Sniffin' Glue. The Hot Rods even released what was to become a 'punk classic' single, Do Anything You Wanna Do, at the height of punk in July 1977. Fellow Canvey

Island R&B group Dr Feelgood, who had formed in 1971 and had a number one album in the UK charts, Stupidity, in September 1976, were very influential to the development of the Pub Rock scene in London, and the developing punk scene - it was a £400 loan from vocalist Lee Brilleaux that allowed Jake Riviera and Dave Robinson to start up Stiff Records in the Summer of 1976. Similarly, The Count Bishops featured heavily in the pages of Sniffin' Glue - sharing the same label as The Gorillas, and offering a high-energy, guitar-led live show, the group fitted well with the Proto Punk scene. The Count Bishops Speedball e.p. was the first release on the Chiswick label in November 1975, and featured a picture sleeve - an unusual device at the time.

Several active groups and individuals on the late hippie underground scene also played a key part in the crossover between Proto Punk and the First Wave of UK punk. The Pink Fairies originally formed in 1969 as a three-piece group featuring vocalist Twink with Steve Peregrin Took (formerly of T Rex) and Mick Farren. Twink left the group in 1971 to pursue a solo career, and was replaced by Larry Wallis - co-founder of Heavy Metal group Motörhead with former Hawkwind bassist Lemmy - who would go on to become part of the Stiff Records regular team as a producer. The Pink Fairies also played at the Mont De Marsan Punk Rock Festival in August 1976, alongside The Damned and various UK Proto Punk groups. Wallis released one solo single on Stiff, Police Car, in November 1977, while Farren released the four track Screwed Up e.p. with The Deviants on the same label. Also in 1977, Twink teamed up with Alan Lee Shaw and Rod Latter of The Maniacs to form The Rings, who released one single, I Wanna Be Free, on the Chiswick label in May 1977, and also performed at the 2nd Mont De Marsan Punk Rock Festival. This crossover between punk and the late hippie underground was to have a direct influence on the formation of Anarcho Punk scene leaders Crass, and the regular Stonehenge Free Festival saw a number of close collaborations between the punk and hippie scenes in subsequent years. Free festivals involving groups from both scenes were a regular occurrence in the South and West of England in the early 1980s, often leading to open conflict with the police, and can be seen in part as precursors to the rave culture of the following decade.

NEW WAVE AND NOVELTY PUNK

Like Proto Punk, many of the artists within this category bear a somewhat tangential position relative to UK punk. While New Wave was a generic term largely applied to the punk movement in its early incarnation, it later became associated with chart-friendly, punk-influenced music which was seen to be distinct from the punk movement itself. However, a number of key figures associated with the New Wave need to be considered in this context. Nick Lowe, formerly a member of successful Pub Rock group Brinsley Schwarz, recorded the first single to be released on Stiff Records, So It Goes, in August 1976 as a solo artist, and went on to become the label's in-house producer. The B-side of the single, Heart Of The City, was described as "...the FIRST new wave punk sound on vinyl" by Melody Maker the following year. Lowe also played the Mont De Marsan Punk Rock Festival, and on the 1977 Live Stiffs Tour alongside Ian Dury & The Blockheads, Elvis Costello and Wreckless Eric. As producer, Lowe is credited with The Damned's debut single, New Rose (October 1976) and album Damned Damned Damned (February 1977) - which are widely noted as the first UK punk single and album release respectively - and his raw production style became hugely influential to subsequent punk recordings by other artists. Other Stiff Records artists, including Ian Dury, Elvis Costello, Wreckless Eric, Rachel Sweet and The Yachts were associated with the early UK punk scene before moving on to commercial success under the New Wave heading - like Nick Lowe, however, they were never really defined as 'punk' in the first place, and the term New Wave seems far more appropriate to apply to all their output. Jake Riviera left Stiff to co-found Radar Records with former United Artists A&R man Andrew Lauder in late 1977, taking Nick Lowe, Elvis Costello and The Yachts with him, and that label also became a significant player in the New Wave scene.

Many successful early UK punk groups became closely associated with the New Wave once they had become more well known, and once production values on their record releases became more acceptable to the mainstream. Many of the successful First Wave groups who managed to establish careers on major labels, such as The Jam, The Stranglers, Siouxsie & The Banshees, The Police and The Clash, expanded their musical repertoire as their careers progressed, moving away from the early generic 'punk rock' description in the process. There is also an overlap between the New Wave genre and certain Proto Punk groups and labels - groups such as The Radio Stars, The Motors, Squeeze and

Ian Dury & The Blockheads could be said to bridge both camps.

The term Novelty Punk covers the range of punk-related records which were produced, particularly during the First Wave, in order to offer an often humorous view of the new genre. The tradition of generic novelty records which reflect and comment on developing trends in popular music is almost as old as recorded music itself. Music Hall comedians such as Stanley Lupino based some of their sketches around reflections on the popularity of Ragtime in the decade after 1910, producing comic records such as Have You Got Any Rag? (1916), while the ensuing decades saw popular generic Jazz and Swing songs during the 1930s and 1940s by the likes of Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Glen Miller, and celebrations of new post-war youth styles such as Chuck Berry's Rock 'n' Roll Music (1957) and Heinz' Just Like Eddie (1963). With the advent of punk, the tradition was embraced by both those operating within the movement and those outside wishing to comment on it. The second single by London pub rock band turned punks The Vibrators, Pogo Dancing (RAK 1976), fits neatly into this model, as do such one-off novelty singles as Norman And The Hooligans I'm A Punk (President 1977) and The Punkettes Goin' Out Wiv A Punk (Response 1977). Pop producer Jonathan King also got in on the act, recording a single under the pseudonym Elizabeth, entitled God Save The Sex Pistols (Creole August 1977), a 'royalist' answer record to the Sex Pistols' God Save The Queen released in May the same year. Some of the most successful punk parodies even made inroads in the national charts - Jilted John by Jilted John (Rabid/EMI 1978) remained in the chart for twelve weeks, peaking at number four in August 1978, while Heads Down No Nonsense Mindless Boogie by fellow Mancunians Alberto Y Lost Trios Paranoias (Logo 1978) charted the following month, and The Monks' Nice Legs Shame About Her Face (Carrere 1979) took punk's by-now generic cockney accent and simple guitar riffs to build a novelty hit in April 1979. The Monks took the punk parody one step further with their next single, Johnny B Rotten (EMI 1979), even going so far as to mimic Jamie Reid's original artwork for the Sex Pistols' Anarchy In The UK.

One punk parody even managed to precede the furore surrounding the Sex Pistols television appearance in December 1976 - had it appeared a few weeks later, it could have achieved national exposure. Gimme That Punk Junk by the Water Pistols was released in November 1976, just a couple of weeks before the Sex Pistols debut single. A comic blend of clichéd tabloid punk descriptions (the singer boasts of wearing chains, swearing and petty violence) and generic rock pop, its play on words is very humorous and pre-figures a number of key later developments in punk history. The chorus repeats the lyrical refrain; "Anarchist... Anarchist... An' I kissed a couple of local girls", playing directly with Johnny Rotten's vocal inflection in the opening lines of Anarchy In The UK, while the subject of the last verse could easily be taken as future Sex Pistols bassist Sid Vicious, real name John Simon Richie:

I am a rebel and Simon's my name
Mum thinks I'm crazy I drive her insane
I know two chords and I sing out of tune
If punk rock lasts I will make a fortune

While this notion of punk parody and humorous critique can be seen to originate from both inside and outside the genre, a distinction should be made between meta-punk, as a punk discourse from within, and the adoption of punk styles for either comedic value or commercial viability by artists outside of the punk movement.



DIY, POST PUNK AND THE AVANT-GARDE

Beginning with the notion of self-publishing, often in parallel with other activities such as fanzine production, this category covers a broad range of musical styles and visual strategies, often produced in limited numbers. As indicated by the definitions used to compile the Independent Chart, independent releases were determined by production and marketing factors rather than musical style, and as such the range of independent and DIY releases in the late 1970s is very broad, covering everything from electronic pop to jazz and dance music. During the First and Second Waves of UK punk, the influence of new labels and distribution networks such as Small Wonder, Cherry Red and Rough Trade helped to create a more established sub-genre of DIY punk music, together with more sophisticated marketing strategies and longer production runs. Other small labels, such as FAST Product, Illegal and Stiff, also enjoyed the benefits of major label distribution deals with established companies.

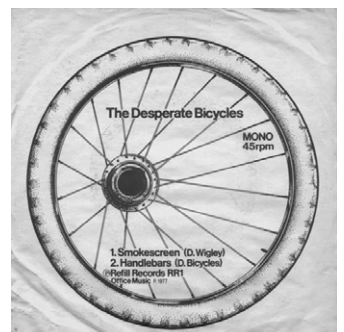
This is the broadest category within this field, covering a range of activities from self-produced and distributed small label output through to popular independent artists or labels with a more established catalogue, and as such it does impact across a range of other sub-genres. Many Anarcho Punk and Hardcore releases, for instance, could equally be defined as DIY, in that they were low budget releases, often with home-produced sleeve artwork and packaging, and were distributed via independents such as Southern Records or Rough Trade. However, a distinction should be made between groups who released their records independently and saw the Do It Yourself maxim as an explicit reflexive practice, and those who may have run their own labels but were less concerned with promoting and foregrounding the 'anyone can do it' message. Independent labels were to have a strong influence on the structure of the music industry throughout the following two decades. The Cartel distribution network was very successful for a number of years, and it took some time for the major labels to reassert their grip on the market. When they did, a new category, Indie, emerged as a loose branding tool, the major labels clumsily attempting to tap into the well-established independent market and audiences.

Many Second Wave bands were heavily influenced by both media coverage of punk and by direct contact with bands on tour and records made available through national distribution and radio airplay. As Jon Savage suggests, a number of DIY,

independent records produced by some of these bands "...mark the full UK take-up of the challenge posed by Buzzcocks' 'Spiral Scratch'. Unlike the US, where major label deals were rarely an option and putting your own records out was a matter of necessity, UK Independent label releases were often the result of choice becoming ideology." Savage refers here directly to the first record release by the Buzzcocks from Manchester, a four-track seven inch e.p. (extended play) single on their own New Hormones label entitled Spiral Scratch, which was released in the spring of 1977 and funded by a loan from guitarist Pete Shelley's father. The single got good publicity and was played on John Peel's national radio show - it eventually sold 16,000 copies before it was deleted in September 1977, making it a hugely successful, and widely recognised, punk DIY enterprise.

Though Spiral Scratch became symbolic of the punk DIY ethos, largely due to its success in gaining radio airplay and enthusiastic reviews in the music press, other groups were also experimenting with self-produced records around the same time. Some of these achieved critical acclaim and sold successfully, particularly those from the capital, where direct contact with journalists documenting the evolving 'scene' was easier. One of the better known DIY groups were the Desperate Bicycles, who issued their first single Smokescreen/Handlebars on their own Refill Records label in London during the summer of 1977. The total cost of production amounted to £153 for recording, pressing and printing simple one sided, one colour sleeves. The group used the profits from the sale of the limited edition of 500 records to produce a second single entitled The Medium Was Tedium/Don't Back The Front (this timewith a two colour sleeve printed on both front and back) some three months later. 1,000 copies of this single were issued, selling within weeks and leading to a repress of a further 1,000. After this batch was sold, the label became self-financing, producing a further three singles and an album over the ensuing three years. The first two Desperate Bicycles releases were also interesting because they featured the same two tracks on both sides, apparently because the group could only afford to cut one master for one side of a record. The lyrics were also concerned with promoting the DIY ethos - on Smokescreen the singer announces "Xerox music's here at last!" and on the run out groove a lone voice shouts the phrase "It was easy, it was cheap, go and do it!". Self-produced DIY efforts over the following year continued

this trend in the promotion of a do-it-yourself ideology, either through the hand-crafted nature of labels and sleeves, or through a direct message within the artwork or lyrics themselves. In London, The Television Personalities issued their first single, 14th Floor/Oxford Street W1, on their own Teen '78 label early in 1978, incorporating hand-written labels and folded, Xeroxed sleeves. Their second single, the Where's Bill Grundy Now? e.p., released on the re-named Kings Road label, sold out of several pressings during 1978, before being taken up and re-pressed by Rough Trade in 1979, eventually selling in excess of 15,000 copies. The Rough Trade version featured sleeves with reproduced notes on the reverse detailing the recording and production costs of both record and artwork. Interestingly, the record sleeves were a major production expense for the group (particularly when you compare it with the cost of recording: "recorded at I.P.S. Shepherd's Bush, August 26/1978, cost £22.50"). The sleeve note reads "...sleeves 2,000 = £110 by Delga, Kent. We didn't want to but what else do we do?", expressing the groups' frustration with the renewed demand for picture sleeves during this period. The lyrics of the Television Personalities' record itself are heavily critical of the new 'punk' market, with its apparent obsession with coloured vinyl records, picture sleeves and trendy venues, and the track Part Time Punks makes a number of barbed comments on the way the punk scene was developing at the time. Other groups moved from a base in the independent avant-garde into more prominent positions with the backing of major record labels, and this development was seen not only as good business by some participants, but as in some ways inevitable in light of the historical development of the music industry. Some independent labels, such as Fast Product, actively encouraged links with the major labels, setting themselves up as a kind of pro-active A&R department to establish groups on the ground and then pass them through to the major labels. Fast Product released debut singles by the Gang Of Four, Mekons, Scars and the Human League, all of whom went on to sign to major labels - in fact, Fast Product was itself eventually bought out by EMI Records.



OI AND STREET PUNK

This category stems originally from the early Second Wave of UK punk, with bands such as Sham 69, Menace and Slaughter & The Dogs providing a musical style based on traditional rock & roll forms twinned with Glam Rock and pop, and a visual aesthetic which references the image of the ‘boot boy’, skinhead culture, and working class youth iconography. The terms ‘Oi’ and ‘Street Punk’ were coined in the late 1970s by journalists, notably Garry Bushell at Sounds, in order to promote a particular genre of newly developing bands and labels who drew on the image of those earlier bands and refined their sound into a loud, fast and aggressive new style. Often dealing with supposedly ‘working class’ subject matter such as football, drinking, sex and violence, songs usually combined singalong choruses and simple chants with melodic hooklines. The influence of earlier Glam Rock on both the musical and visual direction of Second Wave UK Street Punk and Oi should not be overlooked. Glam Rock had initially grown in popularity as a back to basics pop rock format in direct opposition to the increasingly complex and professional output of the Progressive Rock movement. The most successful UK singles band of the early 1970s were Slade, from Walsall in the West Midlands. Their early image tapped into the skinhead style of the late 1960s, wearing the outfits of the football terraces and street style of working class youth, and their music was simple, loud and heavy, utilising strong 4/4 drum patterns - which became central to the Glam Rock musical style. As the public interest in Glam Rock grew, Slade, along with other successful Glam artists such as David Bowie, Marc Bolan, The Sweet and Mud, moved further into the pop mainstream, adopting a musical style which married their earlier raw rock & roll with catchy hooklines and melodic choruses.

Oi groups such as Cock Sparrer, who formed in 1974 as a pub rock band playing mostly Small Faces covers and attracted a skinhead and bootboy following in East London, were directly influenced by early Glam Rock, and later Oi and Street Punk groups tended to wear their influences on their collective sleeves: both One Way System and The Crack covered Slade’s Cum On Feel The Noize, while the 4 Skins covered Merry Xmas Everybody and Vice Squad recorded a version of The Sweet’s Teenage Rampage. It should also be noted that this link between punk and Glam Rock had also been prominent during earlier periods of the movement: the Sex Pistols had auditioned singer Johnny Rotten by asking him to sing along to a recording of Alice Cooper’s Eighteen, guitarist Mick Jones of The Clash had been heavily influenced by Mott

The Hoople, and both The Damned and The Rezillos covered The Sweet’s Ballroom Blitz. The Damned also toured as support act to Marc Bolan in March 1977, and a television series entitled Marc, which was commissioned by Granada Television and presented by Bolan in the autumn of 1977, featured a number of punk artists including Generation X and the Boomtown Rats. The interpretation of Oi as an essentially live music form which embraced singalong traditions and a (drunken) party atmosphere is also evident in other cover versions and in the development of Oi sub-genres such as the Garry Bushell-manufactured ‘Punk Pathetique’ movement incorporating Splodgenessabounds, the Toy Dolls and Bushell’s own group The Gonads. The Gonads recorded a punk version of Tom Jones’ Delilah, and both the Toy Dolls and Splodgenessabounds were renowned for various comic interpretations of well-known songs. Splodgenessabounds covered the Rolf Harris children’s classic Two Little Boys - which actually spent seven weeks in the national charts between August and September 1980 - while the Toy Dolls achieved a Top Ten place at Christmas 1984 with their radical reworking of the nursery rhyme Nellie The Elephant.

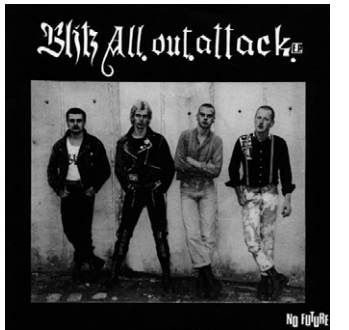
The patriotic sentiments expressed by the likes of The Last Resort (whose record releases included titles such as Red, White and Blue, Lionheart and Rose Of England) and Cock Sparrer (whose 1982 single England Belongs To Me became an instant Oi classic) helped to give the Oi movement a notoriety and fascist associations. Even the nationalist associations of songs such as the 4 Skins version of the Dambusters theme and The Business’ interpretation of traditional Negro spiritual Dayo (The Banana Boat Song) appeared to display an uneasy mix of male drinking rituals and jingoism. Tensions created in the press came to a head with a gig at the Hamborough Tavern, Southall in July 1981 featuring the 4-Skins and The Business. The venue was attacked by local Asian youths, and fighting between gig-goers, the police and local Asians led to a full-scale riot and considerable damage to the pub and local businesses. The resulting publicity meant that the Oi movement was forced to go underground, and many left-wing and non-political groups were put in a difficult position of disassociating themselves from the movement that they had been happy to be connected with earlier in their careers whilst it had led to gigs and audiences for their records. The Southall riot was widely reported in the national press, with almost all journalists placing the blame firmly in the camp of the bands and their skinhead followers. The

Daily Mail went so far as to target music journalist Garry Bushell and the Sounds music paper: a headline on 9th July 1981 described Sounds as [“The Skinhead Bible of Hate from an Establishment Stable”](#), the editorial going on to report that it was [“...not merely a pop paper but a vehicle for viciously extremist and fascist views.”](#) Sounds management took legal action against the Daily Mail and the NME (who had repeated the allegations), but the perception of the Oi movement as wholly embracing the racist cause had already become widely accepted as fact.

Garry Johnson, an outspokenly anti-racist Oi poet, did make an attempt to redress the balance with his 1981 book Oi: A View from the Dead End of the Street, written in the weeks following the Southall riot. Placing the contemporary skinhead culture firmly within a set of historical references which traced back to the 1960s rude boy fashions and their adoption of early ska and reggae music from Jamaica, and including photographs of black punk fans and ska musicians, Johnson states [“...white working class got more in common with black working class, than they have with white rich middle class.”](#) He also argues strongly against both right and left-wing political groups, and tries to centre the Oi movement within an apolitical working class youth culture (thus mirroring the position of much First Wave punk). This is a similar argument to that put across by Garry Bushell and other sympathetic journalists, though their ideas of working class tradition and pride are often fraught with ideological problems.

Ironically, the press backlash which forced the Oi movement underground may well have led to a consolidation and strengthening of the right-wing factions within it, with far-right elements continuing to grow throughout the 1980s and 1990s and the establishment of dedicated labels and fund-raising gigs for neo-fascist parties. Some Oi groups such as Cock Sparrer and the Cockney Rejects (whose track Oi, Oi, Oi, on their second album, Greatest Hits Vol.2, leant the movement its name) espoused allegiance to football teams (in both cases West Ham FC), and dressed in the ‘uniform’ of the football terraces - boots, braces and short hair. The Cockney Rejects featured a photograph of a football crowd on the sleeve of their single We Are The Firm/War On The Terraces (1980), while another single based on a football terrace chant, I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles, featured military stripes in the colours of the West Ham football strip. These approaches were not without precedent: promo sleeves for the debut

single by Cock Sparrer, Runnin’ Riot (Decca 1977) had featured a photograph of a pitch invasion by West Ham supporters. Coupled with lyrics which were often anti-establishment, and in particular anti-police, this image attracted a following which included football hooligans, skinheads and some right-wing elements. Many of the early Oi bands gained a strong following and achieved minor chart positions with record releases, but by 1981 were attracting an increasingly violent faction to their gigs. Garry Johnson asserts that trouble within the movement was largely caused by football allegiances rather than racism: [“...the real problem of the movement was rival football fans - but it was a problem we were fighting and winning.”](#)

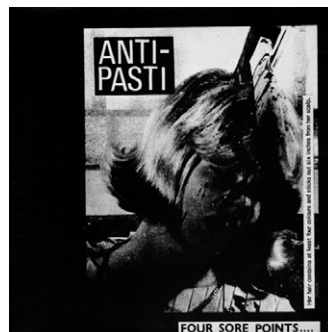


REAL PUNK, NEW PUNK AND HARDCORE

Parallel to the development of Oi as a separate genre, another punk style was evolving which drew inspiration from the First Wave sounds of the Sex Pistols, The Clash and The Damned and Second Wave back-to-basics groups such as the UK Subs, The Lurkers, The Ruts and Stiff Little Fingers. New Punk and Hardcore groups often espoused anti-authoritarian sentiments along with an abrasive, less melodic, musical style set against the popular trends in New Wave and other Post Punk releases. As with the Oi sub-genre, the Sounds newspaper was again instrumental in defining this development as 'New Punk' - and groups such as The Exploited, Chron Gen, GBH, Discharge, Vice Squad and the Anti Nowhere League gained large followings and enough record sales to reach the national charts. It is also important to note that none of these groups came from London: the overall impression given by the music press and supporters of New Punk was that it signalled a return to Punk's 'true' roots in working class culture, and many of those involved were from working class backgrounds across the smaller towns and cities of the UK.

Some labels specialising in New Punk and Oi records did achieve solid sales figures and regular placings in both the alternative charts and the national chart. The Riot City label became synonymous with the New Punk movement, following their initial success with Vice Squad, The Insane and Abrasive Wheels, although Garry Bushell, writing in Sounds, described the label as the "dustbin of punk". Vice Squad were later signed to EMI records, though they kept the Riot City label identity on their releases: in fact, EMI set up a subsidiary punk and new wave label under the revived Zonophone banner, and signed other successful punk groups the Cockney Rejects and the Angelic Upstarts, both of whom went on to have national chart successes. This model of specialist New Punk labels was mirrored by others such as Beat The System, Rot Records, Razor, Fallout, Pax and Clay Records (the latter, like Rondelet, covering both New Punk/Hardcore and NWOBHM/Heavy Metal releases). Other labels crossed over between the New Punk and Oi sub-genres; Secret Records became home to The Exploited, The 4 Skins, The Business and Chron Gen, while No Future Records released material by Blitz, The Partisans and Peter & The Test Tube Babies, many of whom featured in the national and alternative charts. Categorisation does become blurred at this point, as some groups crossed boundaries between definitions of Oi, Street Punk and New Punk. This is partly because some bands, such as The Exploited, the Newtown

Neurotics and The Partisans, appeared on the early Oi compilation albums, before establishing their own identity as central to the New Punk movement. Others, including Infa Riot and Blitz, sought to distance themselves from early categorisation with the Oi movement following the negative publicity and connotations of right-wing political positions attributed to the genre. Some early influences, both musically and lyrically, also cross the boundaries: Sham 69, Menace, The Lurkers and the UK Subs, for instance, married overt working class sentiments to rabble-rousing chants and football terrace choruses - themes which continued to be central to both Oi and New Punk songwriting. However, fairly strong divisions - musical, political and sartorial - were to become apparent between the developing Hardcore Punk and Oi sub-genres, to the extent that these two terms became widely recognised and the New Punk category itself faded from view over time.



ANARCHO PUNK

A sub-genre which developed in its own right, partly as a reaction to the increased political polarisation within punk as a whole, and as a connection to earlier concerns of the underground movement of the 1960s. Often employing explicit visual and verbal attacks on the power of the state and authority figures, together with strong anti-war and/or animal rights sentiments and an austere, monochrome, deliberately lo-tech sleeve design approach, Anarcho Punk records tended to follow certain unspoken aesthetic rules, often directly influenced by the output of the leading Anarcho Punk band Crass. Crass were an anarchist collective based in a commune in Epping forest. In the late 1970s, the members of this loose-knit, strongly ideological group formed a punk band to relay their anarchist message following the networks established by Rock Against Racism and a wide base of support for CND, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Their media interruptions - incorporating records, books, films, events, concerts, and posters - employed a distinctive visual style and an overt anarchist rhetoric, and paved the way for an entire sub-genre of anarchist punk bands. They also had a strong influence on the growing traveller movement, and their utopian visions of the future, coupled with an aggressive refusal to cooperate with the mainstream, saw them frequently in direct confrontation with authority. A successful marketing strategy, based on word-of-mouth communications and the underground scene born out of the early punk networks, saw the band's name stencilled on walls across the country, even though their records were blacklisted in many of the major record chains. Using a strategy of (low) maximum price details on the sleeves, visual devices centred on a heavy black circle (initially derived from the band's central visual identity), the anarchist symbol, and fold-out posters, the group's graphic output was designed to make strong political messages.

Crass had a strong influence among the countless number of young groups formed in their wake who shared their concerns about the threat of nuclear war and the exploitation inherent within the capitalist system, though they often expressed this in less convincing terms. Many of the Crass collective were from an older, and more educated, background than their followers, and the inclusion of substantial anarchist texts on their record sleeves was mirrored by some (often rather inarticulate) copycat pieces by younger bands. Bands were supported by underground Anarcho Punk networks - gigs were set up by local activists in small venues across the

country, often outside of the regular music industry circuit. Many of these events raised funds for a range of political causes, from CND to the Animal Liberation Front, as well as smaller local campaigns. Book and record stalls at venues provided access to the underground and anarchist media, and gigs were sometimes scheduled for afternoons without a bar licence in order to give admittance a younger audience. The Crass Records label also released a series of budget-price compilation albums, entitled Bullshit Detector, showcasing demo tapes sent in by unknown bands sympathetic to the Anarcho Punk cause. Later developments in the sub-genre saw a further reflection and critique of the way that Anarcho Punk, in itself, had become stylised and had established invisible rules and codes of conduct among its followers.

Anarcho Punk was also to split politically as the sub-genre developed during the early 1980s, at least in terms of approach. While Crass continued to offer a subversive critique of the British government's involvement in the Falklands War and the threat of global nuclear conflict, others such as Flux Of Pink Indians and Conflict took on radical positions regarding animal testing and the meat industry, through records such as the Flux debut album Strive To Survive Causing The Least Suffering Possible and Conflict's To A Nation Of Animal Lovers. Conflict also encouraged a more proactive form of resistance than the peaceful means of protest put forward by the Crass camp, with strong links being tied to underground anarchist groups such as Class War and activists within the Animal Liberation Front. The Stop The City campaign, which involved mass rallies in central London to bring the city to a halt, also had close ties to a number of interlinked anarchist groups, and running battles with the authorities were commonplace.

In common with the cross-over between New Punk and Oi, a grey area exists in the distinction between Anarcho Punk and several groups who are more commonly labelled Hardcore, in particular the latter's scene leaders Discharge and other associated groups on Stoke's Clay and Bristol's Riot City labels. Nearly all of Discharge's output between 1980-84 was concerned with the threat of nuclear war and included strong anti-militarist statements: songs such as Realities Of War, State Violence State Control, Two Monstrous Nuclear Stock Piles and Protest And Survive provided a central manifesto for the group, and their lyrical and musical concerns were adopted

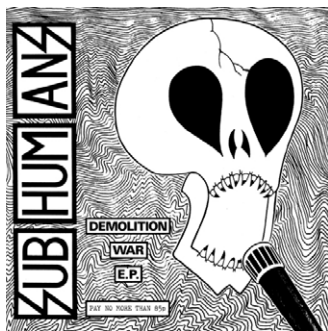
by a number of like-minded groups such as The Varukers, The Skeptix and Broken Bones. Songs recorded by these groups do indeed echo many of the sentiments of Anarcho Punk groups such as Crass and Flux Of Pink Indians, but the groups were more commonly associated with the evolving Hardcore scene for a number of reasons. Firstly, the overarching banner of the Crass collective encompassed so much of the Anarcho Punk scene during this period that many groups found themselves in a position where they had to either ally themselves with the Crass camp or be seen as distinct from it. Some music journalists adopted a very negative attitude towards Crass, and were followed by outspoken members of a number of groups in the Oi and New Punk scenes. It should be noted here that these sub-genres were evolving in parallel to Anarcho Punk, and could be seen as being in direct competition, so allegiances tended to become more explicit. A rift grew between those groups who identified themselves with Anarcho Punk, centred around Crass, and the New Punk and Oi bands who featured on the Oi! compilation albums and were championed by Garry Bushell in Sounds. Crass had included a song entitled Punk Is Dead on their debut mini album in 1978, and Bushell had taken it upon himself to criticise the group regularly within his reviews. The debut album by The Exploited, Punk's Not Dead (Secret 1981), bears a direct relationship to the Crass title, and the group became standard-bearers for the New Punk movement.

The war of words between New Punk groups and the Anarcho Punk bands even went so far as the trading of insults on vinyl: Crass released a flexidisc entitled Rival Tribal Rebel Revel (Crass 1981), mimicking the stylised Cockney accent adopted by many Oi groups, and exchanged words with Bushell in the music press and fanzine interviews. The argument was later taken up by Special Duties singer Steve Arrogant (the pseudonym itself an ironic opposition to Crass lead singer Steve Ignorant). Arrogant was a regular commentator in Sounds, frequently writing letters to the paper to put forward his vision of 1980s punk, and Special Duties released the single Bullshit Crass on Rondelet records in 1982, reaching number seven in the independent chart. Many of the sentiments expressed in this song were reiterated by other groups, including the Crowbar single Hippy Punks (1984) and The Gonads' Peace Artists (1982). Ever ones to take an argument further, Crass retorted with the track It's The Greatest Working Class Rip-Off, itself a parody of The Cockney Rejects single The Greatest Cockney Rip Off,

a genre-defining Oi classic released in 1980:-

It's the greatest working class rip off, oi, oi, oi What a fucking rip off, oi, oi, oi

The success of groups such as Discharge, both in terms of chart placings and critical support in the music press, also saw them more closely aligned with the New Punk establishment. Discharge's participation in the Apocalypse Now tour of 1981, alongside The Exploited, Anti Nowhere League, Anti Pasti and Chron Gen, saw them gain some level of critical and commercial success, but also placed them firmly in the New Punk camp by association. Whereas Crass, Conflict and Poison Girls deliberately operated outside of the music press and standard performance venues, and were prepared to vary their musical and lyrical styles to encompass a broad range of influences (including poetry, literature and spoken-word performance for instance), the Hardcore groups tended to retain the visual and verbal language of 'anarchy' allied to a brutal, monotonous sound assault.



SOUND AND VISION

The punk categories and sub-genres listed above were defined in large part by critics in the music press, with labels and groups often keen to latch on to new trends as a form of promotion. The later sub-genres of UK punk - Oi, Hardcore, New Punk and Anarcho Punk - became firmly established during the Third Wave, and carried musical and sartorial codes through which to define themselves and their opposition to other groups and factions. A key question in relation to punk graphic approaches is whether similar distinctions were voiced in the sleeve design of records within these punk communities. A series of exhibition panels relating to these punk sub-genres aims to display the range of graphic codes and iconic devices present on a range of record sleeves, in order to evaluate distinctions and to unpack the subtle ways in which agendas might be promoted and audience allegiances secured. Strong graphic styles, such as the raw, black and white aesthetic of the Crass label, were emulated by other groups who felt an affinity to that particular scene, and this led to the cementing of certain generic visual codes across a range of material: indeed, the graphic styles of 'scene leaders' were often mirrored by up-and-coming groups, particularly through home-made, DIY artwork. In some cases, visual styles were directly 'lifted' in order to provide an instant connection to the original, while others used appropriation as a tool to comment on punk's internal discourse, or as an ironic attack on the movement. While many early punk releases were housed in plain record company bags or simple black and white picture sleeves, and increasing number of New Wave sleeves produced during the 'boom' of 1978-79 show signs of a major financial investment - coloured vinyl records housed in full colour litho-printed sleeves, for instance. Parallel DIY efforts tended to be much more basic, with limited use of colour and the adoption of simple folding and packaging solutions. Meanwhile, the 1981-82 New Punk explosion displays a real split between sleeves incorporating glossy, full colour images (and, curiously, a growth in the use of picture discs, a very un-punk format if ever there was one), and the raw, back-to-basics, black and white sleeves of the Hardcore and Anarcho Punk groups - in this case, the result more of an ideological, rather than purely economic, split.

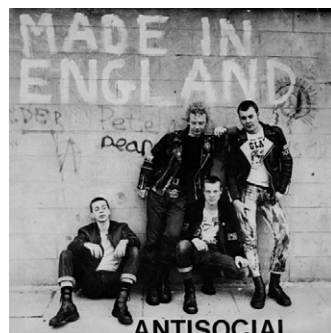
When compared with other contemporary forms of popular music, punk offers some interesting contrasts. In particular, a significant strand of punk can be seen to have been in a constant battle with the music

industry to remain underground, avant-garde and uncommercial. As the industry invested in the New Wave, for instance - the only punk sub-genre to achieve relative success in the USA - other punk sub-genres sought to distance themselves from this field. The development of a number of increasingly aggressive, abrasive and awkward sub-genres (such as Hardcore, Oi, New Punk and Anarcho Punk, as well as the more radical elements of DIY and Post Punk) can be seen to be an inverse reaction to punk's co-option into the mainstream, and patterns can be observed in the way that waves of acceptance and opposition play out over time. These patterns can be seen to have been both political and aesthetic - from the lyrics and public statements of the groups involved to the musical and visual styles of their records. This trend identifies punk as distinct from other contemporaneous forms of popular music such as Pop, Disco and Funk, each of which could be seen to enjoy a sense of close allegiance with the record industry, and where new artists were keen to be embraced by the commercial mainstream. Disco and funk, like jazz, country, rock & roll and rhythm & blues before them, enjoyed far higher levels of commercial success worldwide than punk, although the development of new markets and an international punk underground was to have far-reaching effects. In particular, the close fit between the punk subculture and a wide range of radical political and cultural groups meant that the genre was to become widely successful in spite of the mainstream, and punk record sales and events remain buoyant in a largely independent and underground market.

The graphic and musical styles of a number of Third Wave punk sub-genres were to remain underground, going on to influence a range of new movements during the 1980s and 1990s. The hard-edged styles of Anarcho and Hardcore punk were always unlikely to cross over into the mainstream, but did enjoy a strong level of support among fans and went on to influence new genres such as Thrash Metal and even the Rave scene of the early 1990s. Other punk-inspired developments such as the new electronica of Mute Records and The Human League crossed over to the pop mainstream in the early 1980s and helped to build a foundation for electronic pop which continues to feature in the charts. A range of DIY styles also provided a strong musical and visual influence on the development of punk as a whole. Innovations in packaging materials and marketing techniques by pioneering labels such as Stiff Records and Beggars Banquet, including coloured vinyl and limited edition releases, were also

subsequently mirrored by the major labels. Indeed, it should be unsurprising that many innovators in the music industry continue to release their initial recordings on a small independent label, before signing to a major label and developing their approach within a more commercial framework. The 'hard edges' of the original approach might be softened in the process, but the influence can often be seen to filter out across a range of subsequent releases. The success of 'indie' music since the mid 1980s bears out this assertion: the use of lo-tech materials and the incorporation of a hand-made and limited edition craft aesthetic is a central theme of many releases within this genre, and has become something of a visual trope in itself. Indeed, the increasing homogenisation of the music industry, reduced to four or five major international labels and distributors by the early 21st Century, together with the growth of new technologies such as the internet, has allowed the DIY underground - and punk with it - to continue to thrive as an 'authentic' voice of opposition.

Russell Bestley, March 2007



Published in conjunction with the exhibition [Hitsville UK: Punk in the Faraway Towns](#) at the Millais Gallery, Southampton April 12th to May 26th 2007.

Thanks to: Sarah, Roger Sabin, Rob Bevan, Alex and Chrysostomos at Company, Les and Bridget at the Millais Gallery, Janice, Angus, Stuart, Patrick and the LCC Research Department, MAGDLCC, Alex Ogg, Ged Babey, TV Smith, The Joiners, Rich Levene, Tony Suspect and the Southampton DIY scene, Ian PTP, Wayne, Chimp, the Luce boys and all punx everywhere

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