

**HITSVILLE UK: PUNK ROCK AND GRAPHIC DESIGN
IN THE FARAWAY TOWNS, 1976-84**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of the Arts London

by

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October 2007

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With thanks to my PhD supervisory team at the University of the Arts London: Janice Hart, Stuart Evans, Angus Carlyle and especially Roger Sabin for all their help and advice throughout the duration of this research. I would also like to thank John Robb, Ian Glasper, Alex Ogg, Roddy Moreno, Mike Dines, Dave Muggleton, Nikki Clayton and Kev Lycett for their time and patience in responding to my questions via email and in person, and my colleagues in the School of Graphic Design at the London College of Communication for their expertise, advice and support – Paul McNeil, Tony Credland, Ian Noble and Penny Hilton. The interactive and exhibition work would have been impossible without the valuable help of Rob Bevan, Alex and Chrysostomos at Company, Ged Babey, Tony Whatley and Rich Levene in Southampton, Les Buckingham at the Millais Gallery, Rhidian Davis at the BFI and Jenny Russell at the Rebellion Festival. Friends and allies who always had something to say included Wayne Daly, Jon ‘Chimp’ Carver, Pete Green and Paul, Kev and Martin Luce. Lastly, and by no means least, I would like to thank my wife, Sarah, for enduring this day-in and day-out for so many years, and my daughters Zoe, Chris and Nikita who had to put up with dad’s moods, and his music, for so long. Thanks should also go to my parents – all those wasted teenage years were not in vain, as I tried to tell you at the time! – and to the punk rock groups from all those faraway towns who gave me the inspiration to go my own way in the first place.

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Russell Bestley

Abstract

This research has two primary aims, both of which relate to a study of graphic design methods within the field of popular culture. The first aim is to identify the visual codes which appear in the sleeve designs of a broad selection of UK punk seven inch singles released between 1976 and 1984, and to analyse these in relation to a number of different punk sub-genres and audience groups. Sleeves are mapped stylistically, geographically and chronologically to show the evolution of a range of distinct design strategies and the diasporic effect on the development of punk in the wider regions of the UK. The documentation of these graphic traits reveals the ways in which distinct patterns within punk's visual language evolved and eventually became entrenched over time.

The second aim is the development of a transferable, theoretical and practical method for characterising the formal properties of a range of graphic material. A number of print-based and interactive visual matrices accompany the written thesis, as a key component of the research methodology. In this way, the relationship between graphic design, time and place, and audience is made clear, while the interactive display allows for a more complex range of textual information to be shown, along with the opportunity to review links between sound and visual form. Visual material extended from this research was exhibited successfully in Southampton, London and Blackpool during the spring and summer of 2007, and a number of public talks were given by the author. The major contribution to new knowledge and understanding is in the development of an analytical methodology that has focused on punk graphics but which could be adapted to the study of other graphic artefacts related to visual manifestations of youth culture in the late 20th century and beyond.

Introduction

These initial pages introduce the graphic history of the first and second generations of UK punk rock, giving particular emphasis to record sleeve design for the most generic and influential punk artefact – the seven inch single. The history of UK punk has been widely documented in recent years, but has tended to focus almost entirely on a short-lived scene within the major metropolitan areas of London and Manchester. Renewed interest in the subject has led to an edited and stylised version of events which centres on a small number of key participants in the movement. Meanwhile, academic and popular historical investigations have emphasised fashion, music and youth culture, but seldom touch upon graphic design beyond a very limited selection of examples from a few high-profile graphic designers.

*This research explores the relationship between punk's prime movers and those inspired to produce their own versions of the genre. As such, it sets itself in opposition to the majority of mainstream historical accounts, and aims to offer a more inclusive alternative based on a broader range of participants and artefacts. The graphic history of UK punk singles is situated here in relation to a broader historical framework and internal discourse in the punk subculture itself. Areas of focus include the history of the seven inch record format, popular music and youth subcultures, the picture sleeve as a marketing tool, the use of iconographic devices such as the anarchy symbol, photomontage and collage, typographic elements, parody and pastiche, and references to locations and personalities. This introduction also includes a definition of the authorial perspective of the project, its relationship to a critical overview of previous publications, and a definition of key terms. The **Thesis Structure** section indicates how the text is organised in order to best present the material and develop a model of analysis.*

0.1 Thesis Structure

This project analyses the graphic properties of a wide range of UK punk and punk-related seven inch record sleeves produced between 1976 and 1984, a period during which punk became established, critically and commercially, as a new musical and subcultural form.

This introduction establishes the critical context of the project and sets out general aims and intentions therein, including the rationale for focussing on the seven inch single and the context of a progression of punk identities across the UK,¹ leading to further innovation and fragmentation over the period in question. **Chapter One: Historical Perspectives** outlines the range of contemporary discourse on UK punk. A deliberate choice has been made to avoid a conventional literature review: instead, an extensive review has been conducted across a range of disciplines, and published work within the public domain has been chosen as a context against which to position the historical perspective of this research. **Chapter Two: The “Punkness” of Punk** attempts to build a revisionist definition of the genre and raises a number of questions in relation to punk and authenticity and the reductive view of the subculture propagated in current accounts. Once the historical context and significance of the punk seven inch single has been defined, **Chapter Three: The Analytical Framework** outlines a number of methods by which these graphic design artefacts can be analysed. The various sub-genres of punk are identified and further defined in **Chapter Four: Key Categories in UK Punk**, while **Chapter Five: From “London’s Burning” to “Sten Guns in Sunderland”** demonstrates the ways in which regional identities and opposing ideologies were reflected in both the lyrical and visual styles of a range of record releases, giving particular emphasis to a deconstruction of graphic codes on the record sleeves themselves. As such, this section offers a qualitative account of a number of design strategies intended to reflect themes of locality, new subcultural styles, the wider punk context and opposition to mainstream developments.

A tighter focus on a number of specific visual approaches within punk sleeve design is provided in **Chapter Six: Design Strategies**, which shows a range of key design strategies and conventions. The extent and importance of these design methods and visual codes are subjected to a quantitative study of punk graphics in **Chapter Seven: Applied Analysis**, where the totality of sleeves are reviewed and compared. A close analysis of a wide range of graphic material allows for a more thorough critical evaluation of those historical accounts described

1. The reasons for focussing on the seven inch single as an artefact which is indicative of the development of the UK punk diaspora, and the parallel evolution of specific graphic languages, are outlined in **o.5: Plastic Passion**.

in the first two chapters of the thesis, and identifies the range of graphic strategies adopted by record sleeve designers to reflect both the evolution of new sub-genres and an increasingly diverse regional interpretation of punk across the UK.

o.2 Practical Elements

Although this is not a practice-based PhD, the development of a range of visual material has been a significant part of the methodology. The study offers a micro-history of a specific youth subculture, coupled with a range of practice-based methodologies which are used to analyse a number of common design strategies employed in the production of UK punk sleeves and to test the validity of arguments within published histories of that subculture. A similar methodology could be applied to the study of graphic material within other areas, though the elements against which to interrogate another field may vary considerably.

While record sleeve design could be said to be at the less formal, or ‘artier’ end of graphic design, it is important to note that it is closely related to branding, packaging and identity design, and that the recognition of visual codes by an intended audience is extremely important to a record’s success. The visual material accompanying this thesis can be used to identify the evolution of specific visual languages appropriate to different punk sub-genres. The relationship between these musical sub-genres is complex and at times indistinct, but certain visual tropes and overarching trends can be seen as common during each stage of punk’s development. In order to develop a quantitative analysis of the range of punk sleeves under review, a number of approaches have been adopted to record and classify the material. Visual matrices describing the chronological and geographical distribution of punk singles – based on the geographic origins of the groups producing the records (**Appendix One**) – display generally emerging graphic trends and patterns, and the inclusion of a timeline of key political and cultural dates (both within the punk subculture and in relation to wider events) provides a context against which developments can be interrogated. The mapping of sleeves by sub-genre – as defined and categorised through group allegiance, contemporary

music press criticism and marketing campaigns (**Appendix Two**) – allows for a more intricate comparison between releases which addressed a similar audience group or target market, and these can be cross-related with the chronological and geographical matrices to further guide the reader.

In mapping the inter-relationship between a wide range of punk single sleeves, particular visual elements and design strategies which provided subcultural codes that participants and audiences could recognise as symbolic of the genre(s) are made explicit. An interactive version of the matrix, which allows the user to select an edited range of sleeves to view through a number of filters (such as sub-genre, region and wave), also gives details of the group, record titles, label and catalogue details as well as information about the sleeve designer, use of image, typography, print method, and number of print colours and special formats such as coloured vinyl etc. This version of the chronology/geography matrix also has the advantage that it plays the music from the lead track on each record, allowing the user a more complete and explicit experience.

o.3 Resources and Methods

The research is archive-based, and has included a number of interviews with specialists in the field together with visits to public and private archives. Methodologies used and the broad range of resources accessed are detailed below:-

- The central resource was the author’s extensive personal collection of seven inch singles spanning more than 35 years. Although the collection centres on the punk genre in its broadest sense, it also includes a wide range of material outside of this subculture against which to evaluate specific punk visual languages. Other collections consulted include the British Library Sound Archive, the Heavy Metal archive at Salford University, a number of specialist retailers including Captain Oi, Bin Liner and Overground Records, and online histories, databases and forums such as www.punk77.co.uk.

- Interviews with punk historians, writers and critics including John Robb, Ian Glasper, Alex Ogg, Roger Sabin, Roddy Moreno, Mike Dines, Dave Muggleton, Nikki Clayton and Kev Lycett informed the work. These interviews were extended through further dialogue throughout the duration of the research. A wider discussion of the nature of punk (and post punk) graphic design also took place via the weblog Design Observer.

- The historical position was tested through a presentation paper at the Institute of Contemporary British History in May 2004, and through a number of presentations at the University of the Arts, London, Southampton Solent University and the British Film Institute during 2006 and 2007.

- The production of a series of graphic matrices of punk sleeves acted as both an analytical method and as a form of visual display. Large format and interactive screen-based versions of these matrices were developed as an exhibition, **Hitsville UK: Punk in the Faraway Towns**, which was shown in London, Southampton and Blackpool during the spring and summer of 2007. The exhibitions provided a location for debate and feedback from punk fans, critics and historians, along with a critical appraisal of the range of material represented.

The range of artefacts selected for study reflects a broad cross-section of over 1,100 punk single releases across the period, and care has been taken to include a full range of ‘important’ or ‘key’ releases – in terms of critical acclaim, chart placings, public awareness, or the development of new styles and sub-genres.² Many contemporary histories are highly selective in their range of sleeves and artists used to describe the development of UK punk, and it is the intention of this thesis to counter those studies by including a broadly representative sample of every release widely presented as ‘punk’ during the period under review. The inclusion of a number of punk-related releases which could be said to be on the periphery of the genre, for instance those defined as Proto Punk or New Wave, also helps to clarify the musical and graphic characteristics of punk as a distinct category.

2. The range of records selected for inclusion reflects a number of key listings and critical appraisals of UK punk. Chart listings include Warwick, Kutner & Brown’s *Complete Book of the British Charts* (2004) and Barry Lazell’s *Indie Hits: The Complete UK Independent Charts 1980-1989* (1997). Other invaluable sources include George Gimarc’s *Punk Diary 1970-1979* (1994) and *Post Punk Diary, 1980-1982* (1997) and Greg Shaw’s contemporary listing *New Wave On Record: England & Europe 1975-8* (1978). Retrospective listings, such as those by Martin Strong (1999), Vernon Joynson (2001) and Henrik Bech Poulson (2005) were also consulted, together with websites such as www.punk77.co.uk and specialist punk reissue labels Captain Oi and Overground Records.

o.4 God Save History

If you're going to reminisce, then you need to do it properly
(The Mekons, *1st Guitarist*, CNT Records 1982)

With regard to critical perspective, this project operates in opposition to the majority of recent accounts, in that it aims to articulate a range of graphic design artefacts that are both geographically and chronologically absent from many histories of the genre. Previous work in the field has touched on the methods of categorising visual styles and subcultural groupings (in relation to fashion, clothing and hairstyles, e.g. Hebdige 1979, Muggleton 2000), musical and lyrical content (Laing 1985), or the chronological development of (a limited section of) the movement (Savage 1991, Colegrave and Sullivan 2001, Reynolds 2005 etc). A more encouraging recent trend has seen the publication of a number of more detailed group-by-group accounts based on interviews with often lesser-known participants in the UK punk scene (Glasper 2004 & 2006, Robb 2006, Ogg 2006), with at least some emphasis on the influence of locality on the individuals involved.

Little work has been done with regard to the analysis of the graphic and visual codes of the period, and a number of broad descriptions of punk design are flawed and inaccurate, particularly in regard to the inclusion – and exclusion – of important punk record sleeves and the narrowness of their categorisation and definition of ‘punk’ itself (Hebdige 1979, Poynor 2003, McKnight-Trontz 2005). This research offers a micro-analysis of punk seven inch record sleeves, and it is clear that such a study cannot give a definitive understanding of the wider field of punk, itself a subcultural phenomenon with a vast range of antecedents and precursors from popular culture – including comedy, comics, film, music, television, fashion, literature and a host of other contemporary influences. While certain directly influential elements will be referred to within the text – such as the Proto Punk and pub rock movements and the DIY politics of the late hippie underground – it is hoped that a focussed

study of a substantial body of archive material, might allow further historical narratives and contexts to grow from the research findings. The role of television and radio broadcasting in relation to regional interpretations of punk could, for instance, provide a substantial field of enquiry, and this potential development is only lightly shaded within this thesis. Equally, the relationship between punk and identity politics, a subject area which might encompass diverse views including radical anarchism, feminism and an unrestricted free market, could help to provide a link between the youth ideologies of late 1960s ‘hippiedom’ and the ‘Thatcherite’ early 1980s, but again this is beyond the remit of this course of study.

The largely unacknowledged regional developments within UK punk, away from London and the major metropolitan centres, are central to this body of research. Theories of a diaspora in relation to popular music and art, together with the role of regional centres and the geography of popular music, will be used to underpin the subject of punk’s shift to the provinces during the Second and Third Waves, but will only be detailed briefly within this thesis. Models such as Taylor’s historical analysis of the roots of American jazz; *Art, An Enemy of the People* (Sim 1992: 77), allow a comparison to be made between the ‘diaspora’ of musical styles (and, in the case of jazz, the consequent shift from ‘low’ to ‘high’ art) and the regional and aesthetic evolution of UK punk, though it will be argued in this thesis that the end result was distinctly different. The following chapters will attempt to locate UK punk within a broader field of enquiry, and the evolution of distinct punk sub-genres and local identities will be put forward as central themes throughout the thesis. Parallels with other studies of popular music, including the detailing of links between locality and musical form will be touched upon, though again this aspect of the work can only offer the reader a brief introduction to the field, and is in no way intended to be comprehensive.

o.5 Plastic Passion

There are a number of reasons for choosing the seven inch single sleeve as the central graphic design focus for this investigation.³ Early UK punk espoused an ideology that

3. The plastic seven inch 45rpm single was introduced in the USA by RCA Victor on 31st March 1949. RCA’s competitor, Columbia Records, had introduced the first vinyl LP format records – ten inch discs with a playing speed of 33 rpm – on 21st June 1948. Prior to this time, most records had been pressed on fragile ten inch shellac discs revolving at 78rpm. In order to compete with the longer playing time of the Columbia disc, RCA designed sets of 45rpm singles to work on an automatic changer and stacking device, and colour coded the vinyl by music style: including red for classical, green for country & western and cerise orange for R&B. Black vinyl was reserved for pop music, a more lucrative market. The multi colour system was soon abandoned, however, and by 1950 the standard formats of the twelve inch 33rpm album and the seven inch 45rpm single had been adopted by all the major labels worldwide. For a detailed historical overview, see Drate (2002) and Barfe (2005).

set itself in opposition to the contemporary fashion in popular music toward heavily produced, musically complex arrangements, usually in the form of long playing, twelve inch 33rpm albums (often in multiple-disc sets – such as the double or triple ‘concept album’). Punk songs tended to be short, fast and aggressive, and the widely repeated credo that “...if it can’t be said it three minutes, it’s not worth saying” was adopted as standard practice. The seven inch 45rpm single, a mainstay of earlier Rock and Roll, Pop and Glam Rock styles, was widely adopted by punk groups as a cheap, accessible, effective and ultimately disposable format for the quick dissemination of musical ideas. Many punk groups wanted to project their ‘message’ out to the public as a matter of urgency – punk celebrated a lack of musical prowess, and the dedication and discipline necessary to rehearse and record enough material to produce an album was beyond the reach of many participants in the movement.

For many groups, the production of one vinyl artefact would form the sum extent of their ambitions – there was often little interest in going on to produce more records, or working towards a longer term career. This was not necessarily an option in any case, given the largely uncommercial nature of much punk output, in purely aesthetic terms, and the wide range of punk records which were simply not very good, at least in terms of critical or commercial acceptance. It is also important to note that many punk groups did not produce records at all, and this study is not designed to offer a representative survey of all punk *activity* across the period in question.⁴ Records, along with media reports, were a key factor in the ways in which regionally-based ‘punks’ could hear, interpret and reenact a punk identity. While it could be argued that punk was essentially a live music phenomenon, recorded material reached far beyond any immediate access at gigs, and helped to shape the wider punk subculture across the UK.

Single releases differ from albums in a number of important ways. Firstly, in common with the immediacy of many songs chosen for the single format by labels and producers (it being historically a ‘pop’ form associated with radio play and the national charts), single sleeves

4. For example the most famous of the punk precursors London SS, together with Flowers Of Romance, The Toilets, The Darlex, The Axidents and Dole Q among many others, did not in fact release any vinyl (see Ogg 2007 and A to Z of UK punk at <http://www.punk77.co.uk/linkpage/punkbands.htm>).

tend to be more direct and less indulgent or cryptic than albums. Many album sleeves of the early 1970s rock market, being more heavily marketed and produced by groups already in some way established, could adopt what might be described as a form of oblique artistic experimentation, often drawing on surrealist or abstract art practices. Album sleeves for groups such as Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd utilised surreal images, often with no indication of the artist or album title on the cover – well known examples of such design approaches include The Beatles *White Album*, Led Zeppelin *Houses Of The Holy* and Pink Floyd *Dark Side Of The Moon*. Though such strategies could be seen to be a part of the late hippie zeitgeist, it is worth stating that while a million-selling rock supergroup could employ high-profile artists and designers to present their new concept album within a visually sophisticated artistic package, single releases by unknown punk groups would be ill advised to adopt similar strategies. Images of naked women crawling across a lunar landscape might work for Led Zeppelin’s latest opus, but would look distinctly out of place on the debut single by Johnny & the Self Abusers.⁵

The analytical framework employed in the study of punk seven inch single sleeves could be extended to include a review of punk album releases across the same period, and indeed some albums (such as the eponymous debut albums by The Ramones and The Clash, *Never Mind The Bollocks* by the Sex Pistols and *London Calling* by The Clash) can be seen to have been widely influential – both musically and graphically – and have become ‘design classics’ in their own right. However, the seven inch single is understood by many groups, fans, collectors and critics to be the definitive punk ‘article’ – possibly because the immediacy of the single format matches the *year zero* rhetoric of the music. Certainly many of the ‘classic punk’ releases (in both musical and graphic design terms) cited in retrospective accounts of the period were released on the seven inch format (see Savage 1991, Mulholland 2002 and Poynor 2003). This research sets out to reflect this focus on the punk seven inch single and, while occasional reference will be made to album artwork, this area should be seen as a potential further field of study in itself. Equally, the DIY ‘home taping’ cassette phenomenon

5. For a fuller description of the early 1970s rock album sleeve context, see the work of design group Hipgnosis and designer/illustrator Roger Dean, together with sleeve illustrations by George Hardie and Peter Lloyd and early design work by Barney Bubbles for Hawkwind. See also de Ville (2003).

of the early 1980s led to a radical, if short-lived, shake up of the independent music scene, and this area will again be left to future enquiry.

o.6 Punk in Print

The seven inch single encompasses other aspects of UK punk which are worthy of further investigation, including the return to popularity of the picture sleeve – a graphic marketing convention which was to become increasingly important to the developing genre. A popular concept for extended play (e.p.) formats and special releases during the 1950s (when a range of music, from classical to jazz, was widely available on seven inch records) and the early 1960s, the picture sleeve was a graphic identity and packaging device which had subsequently fallen out of fashion. Punk sleeves are also a good example of the use of graphic design to communicate particular visual messages to a specific record-buying public, and the ‘official’ nature of those graphic messages. Unlike fanzines and flyers, which were usually produced by fans or local promoters, record sleeves were often directly commissioned and approved by the group or their management, or in the case of many DIY (*do it yourself*, home made or self released) punk records were originated by the group themselves. This does lend the sleeve design some authority in the way that a particular group is represented – even in the case of punk groups signed to major labels, where an in-house design team might have been responsible for the design and production of the record sleeve, there would usually be some indication of an ‘official’ group visual style or brand identity. It is also important to note that the record sleeve was often the first point of contact for fans and followers of the group – and the graphic message would be the first thing a prospective buyer would encounter in a record shop. The effect of this ‘first impression’ on the buyer could, in many cases, be both significant and long lasting, and would help to establish a visual connection to the group.⁶

Some of the more successful UK punk groups worked with graphic designers over a period of time to establish a strong visual identity for their records: following the release of their

6. It was also not always positive: when long-standing Second Wave Hardcore punk stalwarts the UK Subs used their record company advance to buy new clothes, consequently dressing in what was seen as the then-fashionable, flamboyant style of the New Romantics for the group photograph on the sleeve of their *Keep On Running* single (Gem Records 1981), fans were openly critical of their perceived change of direction, and the record sleeve still causes some disgruntlement in histories of the group today. See Gibbs (1996) and Ogg (2006).

debut self-produced DIY e.p., The Buzzcocks’ subsequent singles and album sleeves were all designed by Malcolm Garrett between 1977 and 1982, and display consistent visual and typographic themes. Similarly, the Sex Pistols sleeves designed by Jamie Reid adopted a strongly recognisable aesthetic. However, most groups from the First and Second Wave did not adopt such a rigorous and consistent approach to their record sleeve design and graphic identity. Many retained a visual style for short periods at a time (usually for two or three singles), then adopted a new visual identity (e.g. The Clash, The Stranglers, 999, The Skids and Ultravox!), while others became more closely associated with marketing and branding techniques such as coloured vinyl records (X Ray Spex, Generation X and the UK Subs, for instance). Later Second and Third Wave groups such as Crass, The Subhumans, Discharge and Killing Joke effectively utilised strong graphic identities and a sense of visual consistency across a longer sequence of record sleeves, though in these cases the designer was either a part of the group or in close allegiance, and design could perhaps be seen as more intrinsic to the group mission or part of a sense of direct ‘control’ over the material they produced.

It is also important not to deny the commercial imperative of the market in relation to punk records – the cultural capital associated with limited edition records was also a product of their scarcity value within a competitive market, and the particular incentives to the record buyer to make a purchase are many and varied. For many punk fans, travelling long distances to a smaller, less frequently visited, record outlet in order to purchase a record in its limited coloured vinyl or picture sleeve form was not unusual – this subject was raised on several occasions by participants in public presentations and discussions of the research. Often, larger stores stocking punk singles would sell out of the limited edition very quickly, if indeed they stocked it at all – records were widely sold in high street chains such as Boots, WH Smiths and Woolworths, and they often only received the more generic second edition records from suppliers once the record had charted. The extent to which punk records can be associated with these themes varies across the period in question. For instance, the First

Wave of punk saw many records issued either in plain (or generic record company) sleeves, or in mass-produced picture sleeves. It was predominantly the influence of early independent labels such as Stiff and Chiswick on the Second Wave punk and upcoming New Wave market that led to widescale adoption of marketing techniques associated with coloured vinyl, limited edition picture sleeves and other collectors' gimmicks (see Figure 01).⁷ Third Wave punk in the early 1980s, particularly the Hardcore and Anarcho Punk sub-genres, eschewed this brazen commerciality in favour of a return to a more politicised 'authentic' punk ideology and the adoption of what were widely seen as the base values of black vinyl records, non-limited edition sleeves and low-cost production values. Interestingly the graphic identities of these records were often more consistent than earlier punk records, with a strong sense of 'brand association' and the use of clear iconographic elements to denote the core principles of the sub-genre (such as a 'back to basics' ideology or political position).

0.7 Uniforms and Authenticity

Genres are constructed through a complex discourse, and the working definitions of this body of research are related to theories of cultural and subcultural capital, as discussed by Thornton (1995), Muggleton (2000), and Muggleton & Weinzierl (2003). While the debates surrounding the notion of 'authenticity' within the UK punk movement present a particular problem in relation to the body of material under analysis, especially within the definitions of punk sub-genres, it is not the intention of this project to attempt to trace particular points of origin within the sleeve artwork of punk records, or to map a direct lineage between examples of similar work beyond their chronological sequence or regional distribution. Where appropriate, examples of a similar visual approach or use of iconic devices across a series of sleeves will be detailed, though the iteration of a level of primacy in the design of certain examples over others – and thus the inference of an 'authentic' original – is avoided. While the First Wave of UK punk was largely centred around a London axis, a gradual shift towards the production and distribution of records from groups based in the wider regions occurred throughout the Second and Third Waves. In fact, the Third Wave of UK punk could

7. The record buying and collecting context is broad, and care should be taken not to make overly general assumptions. Records are often bought by music fans, either of the music genre or of the group itself, and by record collectors, either to continue a collection or as an investment. When a new release was seen to be limited and to have the potential to become desirable in a collectors' market, as with many early punk records, the records may have been purchased by a wider range of buyers than simply fans of the music. This is in part evidenced by the fairly high number of collectable rare early punk records in mint or unplayed condition for sale at record fairs and on the ebay auction website.



Fig.01: Skids *Sweet Suburbia/Open Sound* (white vinyl) (Virgin VS227) 1978

be said to have been almost entirely provincially based, partly as a reaction to the ways in which metropolitan trends had moved on to seek out new fashions and styles to explore – including the Mod revival and the developing New Romantic movement. While London remained a focal point for the business of record production (particularly as a commercial base for the larger record companies), punk groups (and their ensuing fan-bases) can be seen

to have originated from further afield as the scene developed. This clearly paralleled the development of some earlier youth movements. Dave Harker quotes from Rock and Cohen's 1970 study to make a similar case in relation to the late 1950s Teddy Boys; “...by 1958-9 the ‘real’ Teddy Boys were only to be found in the provinces. In London they had become very much a submerged minority” (Harker 1980: 75). This comparison between what are often seen as distinct youth subcultures is echoed by music journalist and broadcaster John Robb: “It’s interesting to look at the way punk became virtually a folk music after it got out of its trendier epicentres... it was bizarre the way that people who hung around the Sex shop sneered at the ‘provincial punks’ who ‘killed punk’... while these ‘provincial punks’ were getting into punk, the trendies were getting into new romantic and supporting Spandau Ballet. It sort of shows how interested they were in punk music in the first place – like it was just another stopping off point for fashion for a bunch of Bowie fans hopping from one scene to another...” (Interview with the author, 2nd September 2004)

Timothy S. Brown, in his overview of the relationship between skinhead subcultures and far-right politics, published in the *Journal of Social History* in 2004, makes a strong case for extending the study of youth culture beyond those academic traditions which have, he asserts, “...been long on theory and short on empirical investigation” (Brown 2004: 172). His conclusion, that “...because of the increasing globalization of youth culture, they must be studied transnationally, that is, not as they exist in supposedly static, localized formations, but as they move from one place to another” could also hold true within narrower boundaries than he suggests. His mapping of the mutation and ideology of the skinhead style across time and space, from the ‘rude boys’ of the late 1960s UK to the neo-fascist ‘boneheads’ of the late 1990s in the UK and Germany, demonstrates the effectiveness of his argument. However, in respect to the development of subcultural styles, a case could be made for those distinctions which arise between regions of the same country, or even between separate towns. The UK is diverse enough, in terms of regional cultures and distinctions between the major cities and the countryside, to demonstrate strong variations and differences between

subcultural groups in different parts of the country. The changes in punk fashion, together with its marketing to a broad audience across the UK have been seen in largely negative terms by writers such as Hebdige and Simonelli – chiefly as a result of an assumed loss of originality or political expression. However, the visual impact of the punk ‘uniform’ could be more potent in smaller towns and cities away from London, Manchester and the major metropolitan areas. Simonelli states that “...by 1978, the punk look was essentially uniform – spiky hair, jeans or bondage trousers, leather jackets with slogans on them, T-shirts, studs and chains. By the 1980s a punk in London was no more a standout than a Mod, a Ted or a skinhead” (Simonelli 2002: 140). The problem with this assertion is that it still centres the punk scene in London itself, even though the late 1970s and early 1980s had seen dramatic shifts in fashion and youth culture in the capital – towards the various factions of Post Punk, Two-Tone, Mod, and the New Romantic movement. London still had a number of regular punk venues in the early 1980s, but the movement had seen a gradual shift to the regions, at least in terms of the rigidity of the punk uniform described by Simonelli. Many labels and punk-related businesses continued to operate from London offices, but regional centres did begin to evolve, particularly around local scenes large enough to support a regular live music venue or a small independent record label. A punk in London might no longer stand out in the street during this period, but a punk in a small town in Devon or Cumbria could still possess the ability to shock. As John Robb states; “...punk outside London was a very different affair. It was a lot more violent and I think everyone involved can recall beatings handed out by irate members of the public. It didn’t take much, you didn’t have to look that punk to get attacked!” (Interview with the author, 2nd September 2004).

This research extends current definitions of UK punk both temporally and geographically, and analyses a range of punk graphic artefacts, paying close attention to methods of production, graphic and compositional aspects of the sleeve design. The visual matrix describes a range of common themes specific to the developing sub-genres of UK punk across a period of nine years, from 1976 to 1984. These dates, marking the parameters of the case

study material selected, are not intended to signify specific points of opening or closure, though they have been chosen deliberately. The first widely acknowledged UK punk rock record, *New Rose* by The Damned, was released on 22nd October 1976, to be closely followed by the first Sex Pistols single, *Anarchy In The UK*, some four weeks later, but it was not until the impact of the Sex Pistols’ notorious 1st December television interview with Bill Grundy, and the ensuing media backlash against the group, that UK punk was to be seen as a significant new youth movement nationally. A fairly large number of punk records (overwhelmingly seven inch singles rather than twelve inch albums) were released during the latter half of 1977, with both major labels and new independents able to take advantage of the newly developing scene.⁸ There were significant precursors to the punk movement prior to 1976, and primary examples are included within a visual matrix extending backwards to the period 1975-76, but the emphasis of the project remains with the mass participation in an evolving UK punk movement from late 1976 onwards.

Conversely, the closing bracket for the project, 1984, is not intended to imply an end to UK punk. Many punk groups continued to record and perform throughout the 1980s and 1990s: indeed, a significant underground/DIY network continues to thrive, together with something of a revival circuit for older groups. There are, however, a number of factors for choosing to end this study at this point: the seven inch single was in decline in the market from around 1982 onwards, particularly with the impact of the twelve inch single as a widely adopted alternative format offering better sound quality and potentially longer playing times. That format – which had been developed for bass-heavy reggae and dance music – didn’t really suit punk’s trebly, lo-tech, three minute song style, though a few early punk singles were pressed on twelve inch vinyl, more as a sales gimmick rather than to increase the listener’s enjoyment of the sound quality of the record. The widespread shift to twelve inch singles in other genres during the early 1980s did eventually have an impact on Third Wave punk formats, and even on music styles themselves: labels such as Cherry Red and Riot City moved production towards multiple track twelve inch discs, while others adopted some production

8. The number of UK punk and punk-related singles released in 1977 probably figures in the low hundreds. The number of UK punk *albums* released in 1977 is significantly smaller, with perhaps less than a dozen getting press reviews and reaching a wide audience. While The Damned, The Jam and The Stranglers managed to release two albums each during that year, The Clash managed one, and the debut Sex Pistols album did not appear until November. Other well-known or acclaimed First Wave groups, such as The Buzzcocks, The Adverts, X Ray Spex and Generation X, did not release their debut albums until the following year. See Bech Poulsen (2005).

styles from the mainstream and began creating extended remixes of standard seven inch single tracks specifically for a club market.⁹

Technological changes also had a major impact on the market for recorded music during the early 1980s. Improvements to the cassette tape format, which had been around since the mid 1970s, together with the launch of the Sony Walkman personal cassette player in 1979, led to a shift away from vinyl in the early 1980s, with cassette sales accounting for more than 50% of the market by 1986.¹⁰ However, the success of the format was to be short lived. The Dutch Philips and Japanese Sony Corporations had been developing digital recording and playback technology since around 1980, and the compact disc was launched in Japan in October 1982 and in Europe in March 1983 as a new, superior quality, pre-recorded music format which was set to dominate the market over the next twenty years. New technologies were also to have a dramatic effect on the graphic design and printing industries during the late 1980s. On January 24th 1984, Apple Computer launched the Macintosh, a desktop computer which was to have an enormous impact on the graphic design profession over the following twenty years. With the advent of desktop publishing software and digital type, the tasks of print pre-production and typesetting were increasingly taken on by graphic designers themselves, leading to drastic changes in the structure of the profession. Many skilled typesetters and compositors lost their jobs in a shrinking market, while graphic designers found themselves increasingly expected by clients to take on the whole design and pre-production process.

The various punk sub-genres had also become strongly fragmented by the period 1983-84, in many cases evolving away from ‘punk’ definitions altogether. New Punk record sales were diminishing, and both the Oi and Anarcho Punk sub-genres had gone underground in order to maintain a movement well outside the mainstream music industry. Hardcore punk was evolving and forming crossovers with Heavy Metal, both musically and graphically, and DIY records were becoming more diverse and removed from any obvious punk heritage, with a strong market for the growing ‘Indie’ scene which impacted heavily on the national charts.

9. Early punk twelve inch singles include Menace *Screwed Up* (Illegal, August 1977), Slaughter And The Dogs *Where Have All The Bootboys Gone?* (Decca, September 1977), X Ray Spex *Oh Bondage! Up Yours!* (Virgin, October 1977) and Sham 69 *I Don’t Wanna* (Step Forward, October 1977).

10. See Barfe (2005).

The Orwellian significance of the date should also not be discounted: 1984 featured in the lyrical obsessions of several punk groups (notably in the coda to The Clash’s 1977, which incorporated a verbal countdown from 1977, leading to an abrupt cut-off in 1984), and Anarcho Punk scene-leaders Crass catalogued all their record releases using a numerical system counting back from 1984, during which year the group ceased producing records altogether.” This research aims to chart UK punk beyond the typical time frames commonly ascribed to the subject, and to analyse those specific graphic languages which were adopted to relate a number of well-defined, but inter-related audiences. These design approaches can be interrogated both as a reaction to changing technical limitations and do-it-yourself innovations, and in response to what can be seen as the growing confidence of newly developing sub-genres, based on new musical and visual styles.

11. Crass set up their own label, Crass Records, in 1979 following initial success with their debut mini album, *The Feeding Of The 5,000* on the independent Small Wonder label. The label released records by a number of other Anarcho Punk groups, together with five albums and nine singles by Crass. Matrix numbers detailed the year of release and number in series from that year, using a numerical system of prefixes counting back from 1984, combined with their trademark play on words and acronyms (the term ANOK4U became a catchphrase for the Anarcho Punk movement). Catalogue numbers began with the first single, numbered 521984 – indicating 5 years to 1984.

Chapter One: A Literature Review of Historical Perspectives

From the outset, it is important to define perspectives and establish the position from which this course of study has been undertaken. The history of UK punk, as a specific movement within contemporary popular culture, has been widely documented. Books, television documentaries, films and newspaper and magazine articles have variously attempted to contextualise it within the wider fields of art, design, popular music, fashion, youth culture and politics. However, although many of these studies overlap substantially, two important aspects of UK punk have been largely overlooked. These themes are closely intertwined, but each offers the researcher a wide range of material to analyse, and offers up some intriguing questions.

The first such area for further research might be defined as an extended chronology and geography of UK punk – the development of punk over a longer time frame than is usually recognised, and beyond the major cities; following the (initially adverse) media reaction, major label appropriation and subsequent mass marketing of the movement. The uptake and reworking of punk style within the wider regions of the UK, in terms of fashion, music and ideology, led to the development of new generic adaptations which extended the basic principles of punk in many new and influential ways. The second area for investigation concerns the nature of punk graphics, in particular the design of record sleeves, posters, handbills and press advertisements – what might be termed the ‘official’ visual representation of the various proponents of UK punk. This seemingly rich area for historical research and analysis has hitherto been under researched. Other than a few poorly edited and annotated ‘picture book’ collections of Punk and New Wave sleeves (Seiler, Burkhardt & Friends 1998, McKnight-Trontz 2005),¹² and occasional references in design histories to Jamie Reid’s artwork for the Sex Pistols (Livingston 1992, Hollis 1994, Walker 2002), and Malcolm Garrett’s Buzzcocks identity (Poynor 2003), very few publications even address the issue of UK punk graphic design, let alone attempt to deconstruct visual examples and articulate how or why the designer might have created the work. Given the critical value ascribed to a few significant examples of UK punk graphic design, it is also interesting to

12. Jennifer McKnight-Trontz goes one step further with *This Ain't No Disco: New Wave Album Covers*, published by Thames & Hudson in 2005, choosing to feature a wide range of sleeves from UK and US groups which in many cases bear little or no relationship to New Wave music. Sleeves by early punk groups such as The Damned and The Buzzcocks are juxtaposed with some of the worst examples of early 1980s chart pop (ABC, Culture Club, Wham!), and even – inexplicably – two album sleeves by Roxy Music dating from 1974!

note that the context within which those examples operated is hardly touched upon in any wider sense. Issues such as the homogeneity and individuality of UK punk graphic styles and approaches are left open to question: Malcolm Garrett’s work, for instance, bears little resemblance to that of Jamie Reid, but both are recognised as significant designers from the early punk period. This lack of a wider contextual discourse does seem surprising, particularly given the attention paid to the critical analysis of other, sometimes less visual, aspects of punk: including David Laing’s detailed analysis of punk lyrics (Laing 1985), and the range of texts discussing punk as fashion, youth culture, style and ideology (including Hebdige 1979, Marcus 1989, Savage 1991, Home 1995, Sabin 1999 and Muggleton 2000).

Design writer Rick Poynor used a number of visual examples of punk graphics to illustrate key themes in his study of graphic design and postmodernism, *No More Rules*, in 2003. Jamie Reid’s sleeves for the Sex Pistols’ *God Save The Queen* single and *Never Mind The Bollocks* album are employed as early examples of ‘deconstruction’ in graphic design, alongside lesser-known examples such as US punk posters by Frank Edie and Cliff Roman, and early 1980s magazine work by Terry Jones and Hard Werken. In a chapter on the theme of ‘appropriation’, Poynor again samples from the punk and post punk sleeve archives, incorporating album cover work by Barney Bubbles, Malcolm Garrett and Peter Saville. Although the arguments put forward by Poynor do attempt to place ‘punk graphic design’ within the wider scheme of 20th Century design history, it is a pity that the examples chosen – in relation to UK punk, at least – are all so obvious. Reid, Bubbles, Garrett and Saville are well known within the design profession – in the case of Garrett and Saville, usually for their later work which had little or nothing to do with their brief involvement with punk. It is also worth noting that all are recognised as design professionals in their own right: although Poynor does briefly mention DIY approaches, only those ultimately ‘successful’ exponents of punk design are featured. The danger here is that credit is given in retrospect, as much because of subsequent commercial success and critical acclaim as for any unique or important graphic work produced during the punk period.

Much second generation punk sleeve artwork is undocumented, either in print or within archive collections, and where examples are recorded they tend to lack critical analysis. Histories of UK punk often prioritise the fashion or occasionally the music, but seldom comment on the graphic design of the record sleeves or associated printed ephemera. Little graphic design output is preserved in museum collections, other than a few items of original paste-up artwork by the well-known designers of the time, and books tend to feature a limited range of well-documented examples.¹³ Nikki Clayton of Leicestershire Museum Service has conducted a study of the representation of ‘subcultures’ within British museums. She notes, “*Regarding museums and punk records/design there isn’t really that much. Museums tend to be obsessed with the sartorial side of ‘subcultures’ and so often what gets collected is costume*” (Interview with the author, 16th August 2002). However, a curious anomaly also arises in the way ‘punk’ is represented within collections, and there is a sense of confusion between First and Second or Third Waves; “*What I’ve also found is that museums confuse the two waves of Punk: they will define ‘Punk’ as the Sex Pistols, 1977 and all that, but when they show Punk outfits/images they often are second wave, i.e. the mowhawked, painted leather jacket variety*” (Ibid) (see Figure 02).

1.1 Punk’s Not Dead

The contemporary received version of UK punk history, centred around certain ‘key individuals’ in the major cities and lasting perhaps two years from 1976-78, has become widely accepted as an authentic account of the period and has led to a stylised and inaccurate summary of what was a disparate and fragmented movement. Many participants in UK punk, be they musicians, designers, writers or fans, have deeply-felt personal views and memories of events that touched their lives and placed them within the collective consciousness of punk, on a more or less visible level, and their recollection of events is bound to be affected by personal taste and experience. This has led to a number of particular problems in relation to UK punk history; the diverse range of opinions, each of which may be termed valid in relation to any punk ‘ideology’, places the primacy of personal experience

13. The Pop music section of the British Library Sound Archive holds a diverse and wide-ranging collection of popular music, covering everything from early 20th Century music hall to contemporary pop, rock and dance music. However, the emphasis of the collection is on preserving the sound recordings themselves, and the graphic design of the record sleeves is seen as supplementary, if it is considered at all. The Library website states that the aim of the collection is to: “...collect and preserve copies of every recording commercially issued in the UK. We also acquire pop videos, radio and television programmes and make our own recordings at festivals, conferences and seminars. All of these, together with our extensive reference library and on-line services combine to provide the premier public research facility for pop music in the UK.” www.bl.uk/collections/sound-archive.pop.html



Fig.02: GBH *Give Me Fire/Mantrap* (Clay Records CLAY16) 1982

against attempts at objective historical analysis. As Buzzcocks lead singer Pete Shelley puts it, with regard to the First Wave of UK punk; *“If, at the time, I’d have known how much interest there would be now about what happened in 1977, I’d have paid more attention”* (Bech Poulsen 2005: 41). Furthermore, the nature of punk as an ephemeral, diverse and popular form which flew in the face of authority and rejected intellectualisation and academic scrutiny means

that writers and historians have had a difficult time documenting events and developments beyond a chronology of the wealth of physical material in existence (in the form of records, magazines, clothing and artefacts etc). Nor have they been particularly successful in building a social history of punk, beyond the repetition of often exaggerated stories culled from press releases and interviews of the period. It should also be emphasised that the notions of personal direct action and political autonomy which are strongly associated with UK punk – in particular during the First and Third Waves (c.1976-77 and c.1980-83) – automatically produced a widespread distrust of what could be seen as ‘outsiders’ attempting to pin down and locate the subculture in order perhaps to sanitise or neutralise it.

A resurgence in interest in the subject (inspired by anniversaries of a number of prominent dates in the original UK punk calendar)¹⁴ resulted in a flurry of activity. September 2001 saw the first British academic conference solely concerned with punk rock – *No Future? Punk 2001*, a week-long series of events, papers and discussions at Wolverhampton University, timed to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the 100 Club Punk Festival of September 1976. This academic review of punk as an important element in contemporary cultural history reflected a growing trend through the late 1990s towards a reappraisal of the impact of UK punk since 1976. Numerous books were published on the subject between 1999 and 2007, many of which purported to tell the ‘definitive’ history of punk, a story which was often accompanied by little-known or unpublished photographs and memorabilia. The popular consensus among critics and music historians tends to suggest a lineage from successful British groups of the 1960s, through progressive rock and Glam in the early 1970s, to punk in the late 1970s in the form of the Sex Pistols and The Clash. The early 1980s are usually represented by Post Punk groups such as Joy Division and later New Order, with popular music again diversifying to embrace Funk, Disco and the New Romantic movement. Some of these aspects of what has been termed ‘Post Punk’ came under wider critical attention in the latter part of 2004 and early 2005. A number of newly emerging UK groups championed within the music press have referenced well known Post Punk names such as the Gang Of

14. Often reflecting the dates of particular record releases (i.e. The Damned, *New Rose* – widely credited as the first UK punk single, 22 October 1976, Sex Pistols, *Anarchy In The UK*, 26 November 1976, The Sex Pistols *God Save The Queen*, 27 May 1977 etc). Often, a vague notion that 1977 was the “year of punk” is enough to cite as a significant anniversary.

Four, Wire, Public Image Limited and Joy Division in interviews, and it appears that a media reappraisal of Post Punk is underway. Music journalist Simon Reynolds’ history of Post Punk, entitled *Rip It Up And Start Again*, was published in March 2005 to widespread critical acclaim, prompting a number of features in the mainstream press. Once again, however, the selection of material included is limited to the author’s own personal tastes and those groups who had been favoured at the time within the weekly music papers – in particular the *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker* (where he worked as a journalist during the 1980s). Thus, although the avant-garde, electronic and DIY scenes are fairly well represented, other developments are only mentioned in passing, if at all. Later versions of punk, particularly the Third Wave Hardcore, Anarcho Punk and Oi sub-genres, often fail to register on the critical radar. This is hard to justify, given that several late 1980s and early 1990s music movements were directly influenced by these styles: Grunge, Thrash Metal, American Pop Punk, and even sections of contemporary dance music display a lineage that can be traced to that era of UK punk. Hugely successful 1990s US groups such as Rancid, Green Day, The Offspring and Blink 182 have adopted many of the visual and musical styles of Third Wave punk, from studded leather jackets and mohican hairstyles to the musical emphasis on speed and aggression, often married to a melodic chorus.

The wide range of CD reissues of punk records available also reflects the changing nature of the music market: as music sales have declined steadily in the pop arena, the business has witnessed a growth in potential for reissues of obscure rock and pop releases from the 1960s and 1970s, and a burgeoning punk collector’s market. Specialist labels have also found new ways to reach niche markets – particularly through the internet – which, combined with new, cheap production techniques (small batch production of CD albums and digital print runs for instance) allow the re-release of obscure recordings which do not need to sell in their thousands to be economically viable. Records and music memorabilia have also become recognised as an important part of popular culture, and a healthy collectors’ market has grown over the past thirty years, with specialist retailers, magazines and auction houses.

1.2 Long Live The Past

In 1999, Roger Sabin’s collection of essays on the history of punk, *Punk Rock: So What?*, attempted to reconsider punk in a cultural and sociological framework, questioning the value of persistent myths and often repeated histories. As Sabin records in his introduction, a great deal of writing has been done on the subject, but objective studies based on the application of a rigorous academic methodology are uncommon, with a plethora of personal, subjective documentaries holding sway in the market; “...*but the problem with all this debate around punk is that history is being rewritten. There’d be no need to worry if the discussions were making the correct historical connections; if the parameters of the debate were sound; if, ultimately, the commentators were ‘getting it right’.* But unfortunately, in general, they haven’t been, and some serious errors of emphasis have been made” (Sabin 1999: 2). As Sabin goes on to note, if the history of punk is cut off in 1979, a great deal of the story is left undocumented. Punk’s ‘Third Wave’, covering such widespread subject matter (and political direction) as Oi and ‘street punk’, neo-Fascist, Hardcore and Anarcho Punk, produced a huge range of material, and sold a great many records in the early 1980s. In many ways, this later era became the foundation for the wider public legacy of punk, from its influence on new punk movements – particularly Hardcore and Thrash metal – worldwide, to magazine and picture-postcard clichés of tattooed youths with mohican haircuts and studded leather jackets. The musical influences include exporting both the political agenda and musical edge to the USA in the early 1980s, DIY and the rise of independent labels as an important area of the record market (further influencing the club and dance scenes of the 1990s), right through to the current crop of Japanese punk bands, who cite 1980s UK Third Wave punk bands such as The Exploited, the Anti Nowhere League, Peter & The Test Tube Babies and Discharge as major influences on both their musical and visual styles.¹⁵

It is also important to make a distinction between the development of punk music and fashion in the UK and that in other countries – in particular the USA. The New York scene around 1975-76 undoubtedly had an effect on UK punk’s development, as did the US West

15. There has even been some crossover between Third Wave UK punk and developments in later, more mainstream, rock and Heavy Metal: heavy rock supergroup Guns N’Roses covered a series of US and UK punk ‘classics’ on their multi-million selling *The Spaghetti Incident* album in 1993, including the UK Subs track *Down On The Farm* (originally released in 1982), and hugely successful thrash metal group Metallica covered both the Anti Nowhere League’s banned track *So What* and Discharge’s *The More I See* on their *Garage Inc.* album in 1998. It is worth noting that the ironic, parochial boast of the lyrics to the first verse of the Anti Nowhere League’s *So What*; “*I’ve been to Hastings, I’ve been to Brighton, I’ve been to Eastbourne too...*” (describing the nearest seaside towns to the group’s own hometown), may well carry more meaning and resonance to the original writers and their local audience in Tunbridge Wells than to a Heavy Metal supergroup from California.

Coast Hardcore scene of the early 1980s – in both cases, through the reciprocal exchange of fashion, musical direction and graphic forms. It is not the purpose of this study to detail those connections beyond certain specific graphic examples (such as the sleeves of early records by The Ramones, The Dead Boys, The Heartbreakers and The Weirdos, for instance, or later releases by Hardcore punk groups – Black Flag, the Dead Kennedys etc – which were made available on import or licence in the UK). Australia could also lay claim to some formative influence on the UK punk scene, as Brisbane garage band The Saints released their first single, *I’m Stranded* in September 1976 to much critical acclaim, and relocated to the UK early the following year. Other European countries, in particular France, can also be seen to have had a strong influence on the First and Second Waves of UK punk – The Damned played an early gig at the first ‘European Punk Rock Festival’, held on 21st August 1976 at the Mont De Marsan bullring in southern France, and the Sex Pistols played two dates in Paris a fortnight later, while French group Stinky Toys played at the 100 Club Punk festival in London on 21st September 1976. It is also interesting to note that the first single issued on the prominent independent Rough Trade record label was by a French group, Metal Urbain, in February 1978. UK punk was a distinct musical, lyrical and cultural form, and whilst influences can be mapped both to and from punk in other countries, this will be left for others to study in greater detail than that which can be encompassed here.

1.3 Myth and History

Two clichés are central to the myth that has been created around the First Wave of UK punk rock, and to mainstream media accounts of the subject. The first repeats the notion that punk in the UK centred on an exclusive and short-lived metropolitan scene based around Malcolm McLaren and the Sex Pistols, followed by a small number of highly influential and successful groups in and around the capital. These have been variously described as the progenitors of UK punk, the scene-makers, or in Nils Stevenson’s words “...*the punk aristocracy*” (Stevenson 1999: 19). Following the release in 1979 of a heavily stylised film which characterised the Sex Pistols as a manufactured group, *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* directed by Julien Temple,

media accounts of UK punk have tended to overemphasise their importance, and in particular the role played by manager Malcolm McLaren and his business partner, the subsequently highly successful fashion designer, Vivienne Westwood. McLaren’s particularly blatant self-promotion helped to create a mythology which still surrounds the individuals involved and those who became close to them during the period 1976-77. The publication of autobiographies by two original group members, bassist Glen Matlock (1990) and singer John Lydon (1993), and the repackaging of the group’s back catalogue in the late 1990s (much of which had been unavailable during the protracted legal dispute between the individual Sex Pistols’ group members and McLaren’s Glitterbest management company, running from 1978 to January 1986), have only added to this process. Along with The Clash and a small number of First Wave key names, the Sex Pistols and their entourage have secured a central place in the ongoing mythology of UK punk. The second cliché documents punk as a natural reaction to social/political conditions in the UK in the mid 1970s; unemployment, the heatwave of 1976, strikes in public services, and to the overblown music supergroups of the period. There is some validity in this argument – of course, the socio-political environment and the economic recession were a catalyst for the politicisation of large numbers of young people in the UK, which in turn had an effect on the disenfranchised voice of punk itself. Punk, as a movement involving art, fashion, music, design and media, goes beyond this limited definition, and encompasses an extremely diverse range of political opinion and means of articulation.¹⁶ Whilst many were drawn to punk for its expression of youthful anger, it should not be overlooked that for others it was simply a popular new fashion style. Punk could thus be seen as a simple contrast to other late 1970s and early 1980s youth culture movements and fashions, such as Disco, the Mod, Ska and Rockabilly revivals, skinhead, New Wave, electro-pop and the New Romantics.

1.4 Riot City and the Building of Empires

However, the decline of traditional industries in the late 1970s did have a widespread effect on the country as a whole, and its impact on punk should not be overlooked. The mid-to-late

16. Following the frenzied media reporting of the punk ‘phenomena’ in late 1976 and early 1977, a large number of groups became categorised, willingly or unwillingly, under the umbrella definition of ‘punk’. Musically, this included diverse styles ranging from R&B/pub rock through reworked Glam Rock to accomplished New Wave and power pop, along with technically incompetent musicians inspired by the notion that ‘anyone can do it’. Politically, any sense of a punk ideology was equally unfocussed – The Sex Pistols released *Anarchy In The UK* in November 1976, influencing a number of imitators to write songs about individuality and autonomy, but voices from the right-wing of politics were also fairly common. (see Sabin 1999: 199)

1970s saw the collapse of the gold standard, continuing problems following the OPEC oil crisis of October 1973, and the infamous 'winter of discontent' of 1978-79, with levels of inflation spiralling out of control. Major changes to employment law also came into force, with the establishment of the Health & Safety at work, Race Relations and Sex Discrimination Acts. Other manufacturing nations, notably Germany and Japan, became prominent on the world economy, manufacturing more efficiently and producing what were seen as better quality and lower-priced products than the UK. Many traditional British heavy industries declined rapidly throughout the 1970s and early 1980s: the UK car industry, for instance, suffered heavily in trying to compete with European and Far Eastern competitors and the growth of cheap imports. This decline was paralleled across other manufacturing and heavy industries such as steel, coal, heavy machinery, freight and shipping, and within major national infrastructures and services such as British Rail, British Airways and the gas, electricity and water industries.

After the 1979 election, a tightening of fiscal policy by the new Conservative government was coupled with a clear aim to restructure the nationalised industries, and government-union relations, in the early 1980s. The impact of this shift of focus was felt differently across the regions of the UK: key manufacturing and heavy industrial centres were to be more directly affected by the shift towards a service economy in the early 1980s, while other areas benefited from the process. Sheffield lost its steel industry, and the decline in coal mining (leading ultimately to the national miners' strike of 1984-85) had a drastic effect on small communities in Yorkshire, Lancashire, South Wales, the north east, and Kent. Meanwhile, affluent areas of the central south and Greater London profited from the growth in new service-led industries and the investment economy created by the Thatcher government's privatisation policies. Between 1979 and 1986, the manufacturing sector lost 1.7 million jobs, while exactly the same number was created in the service industries between 1983 and 1987 (Bédarida 1990: 317).

At the same time, between 1979 and 1987 the living standards of the poorest fifth of the population increased by 1 per cent while the wealthiest fifth gained 30 per cent (Blackwell and Seabrook 1996: 162). In 1981, the government began a radical programme of mass privatisation of key state-run industries, in order to cut 'uneconomic' production costs and to create a financial boom among those sections of British society who could afford to buy into such a scheme (including many Conservative voters).¹⁷ The selling off of private shares in what were once publicly-owned, nationalised utilities such as water, electricity, gas and the railways – many of which had originally been nationalised in the social and political reforms of the immediate post-war period of the late 1940s – took more than a decade to complete. A report by Conservative cabinet minister Nicholas Ridley leaked to *The Economist* in May 1978, informed the new government policy: “...*Ridley believed that the nationalised industries were from every point of view deplorable. Over-subsidised, uncompetitive and monopolistic, they could not but be inefficient and under-productive. His report proposed a strategy for dismantling them, or at least for removing their offensive dependence on subsidy from the taxpayer's bottomless purse*” (Young 1989: 358). However, the government was restricted in its first term, and a national strikes by both the steelworkers and civil servants limited their ability to move toward full-scale privatisation. By 1982, ambitions had moved on: “...*in September 1982, Nigel Lawson, who as Energy Secretary had several of these industrial baronies under his command, said that this could not be allowed to continue. 'No industry should remain under state ownership unless there is a positive and overwhelming case for it so doing. Inertia is not good enough. We simply cannot afford it.'* In so saying, Lawson was by now speaking for the whole Government” (Ibid: 360).

Other policies involving the shift away from public provision toward individual 'responsibility' saw the mass selling-off of council housing stock and widespread moves to generate private enterprise and a market economy in schools, hospitals and local services. The fact that British manufacturing was undergoing a process of steady decline meant that predominantly working class communities and individuals were directly affected more than

17. The Conservative administration was elected on a manifesto designed to tackle the ongoing problems in the labour market caused by a global recession and what the right-wing administration saw as the failure of earlier governments to address deep-seated problems in labour relations in the nationalised industries. As Hugo Young notes, “...*the refusal to prop up lame ducks with public money was one of the most aggressively stated of Tory policies.*” (Young 1989: 318). The failure of earlier administrations to deal with what were seen as 'uncompetitive' industries (including the motor industry and the coal mines) and union demands on public sector pay which led to the disruption of the early 1970s was not to be repeated.

the middle classes – many of whom could afford, in both economic and educational terms, to “get on their bikes” and seek alternative means of employment. That famous expression, by Conservative Secretary of State for Employment Norman Tebbit at the Tory party conference in 1981 (made in response to rising unemployment and the inner city riots in London, Bristol, Liverpool and Manchester that summer), became a catchphrase for both the right-wing press and left-wing campaigners as a symbol of the Thatcher government’s political ethos.

Links to contemporary political events were commonplace in punk, and the inner city riots of 1980 and 1981 were evident in several releases: rioting in the St. Paul’s area of Bristol in April 1980 even led directly to the name of new Bristol punk label Riot City in the Autumn of the same year. Rioting and confrontations between groups of young people and the police occurred in a spate of other UK towns and cities during the summer of 1981 – trouble flared in Toxteth, Liverpool, Brixton, Moss Side, Manchester, Leeds, Bradford and Southall among other places, and the term ‘inner city’ as a site synonymous with race and/or class conflict became a common theme across the right-wing media and in the policies and public announcements of Margaret Thatcher’s government. A number of bands that formed around this time adopted monikers directly referring to these events. Riot Squad, formed in Mansfield in 1982, took their name from the police special forces trained to deal with public street disturbances: their debut single, *Fuck The Tories*, leaves little room for doubt as to their feelings towards the government at the time. Meanwhile, the second single by Stockport Oi band The Violators, entitled *Summer of 81* and released by the No Future label in December 1982 (see Figure 03), ended with the lyrical coda “Brixton – Riot Riot, Toxteth – Riot Riot, Bristol – Riot Riot, Moss Side – Riot Riot, England – Riot Riot Riot Riot.” Punk’s romance with inner city confrontation can be traced directly to the first single by The Clash, *White Riot* (CBS 1977), which was written in response to trouble the group members had witnessed at the Notting Hill carnival in 1976 – a photograph of the riots was also used on the sleeve of their debut album, released in April 1977.¹⁸

18. One alternative viewpoint to the punk clichés worth noting was the debut single by the Cult Maniax, from Torrington in Devon. The song, *Blitz*, mentions Brixton, Toxteth and St. Pauls, but the singer attempts to go one stage further than simply namechecking the riots, and makes comparisons between the destruction caused in those areas and the impact of the Blitz by the German Luftwaffe on the population of East London during World War Two.

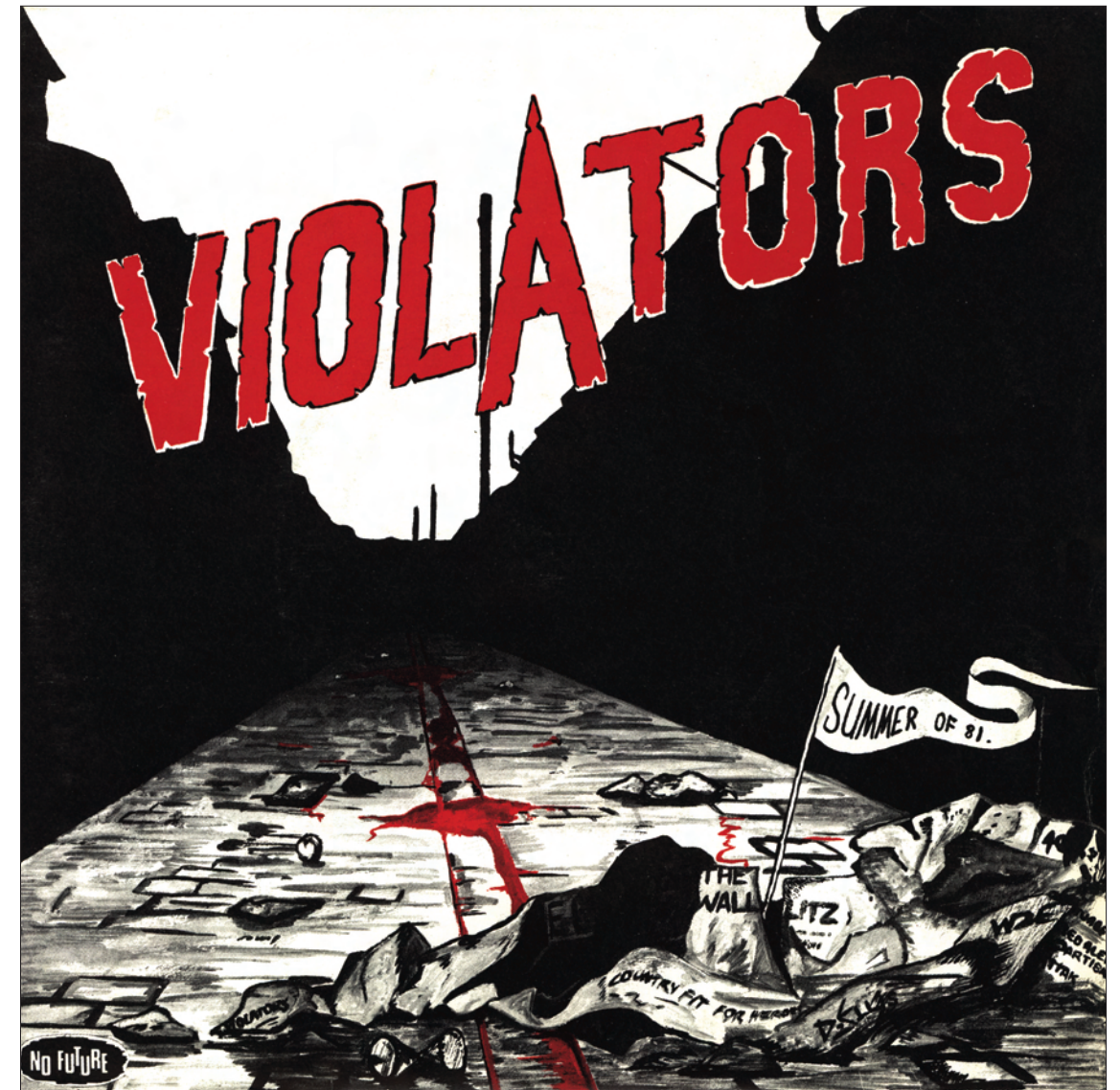


Fig.03: Violators *Summer Of 81/Live Fast Die Young* (No Future Oh19) 1982

The turmoil caused by this shift in employment prospects did have a direct effect on British popular culture. Films and television dramas reflected a sense of despair at the loss of traditional social values, and predicted a depressing end to the post-war economic boom and ‘jobs for life’.¹⁹ In what could be called a sense of *declinism*, the unstable and unpredictable future envisaged at the turn of the decade leading into the 1980s resulted in a period of both

19. Unemployment was to be a central issue in the early 1980s, as the Thatcher government’s restructuring of industry resulted in sweeping changes in the labour market and a dramatic rise in jobless figures. The number of unemployed benefit claimants “...rose from 1.2 million in May 1979 to 3 million in May 1983. If there hadn’t been several changes in the basis on which the figures were calculated, another 300,000 would have appeared in the latest total. Yet another 350,000 were accounted for by special employment measures which kept them out of the headline tallies.” (Young 1989: 316)

cynical opportunism in business and a reflective sombreness in the arts. *Boys From the Blackstuff*, the first television series by Liverpool playwright Alan Bleasdale, was a critical triumph for BBC English Regions Drama, broadcast on BBC2 in October 1982 and winning a BAFTA award for best drama series of the year. Set in recession-hit Liverpool, it chronicled the attempts of five former members of a tarmac gang to find work in a city hit hard by mounting unemployment and depression, and managed to capture the public mood during a time of economic recession and anxiety about unemployment. November 1982 also saw the debut series of BBC2 alternative comedy classic *The Young Ones*, written by Ben Elton and starring Rik Mayall, Adrian Edmondson and Nigel Planer, again basing much of its content on the economic crisis and unemployment. Alternative comedy became very successful over the following year, with the commencement of the first series of BBC sitcom *Blackadder*, starring Rowan Atkinson, and the critically acclaimed *Comic Strip Presents* parodies on the newly-launched Channel Four.

The sense of a great divide created between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ in the early 1980s were played out in popular drama, theatre, comedy, film and in music. Dramatic increases in the personal fortunes of some (such as investment bankers, share dealers, and the upper middle classes) were mirrored by widespread unemployment and the destruction of communities based around traditional manufacturing bases. On January 26th 1982, UK unemployment figures topped three million for the first time since the 1930s, with regional blackspots such as Northern Ireland and parts of Scotland, Wales, the north, and south west of England seeing between 15% and 20% of workers registered for unemployment benefits. Television programmes reflected the sense of division, with documentaries on the unemployment crisis and plays based on the decline of traditional social structures. In this period of turmoil, dramatic shifts in the media and broadcasting technology also led to the creation of new newspaper and television media, including the launch Of Channel Four television in November 1982. Sunday, May 2nd 1982 saw the launch of the Mail on Sunday: the first photocomposed national newspaper in Britain. Both launches were soon followed by

changes in the traditional set-up of their competitors, as the BBC and ITV sought to compete with the new channel, and other newspapers moved directly to the widespread adoption of the new computer technology.²⁰

Many of the larger record companies also sought to diversify, in order to take advantage of changing technologies and new licensing and marketing opportunities, and the early 1980s saw a shift in label ownership, with many smaller labels losing out to takeovers from major multinational media and entertainment businesses. These sales of smaller labels were to be a precursor to the corporate takeover and consolidation of a broad section of the record business in the ensuing decade. The Decca label, a major force in the pop music industry since the 1960s with a number of high profile signings including the Rolling Stones and the Small Faces, was sold off to the PolyGram group in January 1980 after several months of negotiation between the chairman, Sir Edward Lewis, and a number of potential investors including EMI and WEA. The pop and rock side of the Decca label was subsequently run down, though the classical music label continued. United Artists and Liberty were taken over by EMI in early 1980, along with specialist jazz label Blue Note. Meanwhile, Pye Records, which had been a strong player in the singles market since the 1960s (though it chose to move into the Disco and pop markets rather than punk in the late 1970s) was bought out by Philips as part of a deal to sell off its electronics wing, and the decision was made to change the label name to PRT in 1980, resulting in a steady decline and the eventual collapse of the label in 1989. Within five years, the entire record market would be dominated by a small number of major players, including EMI, PolyGram, WEA, CBS and RCA. With the collapse of the independent distributor Pinnacle Records in 1984, shortly followed by the Cartel network, the scene was set for the dominance of the corporate entertainment empires from the 1990s onwards.

20. Channel Four, the new UK territorial television channel dedicated to the arts and culture, went on air on 2nd November 1982, with a brief to provide minority and complementary programming to the three existing channels. The BBC's new Breakfast Time programme went on air at 0630 GMT on 17th January 1983, quickly followed by the launch of the ITV breakfast programme TVam the following month. Australian media baron Rupert Murdoch, who had beaten his rival Robert Maxwell to take control of *The Sun* and the *News Of The World* in 1969, bought *The Times* and *Sunday Times* newspapers in 1981, while Maxwell acquired the Mirror Group in 1984.

Chapter Two: The “Punkness” of Punk

This chapter describes a working definition of UK punk across the period 1976-84, with reference to contemporary reviews and publicity material, Alternative and Independent Chart listings, music press descriptions and a range of marketing and audience definitions. The historical framework for UK punk, its antecedents and its relationship to other forms of popular music are outlined, giving an indication of what is, and what is not, under review in this project. All of the working punk sub-genres fit under the main generic heading, which allows for a broad visual language of ‘punk’, whilst at the same time offering a distinction from other genres within the range of popular music (such as Disco, Soul, Heavy Metal etc). The relationship between punk rock and a range of popular cultural and musical precursors, as well as a number of parallel developments during the late 1970s and early 1980s, is also worthy of study. While the thesis will address certain themes within this discourse, such as the influence on First Wave punk of Glam Rock, Pub Rock and the early 1970s hippie underground, a full assessment of the complex relationships between genres is not possible. This study also touches on themes relating to what might be termed a ‘sociology of record-buying’, as well as marketing strategies and the creation of distinct fan-bases. The problems with defining youth subcultures and punk sub-genres are also outlined, with particular reference to genre theory and the relationship between the market, critics and popular youth culture in the definition and refinement of visual and musical styles.

The punk movement between 1976-84 represented a distinctive period in the development of youth culture in Britain. Whilst certain principles paralleled earlier generations and youth movements, they were married to an outspoken ideology that declared ‘anyone can do it’ and an overtly nihilistic attitude toward the music industry itself. This led to a situation where ‘anyone’ did, in fact, ‘do it’, and the resulting deluge of independent, do-it-yourself records, concerts and networks of activity threatened to seriously disrupt the commercial stability of the popular music business, albeit temporarily.

With regard to the main aspects of the genre, a working definition of ‘punk’ gives emphasis to the market and critical responses from the music press, as against a self definition in the form of a manifesto or shared, published ideology. Many involved in the First Wave of UK punk in particular, both as performers and fans, were resistant to categorisation, and contemporary interviews and group statements are contradictory. By contrast, many Third Wave groups reflected directly (and publicly) on their self-definition as ‘authentic’ punks, and one sub-genre, Anarcho Punk, saw the publication of a range of texts which attempted to define a common political position for both groups and fans.

For the purpose of this investigation, the First Wave of UK punk is defined as those groups and individuals associated with the London punk scene around 1976-77, together with early participants from other major cities, such as Manchester and Liverpool. The Second Wave might be termed those groups and labels who responded to early press coverage and tours by the likes of the Sex Pistols and The Clash and developed their own local scenes, often in smaller towns and cities around the UK. This would include the independent/DIY scene between 1977 and 1979, together with those groups responding directly to major label interest and taking advantage of their ensuing (substantial) financial investment. The Third Wave then describes UK punk between 1979-84, with the development of Oi, Anarcho Punk and Hardcore and the resurgence of interest from fans and sections of the music press in the early 1980s. It is important to note that these definitions do go against many accepted accounts of the development of UK punk – the general consensus is that punk developed as a First Wave, from 1976 onwards, and then as a Second Wave in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see Gibbs (1996), Glasper (2004), Wells (2004), Reynolds (2005) and Robb (2006), together with numerous magazine features). However, this system fails to take into account the cultural shift between the different aspects of the movement, and is often viewed simply from one perspective (e.g. from the First Wave forward or the Second Wave backwards). Jon Savage, for instance, charts the development of the First Wave of UK punk, which develops into what he terms “*the diaspora*” of the regional and independent DIY scenes from

1978 onwards, but he declines to feature the development of early 1980s punk styles and the New Punk movement. Simon Reynolds, similarly, details the development of Post Punk – which maps onto Savage’s diaspora model quite tightly – while discounting the “*...hooligan menace*” of groups such as The Exploited (Reynolds 2005: 344) and “*...lumpen Oi... [which] ...wallowed in its own oppression*” (Ibid: 424). It would appear that the diaspora was a distinct development away from early UK punk, and as such it should be defined as a Second Wave, while the early 1980s New Punk, Oi, Hardcore and Anarcho Punk scenes were a further shift in musical and visual style, as well as political and subcultural perspective. The sub-genres within ‘punk’ can be identified by specific musical and visual codes and references, and conclusions can be drawn from those places where these codes overlap, or where they are used against their original context in ‘oppositional’ or recuperated themes (for instance, in the ironic use and repetition of visual references to Street Punk and Oi in certain Anarcho Punk sleeves, and vice versa). Central to the evolution of punk and post punk music was the role of the music press, in helping to establish and promote new styles and sub-genres – contemporary listings, reviews and catalogues can help to establish useful working definitions and boundaries, and the Alternative and Independent Charts can show the impact of certain records and labels within the wider pop and rock record market.

Definitions of punk as a specific style – applied to music, fashion and graphics for instance – are difficult to pin down. Retrospective accounts of the development of the UK punk scene, such as David Simonelli’s *Anarchy, Pop and Violence: The Punk Rock Subculture and Rhetoric of Class, 1976-78*, published in the journal *British Contemporary History* (2002) present a somewhat simplistic chronology of key events and a distinct contrast between the values and ideology of early Punk Rock groups, their followers and the emerging New Wave. Simonelli argues that the evolution of a wider punk movement led to a dilution of punk’s “*revolutionary moment*” as groups adopted a more professional approach to their craft and found a niche for themselves within the music industry. His assertion that “*...young people came to appreciate less iconoclastic versions of punk, especially ‘new wave’ music*” (Simonelli

2002: 121) is supported by indications of the chart placings achieved by later record releases by the likes of Elvis Costello, The Jam and The Stranglers.²¹ This notion of a revolutionary core at the centre of early UK punk, which is later defused by recuperation into the music business and popular culture, is also central to the position adopted by Dick Hebdige in his earlier study of punk subculture (Hebdige 1979), and in much writing within cultural studies since: Stacy Thompson, for instance, offers a summary of “*the punk project*” as by definition “...*opposed to capitalism... In truth, capitalism is neither natural nor necessary, and punks have not forgotten this fact*” (Thompson 2004: 4). An interesting counter argument, based on an analysis of self identity expressed within certain punk lyrics, was offered by Jude Davies in *The Future of “No Future”: Punk Rock and Postmodern Theory*, published in the *Journal of Popular Culture* in 1996. By viewing punk as essentially postmodernist, Davies attempts to outline a number of ways in which Second Wave punk groups adopted new positions relative to both the music industry and to the First Wave of punk; “...*punk had always been inseparable from working-class-youth rebelliousness. As a movement or a fashion it offered an oppositional identity. But there seems to be a vast gap between the political activism and engagement of the later punks, and the nihilism that seems equally to typify the punk outlook*” (Davies 1996: 9).

Davies’ examples, drawing heavily from a small number of popular Second Wave groups such as the Tom Robinson Band and Stiff Little Fingers, go some way to supporting his argument, but where the opportunity arises to take the hypothesis further, by looking at the political positions adopted by many of the Third Wave punk groups, he seems unwilling to take up the case. He asserts that punk underwent a shift through 1978, from the First Wave groups and their concern with “*disturbance and subversion*” toward a more conscious political position; “...*as the year wore on, though, punk became increasingly overtly politicised*” (Ibid: 16). Davies goes on to argue that a number of strategies were adopted during the Second Wave of punk in order to avoid recuperation and commodification, and a range of possibilities were opened up which “...*were concerned with the communicative and the consensual*” (Ibid: 16)

21. First Wave groups such as the Sex Pistols and The Clash did in fact achieve some chart success – including Top Ten places for the Sex Pistols singles and a Number One debut album in 1977, and Top Forty places for early singles by The Clash and Top Twenty for each of their album releases. The Sex Pistols were even featured in a filmed performance of their third single, *Pretty Vacant*, on Top Of The Pops, on 14th July 1977. Third Wave Punk also made some headway in both the national and independent charts, with Top Forty places for The Exploited, Anti Nowhere League and Vice Squad.

These possibilities ranged from the political affiliations of certain groups with both the Anti Nazi League and the Rock Against Racism campaign (and hence the adoption of a more conventional songwriting stance, albeit within a more radical constituency), to an explicit interrogation of the relationship between performer and audience as exemplified within the lyrics of groups such as Stiff Little Fingers and the Gang of Four. It is a pity that Davies avoids applying his theoretical model to the radical political agenda offered up by the Anarcho Punk groups in the late 1970s and early 1980s which, in many cases, attempted to embrace *both* of his strategies for a new punk ideology. Radical politics were central to the position adopted by groups in the Anarcho Punk sub-genre, but these were also supported by a refusal to engage with mainstream rock/pop markets and a rejection of any kind of star status afforded the performer (an ideology which was played out in full at live gigs and in the creation of alternative spaces for performance and distribution).

Many of these complex shifts in punk identity, especially between 1978 and 1981, were acted out well away from the more mainstream Punk Rock/New Wave debate, although that division does require further elaboration. Simonelli’s distinction between Punk Rock and New Wave appears initially straightforward: as punk styles were “*interpreted and reinterpreted*” by larger numbers of groups and their fans, punk “...*could not help but become a more acceptable music to a wider public. The result came to be referred to by journalists and musicians as ‘new wave’, the most prominent rhetorical term used to defuse the radical elements in punk music*” (Ibid: 137). Punk, then, “...*was not entirely assimilated into the mainstream of British youth culture*”, but the commercial success of many of its original innovators is held up as an example of the recuperation of its initial political potential. Though Simonelli presents a persuasive case, distinctions between ‘Punk’ and ‘New Wave’ as descriptive terms were far less marked early on in the development of a UK punk scene: in fact, the two terms were very often virtually interchangeable. A live review by Barry Miles²² of an early gig by The Clash in the *New Musical Express* clearly demonstrates the confusion. The review, of a gig at ICA on 23rd October 1976, treats the two terms as synonymous; “...*the*

22. Barry Miles had been heavily involved in the late 1960s London hippie counterculture, co-founding the Indica Gallery in the basement of the Indica Bookshop in Mason's Yard, Mayfair, and also helping to set up underground newspaper *The International Times* with Paul McCartney. In the mid 1970s he was a regular reviewer for the *New Musical Express*.

Punk Rock scene – or New Wave Rock as it is better known – has already developed its merchant class of magazine importers, purveyors of ‘punk paraphernalia’ and, of course, journalists” (NME, 6 November 1976)

Earlier that same year, the battle for a generic description for the UK’s answer to American ‘punk’ had led to a number of short-lived suggestions in the music press. *Melody Maker* journalist Caroline Coon used the overarching term “*Punk Rock*” in her overview feature of 7th August 1976, favourably comparing the new scene to the British beat boom of more than a decade earlier. By the time she produced a follow-up article – a “*Six page MM Guide to Punk Power*” on 27th November 1976, the two terms New Wave and Punk had been separated, albeit rather crudely. Coon’s “*Punk Alphabet*” – a dictionary of names and terms – described New Wave as “...an inclusive term used to describe a variety of bands like Eddie And The Hot Rods, the Stranglers, Chris Spedding And The Vibrators, the Suburban Studs, Slaughter And The Dogs who are not definitively hard-core punk but, because they play with speed and energy or because they try hard, are part of the scene...”. By contrast, Coon defined Punk as “*Not a popular label but now accepted to describe bands like the Clash, the Damned, Eater, Chelsea, Siouxsie And The Banshees, Subway Sect and the Sex Pistols – bands who usually play frantically fast, minimal, aggressive rock with the emphasis on brevity, an all-in sound rather than individual solos and an arrogance calculated to shock*” (*Melody Maker* 27th November 1976). Interestingly, in the two months between articles, Coon’s awareness of the growing scene and personal contact with groups involved such as the Sex Pistols and The Clash led to a further refinement of the terms Punk and New Wave, with certain groups – such as The Stranglers and Eddie And The Hot Rods – being moved from the first category to the second. Meanwhile Coon’s friend and fellow gig-goer, *Sounds* journalist Jonh Ingham, attempted unsuccessfully to re-christen the movement “*? Rock*” in a six page article following the 100 Club Punk Festival of 20th and 21st September 1976. Demonstrating the heightened awareness of a new phenomenon in the music press, 2nd October 1976 saw an article by *NME* journalist Tony Parsons entitled *Go Johnny Go*. In a similar fashion to Coon’s earlier *Melody*

Maker article, the piece attempted to trace a lineage between pub rock and the evolving punk movement, whilst at the same time offering a critical perspective on the term itself. Stating that “...*punk rock is really just a lazy journalist media spiel for a genuine new wave*”, Parsons refuted the name punk as a generic, American-derived term, preferring to describe the emerging UK scene as “*kids-rock*” or “*new wave*”.²³ It is true, however, that the term New Wave (along with the short-lived ‘Power Pop’) was later taken up and used as a distinct marketing category by record labels and certain parts of the music press. Early press releases and reviews of gigs and records by First Wave groups may have included mixed descriptions and terminology, but this was largely due to the lack of a specific and accepted common language for the evolving genre. The New Wave genre, specifically referring to a form of more commercial, well produced, and often radio-friendly, punk-inspired popular music was then increasingly refined and marketed by the major record labels throughout 1978 and 1979. Interestingly, the inherent problems in developing a terminology for new and evolving genres were paralleled during the Third Wave of UK Punk between 1980-84, whereby certain new groups were variously described as either New Punk, Hardcore, Real Punk, Oi or Street Punk, with few attempts made to define, and distinguish between, the terms in themselves.

2.1 Sounds of the Suburbs

Following the initial impetus provided by the developing First Wave punk scene in London, many existing groups across the country became associated with the movement through their individual musical and fashion styles which, though often dissimilar from bands such as the Sex Pistols or the Clash, contained elements which could be credited with the same foundation. These might include particular instrumentation (the basic rock & roll elements of electric guitar, bass and drums) and musical influences (often 60s garage rock), or simply a similarly aggressive attitude. The music press, keen to promote a new scene, was quick to identify (sometimes quite tenuous) links between groups. This did lead to some confusion, with many bands branded ‘punk’ by promoters and agents quick to spot a new trend, though this tactic could often be self-defeating once venues began to reject punk acts in light of bad

23. *The NME Encyclopedia of Rock*, published in the Autumn of 1977, includes just four references to the most commercially successful First Wave bands – the Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Damned and The Stranglers – describing each as a part of the growing “*British new wave*”, in direct contrast to “*American punk*” groups such as The Ramones.

publicity in the national press, and audiences became more familiar, and discerning, with the recognised (musical and visual) codes of the new movement. It should also be noted that the visual and textual codes of early UK punk rock, disseminated through a variety of means, were not necessarily directly related to what Dick Hebdige describes as the “*first wave of self-conscious innovators*” (Hebdige 1979: 122), an elite vanguard of cultural style-makers based around the developing London scene. Hebdige suggests that these original innovators created ‘authentic’ moments of resistance through the employment of bricolage in the construction of new meanings. He goes on to argue that once these stylistic innovations were publicised, the subsequent marketing of a style to a wider audience lost this notion of individuality or authenticity and created a distinction “*...between originals and hangers-on*” (Ibid).²⁴ However, dress codes also provided punk followers with a collective identity – as Frank Cartledge notes, certain generic styles were widely adopted, creating a common bond among punk fans; “*...for the ‘average’ punk a more likely scenario would be that clothing was regarded as an expression of style, a cultural language that formed a community*” (Sabin 1999: 150). Punk’s musical and visual identity was at least in part about group solidarity, although it was often expressed in a language which proclaimed individuality and autonomy. Graphic design styles relating to the punk movement also follow similar patterns – the need to be recognised as a part of the new style is counterbalanced by the desire to stand out as an individual or to display an originality of intent. Punk’s graphic language needed to be recognisable to potential audiences – to be effective, record sleeves generally had to communicate that they contained ‘punk’ material – but at the same time designers often strived for an individual identity for the band or label within the field of punk iconography.

2.2 From Company Sleeve to Picture Sleeve

The picture sleeve had been a common marketing feature for the seven inch e.p. format in the 1960s, particularly within the teen/pop market, but was seldom used for single releases: “*...most singles from the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s were issued in ‘company’ sleeves, carrying the name and logo of the label which issued the record*” (Kane 2002: 11) (see Figure 04). This

24. Hebdige attempts to make a clear distinction between the originators of a subculture and those that adopt the new style after it has come to light, making the assertion that punk style “*no doubt made sense*” for the First Wave of originators at a level “*which remained inaccessible to those who became punks after the subculture had surfaced and been publicised.*” (Hebdige 1979: 122). Although this distinction is supported by the ways in which group members defined others in the subculture (‘part time punks’ etc), it does seem overly rigid in its application – further innovations as punk subdivided into different sub-genres, for instance, led to the evolution of new styles within changing parameters.

trend continued into the mid 1970s, with many labels (e.g. RAK, EMI and Decca) simply adopting a house style for their paper sleeves. Following the very early period of ‘punk’ single releases, when a few singles were in fact issued in plain sleeves, it was unusual for a single *not* to be issued in a limited edition picture sleeve. Record labels such as Stiff Records (where Barney Bubbles was the house designer) and Chiswick made a point of utilising a range of unusual and limited edition formats and sleeves for their new releases. Given the resulting close association between UK punk and the seven inch picture sleeve, it is also interesting to note that the first Sex Pistols single, *Anarchy In The UK* – arguably *the* most famous example of the genre – was originally issued in a plain black bag, then in a standard company sleeve by EMI Records (see Figure 05). Punk had been gaining in commercial status from 1977 onwards, and the range of marketing strategies adopted by both major labels and the new independents was predominantly based on a combination of limited edition coloured vinyl singles and/or picture sleeves, presenting something of a dilemma for DIY record producers: they could choose to stand apart from what they saw as the blatant commercialisation of the genre, and thus risk sinking into (or remaining in) obscurity, or they could embrace the newly developing market within which to sell their goods. Most groups chose the latter route, albeit sometimes reluctantly, and very few punk singles were issued without picture sleeves after 1977. Some, particularly those produced by the major labels, were issued with a limited edition picture sleeve for the first pressing, with ensuing copies in a plain, or generic record company, bag, but most DIY and independent records were produced with a picture sleeve for the whole run. However, in comparison with the major labels, the entire production run itself might be seen as a limited edition in the case of many DIY releases, as numbers were often in the low thousands or even hundreds.

2.3 Where Were You?

The apparent paradox in the relationship between ‘original’ punks and ‘hangers-on’ is explored in detail by David Muggleton (2000), who questions the distinctions made by Hebdige and the CCCS regarding originality and authenticity; “*...now let us attempt our*



Fig.04: A range of company branded seven inch record sleeves from the 1960s and early 1970s

own theoretical re-evaluation of what occurs “after the subculture has surfaced and been publicised” (Hebdige 1979: 122). We could assume this necessarily leads to the passive and collective acceptance of a commercially produced style. Or, alternatively, we could propose that such commodified subcultural styles, whether purchased new or obtained second-hand, continue to be customised and subverted. “Just as the innovators can construct new meanings



Fig.05: Sex Pistols Anarchy In The Uk/I Wanna Be Me (company sleeve) (EMI EM12566) 1976

for clothes or other symbols from the dominant culture, so too can members adapt and change the subcultural items for their own purpose and needs” (Andes 1998: 213). Why, then, should the option of further adaptation leading to heterogeneity be any less subversive than the actions of the original innovators? The answer, of course, is that it isn’t, particularly when one further considers that some of the original adapters may also have adopted” (Muggleton 2000: 144).

Thus, the notion of an authentic group of ‘original’ punks is brought into question, and the importance of later developments and interpretations is not overlooked. This criticism of a static notion of subcultural style is reiterated in Gary Clarke’s response to Hall and Jefferson’s earlier *Resistance Through Rituals*. In “Defending Ski-Jumpers”, Clarke states: “...*there is an uncomfortable absence in the literature of any discussion as to how and with what consequences the pure subcultures are sustained, transformed, appropriated, disfigured, or destroyed*” (Frith & Goodwin 1990: 82). Hebdige’s concern with the notion of authenticity and the ‘innovators’ of the punk movement is also brought into critical view by Clarke: “*Hebdige concerns himself only with the innovative punks, the original ‘authentic’ and ‘genuine’ punks concentrated in the London area. This is characteristic of most of the Centre’s subcultural theory – it explains why certain youths develop a particular style say, in the East End, but youth subcultures elsewhere are usually dismissed as part of the incorporation and containment of the subversive implications of that style. We are never given reasons why youths ‘in the sticks’ are inclined to adopt a particular style. Hebdige’s analysis begins with a heat wave in Oxford Street and ends in a Kings Road boutique*” (Ibid: 86)

Certain histories of the movement have gone on to reiterate this erroneous premise, paying uncritical respect to the ‘authenticity’ of those involved in the early punk movement in and around the capital, and in the process denying the part played by many of those who took up the punk ideology and created something new, powerful or exciting. In the introduction to his account of the development of Post Punk, Simon Reynolds states that “...*by summer 1977, punk had become a parody of itself. Many of the movement’s original participants felt that something open-ended and full of possibilities had degenerated into a commercial formula*” (Reynolds 2005: xvii). By sounding the death knell for punk in mid 1977, Reynolds goes one step further than even the generic punk histories which culminate in punk’s loss of identity and accelerated decline in late 1978 or early 1979. The fact is that, for many across the UK, the summer of 1977 was the period when punk was just beginning to happen – the opening chapter of the story, not the end of an era. Many First and Second Wave punk groups were

only just at the point of recording or releasing their own records by this time, including a great number who would feature heavily in retrospective accounts by many fans and critics of the movement: Sham 69, X Ray Spex, Generation X, ATV, Penetration, Siouxsie & The Banshees, Wire, The Lurkers, The Slits and 999 hadn’t even released a record at this point in time, and the number of UK punk albums on the market could be counted on one hand.

Muggleton’s description of the “*further adaptation*” of punk style (both musical and visual) can be compared with the evolution of the UK punk movement during its Second and Third Waves. The development of individual sub-genres of punk, from Oi to Anarcho and Hardcore punk in the early 1980s for instance, demonstrates that punk style was not static, and was in fact subject to radical change. The terms ‘Punk’ and ‘New Wave’ had always been adopted and used in a very loose manner by the music press, and even by record labels and the bands themselves, and a notion of a pure or authentic punk style is difficult to justify. The increased fragmentation of the genre, particularly in the latter period of this study, often demonstrates a clear development in both musical and visual styles, with groups citing influences within the earlier punk canon (in press interviews, within lyrics and on record sleeves) and what might be termed a punk ‘heritage’ upon which they have built and/or adapted. The development of new punk styles and sub-genres, such as New Punk, Hardcore and Anarcho Punk can be seen in part as oppositional reactions to the development of earlier punk styles – a ‘back to basics’ ideology which took what participants saw as the original spirit or intentions of punk and revitalised it through the creation of new forms, giving an emphasis to those core principles which had been neglected as punk gained commercial status and mainstream respectability. Gavin Gritton, from Third Wave group Anti-Establishment, suggests that punk bands from the later Second and Third Waves were directly influenced by the First Wave bands, but followed a distinct agenda; “...*the second wave of punks were the kids who like ourselves had missed out on punk the first time around, who were less pretentious and proud to be punk for the youth culture side of it*” (Glasper 2004: 8). His point is taken up by Karl Morris of Xtract, interviewed by the same author; “...*it was brutal, fast and aggressive;*

I think it was more orientated towards the working classes and really did belong to the youth subculture. Leather, studs, spiky hair, ripped jeans and Docs... definitely, and defiantly, no art school influences in the scene” (Ibid: 10). Even some of the First Wave pioneers have revised their opinions of the Third Wave in retrospect, as Mark Perry suggests in a personal summary of the differences between the movements; *“I think there was almost too many professional musicians in punk to really make it like revolutionary, in a streetfighting sense... The real punk bands came a couple of years later, the bands we all hated like the Exploited and all those nasty working-class people [laughs] that have convictions and have been in trouble with the police, and they were from out of London”* (Robb 2006: 340).

2.4 Hitsville UK

It is true to say that the initial period of the Second Wave reaction to punk in the UK (1977-78), with groups adapting their styles or deliberately forming to become ‘punk’ bands modelled on the First Wave scene leaders such as the Sex Pistols and The Clash, did in fact lead to a widespread uniformity of musical style, which was only surpassed by the increased confidence of its progenitors to develop their own musical agendas over a period of time – a developing self-assurance which was also reflected in the lyrical concerns of many bands as the market for the New Wave grew in the late 1970s. This increased confidence was also partly due to the establishment of a successful ‘underground’ music scene, championed by the music press (predominantly *Melody Maker* and *Sounds*, together with the *New Musical Express* a little later on) and the likes of disc jockeys John Peel at Radio One and Stuart Henry at Radio Luxembourg. Whilst early independent record releases were potentially risky undertakings, the establishment of a market and a receptive audience meant that later groups and labels could be fairly confident of a return on their investment. These responses to the growing punk movement away from the London scene were also strongly evident in punk audiences, particularly in their adoption of dress codes and fashion styles. Whilst some early punk enthusiasts could travel to London to buy ‘authentic’ punk fashions, many more were forced to ‘make do’ with adaptations of their existing clothes or a mixture of fashions

available in high street and charity shops. To others involved in early punk, fashion styles and dress codes were seen as unimportant, and the ‘working class’ credentials of punk were emphasised in the deliberate wearing of everyday street and work clothes. Mark Perry, editor of *Sniffin’ Glue* fanzine, travelled to Manchester for a gig by London group Chelsea at a Heavy Metal club called the Electric Circus in Collyhurst in October 1976, and recalls; *“...it was the first time that I’d been up north and it was a bit of a culture shock. The Electric Circus sat in the middle of what looked like a complete wasteland. The Manchester punks in the audience looked like they’d just stepped off of a football terrace. In those days northern kids had always been a bit behind London in the fashion stakes and these punks were no different. It made me realise just how big the punk scene had got. I’d always thought that if punk was to have a large audience it would have to go beyond the ‘cliquey’ London crowd and reach out to the normal kids living up and down the country with absolutely no prospect of a decent job and even less of a prospect of a decent life. Most of these kids had never been down the Kings Road and probably couldn’t give a fuck about what clothes were in or out”* (Perry 2000: 30)

Beyond the small number of ‘successful’ punk bands (usually those associated with major labels and their subsequent grip on the market: i.e. those acts signed directly to a major label, or to smaller independent labels whose roster became subsidiary to a major label either through the acquisition of the business or deals involving manufacture and distribution rights), the plethora of smaller labels and DIY projects go almost unnoticed in contemporary histories. The majority of these independent groups and labels were responding to punk from outside the capital, as the movement took hold in the press and gained widespread critical and public interest. Many were forced to relocate to London or the major cities, either geographically (for gigs, press reviews) or in terms of their points of reference (both lyrically and in visual representation in the music press or on record sleeves etc).

Whereas First Wave punk operated largely within the structures – and the restrictions – of the music industry, the Second Wave saw a massive growth in independent labels and DIY

production, and quantitative data related to this field is difficult to find. David Marlow, writer for alternative music magazine *ZigZag*, did set about producing a historical record and reference catalogue for small label records, which was published by the magazine in March 1978 and updated several times over later years. National music business listings included those releases which were distributed by the major networks or by the central independents such as Rough Trade, but the plethora of self-produced, self-distributed records outside of this framework fail to register. Some fanzines and music papers did publish punk and alternative charts in the late 1970s, often based on rather subjective and flimsy data, but it was not until January 1980 that a recognised national Independent Chart was put in place. Following a suggestion by an associate of David Marlow, Cherry Red label owner Iain McNay, the music trade paper *Record Business* began compiling a chart of those Independent records (or, as they were later to become termed, ‘Indies’ – a classification which was to become associated with a certain musical style by the 1990s) which were not manufactured and distributed by the major label system. As Barry Lazell, a researcher at the paper given the task of compiling the weekly chart, recalls; “...*most importantly... indie is not a musical or artistic definition... To have indie status, a record – or the label on which it was released – had to be one which was independently distributed: produced, manufactured, marketed and put into the shops without recourse to the major record companies which have traditionally controlled virtually all aspects of the record industry*” (Lazell 1997: II).

Launched on January 19th 1980, the Independent Chart was an immediate success, providing information to retailers and radio stations, and giving a voice to the smaller labels in a competitive international market. Iain McNay had enough experience of dealing with other independent labels through Cherry Red to see the need for a consolidated approach, “*Some acts on independent labels were now selling enough to make the Top 10 of the National charts. But, at the same time, there were literally hundreds of releases that were still selling significantly, even if not well enough to make the National charts*” (Lazell 1997: I). Many punk releases were to feature in the Independent Chart from the outset, and the chart was

extended (from the top 30 singles and top 15 albums to a top 50 and top 20 respectively) and published in *Sounds* from February 1980 onwards.²⁵

2.5 Social Fools

The idea that punk represented some kind of liberal, leftist, anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-homophobic ideology – repeated in much contemporary writing on the subject – is also dubious when subjected to thorough interrogation. Many writers sought to promote a personal political agenda in their reviews of punk – in particular a number of journalists at *Sounds* and the *New Musical Express* – and this written record, together with details of punk bands supporting the Anti Nazi League and Rock Against Racism and stories of individual punk followers frequenting gay or black clubs, has mistakenly been used as evidence to show a wider political ethos which can be applied in retrospect to all punk bands and fans. One outcome from this revisionist historical agenda is the widespread retrospective assumption of some kind of direct association between punk and reggae – even to the extent of punk style being described as a white reaction to black West Indian fashion and politics. Of course, some early punk groups – notably The Clash, The Slits and Alternative TV – chose to identify with black youth, especially in South and West London, styling parts of their music on reggae and dub, and some early punk clubs in London played reggae music between acts (partly due to the lack of any recorded punk material at the time), but any wider link – and especially any claim of a sense of integration or common purpose – is difficult to sustain. The lyrics to The Clash’s fifth single, *White Man In Hammersmith Palais*, released in June 1978, reflect Joe Strummer’s sense of alienation and disappointment in attending a reggae night and finding that his perceptions of a rebellious underground movement were not played out in reality; “*Onstage they ain’t got no... roots rock rebel.*”

One true acid test for an inclusive, anti-racist (or even multicultural) punk subculture might be a survey of the numbers of ethnic minority members of the audience at specifically punk gigs – rather than in attendance at mixed bills such as RAR events which featured both

25. For further reference, see Lazell (1997), Gimarc (1994) and (1997), Strong (1999), Joynton (2001) and Bech Poulson (2005).

reggae and punk acts – or the numbers of black musicians within punk groups. In fact, all indications are that these figures were very low: punk audiences tended to be largely male and white, a trend which mirrored the groups themselves. Certain black figures did become prominent during the First Wave of punk – in particular Don Letts, resident DJ at the Roxy Club and personal friend of The Clash, and Barry Adamson, bassist with Manchester avant-garde group Magazine.²⁶ In contrast to most other descriptions of the symbiotic relationship between black and white youth subcultures in the late 1970s, Dave Rimmer has made an interesting case for punk as a natural complement to reggae, rather than owing a direct allegiance; “...*reggae was an extreme music. More like be-bop than Motown, it was pronounced and proscriptive in its Blackness, designed to be almost completely incomprehensible to the average white listener. Punk didn’t try to imitate it. Instead, it established itself in a kind of complementary opposition. Where reggae was languorous and rooted in bass, punk was manic and trebly. Where reggae communicated with metaphor and allusion, punk applied sarcasm and raw polemic*” (Rimmer 1985: 86). Drawing on Hebdige’s earlier descriptions of punk’s relationship to black culture, he goes on to state that “...*punk established itself as the first authentically White ethnic music.*” (Ibid: 88).

Even the language used in punk lyrics to describe issues such as race and politics can appear problematic to the casual observer, particularly when taken out of their context. Early punk songs such as *I Feel Like A Wog* by The Stranglers and *Arabs In ‘Arrads* by the Art Attacks may appear at least clumsy, if not downright offensive in a contemporary context: they are among many songs which tend to be avoided in documentaries and historical accounts of UK punk, and a song entitled *I Feel Like a Wog* almost certainly wouldn’t get played on mainstream radio today.²⁷ Another line in the Stranglers debut album track *Ugly* might also be construed as deliberately provocative: the lyric “*It’s different for Jews somehow*” is also highly ambiguous. However, both groups were considered to be at least broadly anti-racist (the Art Attacks even played Rock Against Racism shows), and the lyrics can be seen to be reflective of wider public sentiments and obsessions. New Wave songwriter Elvis Costello

26. American group Pure Hell, which featured four black musicians, came to the UK in 1978 to record a single on the independent Golden Sphinx label, and other US black and multi-racial punk groups did exist (most notably the Reggae/Hardcore Punk crossover group Bad Brains, from Washington DC), but in the UK they tended to remain a very small minority. This was even more evident during the Third Wave of UK punk, though Death Sentence from Nottingham and Demob from Bristol, both of which featured black and white group members, were rare exceptions.

27. An early fixture in The Stranglers’ live set, *I Feel Like A Wog* was recorded for their debut John Peel radio session on 3rd March 1977, and was subsequently included on their second album, *No More Heroes*, in October 1977. Peel broadcast the recording, though he did feel the need to clarify the song’s intent as not a racist outburst, but rather a criticism of all forms of discrimination.

also commented that “*London is full of arabs*” on his hit single *Olivers Army*, released in early 1979, a phrase which echoed reports in the tabloid press of wealthy arab sheikhs buying property in the West End.²⁸ A distinction should also be drawn between punk’s relationship with West Indian culture and other ethnic groups, notably Asian immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh, where a culture of mutual respect was often less evident. Many punk groups emphasised an allegiance to (West Indian) black culture, but were critical of other minority groups (see Sabin 1999: 199-218).

The battle for the hearts and minds of punk audiences was played out across the political spectrum, including a number of far left and far right political groups. The Anti Nazi League and Rock Against Racism held close allegiances with left-wing parties and campaign groups, including sections of the Labour party, Trades Unions, the Socialist Workers’ Party and other activist organisations. Rock Against Racism embraced large sections of the punk movement, promoting punk gigs and publishing newspapers and fanzines with punk articles and interviews. Although political groups from both right and left were initially reluctant to become too closely associated with punk, by mid 1977 the movement had achieved such a groundswell of interest nationally that activists saw an opportunity to become involved. As Eddy Morrison, the Leeds and Yorkshire organiser for the National Front, states, “...*I could also see that Punk was becoming a powerful weapon for anyone who could turn it politically. The reds were already attempting to do this with their newly formed ‘Rock Against Racism’, and many teenagers went to their concerts, not because they were anti-racist but simply to hear the music. This couldn’t be allowed to continue. We either had to condemn Punk or use it. I chose the latter option and started a spoof fanzine called ‘Punk Front’ which featured a NF logo with a safety pin in it. To my great surprise, ‘Punk Front’ was a huge success and soon, especially in Leeds, NF members and supporters were going to the biggest Punk Club around – the infamous F Club. I started to regularly go to the club and NF Punks were recruiting other punks*” (Morrison 2002: Part Eight).

28. A popular media subject throughout the 1970s. During the 1973 oil crisis, OPEC (the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) members refused to ship oil to countries that had supported Israel in its conflict with Egypt, notably the USA and its European allies. OPEC also managed to quadruple the price of crude oil worldwide, creating huge profits for its members with controlling interests in Middle Eastern oil companies. One other interesting side-effect of the restrictions was a worldwide shortage of vinyl with which to manufacture records.

However, it was largely the left-wing activist groups that gained national publicity for their links with punk, and through a sympathetic music press. Journalists who had very overt political agendas through which they wrote about the growing (early) punk movement included Nick Kent, Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons at the *New Musical Express*, and Jon Savage at *Sounds*, all of whom saw punk as a potential vehicle for a radical left-wing cultural revolution. During the evolution of punk's Second and Third Waves, Garry Bushell played a significant part in creating and supporting the Oi movement through his writing at *Sounds*, moving in the process from championing 'real punk' and some kind of ill-defined traditional working class leftist ideology to a more right-wing nationalist position as Oi developed from a fairly apolitical 'street' form to encompass a more radical, violent rhetorical style. Some reports made by the media during the First Wave of punk had attempted to associate the new movement with far-right politics, notably through the outraged reaction to photographs of some punk groups and audience members wearing swastika armbands and badges. This trend was somewhat short-lived, and its impact has been overestimated in ensuing studies of punk fashion and politics. Mark Paytress, in his biography of Sex Pistols bassist Sid Vicious, does acknowledge the knowing dumbness in the use of the swastika by certain factions in the First Wave punk crowd; "*Taken with the bondage trousers, the proliferation of padlocks and safety pins, the repetitive pogo dance, the temporal and technical restrictions in the music, the radical rhetoric, and the nihilism that pervaded the scene, the swastika expressed all the bad-tempered visual noise that punk could muster*" (Paytress 2004: 112).

Dick Hebdige gives a great deal of emphasis to the use of the swastika as a subcultural "*exotic display*" in his 1979 analysis of punk subculture. His assertion that the symbol was "*made available*" to punks via David Bowie and Lou Reed's *Berlin* phase, and reflected "*punks' interest in a decadent and evil Germany – a Germany which had no future*" labours the point a little, ignoring a range of other precursors beyond his idealistic Art School/punk stylemakers model. Hebdige goes on to outline the use of the swastika as a symbol purely to shock, rather than a signifier of the concept of nazism, and asserts that in its adoption, it had been

"...repositioned (as 'Berlin') within an alternative subcultural context, its primary value and appeal derived precisely from its lack of meaning" (Frith & Goodwin, 1990: 58).²⁹ David Bowie's 'Berlin trilogy' of albums, *Low*, *Heroes* and *Lodger*, recorded in Berlin during 1977, did have a major influence on what was to come in the immediate period after the First Wave of UK punk, in particular within the field of Post Punk, but they cannot be held to be an influence on the adoption of German historical references in 1976 and early 1977. Far more influential, at least sartorially, were the films *Cabaret*, directed by Bob Fosse and starring Liza Minnelli, released in 1972, and *The Night Porter*, directed by Liliana Cavani and starring Charlotte Rampling and Dirk Bogarde, released in 1974. Both films depict a mixture of sexually charged imagery alongside the decadence of pre-war Germany and the threat of Nazism.

Though the Bowie/Reed influence could be traced through the musical tastes of certain prominent figures in the Sex Pistols' immediate entourage, Hebdige excludes other first-hand references to nazism and fascism from within punk's own direct musical lineage. New York group the Ramones had released their eponymous debut album in July 1976, playing their debut UK show at the London Roundhouse around the same time. Songs such as *Blitzkrieg Bop* and *Today Your Love, Tomorrow The World* made direct lyrical reference to German war themes, the latter declaring "*I'm a shock trooper in a stupor, yes I am, I'm a Nazi schatze, Y'know I fight for the fatherland.*" Ramones bassist and songwriter Dee Dee Ramone had spent most of his childhood in Germany, his father working at a number of US military bases there before returning to the USA in the late 1960s, and it appears that at least some of the interest in Germany, nazi iconography and the Second World War stems from his teenage experiences. Fellow US punks The Dead Boys also adopted nazi imagery in their dress codes, even going so far as to wear nazi uniforms as well as swastikas and SS military insignia. In fact, besides the swastika itself, militaria – and especially German regalia such as the peaked caps of SS officers – was to become a common fashion accessory within punk on both sides of the Atlantic.

29. Bertie Marshall, a member of a group of early punk fans known as the Bromley contingent along with Siouxsie Sioux (Susan Ballion), Billy Idol (William Broad) and Steve Severin (Steven Bailey), even went so far as to adopt the pseudonym 'Berlin', partly in reference to the 1973 album by Lou Reed and the Bowie connection (and possibly to mask the upper-class connotations of his real name).

Hebdige’s interpretations of punk’s flirtation with nazi iconography are also challenged by Stacy Thompson in a rather flawed overview of the relationship between punk and commerce, *Punk Productions: Unfinished Business*. In relation to the wearing of swastikas and bondage gear within what he terms the “*English scene*”, Thompson asserts that “...*punks did not want their surfaces to be legible; they did not want their surfaces to contain them within traditional categories of sexuality, class, and politics... punk style raises the question of what forces construct identity besides style, and where does the negation of style leave identity as a construct?*” (Thompson 2004: 29). Although this notion of punk as intellectual critique of the dominant social order might be attractive to cultural theorists such as Thompson, the young ages of many punk followers who bought into these dress codes go some way to counter this position. Simply put, this was the first post-war generation without a direct experience of the conflict – many of their grandparents fought in the war, and their parents were affected by an immediate family involvement. The war with Germany was still fresh in the minds of many of the older generation (i.e. those who the punks wished to rebel against), war films were commonplace at the cinema and on television, and Second World War militaria was widely available. Many childrens’ toys were based on similar images – Action Man, sold in the United Kingdom by Palitoy Ltd, was a British version of the American GI Joe figure, and was a common feature in many young boys’ lives. In London, army surplus stores such as Silvermans and Laurence Corner stocked a range of uniforms and combat wear, and smaller stores across the country sold similar goods as heavy-duty workwear. This widespread availability of military uniforms, together with the nature of the Second World War as central to the identity of the older generation, meant that the ability to shock through the adoption of German military insignia was a relatively easy stance to take. In the way that the black clothes of the bad guys in cowboy films filtered into rock & roll styles, the demonised SS officers within films such as *The Desert Rats* (1953), *The Longest Day* (1962) and *The Great Escape* (1963) bore some ‘rebellious’ attraction. The 1955 film *The Colditz Story*, together with the 1972 television series *Colditz* and the popular children’s board game which followed also helped to reinforce this notion.

The lyrical reference to nazism, either as a cartoonish mock salute or as a negative statement against racism and fascism, was carried through by a number of early UK punk groups – notably in songs such as The Spitfire Boys *British Refugee/Mein Kampf* (1977), The Cortinas *Fascist Dictator* (1977), The Valves *For Adolfs’ Only* (1977), The Nosebleeds *Fascist Pigs* (1977), The Vibrators (*I’m Gonna Be Your*) *Nazi Baby* (1978) and Throbbing Gristle *Zyklon B Zombie* (taking its title from the chemical agent used in the gas chambers) (1978), as well as in group names such as Stormtrooper, Warsaw, The Stukas and Martin & The Brownshirts. Incidentally, the Stormtrooper single, *I’m A Mess*, was originally recorded in 1975, but was subsequently released by Isle of Wight label Solent Records to cash in on the punk market in the Autumn of 1977. The catalogue prefix initials ‘SS’ may also have raised suspicion: however, this prefix had been used on all the other record releases on the label, including the rather less sinister sounding *Ferry To The Isle Of Wight* by Tony Malo. Although it was left off the first album and only eventually surfaced on the soundtrack to *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, the Sex Pistols also recorded an early song written by Sid Vicious before he joined the group: entitled *Belsen Was A Gas*, the lyrics were certainly intended to shock:

Belsen was a gas I heard the other day
In the open graves where the Jews all lay
Life is fun, and I wish you were here
They wrote on postcards to those they held dear

The chorus featured a repeated comic refrain “*Oh dear!*”, further reinforcing the underlying theme of mocking widely held public sensitivities and taboo subjects.³⁰ The insult was further compounded when the track was featured on *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* in two versions: the first recorded with original Sex Pistols singer Johnny Rotten, which segues into a second with the former ‘Great Train Robber’ Ronnie Biggs, at that time in self-imposed exile in Rio de Janeiro, on vocals. With the song re-titled *Einmal War Belsen Wirflich Bortrefflich*, and introduced by a spoken statement “...*o.k, this time for real...*” in a fake German accent, the

30. The Sex Pistols later use of Nazi imagery and somewhat camp references to the regime might be said to have something in common with the Mel Brooks 1968 musical *The Producers* – a play which is based around a fictional Broadway show entitled “Springtime for Hitler”, featuring characters dressed in Nazi uniforms performing a song-and-dance routine with a chorus line dressed in WWII German military uniform.

accompanying film also featured American actor Jim Jetter dressed in full Nazi regalia to portray an ageing Martin Bormann, a senior member of the Nazi party who had been sentenced to death in absentia at Nuremberg on 1st October 1946 and about whom conspiracy theories abounded. In keeping with a number of satirical comedy shows in the early 1970s, including sketches on popular television programmes Monty Python and Fawlty Towers, this could be said to be another tongue-in-cheek play on the widespread newspaper reports of former Nazi leaders who escaped trial at Nuremberg and were now rumoured to be living in luxury in South America.

The mid 1970s saw a number of high profile films and books on the subject of former Nazi leaders in hiding long after the end of the war. Ira Levin's fictional thriller, *The Boys From Brazil*, the story of a Jewish Nazi hunter searching for war criminals, was published in 1976 and made into a film in 1978. Meanwhile, *Marathon Man*, a thriller starring Dustin Hoffman released in 1976, centred on the story of a young man's encounter with a former Nazi war criminal. In keeping with this theme, early punk pioneers The Boys released their first Christmas single in December 1977 under the pseudonym The Yobs – thus starting a tradition that they would continue over the following four years. A cover of a Chuck Berry 1963 hit, *Run Rudolph Run* features a photomontage of wartime defector Rudolph Hess in front of Spandau Prison, where he was serving a life sentence for his part in Hitler's administration. On the sleeve, Hess has acquired a scribbled red nose – a reference to the popular Christmas song *Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer*, the narrative of which forms the basis of the Chuck Berry original (see Figure 06). Hess had featured heavily in the media over the preceding year – Eugene Bird, a former American Commandant at Spandau, had written a book about his famous prisoner, *The Loneliest Man in the World*, in 1976, and a widespread media campaign had highlighted his physical and mental deterioration, with many politicians and media figures calling for his compassionate release on the grounds of poor health. The Yobs continued to play with the German war theme on their ensuing releases. 1978 saw the release of *Silent Night*, with a montage of Hitler in a santa claus outfit on the cover (see

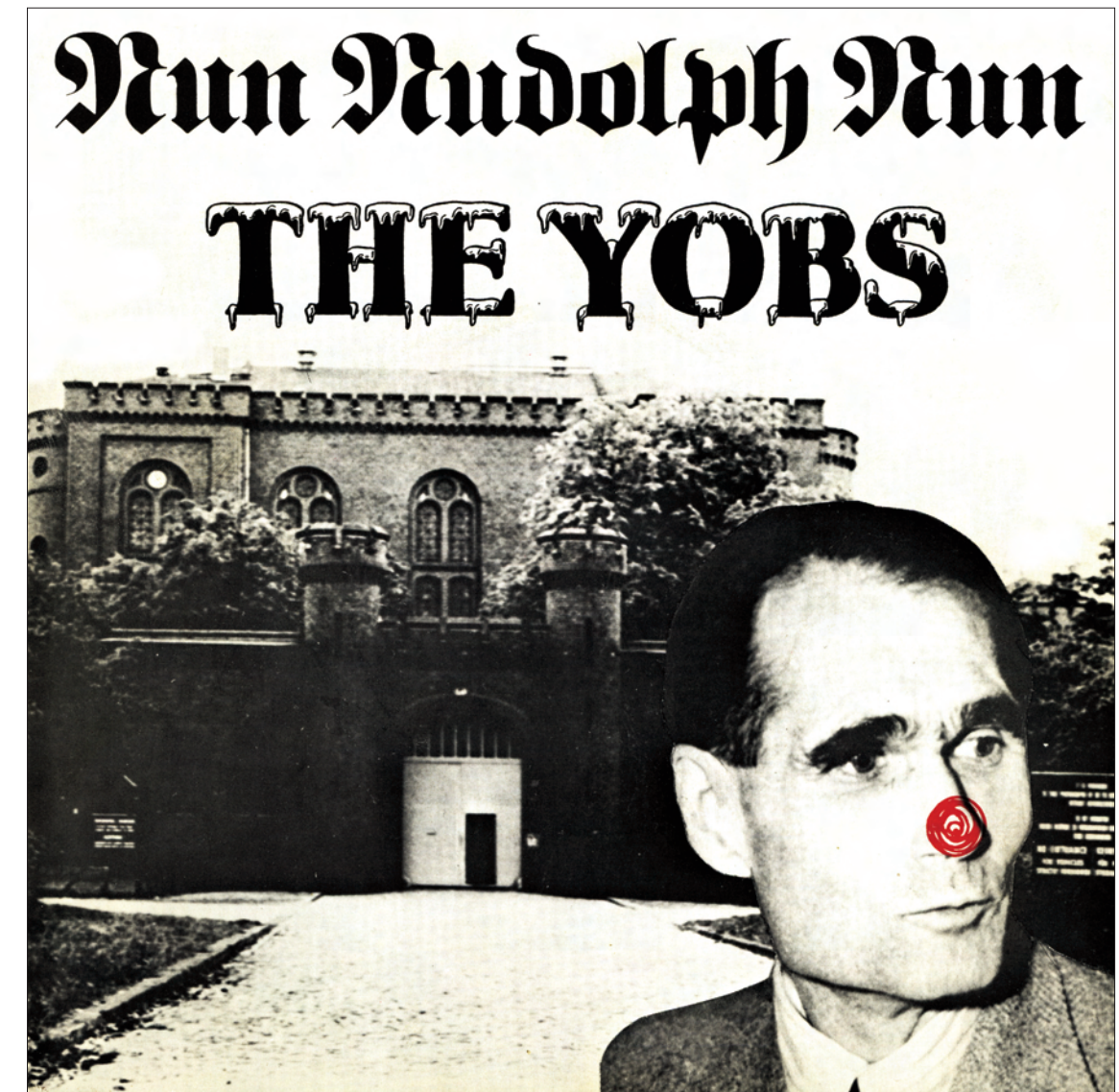


Fig.06: The Yobs *Run Rudolph Run/The Worm Song* (NEMS NES114) 1977

Figure 07), while 1979's *Rub A Dum Dum* single featured the torso of a man dressed in a German SS officer's uniform with a baby's dummy attached around the neck with medal ribbon (see Figure 08). These overt references to German war history and Nazi Party leaders did lead to further confusion, both in the media and amongst punk audiences, as to the legitimate use of nazi imagery and slogans either as shock polemic symbols, direct political



Fig.07: The Yobs *Silent Night/Stille Nacht* (Yob YOB79) 1978

protest or ironic statements. The abundantly negative reaction to the use of nazi imagery and language, particularly in the music press, and the widespread mistrust given to political symbolism by punk audiences, did see its popularity diminish rapidly after 1978. More general Second World War themes did reappear strongly in the early 1980s, particularly in response to the cold war and the growing threat of nuclear confrontation between East and

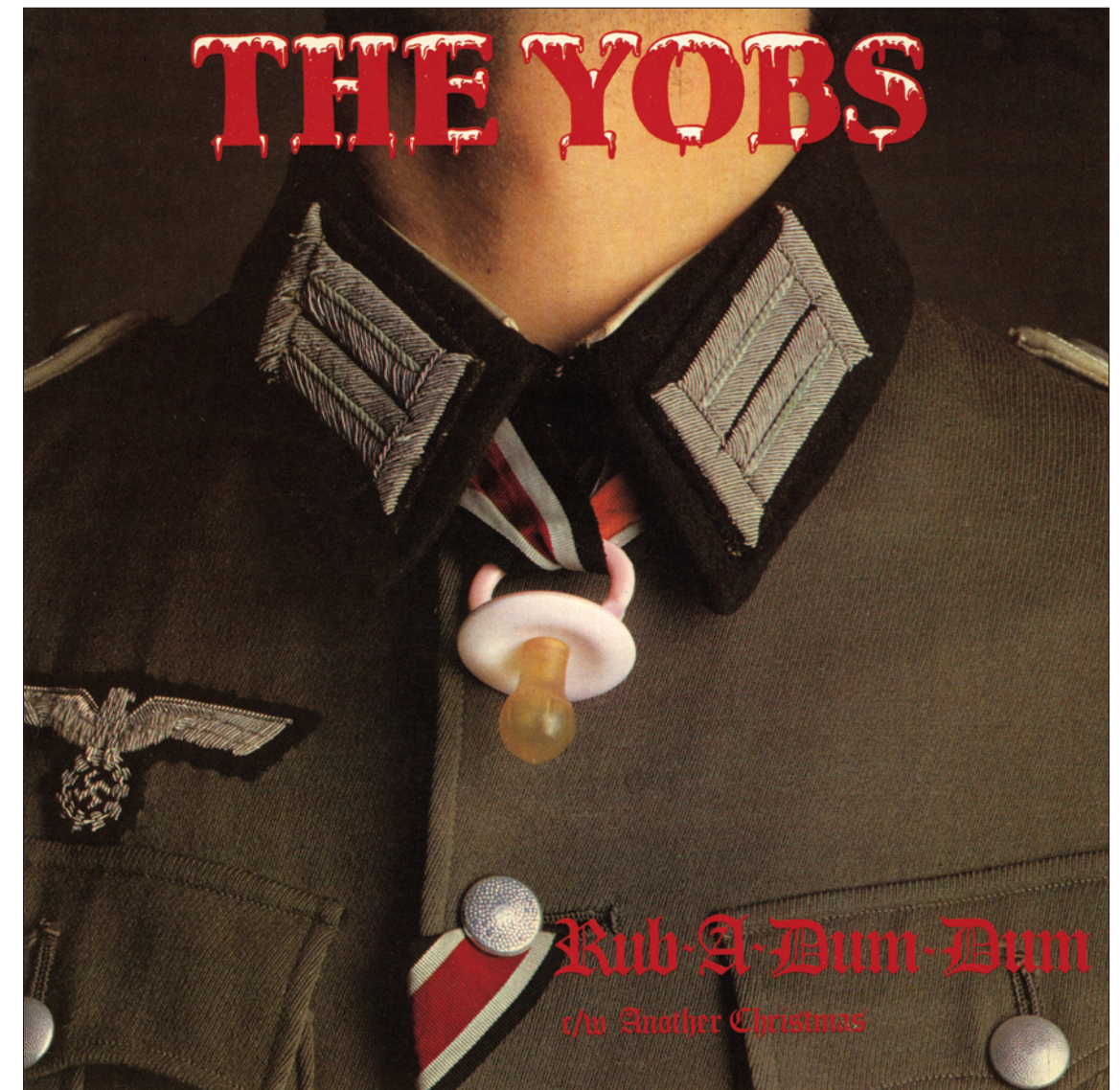


Fig.08: The Yobs *Rub A Dum Dum/Another Christmas* (Safari YULE1) 1979

West, and in the names of a number of Oi and Anarcho Punk groups such as Blitz, Blitzkrieg, The Partisans and The Snipers.

2.6 Sexual Revolutions

Similar difficulties surround the suggestion that punk was liberating for female participants,

or the argument that it offered a non-sexist or more equal platform in its depiction of women. While feminist discourse was firmly in the public realm – the Equal Pay Act of 1970 had brought women’s employment rights to the fore, and it was followed by the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 which outlawed discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of sex or marital status – popular culture was still based on traditional hierarchies of class, gender and race, and it would take many years for any widespread acceptance of a new ideology based on sexual or racial equality. Radical political groups did put forward strong arguments for change, but in many cases their positions were seen as extreme within the wider public arena. *Spare Rib*, one of the most prominent feminist magazines that emerged at the time, was launched in June 1972 in Britain with the aim of extending the arguments posited by a wide range of smaller, more local, activist publications within a nationwide magazine, but many newsagents and retailers refused to stock the title. Mainstream publishing also saw the launch of new titles aimed at a self-aware and empowered female audience – the first issue of *Cosmopolitan* was published in March 1972, and was met with a media storm, fuelled by a rumour that the second issue would feature a full-frontal male nude. The editorial stance was equally confrontational – the first issue introduced its position on female liberation with the following words: “*You’re very interested in men, naturally, but you think too much of yourself to live your life entirely through him. That means you’re going to make the most of yourself – your body, your face, your clothes, your hair, your job and your mind*” (www.natmags.co.uk). Interestingly, *Cosmopolitan* magazine was itself the central subject matter for one punk single, *Cheap Night Out* by Raped (Parole Records, December 1978). While the lyrics of the song document the narrator masturbating over the picture of a young girl in the magazine (“...cool Christine”), the sleeve is a pastiche of a *Cosmopolitan* cover design, featuring a photograph of the group and titles of fictional articles (see Figure 09).

The political radicalism which first formed in the late 1960s underground did filter through to College and University campuses, and it also had some effect within the avant-garde of popular culture – at least some of the writers in the popular music press began to adopt



Fig.09: Raped Cheap Night Out/Foreplay Playground (Parole PURL1) 1978

positions on equality, anti-racism and anti-sexism – but a wider discourse was slower to develop. Within early 1970s rock music, commonly accepted roles of male performers and stereotypical lyrics about girls – and thus their accompanying sexual hierarchies – prevailed. With the advent of punk, this set of hidden rules was not about to change overnight, although some participants saw an opportunity in the new styles. Lucy O’Brien is critical of

the feminist agenda of the hippie counterculture: in contrast to the radical sexual revolution that has been widely portrayed, she notes that; “...for women, the new sexuality was a muddled mix of old-fashioned passivity and experimental self-assertion” (Sabin 1999: 188). By contrast, she goes on to suggest that punk offered fresh opportunities and a new framework for feminist discourse; “...by 1976, amid increasing economic uncertainty, the hippie look had been mass marketed and diluted to the point where it became the new conformity. To find fresh meanings as a woman it was necessary to overturn the pastel shades of post-60s femininity and make an overt statement on a newly emerging, more aggressive understanding of female sexuality. Punk provided the perfect opportunity” (Ibid: 188).

The role of women performers, in particular as instrumentalists, within the punk movement was investigated within a research project by Helen Reddington in 2003, entitled *Unprecedented Access? Women Instrumentalists in Punk Bands 1976-1984: An Exploration*. Reddington’s study focuses on the ways in which women were able to take on previously inaccessible roles within rock groups through the empowering nature of punk – she argues that punk’s removal of emphasis on technical skill and musicianship opened up new routes for women into popular music which had previously been unavailable. She suggests that this empowerment was short-lived, and that women musicians faced difficulties in their encounters with the (mostly male) “media gatekeepers and cultural intermediaries” who were largely ambivalent, or even hostile, towards a perceived change in gender roles. Therefore, although the punk movement might be seen to be positive toward breaking down earlier stereotypes and hierarchies, the music industry itself was not about to be co-opted. This could equally be said of the relationship between the record industry and punk groups in general, however, given that many punk bands experienced difficulties in negotiating any kind of long-term career once punk became no longer ‘hot property’ and initial record company interest waned. Reddington makes a case study of her experience of the punk and post punk music scene in Brighton, where she played bass for Joby And The Hooligans and The Chefs, but it is unfortunate that she chooses to end her study on a downbeat note, with

women performers either moving away from the music business, or being recuperated into the mainstream pop market. She cites the changes made by previously ‘political’ acts as they entered the chart mainstream: “...2-Tone band *The Bodysnatchers* metamorphosed into the more showbiz *Belle Stars*. In a classic example of hegemonic assimilation the commercial aspects of punk were severed from the grass roots” (Reddington 2003: 141).

A similar conclusion is reached by Lucy O’Brien, who notes that – despite her earlier optimism regarding the liberating potential of the new subculture – widespread acceptance by the music industry was not forthcoming; “...the lack of emphasis on technical expertise meant that many women felt able to enter a world from which they’d previously been excluded. Once there, however, few made it above ground level. And those that signed record deals found themselves at loggerheads with a music industry that was still locked into marketing women as disco dollies or raunchy rock chicks” (Sabin 1999: 194). While this assertion that chart-friendliness and major label investment in punk and post punk groups did lead to a loss of political intent can be supported by a number of high profile examples, the punk underground did continue to offer a space for ideologically-minded performers, including women and minority groups. It could be argued that pressure from the major labels to ‘conform’ affected all punk musicians, male and female, and the sense that remaining ‘independent’ allowed for a more radical (or even ‘authentic’) position. Reddington includes local group the Poison Girls in her Brighton overview, but fails to mention that singer/guitarist Vi Subversa and lead guitarist Richard Famous were both in their 40s when the group formed, and faced hostility in the music press and discrimination because of their age. Subversa, a mother of two teenagers (her children also played in punk groups Fatal Microbes and Rubella Ballet), had a formidable stage presence, and the group’s songs explored age, sexuality and gender roles. Like Crass, who also featured a mixed-gender (and older) line up, the Poison Girls found an enthusiastic audience within the Anarcho Punk scene, as did numerous other non-mainstream performers. Women musicians continued to feature in the Anarcho Punk underground. Hagar The Womb, for instance, were formed in London in 1980,

originally as an all-girl group who “...were determined to have our say in an already male-dominated scene.”³¹ Their debut performance occurred just a week after forming, echoing the raw beginnings of earlier punk groups, and over the following five years the group’s line-up fluctuated to include both male and female instrumentalists. Although far from perfect, as the statement about a ‘male-dominated scene’ indicates, the Anarcho Punk underground was in many ways more inclusive than other music genres of the period, and also helped to establish a network of local venues which could provide everything from cheap food and rehearsal space to live music, printing facilities and even free accommodation for the homeless. Crass also released an album entirely dedicated to anarcho-feminist politics, entitled *Penis Envy* (Crass Records, 1981).

However, contrary to many historical accounts, the majority of the punk music business *did* take on the aspirations and attitudes of the established rock canon. Although, as Reddington asserts, punk did open up new avenues for women as performers, sexual stereotyping within the industry – *and*, importantly, within the punk scene itself – saw women still portrayed widely as objects of male desire. Female performers such as Siouxsie Sioux, Pauline Murray, Poly Styrene, The Slits and The Raincoats did present a provocative and independent image, but were still in the main portrayed and marketed as ‘sexy women’ to a largely male audience. Debbie Harry of US New Wave group Blondie received a huge amount of press attention focussed on her looks, and this caused stresses within the band, to the extent that their label, Chrysalis, produced badges stating “*Blondie is a group*” to try to counter the problem. Harry had also reportedly been incensed when the label advertised their single *Rip Her To Shreds* in November 1977, using a photograph of the singer alongside the caption “...wouldn’t you like to rip her to shreds?”. Gaye Advert, bassist with UK group The Adverts, also gained a lot of media attention, primarily because of her photogenic appearance. Even though this was downplayed by the group themselves, their label Stiff Records used a photograph of Gaye’s face on the sleeve of their debut single, *One Chord Wonders*, released in April 1977 (see Figure 10). The group had previously agreed to use a photograph of the whole

31. Quote taken from the sleevenotes to the retrospective Anarcho Punk collection *Anti-Society* (Overground Records 2006).



Fig.10: The Adverts *One Chord Wonders/Quickstep* (Stiff BUY13) 1977

band, and felt angry that their decision had been over-ruled, but the label continued to exploit the situation, and she continued to feature heavily in the marketing campaign for the record. Other early UK punk groups adopted more stereotypically male roles, some being castigated for their lyrics in the process. The Stranglers, the most successful early punk group in terms of chart placings, were criticised for the lyrics to many of the songs on their debut

album, *Rattus Norvegicus*, released in April 1977, and for the single *Peaches*, released the following month. The B-side of their debut single, entitled *London Lady*, was heavily critical of an unnamed woman – rumoured to be journalist Caroline Coon;

Making love to the Mersey Tunnel
With a sausage, have you ever been to Liverpool?

Similarly blunt descriptions of women occupied songs such as *Princess Of The Streets*, *Ugly* and *Peaches*, while the description of domestic violence in the album opening track *Sometimes* brought accusations of misogyny;

Someday I'm going to smack your face
Somebody's going to call your bluff
Somebody's going to treat you rough
Sometimes there is only one way out
I've got to fight
You're way past your station
Beat you honey till you drop

The Stranglers courted this controversy, going even further on their second album, *No More Heroes*, released in October the same year. The track *Bring On The Nubiles* is a provocative response to their critics, documenting an obsession with underage girls, while *English Towns*, *Bitching* and *School Mam* faced further accusations of blatant sexism. The group headlined an open air event in Battersea Park in September 1978, and were accompanied by a group of strippers for an extended performance of their hit single *Nice 'N' Sleazy* – the stunt led to widespread attention in the press, with both positive and negative reviews accompanied by numerous photographs of the event (thus combining moral indignation with visual titillation in the time-honoured way of the British media). The UK Subs were also fairly

explicit in their lyrical references to women on songs such as *Tomorrow's Girls*, *All I Wanna Know* and *Dirty Girls*. While *All I Wanna Know* simply declares “...*All I wanna know, All I wanna know... Does she suck?*”, *Dirty Girls* follows a consistent theme in the UK Subs lyrics by contextualising the story within the evolving London punk scene, namechecking regular punk venues the Marquee and Music Machine;

The girls inside the Marquee
All dressed up to go
Outside the Music Machine
They never tell you no
Night times here I'm on my way
On the subway to the city
Those dirty girls never say no
Maybe that's why I love 'em so

Stewart Home quotes a number of lyrics to songs by both Brighton band The Depressions and early punk pioneers Adam & The Ants as examples of punk's ability to provoke a reaction, arguing that “...*rather than being socially progressive, Punk Rock contained a provocative ambiguity*” (Home 1995: 74). Essex Novelty Punk group the Pork Dukes recorded a series of totally over-the-top songs largely centred on the theme of sex. Their debut single, *Bend And Flush* (see Figure 11), and subsequent releases such as *Telephone Masturbator* and *Making Bacon* included lyrics and record sleeve artwork which were certainly designed to be taken with a pinch of salt. Other groups who recorded songs which could be considered derogatory towards women include GBH, whose *Big Women* single (Clay Records 1982) extolled the virtues of larger girls, and the Anti Nowhere League, whose *Woman* single entered the lower reaches of the national chart in 1982. The song documents the singer marrying a woman who appears ideal, but the narrator becomes disenchanted with the situation very quickly;

Well, what's that you just said to me?
You didn't argue like this yesterday
Woman – I don't understand
And what's that you just said to me?
I can't sit at home and watch my TV
Woman – You're annoying me
Yeah, you sit around the house in your dirty clothes
Looking a mess and picking your nose
Woman – You're a fucking mess
Your tits are big but your brains are small
Sometimes I wonder if you've brains at all
Woman – Go fuck yourself
Well fuck you, fuck you,
Don't you tell me what to do
Woman – Ah fuck off!

The Anti Nowhere League had already courted controversy when both their debut single, *Streets Of London*, and album, *We Are The League*, were seized by police under the Obscene Publications Act. The single actually made the Top Fifty in the national chart, but its B-side, *So What*, was deemed highly offensive and was banned, with around 10,000 copies destroyed. Their second single *I Hate People* also charted, passing the censors on this occasion, though the album had to be re-recorded with modified lyrics, thus ensuring a long-lasting notoriety for with the group. During the Third Wave, other groups reverted to rock 'tradition' in their depiction of women on record sleeves. Both The Fits, with their single *Action* (see Figure 12) and The Lurkers *Drag You Out* (see Figure 13) depict a woman's legs – in the first case as a full colour photograph wearing thigh-length leather boots (and nothing else), and in the latter as a halftone illustration, wearing fishnet stockings. At the same time, certain female performers were becoming known for their 'sexy' image – Beki Bondage, lead

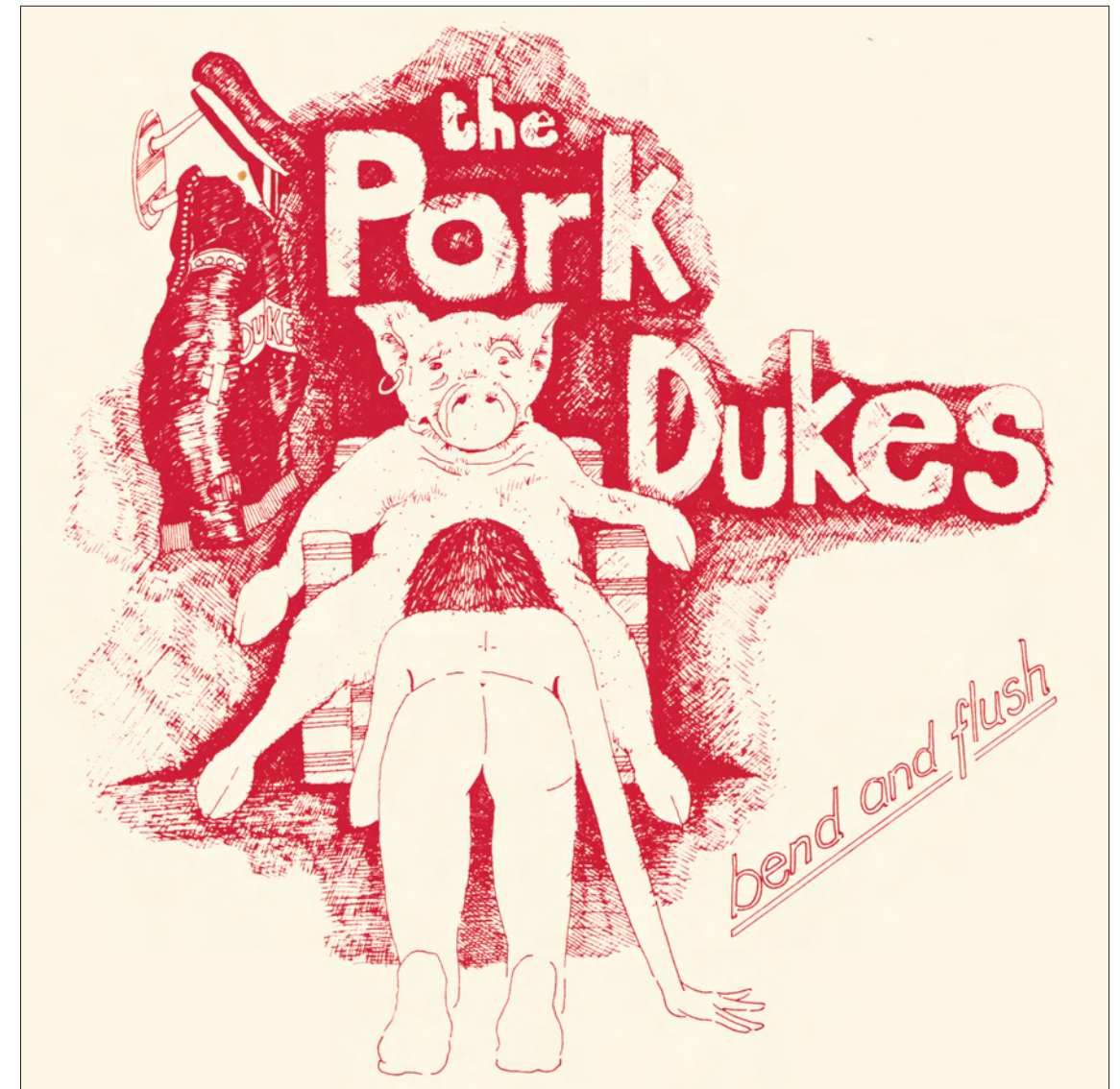


Fig.11: Pork Dukes *Bend And Flush/Throbbing Gristle* (Wood WOOD9) 1977

singer with Vice Squad, was featured regularly in the *Sounds* music paper, and was usually depicted as a sex symbol for the New Punk movement.

2.7 A New Art School

It might be argued that the notion of Art School education and a subsequent awareness of



Fig.12: The Fits Action/Achilles Heel (Trapper FIT1) 1984

earlier forms of visual protest – derived from that environment and the supposed political radicalism of the education system at the time – is overplayed in design histories of the punk genre. Certainly the student protest movement of the late 1960s did have an effect on youth politics, and the fact that several key proponents of the early UK punk movement had formed early associations at Art Schools and Colleges in Croydon, Hornsey and Goldsmiths should

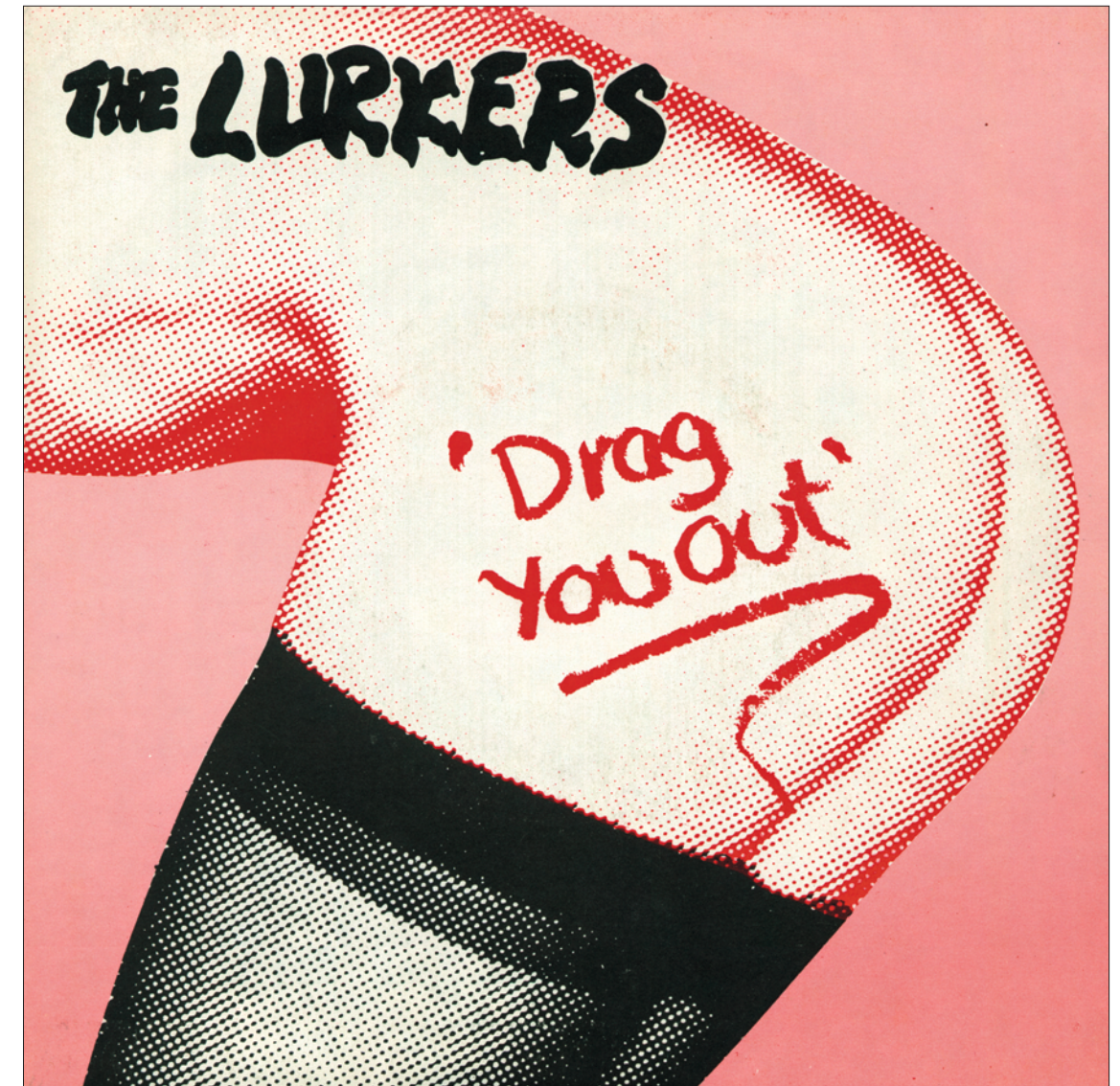


Fig.13: The Lurkers Drag You Out/Heroin (It's All Over) (Clay CLAY17) 1982

not be discounted. However, the extent to which a detailed knowledge of the historical context of Twentieth Century art, politics and protest could have been gleaned from one or two years on a Foundation course is open to question. Many participants in the emerging punk movement were very young – indeed, youth was a celebrated factor in punk identity, to the extent that older participants often disguised their age – and a mature appreciation of

the history of oppositional, avant-garde art theory and practice would seem rather unlikely, despite the range of subsequent analyses of the genre by more mature, Oxbridge-educated cultural theorists. A number of champions of the early punk scene in the music press were educated, middle class journalists, who saw an opportunity to promote a new movement which could be analysed and reinterpreted within their own frames of reference – from English literature, politics and history to sociology and contemporary cultural theory – together with a malleable and often less articulate group of key participants.

Subsequent writers have offered similarly distorted and highly personalised perspectives on the interpretation of punk identity. These factors have led to a number of bizarre episodes, including claims by Paul Morley to link freeform jazz, Ornette Coleman and Miles Davis to early performances by The Buzzcocks. Interviewed retrospectively by Simon Reynolds, Morley scores highly for pretension in his evaluation of the early musical status of the group; “...*I remember delightedly screaming, “This is like fucking Ornette Coleman!” when I went to see Buzzcocks play very early on. The guitars and bass were skidding, the drums just seemed to be completely polyrhythmical, the voice was flailing away. If you stood back a couple of inches, you thought: This is like free jazz”* (Reynolds 2005: 16). It is hardly surprising that these supposed connections were not picked up by other journalists (or, for that matter, by the band themselves) at the time – in fact, founder members Pete Shelley and Howard Devoto drew inspiration from their own personal tastes in both Glam Rock and the American underground, including T Rex, The Stooges, the Velvet Underground and David Bowie (covering a number of songs by each of these artists in their early repertoire), and were catalysed by seeing the Sex Pistols in London in February 1976 (McGartland 1995: 20). An early live review by Nick Kent in the *NME* described the group as “...*sounding exactly like a cheap, sloppy Ramones work-out*” (*NME*, March 9th 1977), while other reviewers centred on their amateurism and cheap guitars – not one writer made the free jazz connection that Morley found so immediately apparent. Morley is not alone in his retrospective positioning of punk within a wider cultural and intellectual framework. In *Lipstick Traces*, Greil Marcus

attempted, rather unsuccessfully, to make connections between the Sex Pistols, Dada, Surrealism and sixteenth century political agitators, while in *England’s Dreaming*, Jon Savage overemphasised Situationist connections and the promotion of women and gay rights within the early punk movement. Simon Reynolds went one stage further in the political rehabilitation of the post punk avant-garde in his 2005 book *Rip It Up And Start Again*, building ivory towers on the supposed Marxist principles and intellectual foundations of Scritti Politti and the DIY post punk elite.³²

Malcolm McLaren and Jamie Reid certainly caught the late 1960s zeitgeist, and did attempt to engage with the then-current ideas of the Situationist International and the student protest movement, but any assumed direct link between punk and earlier art groups should not be taken at face value. Reid had attended a pre-diploma course in art and design at Wimbledon Art School between 1962 and 1964, which he described as “...*very odd. Tweed jackets, brogues and monacles, still lifes and life classes: very much the old guard’s last retreat before everything went pop*” (Reid & Savage 1987: 12), before going on to Croydon Art School to take a vocational course in painting. Although political events around 1968 were a strong influence on his work (especially that produced for the early 1970s Croydon underground magazine *Suburban Press*), there is little to suggest that the School, or its curriculum, had a great deal of influence on his later output. The notion of the Art School as a place for free expression was, however, adopted by a number of early punk participants: Paul Weller, though not a product of the Art School system himself, even used the subject as a metaphor for the punk movement, on the song *Art School* from the debut album by The Jam, *In The City* (Polydor 1977);

Anything that you wanna do, anyplace that you wanna go
Don’t need permission for everything that you want
Any taste that you feel is right
Wear any clothes just as long as they’re bright
Say what you want, ’cos this is a new Art School

32. Reynolds manages to scale even higher realms of intellectual aggrandisement whilst reflecting on the merits of early DIY post punks Scritti Politti. Discussing the cover photograph of the interior of the group’s squat in North London, Reynolds admits that he has no first-hand knowledge of the household or their personal habits, but still enthuses; “...*it’s a snapshot of a lifestyle: theory-addled, speed-stoked conversations raging until the crack of dawn; fevered debates about the radical potentials and counter-revolutionary pitfalls of popular music punctuated by visits to illegal reggae parties and post-punk gigs at Acklam Hall or the Cryptic One Club.*” (Reynolds 2005: 198).

A number of other Art School graduates and dropouts within the early punk movement cited art references in their work. Adam & The Ants – whose singer, Stuart Goddard had attended Hornsey School of Art – sang about the Futurists in their song *Animals & Men*, first recorded in July 1978;

Marinetti, Boccioni, Carra, Balla, Palasechi!
Futurist manifesto!

Meanwhile, Irish New Wave group the Boomtown Rats made a knowing reference to Marcel Duchamp's *LHOOQ*, as well as commenting on supposed links between punk and nazi imagery, in the lyrics to their third hit single, *She's So Modern* (Ensign 1978);

Jean confided to me
She's Mona Lisa's biggest fan
She drew a mustache on her face
She's always seen her as a man
And Charlie ain't no Nazi
She likes to wear her leather boots
Cos it's exciting for the veterans
And it's a tonic for the troops

The single reached number twelve in the national charts, and the group even performed the song live on Top Of The Pops three times between April and May 1978. The above examples obviously rely on a sense of familiarity with art history on the part of audiences in order to understand their context and meaning, and it is quite unclear as to how successful they actually were in this regard. The Boomtown Rats single sold well, and the group's second album, *A Tonic For The Troops*, hit the Top Ten in June 1978, but the rather obscure lyrical reference was most probably lost on many buyers. Similarly, the adoption of a John

Heartfield photomontage for the cover of the Siouxsie & The Banshees single *Mittageisen* (Polydor 1979) could easily have been misconstrued by an unknowing audience as simply a further link between punk visual style and nazi iconography (see Figure 14). Other visual references in the sleeve design of a number of punk and post punk records are equally obvious to the trained eye, though again care must be taken not to assume that audiences read or understood the connections made. The debut single by Generation X, *Your Generation* (Chrysalis 1977), featured a sleeve designed by Barney Bubbles that was directly derived from the range of typographic experiments produced by El Lissitzky, Henryk Berlewi and the Russian Constructivists (see Figure 15)³³ and, in a similar manner, Alexander Rodchenko's *Design for Pacifiers* poster of 1920 was (anonymously) pastiched for the sleeve of The Damned's *Generals* single (Bronze 1982) (see Figure 16). Herbert Spencer's seminal book on modernist design and typography, *Pioneers of Modern Typography*, first published in 1969 and subsequently reprinted in the autumn of 1977, was widely taken up by graphic design courses across the UK as a key text on the origins and values of the profession. The influence of this text, and – perhaps more importantly – the visual examples of work it contained by designers such as Jan Tschichold, El Lissitzky and Alexander Rodchenko, was acknowledged by Peter Saville in his retrospective exhibition at the Design Museum in 2003 (King 2003: 26), and by Rick Poynor in his summary of 'appropriation' as a design method (Poynor 2003: 73).³⁴

Other punk sleeve designers drew on wider art and design references from the early 20th Century: illustrator Jill Mumford made links to Man Ray in her later sleeves for The Skids, though her work could be seen as more of an homage than a direct appropriation. Her sleeves for the 1980 sequence of singles by the group, *Circus Games*, *Goodbye Civilian* and *Woman In Winter* (Virgin Records) featured abstract images based on curved forms, with the accompanying description “...from a Man Ray Aerograph” (see Figure 17). It should be noted, however, that these examples, along with the sleeves designed by Saville for New Order, were operating within a wider, and supposedly more sophisticated musical and visual arena than most earlier punk output. Manchester's Factory Records, Joy Division and New Order were

33. The sleeve, like Malcolm Garrett's design for the Magazine single *Touch And Go* (Virgin 1978), reflects a number of early modernist formal experiments such as El Lissitsky's Supremacist story *Two Squares*, published in Berlin in 1922. The Generation X sleeve also bears a striking resemblance to the mechano-faktura constructions produced by Berlewi in 1922 and published in Spencer's *Pioneers of Modern Typography* (see Spencer 1969: 54).

34. The Saville catalogue even includes examples of original artwork 'appropriated' by the designer, as in the sleeve for the debut album by New Order, *Movement* (Factory 1981), which borrows directly from a journal cover by Italian Futurist designer Fortunato Depero, originally published in 1932.



Fig.14: Siouxsie And The Banshees *Mittageisen/Love In A Void* (Polydor 2059151) 1979

(rather unwittingly) central to the evolution of a Post Punk identity, and to surrounding discourse in the music press which attempted to raise the intellectual bar away from 'outdated' and inarticulate punk themes and into an aspirational new decade.³⁵ The Skids had also by this time attempted to move away from their earlier pop punk identity towards a more articulate (and verbose) engagement with the developing New Romantic scene.

35. Much of this discourse was not originated by the post punk groups themselves, but was built around an interpretation of their aims and objectives by a number of key writers in the music press. Some groups, such as the Gang Of Four, Scritti Politti, Wire and The Pop Group did help to feed this trend (particularly in interviews, where art, literature, politics and philosophy were often discussed at length with enthusiastic graduate journalists keen to demonstrate their own 'academic' and 'high culture' interests), but this did lead to something of an erroneous over-intellectualisation of the Post Punk sub-genre as a whole.



Fig.15: Generation X *Your Generation/Day By Day* (Chrysalis CHS2165) 1977

Barney Bubbles, a key influence on Malcolm Garrett and Neville Brody, had adopted a visual practice based in part on similar usage of parody and pastiche at Stiff Records. His sleeve for the second album by The Damned, *Music For Pleasure* (Stiff 1977), was an amusing abstract graphic interpretation of the visual style of Wassily Kandinsky: Rick Poyner argues that the cover "...is not exactly a parody – more a tribute that gleefully embraces its source material"

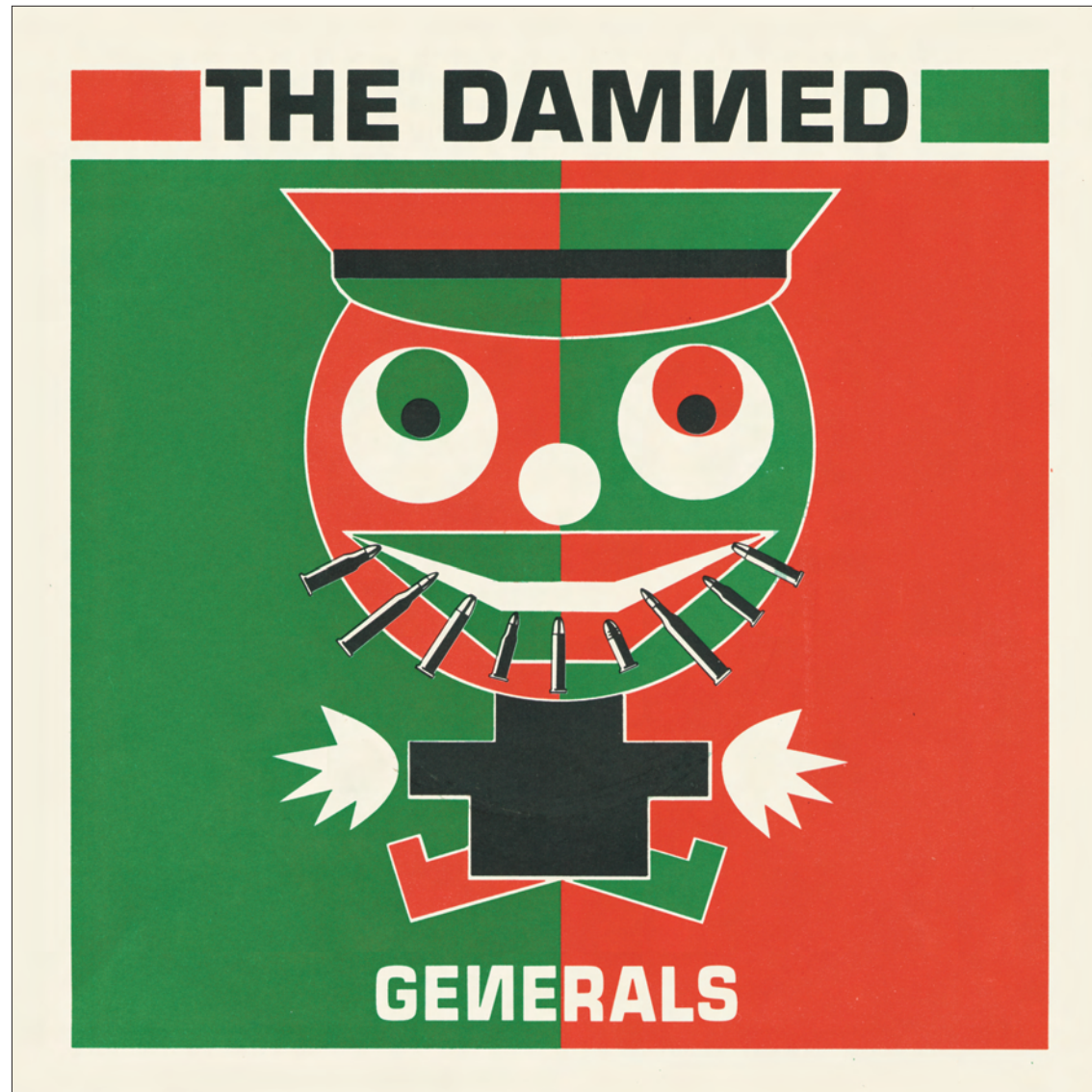


Fig.16: The Damned *Generals/Disguise/Citadel Zombies* (Bronze BRO159) 1982

(Poynor 2003: 73). The album was originally intended to be a crossover between punk and the group's original love of psychedelia, but the resulting confused musical direction was subject to widespread criticism. The album subsequently 'bombed', leading to the group being sacked by their label a month later. The sleeve design could also be called into question in relation to the group's natural audience – it is hard to read, and contains few, if any, 'punk'



Fig.17: Skids *Goodbye Civilian/Monkey McGuire Meets Specky Potter Behind Lochore Institute* (Virgin VS373) 1980

visual references. As such, it is a brave, or foolhardy, step away from their earlier recognised visual style, which had usually incorporated photographic group portraits captured with a sense of exuberant 'fun' – their debut album had featured a colour photograph of the band covered in custard pies, while the second single *Neat Neat Neat* (released in March 1977) again featured a band photograph, but with a paper bag over each member's head.

The *Music For Pleasure* album did in fact continue this tradition in a sense, in that Bubbles included an abstract cartoon ‘portrait’ of each group member, hidden in the artwork, but any direct representation of the group was hard to find. Other sleeves produced by Bubbles for the Stiff label at the time used a very similar graphic style to the Kandinsky parody, utilising graceful curved arcs, ellipses and lines combined with strong, flat colours and playfully constructed images. A number of sleeves for New Wave artists Elvis Costello, Nick Lowe (see Figure 18), Ian Dury and Graham Parker & The Rumour were strikingly similar to the approach adopted for The Damned, even though they were musically quite distinct, and the visual approach seems to say more about the signature style of the designer, or the house style of the label, than it does about the individual artists themselves. In the same way, Garrett’s ‘retrievalist’ sleeves for The Buzzcocks and Magazine could be said to once again re-embrace the spirit of progressive modernism (and International Constructivism), but their place within the wider scope of an emerging punk visual vocabulary might also appear somewhat out of step with the times. Garrett’s developing visual style, like Brody’s and Saville’s, found critical praise within sections of the art and design professions, and all three designers were certainly to prove influential during the early 1980s, but the crossover appeal of their work saw similar styles emerging across the wider music industry, particularly in the field of New Pop, the New Romantic movement and the trend in style magazines at the time, such as *The Face* and *iD* magazine. The fact that Garrett barely changed his design approach for sleeves by pop groups Duran Duran, Boy George and Simple Minds in the early 1980s reflects the ways in which his graphic style was not intrinsic to ‘punk’ at all.

In a similar manner, the influence by a number of critically praised early punk sleeve designers on subsequent punk graphics can also be called into question. Record sleeves, in the most basic sense, are a form of packaging: they protect a fragile plastic disc, while at the same time offering graphic information to a potential buyer (i.e. a brand image) and a subsequent user (group and label information, to contextualise the material and promote allegiance to the brand). In these (admittedly rather harsh) terms, graphics which are fit for



Fig.18: Nick Lowe *I Love The Sound Of Breaking Glass/They Called It Rock* (Radar ADA1) 1978

purpose need to communicate specific messages to specific audiences. While it could be argued that certain early work by Garrett, Brody or Saville does this in an admirable and original fashion – the design *does* stand apart from its contemporaries, and can be seen as in a sense ‘modern’ – their later work was not aesthetically or materially distinct from other genres in the popular music industry (see Figures 19 and 20). Simply put, the later sleeves for



Fig.19: Magazine *Touch And Go/Goldfinger* (Virgin VS207) 1978

punk and New Wave groups such as The Buzzcocks, Magazine or The Yachts are largely indistinguishable from the likes of Duran Duran, Culture Club or Spandau Ballet. This fact not only causes a great deal of retrospective confusion among cultural critics and music writers such as Simon Reynolds and Jennifer McKnight-Trontz: it means that a distinctive visual position for punk – either in opposition to, or away from, mainstream ‘pop’ identities –

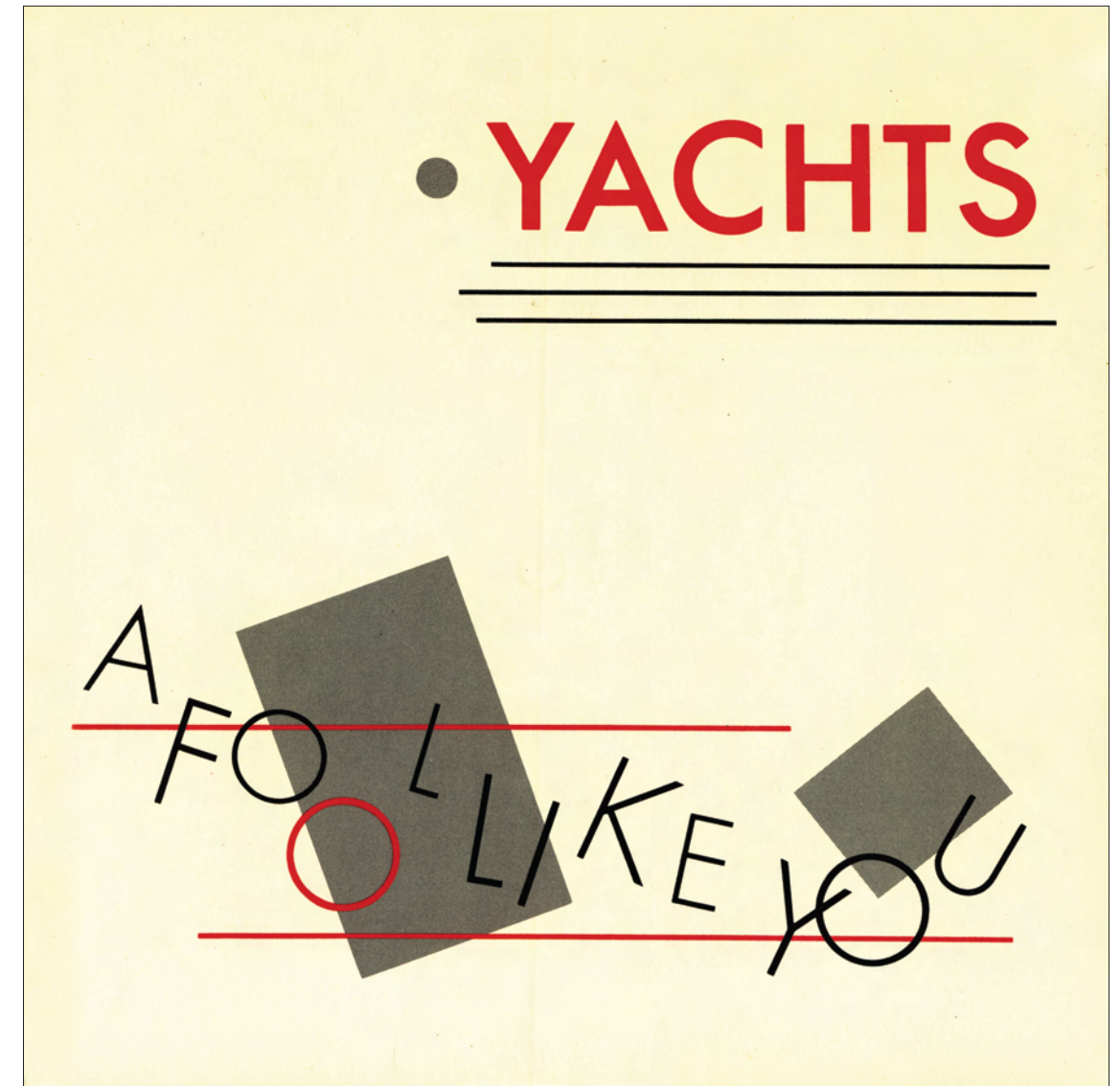


Fig.20: Yachts *A Fool Like You/Dubmarine* (Demon D1005) 1981

was compromised. In contrast, the hard-edged graphics of much Third Wave punk output remained, like the music itself, aesthetically apart from any potential crossover, and many Third Wave groups found both (underground) commercial success and a strong sense of audience allegiance as a result. The fact that this visual and musical style has remained intact for in excess of twenty five years worldwide is testament to its success in terms of

design-for-purpose, despite the lack of crossover into either popular music or the graphic design mainstream. Hardcore punk music may not bother the charts, and the visual style hasn't appeared more widely within magazine design, art galleries or trendy club flyers and identities, but a significant underground market still exists around the globe.

It is also important to question the notion of a direct association between work by prominent early punk designers such as Jamie Reid and the emergence of a new visual language of parody or agit-prop – to an extent, the techniques adopted by Reid were already widely accepted as the *natural* graphic languages of anger and protest. The 'samizdat' tradition of subversive, lo-tech graphic material disseminated through personal networks, originally a feature of the Russian underground where the term denoted the clandestine copying and distribution of government-suppressed literature or other media, led to the evolution of a particular visual style. The natural limitations of simple tools and materials, as well as the quick production of graphic work by untrained designers, led to a repetition of certain graphic conventions: simple black and white or two colour artwork, hand folding and binding techniques, and hand-rendered or simple letterpress or typewritten text. These basic graphic elements were also key to a number of avant-garde art movements during the early Twentieth Century, and became central to the visual communication of subversion or political protest. Reid's awareness of the work of the Situationist International and the late hippie underground in Europe and the USA may have led him toward more 'informed' versions of agit-prop graphic material, but many other punk designers following on from the First Wave made no such historical allusions – the look was simple, dirty and aggressive, and it *meant* 'punk'.

2.8 The Prole Art Threat

While there were many precursors to punk artwork, and some early punk sleeve designers (notably Jamie Reid, Malcolm Garrett and Linder Sterling) were to an extent aware of earlier art and design approaches from their Art School education, a large proportion of the Second

and Third Waves saw 1977 as 'year zero' in a very literal sense. In this way, methods of design and production, especially the use of parody or 'détournement', were a reflection of earlier 'punk' styles (i.e. Reid), and *not* taken directly from Dada or the Situationists. Links to earlier avant-garde practices may have been made by some designers and critics, but it should be said that much punk graphic design was not knowingly or self-consciously drawing on these themes. The assumed links between punk and the Situationist International have been called into question by a number of writers (most notably Stewart Home), while the more evident links between early UK punk and the late hippie underground have yet to be explored in any detail. Punk's relationship with the music business, and the use of already widely accepted marketing and promotional tools – together with a few new or revived innovations such as limited edition releases, coloured vinyl or alternative formats – should also be emphasised. Industry conventions regarding release dates and promotional tours, as well as graphic devices related to the branding and marketing of a group or label identity, were still dominant during this period, and punk was, in many ways, simply an extension of the traditional popular music market.

A number of interviews conducted by Ian Glasper for the Third Wave book *Burning Britain: The History of UK Punk 1980-1984* centre on the perceived 'working class' nature of the 1980s Hardcore and New Punk movements. While certain arguments about class credibility and punk authenticity might be called into question, it is broadly true to say that many Third Wave groups and fans did voice a general opposition to what they termed the 'middle class' roots of earlier punk, and towards students in particular. Songs such as *Student Wankers* by Peter & The Test Tube Babies and *Are Students Safe?* by Chaotic Dischord display a certain antipathy towards their subject. In such company, Art School connections and references to 'Dionysian' attitudes (Simon Reynolds' favourite catchphrase for Post Punk intellectuals) are unlikely to travel far. With a widespread rise in unemployment in the early 1980s, particularly amongst the young working class, and an accompanying increase in the divide between rich and poor, the "*new Art School*" optimism of the First Wave was largely replaced

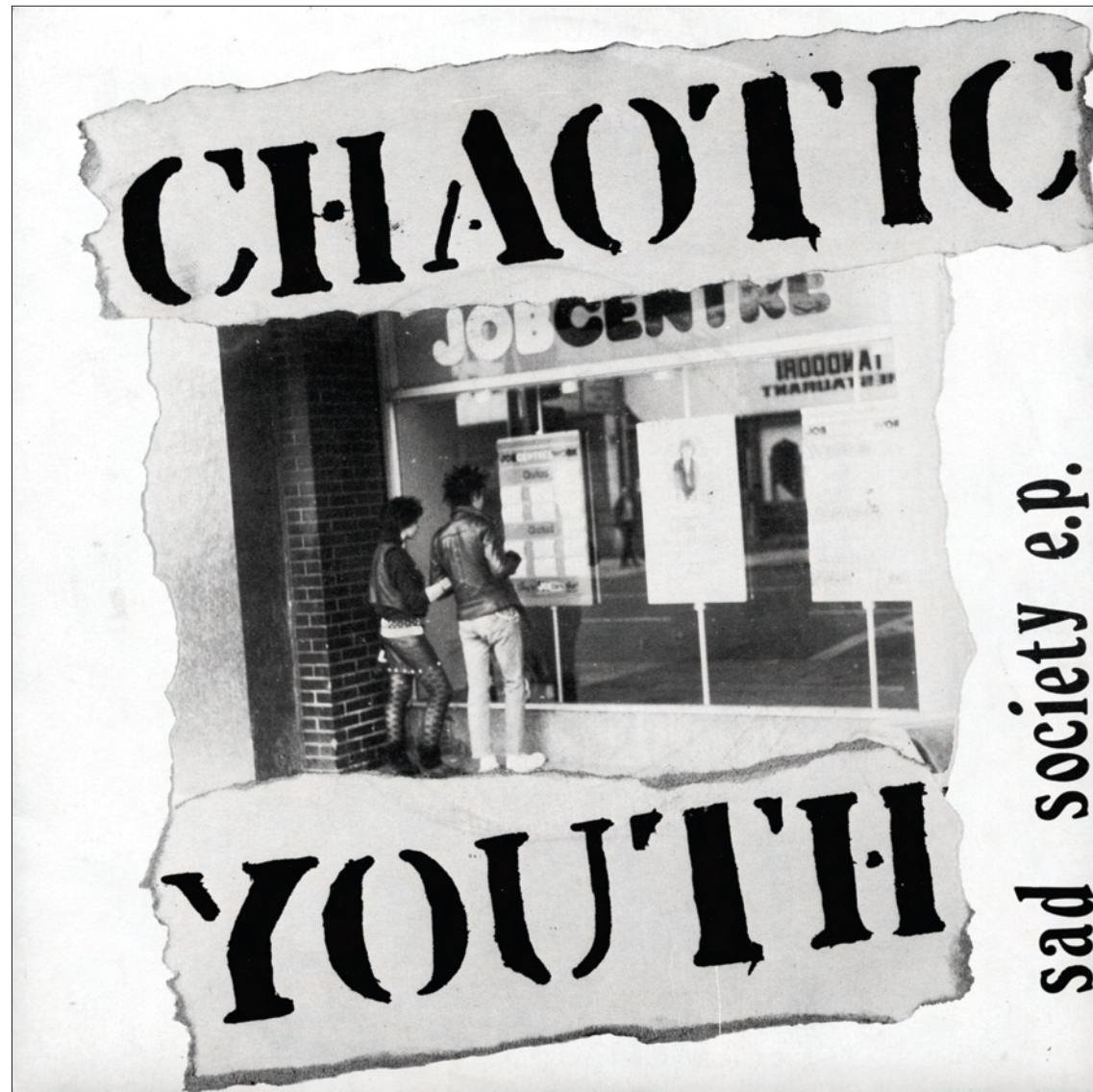


Fig.21: Chaotic Youth *Sad Society/No Future UK/Tip Off/Arms Race* (Beat The System YOUTH1) 1982

by the 'old dole queue' pessimism of the Third Wave (see Figures 21 and 22). A number of punk sub-genres and factions were becoming increasingly distinct at this time, and fractures along class, as well as territorial, lines were quite common: while what became known as avant-garde Post Punk embraced a range of class positions and backgrounds, Oi was far more ideologically entrenched within a 'traditional' working class subculture. Similarly, Hardcore



Fig.22: Action Pact *Suicide Bag/Stanwell/Blue Blood* (Fallout FALL003) 1982

could be seen as in some ways a break away from the middle class values and pretensions of some sections of Anarcho Punk, and New Punk as a voice of opposition to the New Wave and the recuperation of punk into the mainstream music industry. The fact is often overlooked that many Second and Third Wave groups were attempting to reenact an 'authentic' punk identity to the best of their (often limited) ability (see Figure 23). This is true both of the

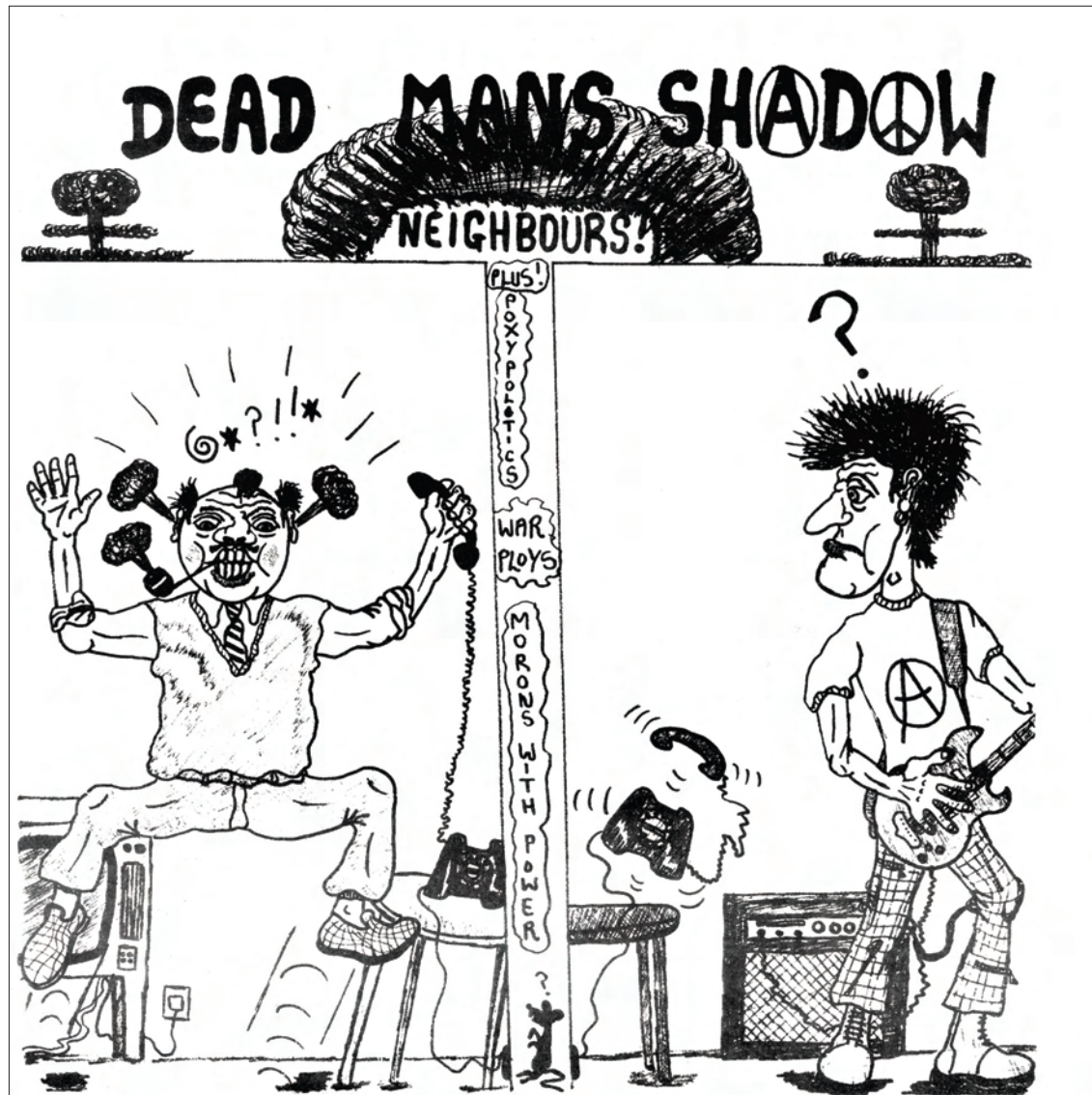


Fig.23: Dead Man's Shadow Neighbours/Poxy Politics/War Ploys/Morons With Power (Pig HOG1) 1981

struggle to create a powerful 'punk' sound on record, and in the attempt to emulate highly-regarded punk graphic styles, such as the work of Jamie Reid or Sebastian Conran's early Clash sleeves and posters. While he denies his group wanting to sound or look like the Sex Pistols or The Clash, preferring to forge their own individual punk identity, Kev Lycett of Leeds group The Mekons, who released their debut single, *Never Been In A Riot* on the Fast



Fig.24: The Mekons *Never Been In A Riot/32 Weeks/Heart And Soul* (Fast Product FAST1) 1978

Product label in February 1978 (see Figure 24), recalls a sense of naivety with regard to the recording process; "...back in those days no-one knew anything about recording and we thought that just the fact of making a record would result in a record that sounded like a 'proper' record. It was a profound shock to hear such a 'crap' sounding thing and we were all too embarrassed to play it to any one for a long time. We wanted it to sound like a 'real'

record!” (Interview with the author, 4th February 2000). In retrospect, the record is widely recognised as something of a punk ‘classic’ because of its simplicity and the impression of a group struggling with their instruments, but the distinction between group or individual aspirations and the reality of recording and manufacturing a record is crucial to an understanding of the genre. Interestingly, the initial sense of disappointment was also reflected in the group’s impression of the single sleeve when it was finally released; “...*at the time I thought it was the crappiest single cover I had ever seen and was bitterly disappointed to see such an ugly, inept thing wrapping my first single!”* (Ibid).

2.9 Punk Humour and Parody

The use of humour in punk – lyrically, in the use of musical phrases, and within graphic languages – is often overlooked. While some punk groups made attempts at overt humour or comedy (often as a result of being comedians first and punks second, if at all) – for instance Novelty Punk outfits such as Alberto Y Lost Trios Paranoias, Jilted John and The Monks – others embraced a biting comic attitude towards their ‘punk’ peers (Splodgenessabounds, The Ejected, Chaotic Dischord), or adopted a tongue-in-cheek approach to lyrics and visual styles which they then carried through in all their work (The Damned, Anti Nowhere League, Toy Dolls). However, these examples are perhaps the more obvious in terms of punk humour – the use of parody, satire and casually offensive lyrical phrasing is implicit to a wide range of punk records, and the underlying humour in the output of such ‘serious’ artists as the Sex Pistols, The Adverts, The Stranglers, Stiff Little Fingers, Crass, GBH and even The Exploited should not be overlooked. There is, of course, a danger of misunderstanding in lyrics to songs such as *White Noise* by Stiff Little Fingers (Rough Trade 1978);

Rastus was a nigger. Thug mugger junkie.
Black golly wog. Big horny monkey.
Pimp pusher coon. Grinning piccanninies.
Send him home soon. Back to the trees.

Black wogs. Black wogs. Face don't fit.
Black wogs. Black wogs. Ain't no Brit.

Ahmed is a Paki. Curry coffee queer.
Ten to a bed. Flocking over here.
Tax-sponging canker. Smelly thieving kids.
Ponce greasy wanker. Worse than the yids.
Brown wogs. Brown wogs. Face don't fit.
Brown wogs. Brown wogs. Ain't no Brit.

Stick together we'll be alright me and you
The only colours we need are red, right and blue.

Paddy is a moron. Spud thick Mick.
Breeds like a rabbit. Thinks with his prick.
Anything floors him if he can't fight or drink it.
Round them up in Ulster. Tow it out and sink it.
Green wogs. Green wogs. Face don't fit.
Green wogs. Green wogs. Ain't no Brit.

The fact that the group came from Belfast, and as such were sending themselves up as the stereotypical ‘green wogs’ was lost on some sections of their audience, and the lyrics were taken at face value as an attack on racial minorities. The song was intended to be a tirade against all forms of racism, perhaps in the vein of the debut single by The Clash, *White Riot* – which, incidentally, was also misinterpreted in some quarters. Stiff Little Fingers singer Jake Burns reasoned that their audience, through their affiliation with the group, would see the problem of racial stereotyping for what it was, but its effect was questionable and perhaps too subtle for the arena he was working within; “...*basically the lyric was just every sort of*

filthy racist comment that we could think of... all put into this one lyric. The twist on it was that we finished it with an attack on the Irish and, of course, being Irish ourselves, that was supposed to highlight the irony within the song. We’ve come a cropper with irony more than once.” (Burns & Parker 2003: 51). The song was heard by a councillor in Newcastle upon Tyne, and the group were subsequently banned from playing in the area due to their supposed ‘racism’, with further irony in the fact that the local newspaper report included a photograph of the group playing live in front of a Rock Against Racism banner.

Equally, the savagery and violence in many punk lyrics, or depicted on record sleeves through the use of war images or illustrations attacking authority figures, can be taken literally or with a certain sense of irony. Third Wave group The Exploited gained a reputation for violence, and songs such as *Sex And Violence* (which simply repeated the title phrase over a churning guitar riff) and *Fuck The Mods* were used as an excuse to resort to violence by some sections of the group’s audience;

Fuck a Mod, Fuck a Mod, Fuck a Mod today
How much fun it is to fuck a Mod until his dead
Kick him in the head
Beat him in the balls
Jump up on his head
How much fun it is to fuck a Mod until his dead

While in this instance the sentiments were nowhere near as well articulated as the Stiff Little Fingers song, and lyricist Wattie Buchan could hardly have been said to have the intention of promoting some kind of punk/mod inter-tribal unity, the childlike lyrical refrain and use of extreme graphic violence puts the song on a par with the likes of the Anti Nowhere League’s *I Hate People (And They Hate Me)* – a rhetorical device to shock and amuse rather than to promote direct conflict or violence. Even the (supposedly) most serious of the

Third Wave political punk groups, Crass, could be playful and humourous at times, as witnessed in their Oi parody *Rival Tribal Rebel Revel* (Crass 1981), and in their numerous parodies of other groups and subversively playful later output – such as the *Merry Crassmas* collection featuring keyboard jingles and cheesy instrumental versions of Crass ‘hits’. The simple opening couplet of the classic Crass lyric *Banned From The Roxy* displays a kind of tongue-in-cheek, childish petulance, with the listener invited in on the joke;

Banned from the Roxy... O.K.
I never much liked playing there anyway

This kind of sardonic wit is typical of UK punk, and could be taken as one of the genre’s defining characteristics: and distinct from the development of punk in other countries. Punk in France and Australia, for instance, was more heavily based on early 1970s garage rock, while many US groups who took on the punk mantle in the early 1980s missed the element of caustic humour and concentrated solely on the ‘gross-out’ aspects of offensive behaviour.³⁶ UK punk embraced the amateur struggles of young bands who had yet to master their instruments, and the tongue-in-cheek arrogance of brash performers with more ‘front’ than talent. This knowingly dumb, or just plain antagonistic stance is echoed in the lyrics to the title track on the debut album by the Anti Nowhere League, *We Are The League*, released by WXYZ Records in 1981:

We are the League and we are shit
But we’re up here and we’re doing it
So don’t you criticise the things we do
‘Cos no fucker pays to go and see you

2.10 Protest and Survive

There was an openly political agenda to many punk statements, both in print and on record,

36. By contrast, some did ‘get it’ – the output of San Francisco punks the Dead Kennedys was consistently offensive *and* witty, and the group scored hits in the UK with their early singles *California Uber Alles* (Fast Product 1979), *Holiday In Cambodia* (Cherry Red 1980), *Kill The Poor* (Cherry Red 1980) and *Too Drunk To Fuck* (Cherry Red 1981).

and in visual styles which were often confrontational or aggressive, but this agenda was at best unfocussed and at worst simply a confused reflection of cultural concerns across the rest of society. As such, although punk had always exhibited a loud voice of protest, it also embraced diverse voices of hedonistic pleasure and playful, juvenile humour, of narcissism, negativity and despondency, both right- and left-wing political rhetoric, and of mindless hooliganism. Certain sub-genres which developed in the early 1980s, such as Anarcho Punk and Hardcore, did retain a strong voice of protest, to the extent that they were actually in some part defined by the politics that they expressed, both through lyrics and graphics and in interviews, sleeve notes and public statements made by bands and labels. However, even here the expression of these sentiments often showed little commonality – from Crass and Poison Girls and their comparatively literate anarchist rants (accompanied by extensive reading matter on the record sleeve, together with references to other material from historical and contemporary anarchist literature) (see Figure 25) to bands such as Discharge and Anti Pasti who embraced the iconography of the anarchist symbol and the anti-authoritarian values of punk but expressed the politics through a less well articulated critique. These bands exerted a huge influence on a number of lesser-known groups, and the iconography of the anarchist symbol, expressions of autonomy and anti-authoritarian, anti-war or general anarchist statements became something of a cliché in the early 1980s. Some groups utilised the identity of the anarchist symbol on their record sleeves and logotypes, but appeared to express little political ideology in either their lyrics or the song content itself – leading to the conclusion that the symbolism (and perhaps the rhetoric) of the anarchist motif had been adopted simply as a stylistic device, and that any further articulation of an anarchist or libertarian position was unnecessary.³⁷

Indeed, the subject matter of punk records often conforms to certain stereotypes during different periods of punk’s evolution – during 1977, expressions of subjective angst and self-identity seemed to be commonplace in the wake of the Sex Pistols recordings *Anarchy In The UK* (whose opening line “*I am an anti-Christ, I am an anarchist*” set the tone for what was

37. Graphic devices such as the Anarchy symbol (A) were used on a wide number of sleeves, and in the logotypes of the bands’ names – a common practice replaced the letter ‘A’ in a band’s name with the Anarchy symbol. This could then be used to denote the general political outlook of the group and was usually drawn in such a way that it could be replicated easily on fan’s clothing. This does occasionally lead to some odd applications: the sleeve of Reality’s *Who Killed The Golden Goose?* e.p. (Fight Back 1984) incorporates the band’s signature logo, the central letter ‘A’ being replaced by the anarchist symbol, although the songs on the record do not espouse any political rhetoric to support this, whilst the logotype for the Disrupters actually rotates the anarchy symbol clockwise through 90 degrees to form a makeshift capital letter ‘D’.

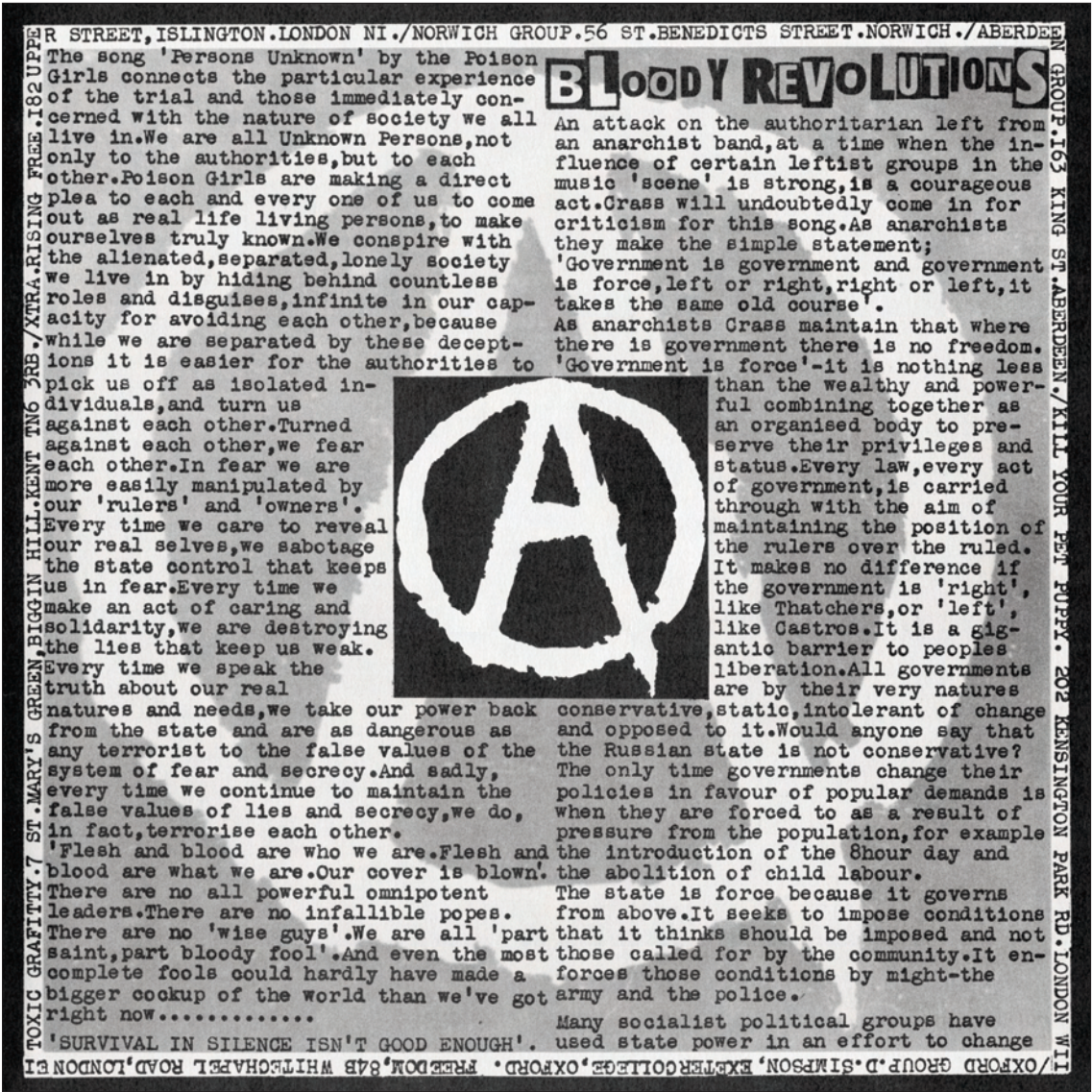


Fig.25: Crass/Poison Girls *Bloody Revolutions/Persons Unknown* (inner sleeve) (Crass Records 421984/1) 1980

to follow) and *I Wanna Be Me*. The Drones *I Just Wanna Be Myself*; Sham 69 *I Don’t Wanna*; The Boys *I Don’t Care*; Suburban Studs *I Hate School*; 999 *I’m Alive*; and The Buzzcocks *What Do I Get?* all followed a similar pattern of (often negative) statements made in the first person. The distinction between subject matter of the songs on five prominent early punk albums (by The Damned, The Clash, The Stranglers, the Sex Pistols and The Vibrators) and the

chart Top 50 singles of 1976 has been documented by Dave Laing. Although the comparison is somewhat flawed – largely by the inconsistencies in the choice of the subject matter (album tracks often being somewhat different in their musical and lyrical construction to singles), it is nonetheless interesting to note that whilst 60% of the chart singles dealt with “*Romantic and sexual relationships*”, only 21% of punk songs followed suit. Meanwhile, 25% of punk songs were concerned with “*Social and political comment*” and 25% were voiced as “*First person feelings*”, against 4% and 3% of chart singles respectively. (Laing 1985: 27). By contrast, the early 1980s saw common themes of the threat of nuclear war and/or institutional violence and victimisation across a wide range of record releases. The ensuing rhetoric, which became something of a coded language in itself, was displayed in song titles, lyrics, and within the iconographic use of images on record sleeves. Songs featured on singles released during this period included: Discharge *Realities Of War*, *War’s No Fairy Tale*, *Death Dealers*, and *Two Monstrous Nuclear Stock Piles*; The Exploited *Dogs Of War*, *Blown To Bits*, and *Army Life*; and The Varukers *Protest And Survive* and *Never Again*. A stark contrast to these sentiments was expressed by the notorious far-right Oi group Combat 84 on *The Right To Choose*, the B-side of their second single, *Rapist*, released on their own Victory label in September 1983. Beginning with the shouted lyric “*Fuck off C.N.D!*” the song goes on to state that “*...it’s better to be dead than fuckin’ red*”, and the repeated chorus “*...the right to choose – we want the cruise*” makes a fairly unequivocal political statement regarding the deployment of cruise missiles at UK airbases, a central campaign issue for the anti-nuclear movement.³⁸ Punk records often tend to reflect wider cultural concerns, in particular those affecting young people. As such, the subject matter of many punk songs often offer a connection to contemporary historical and political debates. This theme, together with an analysis of the relationship between the subject of the title, song lyrics and the cover image, will be explored in closer detail later in this thesis.

38. One aspect of this deployment which tied together the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and feminist politics was the Women’s Peace Camp at Greenham Common in Berkshire. On the 5th September 1981, the Welsh group “Women for Life on Earth” arrived at Greenham Common, having marched from Cardiff with the intention of challenging the decision to site 96 Cruise missiles there. On arrival they delivered a letter to the Base Commander, and when their request for a public debate was ignored they set up a Peace Camp just outside the fence surrounding RAF Greenham Common Airbase. Over the ensuing years, the camp grew in size, and became a focus for the peace movement, as well as an object of vilification in the right-wing media. See www.greenhamwpc.org.uk for a history of the camp by participants in the protest.

Chapter Three: The Analytical Framework

Having defined the parameters of ‘punk’ together with a chronology of UK punk records across the period under review, the second stage of the research analyses particular examples of sleeve design, with a view to establishing a detailed classification of the subject. The construction of visual information systems which highlight different aspects of the regional development of punk sleeve design, together with the relationship between developing sub-genres and graphic styles, presents a significant new methodology for the analysis of graphic design related to youth subcultures. Key graphic elements and design strategies are identified as indicative of a generic ‘punk’ visual language, and related to the wider framework of music packaging, the subsequent fragmentation of punk and the evolution of specific punk sub-genres.

This study describes a range of artefacts that are absent from many contemporary histories, to map trends in visual style and the evolution of a range of identifiable and distinct punk sub-genres. A broad sample of records for inclusion was identified through reference to chart placings and contemporary music press reviews, together with a range of retrospective punk listings and guides. The central source of sleeves was the author’s personal collection of punk records, though it was important to include as many examples as possible which had been categorised at some point beneath the ‘punk’ umbrella, and it was necessary to trace a number of further records for inclusion via specialist retailers and auction sites. No public archives of this material exist, with nearly all existing artefacts belonging in the hands of private collectors and retailers, though the viewing of related contextual material at Salford University, the British Library Sound Archive and a number of specialist record retailers allowed for a deeper understanding of the range of antecedental and contemporary material within the broader framework of ‘popular music’.³⁹ Although some public and private archives of related material were consulted, together with a number of web resources, the most practical approach was to build a database from the sleeves available to hand, and then subject the range of artefacts included to critical appraisal from peers and experts in the field. Questions regarding which material should be included were also posed at the online

39. The Department of Popular Music at the University of Salford houses an archive of Heavy Metal album releases from the late 1960s to early 1980s, while the British Library Sound Archive includes a wide range of material related to popular music across a broader range of subcultural groupings and a longer timeframe. It is, however, limited in terms of DIY and Second/Third Wave punk material.

forum at the website www.punk77.co.uk and a number of specialist web resources were consulted. The historical position was tested through a presentation paper at the Institute of Contemporary British History in May 2004, and through a number of presentations at the University of the Arts, London, and Southampton Solent University. Discussion around the nature of punk (and post punk) graphic design also took place via the weblog at Design Observer, with a quite heated debate involving the author, Rick Poynor and a number of other participants.⁴⁰

The visual material was presented in a number of public locations for feedback and critique, and each event was followed by a series of detailed discussions between the author and several punk historians and academics, including Alex Ogg, Roger Sabin and Ian Glasper, together with a number of punk fans and record collectors. The print and interactive chronology matrices and sub-genre groupings were developed as an exhibition entitled Hitsville UK: Punk in the Faraway Towns, which was shown at a number of galleries across the country. The first such exhibition was mounted at the Research Gallery, London College of Communication, between 26th October and 7th December 2006, where a number of options for the display of the material were tested. Following this small-scale exhibition, the work was developed in a much larger format, including two separate interactive displays, a large chronology and eight individual sub-genre panels featuring sleeves reproduced at full size. This work was exhibited at the Millais Gallery, Southampton between 12th April and 26th May 2007, where a number of parallel events were also arranged, including a performance by TV Smith of The Adverts and a public discussion panel. A similar exhibition followed at the British Film Institute, South Bank, London, to coincide with a punk film season and the launch of the new South Bank centre and BFI opening event – this exhibition ran between 1st June and 6th August 2007. As with the earlier exhibitions, the event was accompanied by a public talk, and was followed by a range of email, telephone and personal discussions with key participants. The chronology and sub-genre panels were also displayed at the Rebellion Punk Festival at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool, between 10th and 13th August 2007.

40. <http://www.designobserver.com/archives/002917.html>

Four inter-related models of analysis were applied to approximately 1,100 sleeve designs covering a broad range of UK punk records: the forms of production, the intention of the designer (the design context), the reception, adoption and adaptation of visual codes and the subcultural dimension of the work (the subcultural context, i.e. its relationship to specific punk sub-genres, defined in large part by their affiliation to musical styles and dress codes and their self-definition as a group). These models work together in the categorisation of visual systems employed by sleeve designers, and the identification of specific graphic forms and styles relative to particular social groups. Ultimately, it is assumed that the subcultural dimension of the band and their musical affiliation (with, or in opposition to others) provides the most coherent definition in terms of audience reception and adopted marketing strategies and visual styles. The systematic analysis of the work through the other models is intended to show formal links between elements of the group (an internal cohesive bond) and distinctions from other subcultural groupings, both within and outside of the overarching definition of ‘punk’. This analysis reflects a number of thematic approaches to decoding or deconstructing the work, each of which is detailed separately below. However, these analytical models should not be seen in isolation, as each approach affects, and is subsequently affected by, the others:-

The formal properties of the work

Categorisation according to design, technical, material and/or typographic principles employed. The study formally analyses such themes as composition (measured against accepted methods in typography and graphic design), the use of symbols and iconographic devices, and elements associated with taste specific to the genre. This includes such design strategies as photomontage, the use of hand-rendered or found type, and the appropriation of contemporary media imagery. A number of recurring design approaches are identified, including the use of ‘ransom note’, black letter and Letraset typography, collage and the détournement of existing images, homage, parody and plagiarism, and the ‘machine aesthetic’. Technical aspects include reproduction processes such as contemporary

photocopier and screenprint technologies, or the employment of professional agencies for print reproduction (i.e. specialist printers producing record sleeves to order from camera-ready artwork). Specific sub-groupings are therefore defined, relating to lo-tech and hand-made production, artwork which has been commercially reproduced by a printer, and artwork which was both professionally designed and reproduced. The examples are also mapped according to the use of colour – from simple black and white or one colour reproduction to four colour process – and the material nature of the sleeve itself, including paper, card, plastic or recycled materials etc.

The intention of both the design and the designer

The range of themes including social, cultural and economic factors which help determine the brief for a design project. This part of the study includes a textual analysis applied to a range of visual artefacts, through the graphic design model of encoding and decoding meaning. It is important to recognise that there is not one ‘natural’ visual style associated with punk, against which to measure alternative approaches and conventions, and as such, this study does not set out to analyse the graphic elements of individual sleeves within an art historical framework. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to analyse individual meanings within images employed across the range of material under review, nor is it possible to fully describe the wide range of interpretations which may be attributed to specific design approaches and iconography. Although an analysis of the semiotics of punk sleeve design would undoubtedly offer some areas for further development, that project would be best undertaken as a study in its own right: the main purpose of this project is to map the territory, which has to date remained uncharted, and to suggest methods for analysing the patterns of repeated visual gestures and design styles across a broad range of sleeves. As such, this study avoids an overemphasis on supposed meanings within these codes, and stays largely in the realm of identifying when and where such ‘visual tropes’ occur.

A number of art historical methods are useful to the analysis of the work, and a simple interpretation of certain regularly-occurring visual elements within punk sleeve design is defined within **Chapter Six: Design Strategies**. Gombrich (1966) defined two opposing interpretations of an image as incorporating *natural* and *conventional* signs – this distinction may be useful in comparing and contrasting the inclusion of colour photographs, for instance, against line drawings and illustrations. Mitchell (1986) does reflect on the arbitrary nature of these categories, particularly in the use of outline and contour, and rejects the clear distinction made by Gombrich; “...*his argument for the ‘naturalness’ of imagery is based... on the consumption rather than the production of images. It may be an artificial act requiring special skill to make an image, but to see what it means or represents is just as natural as opening your eyes and seeing objects in the world*” (Mitchell 1986: 85). Contour – a graphic means to separate objects from their background, along with the use of light and dark, colour, texture, hue and pattern – can indeed be interpreted as *unnatural*, but this does not detract from the way in which photographs and illustrations are widely used, and interpreted, within the realm of graphic design. The use of illustration does provide the designer with a wider range of options as to what might be depicted: a drawing might be created as an imaginary concept – put simply, it doesn’t *need* to reflect reality, whereas a photograph (unless it is physically altered in the darkroom, for instance) is usually treated – and interpreted – as an accurate record of an object or location. In terms of punk record sleeves, the two distinctions are relatively clear: photography is nearly always used to depict people (often the group themselves) or locations, whereas illustration is often used to depict imaginary events (such as acts of extreme brutality or violence, nuclear war, fantasy figures etc). Many illustrations on punk sleeves encapsulate a narrative, often linked to the lyrics of the song, and examples of these different approaches will be outlined and compared.

Defusion and Diffusion

The application of theories of defusion (whereby subversive potential of subcultural style is sanitised through recuperation into mainstream fashion) and diffusion (the geographical

and social dispersal of a style through television or tabloid news media). While these theories have in the past been applied to punk visual style (Hebdige 1979 and 1988, Muggleton 2000), particularly in terms of fashion and dress, the relationship between the various visual languages of punk graphic design has been left unexplored. Although strong connections may be made between some examples of Second Wave punk graphics and earlier themes (through the use of formal design codes including photomontage, stencil and Letraset typography for instance), the notion of an ‘authentic original’ is problematic, particularly given the widespread use of found and/or appropriated imagery throughout the movement. Provincial themes and regional aspirations also played a part as influential factors on both designers and bands, whose primary concern was an immediate local (potential) audience – this inclusive attitude led to the creation of a diverse range of styles, each of which could be adapted to individual needs and local distinctions. This study, however, attempts to place the use of certain visual tropes within an historical context, both from *within* the punk movement and preceding it: for instance, through the use of photographic styles which draw on earlier models of popular photography, fashion and music of the 1950s and 1960s and the use of blackletter type within certain Hardcore and Oi design styles.

Graphic Sub-genres

This includes a review of the diverse range of artefacts by genre and sub-genre, both graphically and through comparison of musical approach, and anticipates strong parallels between the two category systems, as visual styles often reflected those languages specific to the tribes. Sleeve artwork can be interrogated through technical and design-specific methods, through its place within the context of contemporary historical and political events, through the record industry and the marketplace, and through its relationship to the developing sub-genres of UK punk. Historical antecedents can then be identified, as well as genre-specific visual codes – through which those fans of the sub-genre could identify allegiances and shared values – and variations across the different regions of the UK.

It is anticipated that all of the sub-genres would fit under the main generic heading, linked to ‘punk’, which would allow for a broad visual language to distinguish between that genre and others alongside it within the range of popular music (Disco, Soul, Heavy Metal etc). This course of study may also address issues related to what might be termed a sociology of record buying. The sub-genres within ‘punk’ could then be identified by specific visual codes and references – conclusions will be drawn from those places where these codes overlap, or where they are used against their original context in ‘oppositional’ or recuperated themes (for instance, the ironic use and repetition of visual references to Street Punk in certain Anarcho Punk sleeves, and vice versa).

3.1 Articulation within the Thesis

While each of the above methods are explored in more detail throughout the text, **Chapter Four: Key Categories in UK Punk** relates more closely to a tight definition of musical sub-genres against which to assess individual graphic approaches, and **Chapter Five: From “London’s Burning” to “Sten Guns in Sunderland”** focuses on a range of theories of intention, defusion and diffusion. The formal analysis of a range of design methods in **Chapter Six: Design Strategies**, and a quantitative assessment of their use and impact in **Chapter Seven: Design Strategies – Applied Analysis**, centre on the use of iconographic elements and graphic codes, together with their relationship to those punk sub-genres defined in **Chapter Four**. The production of visual print-based and interactive matrices is intended to display the evolution of graphic styles through direct representation of the work.

Chapter Four: Key Categories in UK Punk

This chapter describes the range of UK punk sub-genres used to categorise design strategies and audience groups within the later sections of the thesis. 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.

*Eight sub-genres of UK punk are defined, with case study examples of records and groups within each category and examples of sleeve design shown. A more detailed visual matrix of a wider range of sleeves within each category form part of the graphic material in **Chapter Seven: Design Strategies – Applied Analysis**. The featured category descriptions are supported by contemporary media reports, together with catalogue listings and reviews. Sub-genre definitions include:-*

- *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*
- *Neo-Fascist Punk*
- *Imports*

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, who in some cases continued to operate alongside the developing new genre, benefiting from the association in the process. Neo-Fascist Punk, as an established

underground scene, also largely falls outside of the period under review, and could be said to occupy a different subcultural space more concerned with extremist political groups and propaganda than punk identity and music. However, a range of arguments surrounding this sub-genre are articulated, in order to substantiate its relationship to the other categories. Similarly, Imports are by definition records imported from overseas distributors and labels, and the relationship between these releases and the evolving UK scenes is discussed.

4.1 The Punk Community

From the outset, 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 thesis 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) will be identified. It is also important to differentiate what might be called Post Punk as a distinct genre, emerging largely from the DIY Avant-Garde and through later experimentation by established punk artists who were by now supported by major label investment and had access to professional recording and production techniques (e.g. Public Image Limited, Wire and the Gang Of Four).⁴¹

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

41. A major retrospective of the Post Punk era by music journalist Simon Reynolds was published in 2005, in which Reynolds attempts to define various aspects of “Post Punk” style, from DIY to New Electronica, Punk Funk and Industrial music. The account was well received by critics, though Reynolds does operate a highly selective approach to the subject, including his own personal favourites and ignoring those he deems unworthy.

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. The role of the music press, including the ‘inkies’ and the punk fanzines, was of crucial importance to the development of punk definitions, particularly during the First and Third Waves. Early reports in the weekly music press merged the terms punk and new wave, while debates about who was ‘in’ or ‘out’ of the new canon were widespread. Journalists such as Mick Farren and Giovanni Dadomo were active in promoting the new ‘punk’ scene early on – in fact, both writers were actively engaged in making music as well as documenting the new movement, so a level of self-promotion cannot be discounted either.⁴² The music press was also keen to keep abreast of the new music scene, and employed a number of fanzine writers (including Adrian Thrills, Garry Bushell and Sandy Robertson), together with young writers who were seen to be in touch with what was going on such as Tony Parsons and Julie Burchill. Fanzines such as *Sniffin’ Glue* also helped to shape the ‘punk’ genre, though again their perspective was to an extent compromised: editor Mark Perry originally chose to feature the bands he admired, some of whom were later felt to be outside of a punk definition such as The Runaways, the Flamin’ Groovies and Heavy Metal outfit Blue Öyster Cult, while his later job as A&R man for the Step Forward label could be said to have been in conflict with his role as an independent journalist. During the Third Wave, Garry Bushell played a central role in establishing first the New Punk and then the Oi sub-genres through his writing at *Sounds*, while others such as Steven Wells and X Moore (Chris Dean) at the *NME* were keen to promote their own agendas.⁴³

The relationship between punk rock and its musical precursors, such as the 1960s British beat boom and 1970s Glam Rock, covers a range of attitudes – from the antagonism and ‘year zero’ rhetoric of The Clash lyric “...no Elvis, Beatles or Rolling Stones in 1977” to the parody of sixties girl group The Shangri-Las on the spoken-word introduction to The Damned’s first single; “...is

42. Farren played with Proto Punk outfits The Pink Fairies and The Deviants, while Dadomo teamed up with fellow *Sounds* writer Dave Fudger and a number of London-based musicians including producer Steve Lillywhite and members of Eddie & The Hot Rods to release one single, *Terminal Stupid/I Can’t Come* under the group name The Snivelling Shits. Mailed out to the press anonymously, the record gained a ‘Single of the Week’ accolade in the *NME*.

43. Bushell also had musical aspirations, through his close allegiance with the Cockney Rejects (he features on the sleeve of their debut single along with the producer, Sham 69 singer Jimmy Pursey) and his own Oi group The Gonads. Wells also performed as ranter/poet Seething Wells, and X Moore formed left-wing Post Punk group The Redskins in 1981.

she really going out with him?’”. Punk cover versions of well-known songs were actually quite widespread, and the trend could almost be analysed as a sub-genre in itself. The Sex Pistols recorded a number of covers during their career, having included 1960s classics such as The Who’s *Substitute* and Paul Revere & The Raiders’ (*I’m Not Your*) *Stepping Stone* in their early live sets, and many other punk groups followed suit. While songs such as the 1960s trash classic by The Kingsmen, *Louie Louie*, and The Stooges’ *Now I’m Gonna Be Your Dog* and *Search & Destroy* were to become staple live numbers for many punk groups, other songs which made it to vinyl were perhaps more surprising. Cliff Richard’s 1962 hit *The Young Ones* was recorded by The Secret (1977), Lockjaw (1977), the Angelic Upstarts (1979) and Menace (1980), while The Damned recorded a suitably frenetic version of The Beatles’ 1965 hit *Help!* for the B-side of their debut single *New Rose* (1976). The Stranglers scored a national chart hit with their version of Dionne Warwick’s *Walk On By* in December 1978: a song they had learned several years earlier whilst gigging on the cabaret circuit. Most of the ‘major players’ of the First Wave recorded cover versions during their careers, and the style of either parody or homage to another artist or song was repeated by numerous punk groups across the period under review.⁴⁴

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 saw the emergence of DIY and the Post Punk Avant-Garde, 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. 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. Although a quite disparate range of potential new sub-genres emerged during the Second and Third Waves of punk, often originated and defined by music critics and record companies, many failed to become widely

44. Cover versions of earlier pop ‘classics’ which became well known as punk covers include the Sex Pistols *C’Mon Everybody* (originally recorded by Eddie Cochran), *Somethin’ Else* (Eddie Cochran), *Rock Around The Clock* (Bill Haley & his Comets) and *My Way* (Frank Sinatra), The Clash *Police & Thieves* (Junior Murvin), The Damned *Ballroom Blitz* (The Sweet), The Banned *Little Girl* (Syndicate of Sound), Eater *Jeepster* (T Rex), The Jam *David Watts* (The Kinks), London *Friday On My Mind* (The Easybeats), Siouxsie And The Banshees *20th Century Boy* (Marc Bolan) and *Dear Prudence* (The Beatles), UK Subs *She’s Not There* (The Zombies), Wreckless Eric *Crying, Waiting, Hoping* (Buddy Holly), Anti Nowhere League *Streets Of London* (Ralph McTell), The Wall *Day Tripper* (The Beatles) and Abrasive Wheels *Jailhouse Rock* (Elvis Presley).

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

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.⁴⁵ 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 (Marcus 1989, Savage 1991, Colegrave & Sullivan 2001). 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 (Gray 2002, Robb 2006) 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). 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 study, Proto Punk examples will be 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

45. Progenitors of the evolving punk scene included groups working the pub rock circuit in London between 1975-76. Many of these bands had built a solid live reputation by returning to earlier UK rock roots, playing aggressive, basic rhythm & blues in pubs and small clubs, often with free or very low-price admission. This circuit provided punk with a useful launch pad on two fronts – some already established bands (notably Eddie & The Hot Rods, The Count Bishops, The 101ers, Dr Feelgood and The Stranglers) found a new audience for their material, in the case of The Stranglers leading to a new musical direction, while the network of venues and labels provided a ready-made platform for many new punk acts to reach an audience and to develop their musical styles.

as Stiff and Chiswick. Certain Pub Rock and R&B groups, such as The Gorillas and Eddie & The Hot Rods (see Figure 26), 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 at the height of punk in July 1977, *Do Anything You Wanna Do*, with their name abbreviated to The Rods. 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 to 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 1976.⁴⁶

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. The origins of Chiswick Records stem from the late hippie underground in and around west London in the early 1970s: the label was founded by Roger Armstrong and Ted Carroll following some success in the retail business with their Rock On chain of small record shops and market stalls. Their initial aim was to cater for an established collectors’ market centred on 1960s punk, garage and R&B – partly influenced by the French Skydog label, which was issuing similar records as short-run, picture sleeve singles and e.p. formats. The label was intended as a reissue specialist, to license long-deleted obscurities regularly requested in the shops, but soon shifted emphasis to sign up current Pub Rock and Proto Punk groups such as The Count Bishops, The 101ers and The (Hammersmith) Gorillas. Through their experience in the retail sector, Armstrong and Carroll saw the potential of the seven inch single housed in a picture sleeve (a format popular on foreign releases, which commanded high prices as imported rarities), and the label began packaging all their singles in this way.

46. Both Dr Feelgood and Eddie & The Hot Rods were described in the music press as part of the ‘Canvey Island sound’, and both groups were keen to exploit their geographical heritage. The sleeve for Dr Feelgood’s fifth album, *Be Seeing You* (United Artists, September 1977), features the group drinking in an Essex pub, with a prominent sign on the wall advertising ‘*Steves Radio Cars, 24 Hour Service, Canvey 4433*’. See also Birch (2003) and Bech Poulsen (2005). It is also interesting to note that Dr Feelgood’s label, United Artists (who found success with The Stranglers and The Buzzcocks), adopted some of the marketing techniques of punk and new wave in order to promote the group – successful singles *Milk And Alcohol* (December 78) and *As Long As The Price Is Right* (May 79) were pressed in several different coloured vinyl and picture sleeve variations.

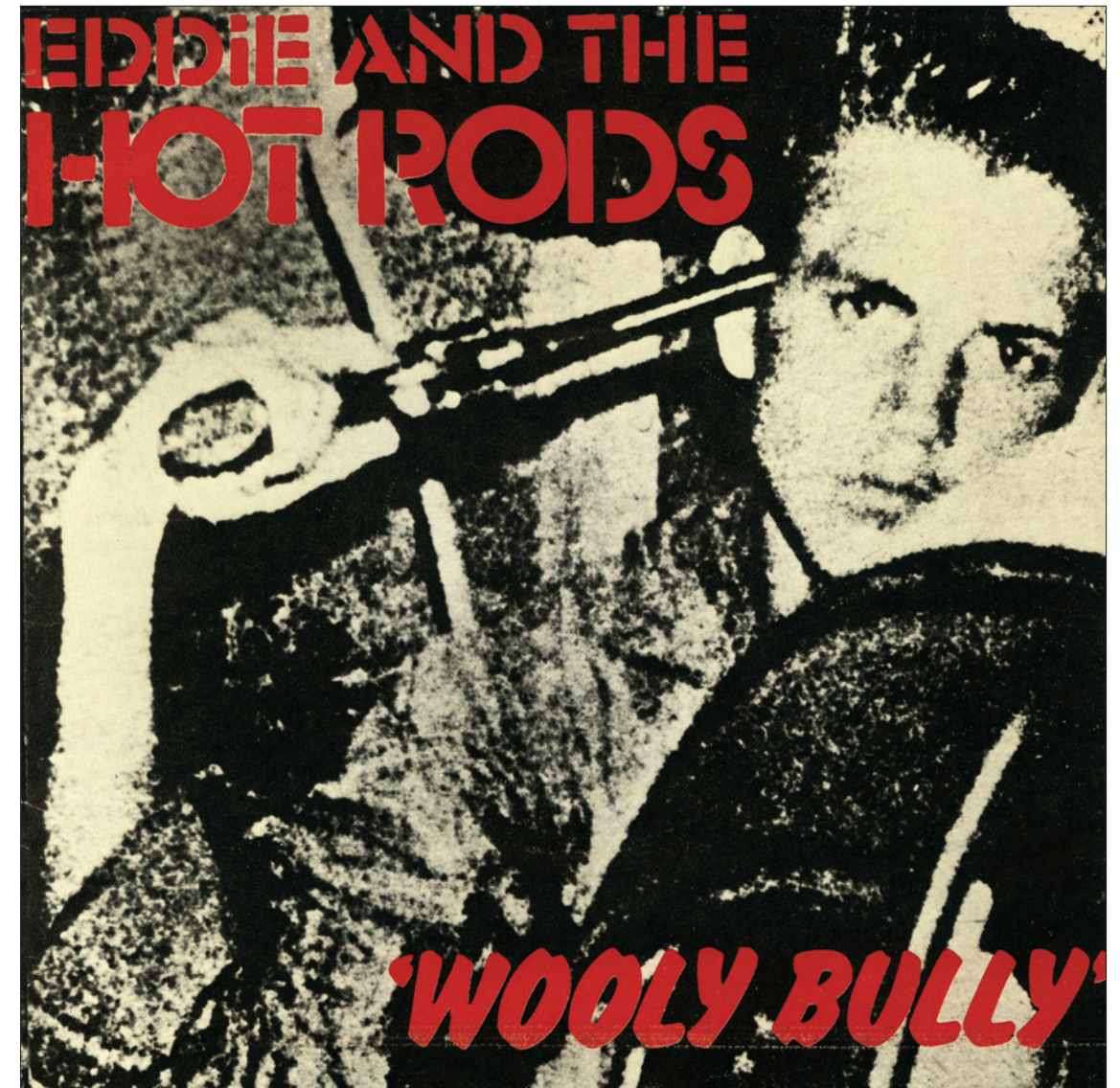


Fig.26: Eddie & The Hot Rods *Wooly Bully/Horseplay (Weary Of The Schmaltz)* (Island WIP6306) 1976

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 (of The Deviants). 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.⁴⁷ 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. A year later, radical anarchist hippie outfit Here & Now teamed up with Mark Perry’s Alternative TV to tour and release a joint live album, *What You See Is What You Are*, in December 1978. 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.⁴⁸ 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 within the bounds of this study. 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,

47. It is notable that a number of active participants in the early Stiff Records circle had previously been actively engaged in the latter stages of the hippie underground and the Free Festival circuit, including Mick Farren, Larry Wallis, Lemmy Kilminster and designer Barney Bubbles, who had produced the light show for Hawkwind.

48. Wally Hope (Phil Russell), hippie activist and organiser of the first Stonehenge Free festival in 1974, lived in the Essex commune which was later to become home to the Crass collective. Hope was arrested in May 1975 on possession of drugs charges and subsequently sectioned in a mental hospital. Discharged in July, he died of an overdose of sleeping pills on 3rd September 1975. A summary account of the case and the subsequent founding of Crass was published as a booklet entitled *A Series of Shock Slogans and Mindless Token Tantrums*. For links between punk and the hippie underground, see also Rimbaud (1999), Farren (2001), Birch (2003) and Bech Poulsen (2005).

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 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, 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 significant in the New Wave scene.

Many successful early UK punk groups became closely associated with the New Wave genre 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 (Chiswick Records), Squeeze (Deptford Fun City/A&M) and Ian Dury & The Blockheads (Stiff Records) (see Figure 27) could be said to bridge both camps. While this does present some problems with definitions in regard to this project, the term New Wave will be used for those groups who were viewed in this guise from the outset, rather than those whose later musical output became associated with the genre.

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



Fig.27: Ian Dury & The Blockheads *What A Waste/Wake Up!* (Stiff BUY27) 1978

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). The early 1970s saw further releases along the same lines, such as Gary Glitter's *Rock 'n' Roll Parts 1 & 2* (1972) and Showaddywaddy's *Hey Rock And Roll* (1974), and even a couple of tongue-in-cheek cash-ins by future New Wave songwriter and punk producer Nick Lowe: a Bay City Rollers tribute, *Bay City Rollers We Love You* by the Tartan Horde (1975) and *Let's Go To The Disco* by The Disco Brothers (1976). Interestingly, the records also featured guitarist Dave Edmunds and drummer Chris Miller, who adopted the pseudonym Rat Scabies and was a founder member of The Damned.⁴⁹

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), The Duggie Briggs Band *Punk Rockin' Granny* (It 1978) 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* (see Figure 28). Belgian singer Plastic Bertrand also scored a UK chart hit in May 1978 with the single *Ça Plane Pour Moi* on Sire Records, which reached number eight and stayed in the chart for

49. Lowe goes under the pseudonym Terry Modern for the Tartan Horde release, while (with a hilarious nod to his own punk moniker) Miller is credited as his brother, Mouse Modern.

twelve weeks – with the singer appearing twice on Top Of The Pops.⁵⁰

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 *Anarchy In The UK*. 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

50. This was a successful European release, originally on the French Vogue label – it should be noted that Plastic Bertrand was taken relatively seriously in France and Belgium, but was seen as something of a novelty by critics in the UK. The backing track for the song was recorded by the remaining members of a group called Bastard, who had been guitarist Brian James’ band prior to his returning to the UK to join London SS and then to form The Damned. The track was originally recorded in an alternative form with different lyrics, as *Jet Boy Jet Girl/Pogo Pogo* by Elton Motello (real name Alan Ward), which was eventually released in the UK on Lightning Records in February 78. The song was re-recorded yet again for a Dutch release by Damned bassist Captain Sensible under the moniker Captain Sensible & The Softies later the same year.



Fig.28: The Monks Johnny B Rotten/*Drugs In My Pocket* (EMI EMI2999) 1979

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 and covers everything from electronic pop to jazz and dance music. For the purpose of this study, this category will be restricted to those releases which could be categorised within the broad parameters of punk, and which tended to embrace

what might be termed an explicit reflexive practice – through the overt use of DIY methods of production and lyrical content. 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 independent 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. A distinction should also 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 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 1991: 594). 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.

The format of the record was also important in helping to establish a generic punk style. Extended play seven inch records had been popular in the 1960s – the biggest selling British e.p. of all time was The Beatles’ *Twist And Shout* released in July 1963, and there was even a dedicated national e.p. chart published by Record Retailer magazine between March 1960 and December 1967 (when it was combined within the singles chart).⁵¹ However, the trend in the early 1970s had been toward single releases which featured one track each on an ‘A’ and a ‘B’ side. The ‘A’ side would usually be the main song on the record, which gained radio play and chart placings etc, whilst the ‘B’ side was often a secondary recording which had been left over from an album session or similar. Early punk releases, particularly those on major labels, continued the ‘A’ and ‘B’ format, though some credited ‘A’ and ‘AA’ sides to the record when the band considered both songs to be equally important, but key releases like *Spiral Scratch* saw a wider proliferation of e.p. format singles being released. The extended play format was well suited to punk releases, as songs were usually short and production values fairly low, so two or more tracks could easily be fitted on one side of a seven inch record (which can usually include up to around 8 minutes of music at 45rpm, or around 12 minutes if the cutting and playing speed is changed to 33rpm). Second Wave DIY punk releases often adopted the e.p. format – the idea that a seven inch single comprised potentially the group’s one and only recorded product and/or artistic output led many to include as much material

51. “List of Important Terms: “EP – extended play disc, with four or more tracks, usually in a picture sleeve.” (Kane 2002: 24)

as possible. It also reflected a non-commercial ideology which eschewed the marketing techniques often associated with the music industry (such as using singles as simply a commercial plug for higher value twelve inch album releases) in favour of ‘low cost’ and ‘good value’ products. This gradual trend was most evident in Third Wave punk records, where multiple track seven inch e.p. records dominated the market between 1981-82. One particular sub-genre, Anarcho Punk, was in part defined by the release of low-price records with a large number of tracks and often a pre-determined retail selling price stamped or printed on the sleeve (“*Pay no more than...*”) – a device not appreciated by large retailers such as HMV and Virgin as it directly affected their profit margin.

Though The Buzzcocks’ *Spiral Scratch* e.p. 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 (see Figure 29). 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 time with 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



Fig.29: Desperate Bicycles *Smokescreen/Handlebars* (Refill RR1) 1977

groove a lone voice shouts the phrase “*It was easy, it was cheap, go and do it!*”. This mantra forms the lyrical basis of the next single, *The Medium Was Tedium*, echoing the calls-to-arms of the punk fanzines.⁵² Many of these DIY publications were responsible for encouraging up and coming bands and local scenes to develop. One fanzine, *Sideburns*, showed hand-drawn diagrams of three guitar chord shapes with a note; “*This is a chord. This is another. This is a*

52. Punk fanzines were low cost, Xeroxed magazines produced in short runs, often by individual enthusiasts, and usually sold through small independent record shops, at gigs or by post. The most well known UK fanzine was *Sniffin’ Glue*, edited by Mark Perry, who saw the opportunity to promote the ideals of punk and DIY by encouraging others to get involved. Issue 5 of *Sniffin’ Glue* called on readers to “*Go out and start your own fanzines... flood the market with punk writing!*” and although reviews were often quite critical, the fanzine network did provide an opportunity for self-produced records to be introduced to a wider audience. See Perry (2000) and Sabin & Triggs (eds) (2000).

third. Now form a band.” This playfully ironic description, which both celebrates the creative potential of the new wave whilst at the same time mocking the critics who had poured scorn on the musical incompetence of punk musicians, was carried through on a number of early punk records and flyers. The Adverts first single, *One Chord Wonders*, was released by Stiff Records in April 1977, and a tour poster for their support slot with The Damned at around the same time included the sardonic caption “*THE DAMNED can play three chords. THE ADVERTS can play one. Hear all four...*”.

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 (see Figure 30). 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.⁵³ 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 humourous and 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

53. Having been revitalised as a marketing and promotions tool for punk single releases, the picture sleeve became an essential element of virtually all punk records from early 1977 onwards (see pp43-46).

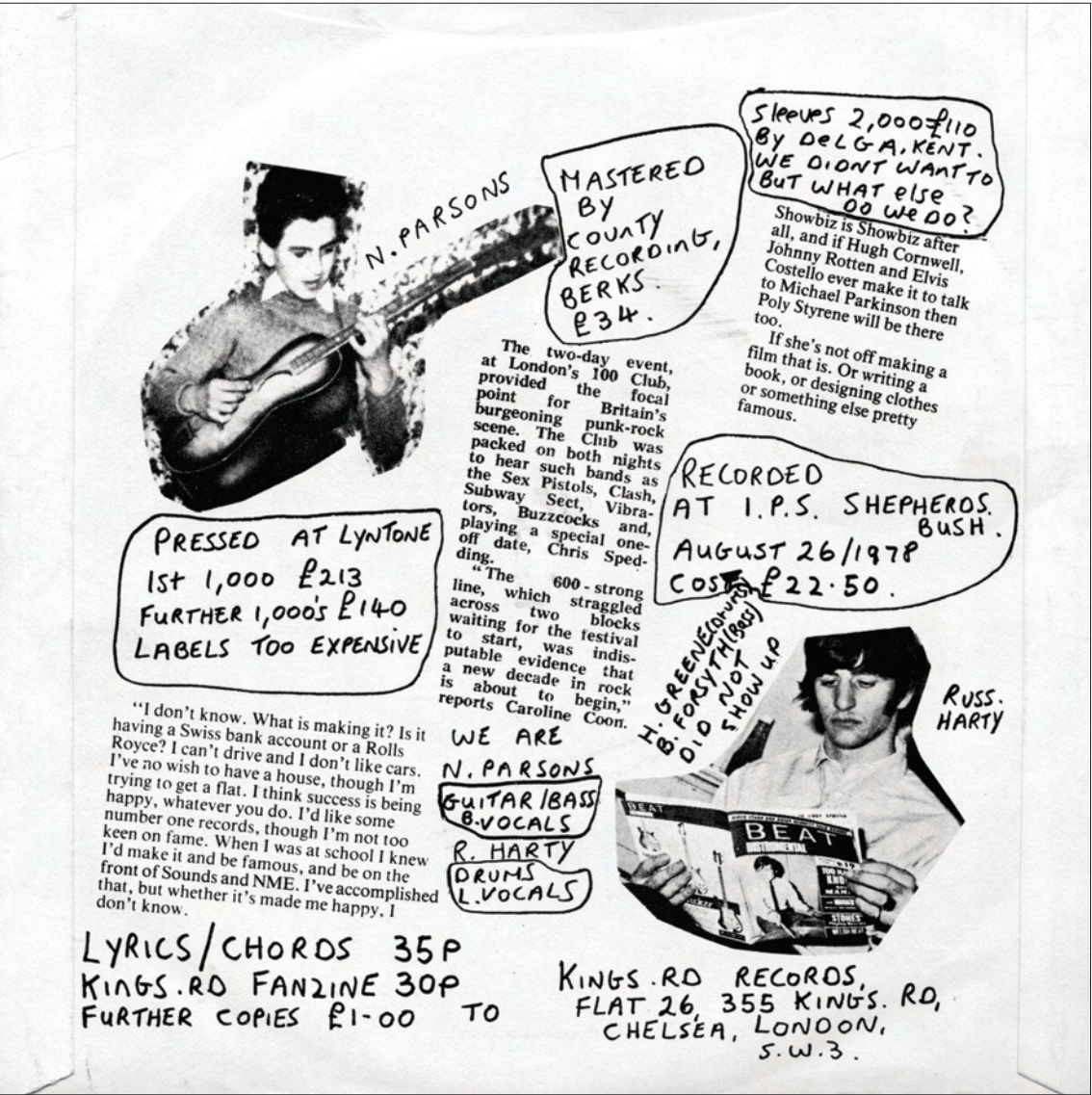


Fig.30: Television Personalities *Where's Bill Grundy Now?* e.p.: Part-Time Punks/Where's Bill Grundy/Happy Families/Posing At The Roundhouse (reverse of sleeve) (Kings Road/Rough Trade RT033) 1979

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, The 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.

A major influence on the development of what would be called Post Punk, Public Image Limited, the group formed by John Lydon after his departure from the Sex Pistols in the Spring of 1978, enjoyed financial backing from Virgin Records from the start, along with a fairly open brief to create music which would be released without too much questioning by the label. Lydon was seen as a key player in the original punk movement, and Virgin were keen to exploit both his talent and his credibility with the record-buying public.⁵⁴ The group's second album, *Metal Box*, was a series of dub sound experiments released as a set of three twelve inch singles in a metal film canister – it proved expensive to produce, and pushed the boundaries of commercial music, but it was to become a central influence on the musical direction of many groups that followed. Meanwhile, Leeds group the Gang Of Four signed to the EMI label in the Autumn of 1978, finding chart success with their second single, *At Home He's A Tourist*, and debut album, *Entertainment*, the following year, and in the process made the transition from agit-pop independent gurus to major league rock stars. Although this was seen by some fans to be a case of selling out their original ideals, the model of building a following on the independent scene then signing to a major label to consolidate their position was one that many others would seek to emulate. Simon Reynolds argues that this attitude led directly to the early 1980s ideals of the New Romantics, and to the more hard-headed and business-oriented attitudes of New Pop groups such as ABC, Scritti Politti and Heaven 17. Although Reynolds attempts to track a series of paths from the early punk independent pioneers through the experimental avant-garde on both sides of the Atlantic, to the development of Industrial Music, Synthpop, New Pop and Punk-Funk, his case is somewhat hampered by a selective form of tunnel vision when it comes to the facts. Popular music is never created in a vacuum, and historical contexts will always shape the form of new work, but to select certain lineages from those groups who enjoyed critical praise in the music press, while ignoring those the author deems irrelevant to the story being told, is a dangerously flawed approach to historical narrative.

54. Having signed the Sex Pistols, Virgin retained the rights to new recordings by the individual members of the group when they split up in February 1978 – the label went on to release a series of Sex Pistols singles and albums based around the film *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, together with releases by Paul Cook and Steve Jones' new group The Professionals and Lydon's Public Image Limited.

As with other categories, the distinction between the DIY/Avant-Garde and Post Punk sub-genres is indistinct – Reynolds makes the case for Post Punk to include the output of the Rough Trade, Factory and Mute labels, for instance, together with major label avant-gardists such as Public Image Limited, Gang Of Four, Siouxsie & The Banshees and Wire. While the latter groups would seem to fit fairly clearly within the Post Punk realm, in that their later output was no longer defined as “punk”, the early output of groups such as the Television Personalities, The Raincoats, Cabaret Voltaire and Scritti Politti clearly makes a case for DIY enterprise in the original spirit of punk as ‘anyone can do it.’ Thus, while the spirit of enterprise that allowed small scale independent labels to flourish did impact on the avant-garde nature of Post Punk (in that formal experimentalism aimed at a small audience group could still be viable in the marketplace), the spirit and intentions of the early DIY pioneers were more closely aligned to an ‘authentic’ punk identity. It is also interesting that Reynolds' version of Post Punk musical developments includes a range of formal and conceptual progressions – in the case of electronic and industrial music, for instance – but excludes other punk sub-genres such as Anarcho Punk and Hardcore. In fact, Hardcore is not mentioned at all in a UK context, and Anarcho Punk is cited only as a counterpoint to the development of the (supposedly more interesting – or at least more stylish) Goth movement; “...*focussed on Crass, a band/label based in a communal farmhouse, the anarcho-punk movement was more ideological and idealistic, spewing out vinyl tracts denouncing the unholy trinity of state/church/military, while extolling pacifism and self-rule*” (Reynolds 2005: 424). Reynolds fails to notice that both Hardcore and Anarcho Punk adopted new musical forms in relation to earlier punk output: in fact, the musical extremes embraced by both sub-genres were to become hugely influential over the following decade, particularly with the development of Thrash Metal and other crossover genres.

Primary examples of records in the DIY category include The Buzzcocks *Spiral Scratch* (1977), Television Personalities *14th Floor* and *Where's Bill Grundy Now?* (1978), The O Level *We Love Malcolm* (1978), and the Desperate Bicycles *Smokescreen* (1977) and *The Medium Was Tedium*

(1978). Post Punk is more eclectic as a sub-genre, and could arguably include a range of groups developing through an entirely different route to punk, but key releases from the sample under review would include Public Image Limited *Public Image* (1978) and *Death Disco* (1979), The Raincoats *Fairytale In The Supermarket* (1979), The Normal *T.V.O.D.* (1978), The Human League *Being Boiled* (1978) and The Fall *Bingo Masters Breakout* (1978), *It's The New Thing* (1978) and *Rowche Rumble* (1979).

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 And 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 often 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 during the early 1970s 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 period 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. The groups associated with Glam Rock also began to compete with one another in their adoption of increasingly flamboyant and androgynous styles of dress. Slade went on to have a string of UK chart hits between 1971 and 1976, many incorporating their signature style of phonetically-misspelled titles such as *Mama Weer All Crazee Now*, *Gudbuy T'Jane*, *Cum On Feel The Noize* and *Skweeze Me, Pleeze Me*.⁵⁵ The later Glam Rock period (1974-76) also saw massive international success for 'manufactured' pop stars the Bay City Rollers; a group who married a highly chart-friendly adaptation of the earlier Glam Rock style with a glossy production and a strong 'boy band' image aimed directly at a young teenage female audience. Interestingly, Malcolm McLaren is said to have initially planned to put together a group modelled on the Rollers, but with a more street-level image – and the Sex Pistols were the (perhaps rather unexpected) result.⁵⁶

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 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* (see Figure 31), 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*. Meanwhile, Siouxsie & The Banshees covered Marc Bolan and T Rex's *20th Century Boy* and Eater recorded the group's 1971 hit *Jeepster*. The Damned also toured as support 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)

55. See also *Coz I Luv You*, *Look Wot You Dun*, *Take Me Back 'Ome*, and *Thanks For The Memory* (*Wham Bam Thank You Mam*), together with their perennial seasonal chart favourite, *Merry Xmas Everybody*.
56. The history of manufactured pop groups dates back to the 1950s, when performers were used as a vehicle for the latest work by a label's resident songwriters. Well known examples include The Monkees, a group created to be the stars of an American television series of the same name which ran from 1966 to 1968, and the numerous 'girl groups' put together by producer Phil Spector and the Motown record label. In the early 1970s, Scottish group the Bay City Rollers achieved only moderate success until their manager Tam Paton enlisted songwriters Phil Coulter and Bill Martin and dressed the band in tartan for a series of chart-topping singles throughout 1974 and 1975. They even secured their own ITV television show, *Shang-A-Lang*, which ran from 1975 to August 1977.

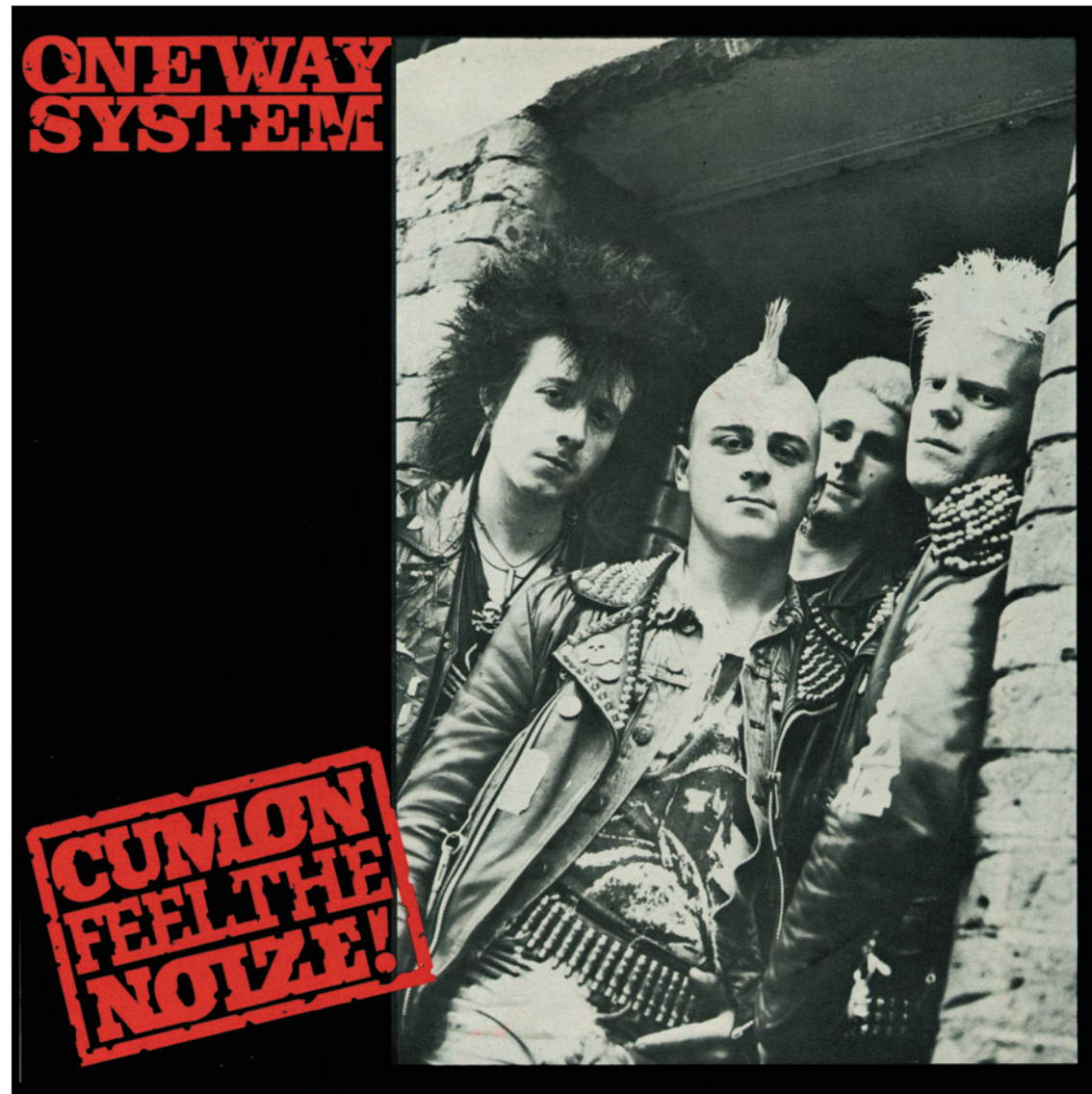


Fig.31: One Way System *Cum On Feel The Noize/Breakin' In* (Anagram ANAg) 1983

party atmosphere is also evident 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 the Tom Jones hit *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 Toy Dolls also produced a number of high-speed covers of traditional pop hits, together with their stock-in-trade comic songs about popular television soap characters such as *Glenda And The Test-Tube Baby*, *Deidre's A Slag* and *Harry Cross (A Tribute To Edna)* – songs centred on characters from *Crossroads*, *Coronation Street* and *Brookside* respectively. Oi compilation albums such as *Oi! The Album* (EMI, November 1980), *Strength Through Oi!* (Decca, May 1981) and *Carry On Oi!* (Secret records, October 1981) all sold in high quantities: the third album selling over 35,000 copies on first release. It is also important to note the transition across different labels for each of the *Oi!* album releases, from large major labels EMI and Decca, through to independent punk specialist Secret Records, mirroring the initial interest and investment in the new sub-genre shown by the record industry, and its subsequent disenfranchisement following the Southall riot of July 1981. EMI and Decca had both made moves to sign up some of the more popular New Punk and Oi groups – EMI signing the Cockney Rejects, Angelic Upstarts and Vice Squad to their Zonophone subsidiary, while Decca already had a historical connection with certain early precursors to the Street Punk style, including Slaughter And The Dogs and Cock Sparrer.

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 (see Figure 32). 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.”⁵⁷ *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. By placing the contemporary skinhead culture firmly within a set of historical references which traced back to the 1960s skinhead 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*” (Johnson 1981: 10). 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.⁵⁸ 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

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57. If ever there was a case of the pot calling the kettle black, this surely must be near the top of the list.
58. Bushell's contradictory stance on working class traditions and nationalist politics has continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Following a long stint as a regular columnist at Rupert Murdoch's *The Sun* newspaper, Bushell entered politics by standing as a candidate for the right-wing, nationalist, English Democrats Party at the General Election of May 2005. He has also mounted public campaigns for a statue in recognition of comedian Benny Hill and for the inauguration of a 'Festival Of England' on St George's Day. He continues to work as a television pundit for the *Sunday People* newspaper.



Fig.32: Cock Sparrer *England Belongs To Me*/Argy Bargo (Carrere CAR255) 1982

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 song *Oi, Oi, Oi*, released in October 1980, leant the movement its name) espoused allegiance to football teams (in both these cases West Ham FC), and dressed in the ‘uniform’ of the football terraces – boots, braces and short hair. The Cockney Rejects also featured a photograph of a

football crowd on the sleeve of their single *We Are The Firm/War On The Terraces* (1980), while the sleeve for 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. The strong links that existed between some Oi groups and football hooliganism were made clear on the retrospective compilation album *Trouble On The Terraces: 16 Classic Football Anthems* (Step One 1996), which featured songs such as *Trouble On The Terraces* by Cock Sparrer, *Saturday's Heroes* by The Business, *Every Saturday* by Section 5 and *We're The Hooligans* by The Oppressed. 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” (Johnson 1981: 6). Early prototypes of Street Punk include Slaughter And the Dogs *Where Have All The Boot Boys Gone?* (1977), Sham 69 *Borstal Breakout*, *Angels With Dirty Faces* and *If The Kids Are United* (1978), the Angelic Upstarts *The Murder Of Liddle Towers* (1978) and *I'm An Upstart* (1979) and the Cockney Rejects *Flares And Slippers* and *I'm Not A Fool* (1979). Key releases under the newly developed generic classification of Oi in the early 1980s include The Business *Harry May* (1981), 4 Skins *One Law For Them* (1981), Cock Sparrer *England Belongs To Me* (1982), Red Alert *In Britain* (1982), Anti-Social *Made In England* (1982) and The Oppressed *Never Say Die* (1983).

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* music paper was again instrumental in defining this development as ‘New Punk’ – and groups such as The Exploited (see Figure 33), 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. Meanwhile, another influence on the development of UK Hardcore Punk were American West Coast groups such as Black Flag and the Dead Kennedys, whose records were beginning to find their way into the UK as imports or under licence to British independent labels and distributors such as Cherry Red and Rough Trade. These American groups adopted an aggressive, brutal approach to both music and visuals, often along with strongly political lyrics and shocking graphic styles. The Dead Kennedys included a fold-out poster/lyric sheet with each of their early albums – a crudely constructed collage of images taken from US advertising and corporate literature combined with war photography and horrific images of death and disaster.

Some labels who specialised in releasing 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 (see Figure 34), 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 the major EMI label, 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



Fig.33: The Exploited *Dead Cities/Hitler's In The Charts Again* (Secret SHH120) 1981

whom went on to have national chart successes.⁵⁹ 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

59. Zonophone had been a trademark used by early US recording pioneer Frank Seaman between 1899 and 1903, and the Regal Zonophone label was formed by the amalgamation of two British labels in 1931, at the time of the formation of EMI. EMI kept the rights to the Zonophone name, enjoying some chart success in the late 1960s with T.Rex, The Move and Procol Harum, after which time the label and name had been mothballed.



Fig.34: Vice Squad *Living On Dreams/Latex Love/Last Rockers* (Riot City RIOT1) 1980

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, 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, particularly between the New Punk and Oi sub-genres. 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. Important New Punk and Hardcore releases include Vice Squad *Living On Dreams* (1980), Discharge *Realities Of War* and *Fight Back* (1980), Anti Pasti *Four Sore Points* (1980), The Exploited *Army Life* (1980), the Anti Nowhere League *I Hate... People* (1982), GBH *No Survivors* (1982), The Partisans *Police Story* (1981) and Riot Squad *Fuck The Tories* (1982).

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, 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's visual work was self-produced, with art direction credits going to Crass and G Sus (Gee Vaucher), a band member who was also an accomplished commercial illustrator and graphic designer, most recently for New York Magazine and Rolling Stone. Their circular visual identity was originally designed for the frontispiece of a self-published book by drummer Penny Rimbaud (an adopted pseudonym for Jeremy Ratter) in 1976 entitled "Christ's Reality Asylum", some time before the formation of the group (see Figure 35). Created by professional graphic designer Dave King, a friend of the author, the symbol "*...represented the various forms of oppression that I'd discussed in the book: family, church and state. Heraldic in quality, part national flag, part cross, part swastika, the circular design broke on its edges into two serpents' heads, suggesting that the power it represented was about to consume itself*" (Rimbaud 1998: 90). Crass had a strong influence on a number of other bands, particularly 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



Fig.35: Crass Reality Asylum/Shaved Women (Crass 521984) 1979

(often rather inarticulate) copycat pieces by younger bands (see Figure 36). Crass were well known to support 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



Fig.36: Icon A.D. Let The Vultures Fly e.p.: Say No/Medals/Trident 1 & 2 (Radical Change RC4) 1983

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.

The political and aesthetic nature of Anarcho Punk has recently been the subject of a PhD research project by popular musicologist Mike Dines, entitled *An Investigation into the Emergence of the Anarcho-Punk Scene of the 1980s*.⁶⁰ Dines traces the legacy of the voicing of anarchist politics and references to anarchism across a period which spans the 1960s hippie underground through to the traveller movements of the late 1980s. His central thesis concerns the interpretation of anarchism within the punk movement, from the initial rhetoric of the Sex Pistols' *Anarchy In The UK*, through the building of an Anarcho Punk sub-genre centred around Crass, Conflict, Discharge and The Subhumans, to the development of a later Thrash scene exemplified by Chaos UK and Extreme Noise Terror in the mid 1980s. Dines is careful to avoid what could be termed the sectarian in-fighting prevalent within the movement – citing both Crass and Discharge, for instance, where many followers of one camp might feel it unnecessary, or even unauthentic, to embrace the other – and his articulate and careful study of both musical composition, production and lyrical structures across the Anarcho Punk genre demonstrates the ways in which both musical and ideological boundaries were attacked, and in some cases broken down.

Dines traces various lineages within the development of Anarcho Punk between the late 1970s and early 1990s. As such, he charts a series of evolutionary threads from the liberal anarchism and peaceful protest of Crass to the direct action promoted by Conflict, and from Discharge's initially confrontational and aggressive musical direction to the brutal noise structures of the 80s Thrash groups such as Extreme Noise Terror and Sore Throat. He also includes a chapter which explores the lyrical introspection and personal politics of songwriter Dick Lucas, with both The Subhumans and Culture Shock, as a distinct theme in the development of the genre in the mid 1980s. One aspect of the investigation covers the ways in which the Anarcho Punk sub-genre evolved as both a *literal* interpretation of the anarchist message of First Wave punk, and as a protest against what the punk movement had become. Later developments 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

60. Mike Dines: *An Investigation into the Emergence of the Anarcho-Punk Scene of the 1980s*. PhD thesis, October 2004, School of Media, Music & Performance, University of Salford, UK.

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 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*, *War's No Fairy Tale*, *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. Crass had also been receiving some bad press during this time, and

the predominantly middle class origins of the group members tended to alienate them from some working class audiences and other groups on the punk scene. 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 the Anarcho Punk sub-genre, centred around Crass, and the New Punk and Oi bands who featured on the *Oi!* compilation album series and were championed by Garry Bushell in *Sounds*. Crass had included a song entitled *Punk Is Dead* on their debut album in 1979, 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 free 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) (see Figure 37). Ever ones to take an argument further, Crass retorted with the track *It's The Greatest Working Class Rip-Off*, itself a parody of a genre-defining Oi classic by The Cockney Rejects, *The Greatest Cockney Rip Off*:-

It's the greatest working class rip off, oi, oi, oi

What a fucking rip off, oi, oi, oi

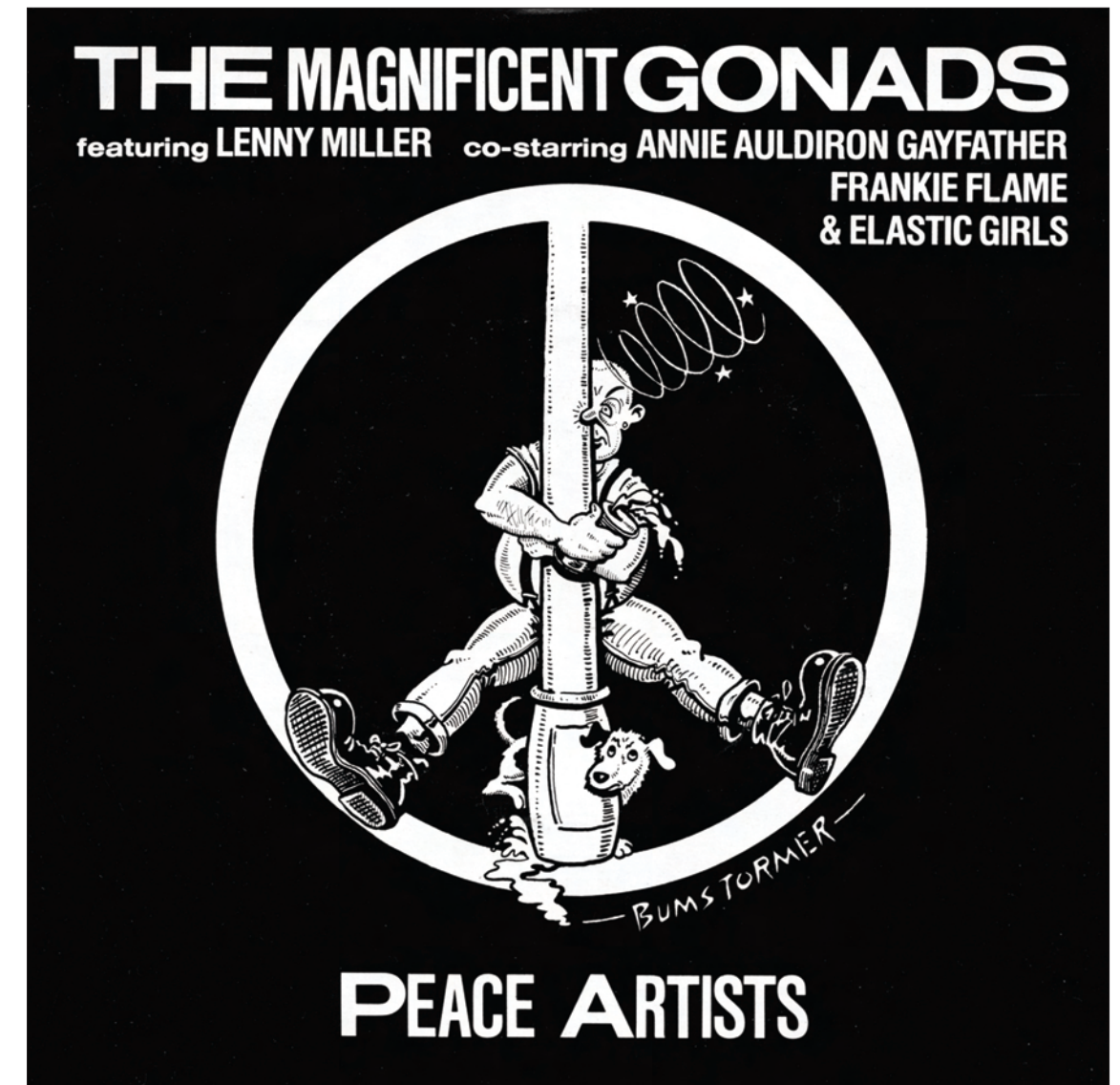


Fig.37: The Gonads *Peace Artists* e.p. *She Can't Whip Me/Punk City Rockers/Gonads Anthem/S.L.A.G.* (Secret SHH134) 1982

Yorkshire Anarcho Punks Chumbawamba also contributed to the battle by submitting a song in response to a call by Secret Records for contributions to an Oi compilation e.p. entitled *Back On The Streets* in 1982. Going under the pseudonym Skin Disease, the group recorded a song entitled *I'm Thick*, the lyrics of which simply repeat the title refrain over a simplistic three chord backing. Surprisingly, the song was selected for inclusion on the record, alongside

regular Oi groups Venom, The Strike, East End Badoes and Angela Rippon's Bum.

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, for instance, 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), the Hardcore groups tended to retain the visual and verbal language of 'anarchy' allied to a brutal, monotonous sound assault. Primary examples of Anarcho Punk records include most releases on the Crass Records label, together with those groups taking up the theme such as The Subhumans, Conflict, Flux Of Pink Indians, Zounds and Poison Girls, and the output of smaller independent Anarcho labels such as Spiderleg, Mortarhate and Radical Change. Particularly important releases by Crass include *Feeding Of The 5,000* (1978), *Reality Asylum* (1979), *How Does It Feel To Be The Mother Of 1000 Dead?* (1982), *Sheep Farming In The Falklands/Gotcha!* (1983) – the B-side named after the notorious Sun newspaper headline of Tuesday May 4, 1982, which reported the sinking of the Argentinian warship General Belgrano in the South Atlantic. Other important Anarcho Punk releases include the Crass/Poison Girls split single *Bloody Revolutions/ Persons Unknown* (1980), The Subhumans *Demolition War* (1981) and *Religious Wars* (1982), Flux of Pink Indians *Neu Smell* (1981) and Conflict *To A Nation Of Animal Lovers* (1983).

Neo-Fascist Punk

A category which has some crossovers with the Oi and Street Punk sub-genre, though the two areas should be treated as separate for a number of reasons. Primarily, this is because any definition of extremist right-wing and Neo-Fascist punk should be determined by the

overtly political nature of the song lyrics, together with the expressed opinions of the group themselves through interviews and public announcements, rather than by association with sections of their audience. Even those groups who might be assumed farthest from the impact of far-right audience violence can be affected and, once made, the association of certain crowds with extremist politics is hard to play down. In his autobiography, Penny Rimbaud of Anarcho Punk leaders Crass, describes the diverse politics of audiences at an early gig at the Conway Hall, London: *"Throughout the evening rumours were flying that out of the audience of over seven hundred people, fifty or so skinheads planned to storm the stage during Crass' performance. It was a rumour we'd heard many times before, one that I felt was not based on any tangible reality, but created out of a sad need for vicarious thrills. Of course some skinheads purported to support the British Movement, but then the Queen purported to support egalitarianism. Very few skins were convinced fascists, and even if they were, so what? They were the ones who could have most benefited from what we had to say. Shortly before we were due to go on, a commotion broke out at the door. We were under attack, not from the British Movement, but from the Red Brigade, Trotskyists who, in their crusade for peoples' power, had taken it upon themselves to rid the hall of 'Nazi scum'. Anyone with hair shorter than half an inch, plus a scattering of those unfortunate enough to be wearing a hat that disguised their allegiance, were regarded as fair game. The resultant carnage was ugly, unnecessary and utterly indefensible"* (Rimbaud 1998: 119).

The Guardian later erroneously reported that the gig had been attacked by the British Movement, *"...a report that created a reputation for violence that became the bane of our life on the road."* (Ibid: 120). Crass' early gigs attracted a politically diverse audience, which the group openly accepted, and had, up until this point, managed to keep from attacking one another: however, they now became a magnet for a stand-off between sections of the right and left, and Crass gigs were often blighted by crowd violence. Crass took a stand for an individualised, personal anarchist politics which acted in counterpoint to what they saw as the corrupt model of Rock Against Racism and the Anti Nazi League as 'fronts' for left-wing

political groups. The song *White Punks On Hope*, released on their second album *Stations Of The Crass* in 1979, reflects on their experiences and makes their position abundantly clear, whilst also referencing the debut single *White Riot* by The Clash:-

*They said that we were trash,
Well the name is Crass, not Clash.
They can stuff their punk credentials
Cause it's them that take the cash.
They won't change nothing with their fashionable talk,
All their RAR badges and their protest walk,
Thousands of white men standing in a park,
Objecting to racism's like a candle in the dark.
Black man's got his problems and his way to deal with it,
So don't fool yourself you're helping with your white liberal shit.
If you care to take a closer look at the way things really stand,
You'd see we're all just niggers to the rulers of this land.*

Some First and Second Wave punk groups attracted a broad following which included hooligan, skinhead and right-wing elements: this association with far-right politics was a constant problem for mainstream groups such as Sham 69 and the Angelic Upstarts, both of whom openly expressed anti-fascist politics and attempted to promote a more inclusive, anti-racist punk scene. As Angelic Upstarts singer Mensi notes; *“To me it seemed like a bit of a right-wing movement in parts. I didn’t like the exclusive white working-class thing – I would rather it was just a working-class thing. The right-wing would latch onto every band, and it’s not the band’s fault. Sometimes they can be very intimidating so bands won’t speak out against them”* (Robb 2006: 473). The rise in skinhead fashion in the late 1970s, together with a resurgence in support for far-right parties such as the National Front, led to increasing numbers of particularly far-right skinheads attending punk gigs and causing trouble with

other members of the audience. These activities came to a head for Sham 69 in the early part of 1979, and the band were reluctantly forced to abandon playing live gigs altogether.⁶¹ Far-right factions also battled with each other: following a disastrous showing in the May 1979 General Election, in part due to voters shifting allegiance to the hard-line right-wing agenda of Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative party, the National Front split into three separate rival organisations. The National Front, the British Movement and the New National Front (led by hardline nationalist John Tyndall), emerged from the split, the latter soon to be renamed as the British National Party.

Similar problems with right-wing crowd trouble to those affecting Sham 69 beset live performances by Menace, the Angelic Upstarts, Cock Sparrer and the Cockney Rejects. The latter also had strong support from the gangs of hooligans who followed West Ham football club – a problem which was not discouraged by the group themselves as their 1980 single release of a punk take on the West Ham football terrace anthem *I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles* demonstrates. None of these groups could be reasonably described as promoting an overtly right-wing agenda, let alone as supporters of the Neo-Fascist cause. Others, however, can be seen as more closely implicated in the development of the 1980s Neo-Fascist Punk scene.

The punk group most commonly associated with far-right politics were Skrewdriver, originally formed in Blackpool in 1977 and signed to the London-based Chiswick label – an early independent bridging pub rock and punk. Although their early singles, *You’re So Dumb* and *Anti-Social* (both released in 1977) were fairly predictable (and largely apolitical), they were classic early examples of what would later become known as Street Punk. The group were not commercially successful and, following a number of image changes and an unsuccessful relocation to Manchester, they split officially in 1979. Lead singer Ian Stuart Donaldson went on to form a new line up of the group in 1982, this time adopting an openly far-right political stance in support of the National Front.⁶² Following the release of several singles on both their own Skrewdriver label and the far-right magazine subsidiary White

61. Trouble caused by predominantly right-wing elements within rock audiences extended well beyond the punk scene. The rise in popularity of ska music in the late 1970s saw a resurgence of interest in the genre from some skinhead factions originally allied with the punk movement. Far-right extremists caused problems at live gigs by Ska and Two-Tone groups such as The Specials and Madness during the same period.

62. The establishment of direct links between extremist groups and record labels for the production of propaganda material was not a new one. Louis Barfe cites some early recordings made by American white supremacist movement the Ku Klux Klan at the Richmond studio in Indiana, USA, a facility owned by the successful jazz recording entrepreneur Fred Gennett. During the 1920s the KKK ran their own record label, adapting traditional hymns to incorporate racist lyrics (see Barfe 2005: 91).

Noise, with the group operating openly to raise funds and support for Neo-Fascist political groups under the Rock Against Communism banner, Stuart was to gain increasing notoriety in far-right political circles (see Figure 38). In December 1985, Stuart was sentenced to 12 months in prison for a racial assault, an event that did little to harm his image among his peers. A split between Stuart's followers and the National Front in 1987 led to the formation of the Blood & Honour movement, named after a Skrewdriver song released in 1986 and intended to provide an outlet for far-right skinhead music and a network for live gigs and fundraising for Neo-Fascist political groups. Stuart was eventually killed in a car accident in September 1993, but his legacy in the Blood & Honour movement worldwide remains strong – witnessed by the number of tributes paid within far-right websites and publications. Another far-right record label, ISD Records, was formed in Stuart's honour in the mid 1990s, releasing CD albums by a number of extremist European Neo-Nazi groups, several of which have been banned under race-hate laws.

Much Neo-Fascist activity within the UK punk scene falls outside of this period of study – the formation of Blood & Honour and the music-related activities of far-right political groups such as Combat 18 were to be much more forcefully felt in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, certain events in the late 1970s and early 1980s can be seen as precursors to the later development of an organised Neo-Fascist Punk movement. In Leeds, the National Front had a strong grass-roots following in the late 1970s, with no less than three active branches, Leeds West, East and South. The Yorkshire region also showed strong support for the NF in Bradford, Huddersfield, Halifax, Sheffield, Hull and York, as well as numerous smaller towns, and local elections saw some successes for the far-right.⁶³ Leeds also became a focus for punk rock groups and fans in the late 1970s. Following the initial success of punk in London and Manchester, punk groups began to form in other regional cities, while London-based punk groups also toured further afield.⁶⁴ One club in Leeds became adopted by punk groups and audiences – the F Club, in Chapeltown, began booking punk gigs, and became a centre of attention for both far-right groups and the Anti Nazi League. According to local NF organiser

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63. The wider Yorkshire area had seen a dramatic influx of new immigrants from India, Pakistan and Uganda over the previous decade, in part reflecting a demand for labour in the local textiles industries. The economic depression of the early 1970s saw unemployment rise across the region and a growth in inter-racial tensions. The National Front was able to capitalise on these local issues in the elections. See also Gilroy (1992), Ridgeway (1995), Lowles (2001) and Ryan (2003).
64. After cancellations at Norwich, Derby and Newcastle, the *Anarchy In The UK* tour, featuring the Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Damned and The Heartbreakers, kicked off at Leeds Polytechnic on 6th December 1976. The Clash returned played Leeds Polytechnic and the University in 1977, and the city became a regular gig on the national punk tour circuit throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s.



Fig.38: Skrewdriver *Voice Of Britain/Sick Society* (White Noise WN2) 1983

Eddy Morrison, the club was used extensively as a National Front recruiting ground, as local far-right activists saw the potential in the new movement. A far-right punk fanzine, Punk Front, was distributed by the Leeds NF, and local organisers felt that they were making strong headway in influencing the punk scene in the city. *"In a few months, the NF was the dominant political force on the big punk scene in Leeds. Music papers such as Sounds and The*

New Musical Express were taking an interest in us. Garry Bushell was sent up to look into the phenomena. We had pro-NF letters published in many music papers and other punks started bringing out pro-NF fanzines. We even started two bands – the Ventz and the Dentists. Both these bands were to feature later on in the start of ‘Rock Against Communism’” (Morrison 2002: Part Seven). Rock Against Communism was devised by the far-right as a direct response to the Anti Nazi League and Rock Against Racism campaigns. Although this did generate some publicity for the National Front, the party itself was fast losing political support in the late 1970s, and splits in the leadership led to the formation of a number of breakaway groups. Rock Against Communism did not pick up widespread interest – partly due to the changing political climate and the move away from punk music styles in the late 1970s. However, with the resurgence of far-right political groups in the early 1980s, the RAC helped lead directly to the Blood & Honour movement, and was to have a lasting effect. Rock Against Communism groups can be traced worldwide today, with strong grassroots followings in both the USA and northern Europe.

It is interesting to note that a wide range of Second and Third Wave punk graphics have been directly appropriated by a number of more recent right-wing and left-wing campaign groups, often in direct contradiction to the political intentions of the original groups and designers. Searchlight Information Services, an anti-fascist campaign group, published an information pack for teachers and organisations entitled *Signs of Hate* in 2004. Edited by veteran campaigners Matthew Collins and Gerry Gable, much of the information in the pack is remarkably inaccurate, with sweeping assumptions and statements about right-wing and fascist skinhead symbols and insignia which do not stand up to even gentle scrutiny. Oi is defined by the authors as a singularly right-wing music genre; “*Oi was a common means of identification among followers of Nazi music and the skinhead subculture from the 1970s... It was intended to be a means of bringing white racist working class youth together. For a while Nazi hate music was known as Oi! music*” (Collins & Gable 2004: section 7, page 8). Similar statements accompany examples of skinhead fashion T-shirts, including a ‘Crucified

Skinhead’ design which has been widely reproduced on clothing and record sleeves, and a cartoon motif depicting two skinhead girls which apparently “...*shows two street-fighting followers of white power groups and Nazi bands*” (Ibid: section 6, page 4).

The biggest mistake is the editors’ failure to make any distinction between the broader factions of Oi music and Neo-Fascist groups, or between skinhead subcultural fashions and Nazi symbolism. The ‘Crucified Skinhead’ T-shirt thus “...*goes beyond the usual targets of blacks and Jews. It insults Churchgoers in the crudest way, reflecting the pagan beliefs of many young Nazis*” (Ibid: section 6, page 3). The writer has failed here to identify one of the basic aspects of skinhead iconography – the depiction of the skinhead as a heroic, persecuted individual. This kind of reference comes up time and again in skinhead and Oi lyrics, artwork and song titles, usually without any further ‘political’ qualification beyond an exhortation to “never surrender”, “fight back” or “stand and fight”. This group psychology identifies with the underdog, and sees a potential solution in fighting back through ritual, pride, allegiance to the tribe and an outspoken personal, or collective, identity. Similar sentiments relate directly to Hardcore and Real Punk, and are reflected in song lyrics across both genres, as well as many Oi releases, and paralleled in graphic design – sleeves often depicting victimhood and state oppression.

However, the clumsiest assumption in the document is reserved for an image taken directly from a punk record sleeve design. In what might be considered an ironic inversion of original intent, were it not so blatantly incorrect, the artwork for the first single by Cardiff anti-fascist Oi group The Oppressed (see Figure 39), featuring a cartoon line drawing of a Doc Marten boot, is included in a selection of race-hate symbols with the caption; “*This symbol shows the link between the boot boys and ‘Paki bashers’ of the 1970s and today’s hardline race haters and Nazis on the international music scene*” (Collins & Gable 2004: section 2, page 6). The artwork on the single sleeve was credited to Jon Soden, though the drawing he had produced was not actually intended for use by the band, and was copied by singer Roddy Moreno; “...*I didn’t*



Fig.39: The Oppressed Never Say Die e.p.: Urban Soldiers/Ultra Violence/Run From You (Firm NICK1) 1983

(still don't) know John. He designed a poster for a local record shop when HMV opened the first Cardiff branch. It showed HMV's Nipper the dog and Gramophone being crushed by a big boot with the caption 'The Indies Bite Back'. I used the outline of his boot and changed it to the black and white logo we use. I gave him a credit as he was a friend of a friend. I don't know if he ever saw it" (Interview with the author, 9th August 2004). Since Moreno has campaigned openly

against racism in the skinhead movement right from the group's outset, the incorporation by Searchlight Information Services of a drawing directly associated with The Oppressed (it is used on badges and T-shirts as the central visual identity for the band – often supplemented with the strapline "Fuck Fascism") is not only factually wrong, it verges on the libellous and undermines the anti-fascist cause. This may be particularly true amongst punk and Oi followers who might gain from a closer association between organisations such as Searchlight and certain strongly anti-fascist punk and Oi groups.

The misappropriation of punk sleeve artwork is not confined to the left, however. The website of the WNP, the extremist White Nationalist Party established in May 2002, features a section entitled *The Political Rebel's Survival Kit*, designed to offer information to any activists of their rights with respect to the police and authorities. Below the heading on the web page, a large black and white image depicts a young man in handcuffs being carried away by two uniformed police officers, with a coarse halftone image of a crowd in the background. The image is taken directly from the reverse sleeve of the first single by Leeds punk group Abrasive Wheels, *Army Song*, originally released on their own Abrasive Records label in 1981 and reissued via Riot City records in 1982 (see Figure 40). Abrasive Wheels were the most successful of the Third Wave groups to come out of Leeds, producing a string of successful melodic punk releases in the early 1980s. Although not outspokenly political, the group played several Rock Against Racism gigs in the late 1970s, and the use of their artwork seems entirely inappropriate in the circumstances. The context for the use of an image taken from a punk rock record released 24 years earlier is also rather confusing, though it is not unusual for extreme political groups from both the right and left to appropriate punk imagery, as the *Signs of Hate* publication makes clear. The WNP also produce stickers and flyers for activists: one example with the headline *Protect Our Young, Hang Paedophile Scum!* incorporates the illustration from the sleeve of the Combat 84 e.p. *Rapist*, released in September 1983 on the Victory Records label (see Figure 41). In this case, the appropriation of the sleeve artwork is not so difficult to justify: the original single is a call for the return of

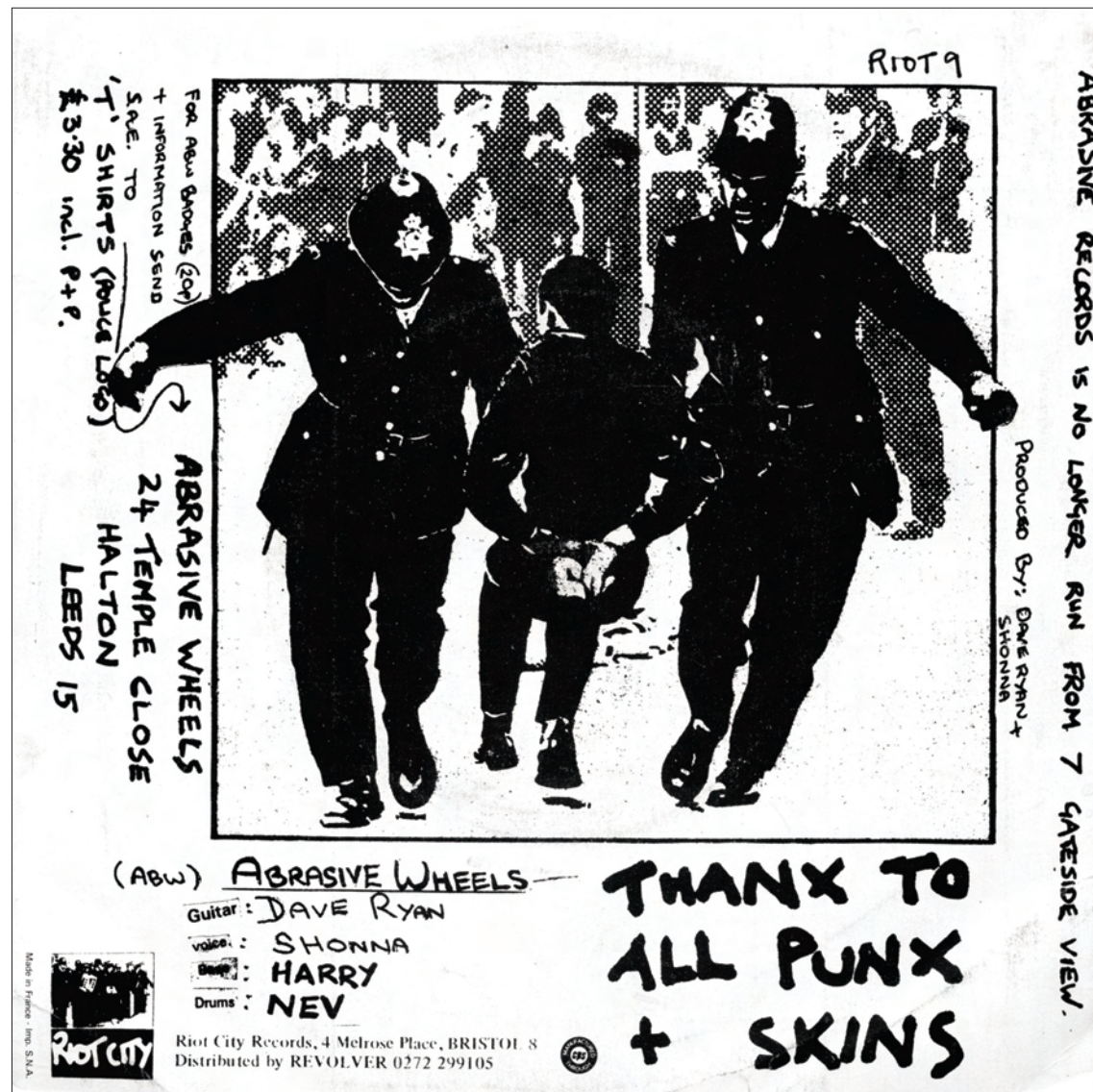


Fig.40: Abrasive Wheels *Army Song/Juvenile/So Low* (reverse of sleeve) (Riot City RIOT9) 1982

capital punishment for rapists and paedophiles, and certain members of the group did in fact have far-right sympathies, as evidenced in a 1984 *40 Minutes* television documentary on far-right music which centred on the group (see also Home 1995). However, both examples of graphic appropriation on the WNP site draw directly on artwork produced for punk records in the early 1980s, and could be seen to be re-using the work completely out of context.



Fig.41: *Combat 84 Rapist/The Right To Choose*/Barry Prudom (Victory VIC2) 1983

Neo-Fascist punk does in fact utilise many of the musical and visual styles from Oi and Street Punk – in particular the chanted choruses, aggressive musical style and skinhead/boot boy image, though (in a similar fashion to Anarcho Punk) an explicit lyrical content and overt political stance defines Neo-Fascist output.⁶⁵ Given the secretive, largely underground nature of the movement, together with the legal restrictions on race-hate propaganda, it should not

65. The 1990s saw a shift in some sections of the Neo-Fascist music movement toward more 'traditional' forms, including folk music and ballads. Many of the lyrical concerns and expressions of these songs are outspokenly patriotic and right-wing, leading to the conclusion that lyrical sentiments are far more indicative of far-right politics than simply the musical structure itself.

be surprising that openly extreme lyrical and graphic messages are fairly rare. Key record releases that can be described as central to the Neo-Fascist Punk sub-genre include *Skrewdriver Back With A Bang* (1982), *White Power/Smash The IRA/Shove The Dove* (1983) and *Voice Of Britain* (1983). Other groups were more careful not to align themselves publicly with the far-right, but did go so far as to adopt strongly right-wing ideological positions. Although certain sentiments expressed might appear extreme, it should not be forgotten that in many cases they were also the views of a substantial section of the ruling Conservative party in government at the time, including many of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's closest political allies.

Imports

The role of imported records, in particular from the USA in the early 1980s, and their influence on the UK punk scene is quite difficult to ascertain. Ideas, visual and musical styles had been mutually exchanged across the Atlantic since the 1950s, and punk was to be no different. Although significant influences can be claimed on the development of early UK punk from the USA (particularly in 1960s garage bands and arthouse rock groups such as The Stooges, MC5 and Velvet Underground, and 1970s New York groups and artists such as Television, Patti Smith and The Ramones), the Second and Third Wave in the UK developed a fairly unique range of styles, and these in turn were very influential on the US music scene. The Damned's tour of the USA in April 1977 with US punks The Dead Boys would go on to have repercussions for years to come, particularly in the development of West Coast Hardcore styles in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The first UK punk group to visit the USA, The Damned's cartoon gothic style was more in keeping with US rock tastes than other First Wave UK acts, being – at least on first impression – not too dissimilar to shock rockers such as Kiss and Alice Cooper. Successful US cartoon punks The Dickies attributed their formation directly to seeing The Damned on this first tour, and many others cite it as a key moment in their development.



Fig.42: Dead Kennedys *California Über Alles/Man With The Dogs* (Fast Product FAST12) 1979

The US influence is again particularly evident in the development of UK Hardcore punk styles in the early 1980s, which drew inspiration from US West Coast acts such as the Dead Kennedys (see Figure 42) and Black Flag.⁶⁶ These groups' records were available in the UK either as Imports – releases on US labels which were distributed in the UK, often in fairly small quantities and at higher prices than domestic product – or licensed through a UK label

66. For further reading on the development of Hardcore in the USA, with particular reference to SST Records and the US independent scene of the late 1980s and early 1990s, see Azerrad (2003). For an overview of the graphic history of the movement, see *Fucked Up and Photocopied: Instant Art of the Punk Rock Movement* by Turcotte & Miller (2001).

for domestic release. For instance, Devo ran their own Booji Boy label in the USA and licensed their UK releases initially through Stiff Records, before signing with Virgin in the UK and Warners in the USA, and the Dead Kennedys released records on their own Alternative Tentacles label in the USA, but were released via a deal with Fast Product and subsequently Cherry Red in the UK. It is also important to note that some groups achieved a greater degree of success in the UK market than they might have done at home: Devo, The Dickies and Blondie all 'found' an audience, and subsequent chart success, in the UK before they gained any widespread recognition at home in the USA, and Brisbane group The Saints relocated from Australia to London in order to find a receptive audience.

One other key distinction must be made between those Imports of foreign groups and records, and the records of certain UK groups which were licensed abroad and subsequently imported back to the UK as collector's items. Some First Wave UK punk groups saw their records issued in overseas territories (including France, Germany, Holland, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South America) under license, usually with different sleeve artwork and occasionally featuring different tracks to UK releases. Some of these releases were relatively obscure even within the UK market, and a range of graphic devices were used in order to inform potential buyers that this was indeed UK punk product, from the depiction of safety pins and razor blades on the front of the sleeve to additional stickers and labels bearing the legend *Original Punk Rock!* or similar phrases. Imported Japanese issues became highly prized collector's items, often featuring a host of additional extras such as lyric sheets and posters, together with artwork in both the Japanese and English languages. One other key feature was the high quality pressing of Japanese releases – European rock and pop releases often used inferior grade vinyl, while Japanese pressings used more expensive virgin (new) vinyl, which was usually reserved for classical releases in the UK market. Although these adaptations for foreign release are of interest, in comparison to the domestic issues of the same records, it is not the intention here to study them in great depth, but instead to consider the graphic and musical influence on the UK punk market by the release of



Fig.43: Fartz *Because This Fuckin' World Stinks* e.p. (Fartz/Alternative Tentacles VIRUS21) 1981

imported records from the East Coast of the USA in the mid 1970s and the West Coast in the early 1980s. Key releases in the UK, either as imports or under local licence, include the entire record catalogues of the New York Dolls, Dead Boys and The Ramones, along with Richard Hell & The Voidoids *Blank Generation* (1976), The Weirdos *Destroy All Music* (1977), Middle Class *Out Of Vogue* (1978), Black Flag *Nervous Breakdown* (1978), Dead Kennedys *California*

Über Alles (1979) and *Holiday In Cambodia* (1980), *Fartz Because This Fuckin World Stinks* (1981) (see Figure 43) and Channel Three *I've Got A Gun* (1982).

4.2 Sound & 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 sub-generic punk communities. The next stage of this project aims to review the range of graphic codes and iconic devices present on a range of record sleeves across the sub-genres, 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.

Chapter Five: From “London’s Burning” to “Sten Guns in Sunderland”

Following the (initially adverse) media reaction, punk styles were adopted across the country, in part reflecting the major label appropriation and subsequent mass marketing of the movement. The chapter investigates the UK punk diaspora, together with the evolution of certain aspects of UK punk encompassing a form of social documentary, in the tradition of folk music and protest songs of earlier generations.

As UK punk developed through the late 1970s, and audiences became more familiar with the term, the diverse nature of many of its early exponents was to become more clearly defined. The uptake and reworking of punk style within the wider regions of the UK led to the development of new generic adaptations which extended the basic principles of punk in many new directions. This led to the establishment of broad groupings according to visual and/or musical style, instrumentation, and connections to other bands (shared gigs, personnel, record labels and management etc). These evolving punk sub-genres encompassed subtle distinctions in terms of musical approach, dress styles, political affiliations and music press definitions. The emergence of distinct sub-genres such as Anarcho Punk and Hardcore, which challenged political hierarchies and displayed a preoccupation with contemporary developments such as the Falklands War and the deployment of US nuclear missiles in Britain, reflected a new politicisation of young people away from the mainstream political parties.

5.1 Two Years Too Late

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. As Colegrave and Sullivan suggest, 1979 – and the election of Margaret Thatcher – signalled a distinct end of an era. They contend that the resounding right-wing majority in the British general election of

May 1979; “...meant that a percentage of the punk record-buying population actually voted Conservative: in other words, punk and all its intentions were now well and truly finished for pretty much everyone, beggars excluded. The Kings Road still attracted the punk minions but the whole style had transmogrified into an absurd caricature of itself. Now punk meant ridiculous six-inch-high Mohican hair-dos, facial tattoos, fake bondage and steel toecapped boots – and now, for the most part, the swastikas were for real. This was the year when everybody – Westwood and Lydon included – turned their back on punk. It had become the uniform of the stupid” (Colegrave and Sullivan 2001: 342).

This tidy historical cut-off point contrasts punk’s political message of radical individuality and autonomy with the mainstream electoral agenda of the Conservative party, and neatly coincides with the death of Sid Vicious in February the same year.⁶⁷ Though these events could be taken as significant to punk, and to the country as a whole, the logic of their use as dates by which to mark the end of punk as a fashion, music and style movement is questioned by Roger Sabin; “Most accounts take the termination point to be 1979, mainly because this is seen to be the moment at which it was overtaken by other youth movements (many of which it had helped spawn) – notably in the UK, the Two-Tone scene, the mod revival and New Romanticism – and by when, in counterpoint, punk had lost its energy and had been largely co-opted by the mainstream... Sid’s death has thus come to be seen as a symbolic full-stop. It’s also a convenient date because it saw a new kind of politics come to power in Britain in the form of the election of Mrs Thatcher’s Conservative government, and because, very simply, it caps off the decade” (Sabin 1999: 3). It should also come as no surprise if some punks had in fact voted for the Conservative party. As previously suggested, punk bands, writers and fans represented a diverse collection of individuals and groups, reflecting many social and political concerns which mirrored the nation as a whole.

The importance of the Sex Pistols and their influence on what was to come in late 1976/1977 should not be underestimated, and it is often necessary for a small ‘scene’ to develop without

67. Sid Vicious had become by this time a key figure in the growing mythology surrounding punk and had attained a status as an iconic figure in both the mainstream press and the music media. His fashion style, derived from a mixture of McLaren and Westwood’s guidance and a boot-boy/biker chic reminiscent of US band The Ramones, became a generic uniform for many punk fans, whilst his narcissistic personal adoption of an extreme version of the live fast, die young rock & roll myth provoked widespread publicity. He died of a heroin overdose in New York on 2nd February 1979 whilst awaiting trial for the suspected murder of his girlfriend, Nancy Spungen.

mainstream exposure in order to build a base, but the exclusive nature of the early London punk scene displayed something of a dichotomy; “Although a lot of criticism was thrown at the punk scene’s ‘cliquey-ness’, for myself (and, I reckon, most of the others involved in the original ‘first wave’ bands) – it was this separatism that made it all so special. Taking the piss out of the provincial new-comers was all part of the fun. Punk rock unofficially died on the day the national press got hold of it. Shame that” (Andy Blade (Eater), November 1997) (Stevenson 1999: 86). However, the benefits of reaching out to a wider audience helped to establish a fanbase for many early groups on the scene, as Vibrators singer Knox notes; “When we eventually started playing these towns outside London, it was a very powerful thing. We were knocking these songs out - bang, bang, bang! It had a big impact” (Robb 2006: 156)

Although some credit is often 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 The Hacienda nightclub, which opened in May 1982. There are in fact a great many 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.

Of course, it would be wrong to make a direct comparison between a wide range of punk bands and records without noting their wider impact and popularity within the commercial marketplace. Early releases by The Sex Pistols and The Stranglers sold in large quantities – reaching the national Top Ten chart for both singles and albums (The Stranglers achieving top five placings with each of their first three albums, and the Sex Pistols gaining a number one for their debut album, *Never Mind The Bollocks*). Sales figures in these cases were in the tens of thousands: records by other UK punk artists, particularly singles, sold in far lesser quantities, and in many cases did not even sell out of their initial pressings of perhaps less than 1,000 copies.

5.2 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 quick to recognise the business 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 ten 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 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 with releases by The Dickies and The Police. It is worth noting that WEA Records issued the first two major label releases by the Angelic Upstarts, *I’m An Upstart* and *Teenage Warning*, in both black and coloured vinyl versions. While the black vinyl versions were housed in a picture sleeve, the coloured vinyls were issued in simple clear plastic sleeves in order to highlight the limited edition, leaving punk record buyers with a particular dilemma as to which to purchase. The natural conclusion of this marketing style saw the second pressing of 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 (see Figure 44). Sales and marketing techniques such as this became important for labels attempting to promote Second Wave punk acts and to achieve chart placings, which could lead to further airplay, or even an appearance on Top Of The Pops. Appearances by the earlier punk groups on the BBC flagship chart show had been fairly rare: The Clash publicly refused to appear on the show, while the Sex Pistols only ever featured in a promotional film for their third single, *Pretty Vacant*, rather than in live – or mimed – performance. Interestingly, during the spring of 1979, two later singles by the (by now defunct) group, *Something Else* and *Silly Thing*, were played on the programme with an accompanying performance by the resident dance troupe, Legs & Co. Other early Punk and New Wave groups did appear on the programme, however, though the greater impact of the scene on the charts was not felt until 1978-79.⁶⁸

Some Second Wave groups managed to establish a loyal fan-base, but failed to reach a

68. The first directly punk-related appearance was by The Jam, on 19th May 1977, with their debut single *In The City* – although some proto punk groups such as Eddie & The Hot Rods had made appearances the previous Autumn. The Stranglers appeared a week later, performing *Go Buddy Go*, and both groups made regular appearances over the following three years. Other early punk appearances on the show included The Saints (July 1977), The Adverts and The Rods (August 1977), Generation X and the Boomtown Rats (September 1977), Elvis Costello and the Tom Robinson Band (November 1977), and The Banned (December 1977). A number of other punk groups made regular appearances, including Siouxsie & The Banshees (15 times), The Skids (12 times) Generation X (9 times), the UK Subs (7 times), X Ray Spex (3 times), The Rezillos (3 times), The Damned (3 times) and The Members (3 times). For further information see the TOTP search engine at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cgi-bin/totpperf/search.pl>

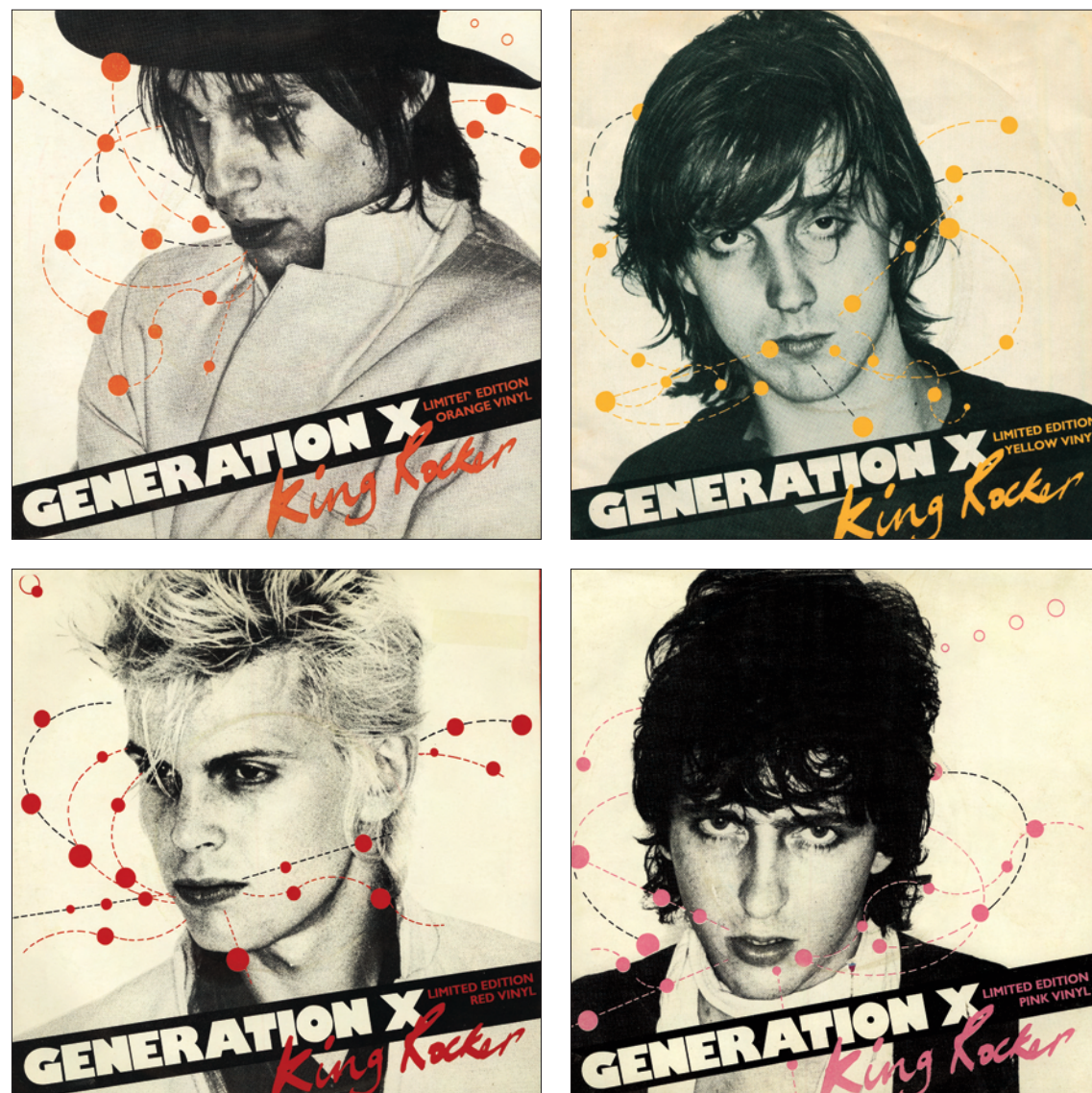


Fig.44: Generation X King Rocker/Gimme Some Truth (Limited group member sleeve and coloured vinyl edition) (Chrysalis CHS2261) 1979

broader record-buying public, and chart positions tended to be short-lived. This did work reasonably well for many groups; record sales were relatively consistent and, given the low overheads associated with the production and promotion of punk music, the group members could survive on at least a basic wage. It is also important to note that a chart entry and radio airplay, however short-lived, did at least mean that the record would be distributed fairly

widely to the mainstream retail outlets, thus ensuring a widely visible presence. As the sleeve notes to the second Cherry Red compilation album of independent singles, *Labels Unlimited* (Cherry Red 1979), noted with respect to its successful predecessor, *Business Unusual* released a year earlier; “*Business Unusual* was available throughout the U.K., and even nestled in the racks next to the K-Tels in branches of the hallowed WH Smiths.” The UK Subs, a Second Wave punk group who managed to achieve a surprising run of chart single and album successes between 1979 and 1981, and later became highly regarded as influential scene-leaders in the Third Wave, were also a case in point, as bass player Alvin Gibbs noted; “Whenever we released a record, our considerable following would go out on mass over the first couple of weeks to purchase enough copies to push the LP or single into the higher reaches of the charts. By the third week though, the sales would start to dry up and the title would start to slip, eventually, within a few weeks, to drop out of the top sixty” (Gibbs 1996: 235)

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.”⁶⁹ This satirical approach was reflected by Brighton New Wave group The Piranhas on their track *Coloured Music* (Attrix 1979), which questioned the purpose of coloured vinyl as being anything other than superficial decoration;

Colour is cool, hanging on your wall

Records are really neat

And every lump of wax is an artefact

Music is obsolete

69. In a typically self-referential style, the Television Personalities reference the O level – another group formed by TVP’s member Edward Ball – and *Read About Seymour*, the debut single by their friends the Swell Maps. The Lurkers were seen by some in the London punk elite as being symbolic of the dumbing down and mass popularisation of the genre.

This prevailing attitude led to something of a backlash against such blatant marketing techniques: Jake Burns of Second Wave punk band Stiff Little Fingers, who signed a contract with Chrysalis Records which stipulated that no coloured vinyl or alternative format versions of their records would be manufactured, later observed, “... *at the time there was a fad for coloured vinyl and picture disks and weird shaped things... it was almost like the whole packaging became more important than the record*” (Burns & Parker 2003: 67). 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*”⁷⁰ 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 range of Anarcho Punk groups heavily influenced by Crass themselves.

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, successfully capturing 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 independents 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

70. Quote taken from the sleevenotes to the retrospective Crass collection *Best Before 1984* (Crass Records 1995)

Simon Edwards of local independent Heartbeat Records to release their first record, is a good example of this genre: 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, selling 154,413 7" singles, 28,203 12" e.p.s, 50,220 LPs in the process, until they were forced to close following the collapse of their distributor Pinnacle Records.⁷¹ 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.

5.3 English Towns

The relationship between geographical location and authenticity with regard to popular music styles is long-standing, though discourse on the subject has been largely overlooked in favour of a style and authenticity debate centred on youth cultures and subcultural groups (Hebdige 1979 and 1988, Marcus 1989, Home 1995, Muggleton 2000). Although Jon Savage does make a case for the punk *diaspora* from 1978 onwards in his detailed history of the Sex Pistols (Savage 1991), the process is still described as one-way, in that authentic punk styles originating in London filtered out to the provinces. Much the same case is made by Dick Hebdige, who attempts to validate his own position regarding what he describes as ‘authentic’ “*originals*” and “*hangers-on*”, while Dave Muggleton adopts a more pluralistic attitude towards individual modes of ‘authentic’ participation. However, these models are all

71. Sales figures quoted by Simon Edwards, founder of Riot City Records, 11th March 2000. Interestingly, though seven inch single sales were the mainstay of the label in the early 1980s, by 1984 sales of this format were diminishing against an increase in popularity of the twelve inch e.p: “*1984 had started well with The Ejected releasing their third e.p., followed by what became the 29th and final 7" single release by the label, courtesy of The Varukers. Single sales had been disappointing and the decision was taken to cease production of the format while we were still ahead.*”
Riot City Records – A History at <http://www.heartbeat-productions.co.uk/riot/default.htm>

based on the perceptions of those involved in subcultural groups, and the physical geography of their locations relative to a perceived ‘centre’ is not discussed in any detail.

A study of the relationship between space, place and identity in popular music has a number of clear historical precedents. Jazz and Blues history tends to centre specific styles on regions such as New Orleans, the Mississippi Delta and Chicago, while country music has a spiritual home in Nashville, Tennessee. Memphis is widely attributed as the original base for Soul, Rhythm & Blues and Rock & Roll with the Stax label, Elvis Presley and BB King among many others. Detroit was home to Tamla Motown in the mid 1960s, while Surf Music originated from the beaches of Southern California and psychedelia from San Francisco. Jamaica is both the home of reggae as a distinct musical form, as well as the centre of its political and spiritual ideology. In the UK, Liverpool was seen as the centre of the ‘beat boom’, based around The Beatles in the early 1960s, and the ‘Merseybeat’ sound of groups such as Gerry & The Pacemakers and The Searchers became synonymous with the city.⁷² In the late 20th century, a heritage and tourism industry grew up around these locations, and the trend looks set to continue with Seattle as the centre of 1990s grunge, Manchester famous for the Factory Records and Hacienda club ‘Madchester’ scene, and ‘punk’ tours around London to see the sites of The Roxy, The Vortex and the 100 Club.⁷³

Roger Taylor’s exploration of the development of American jazz styles, and their resulting diaspora from the Southern States to the major cities, raises some interesting questions in relation to later forms of popular music. In *Art, An Enemy of the People*, Taylor argues that the status of jazz as a form of high art has denied the liberating and subversive potential of “...*an essentially proletarian form of expression*” (Sim 1992: 77), and that this application within a universal category has in turn “...*blunted a perception of jazz as particularity*” (Ibid: 81). Taylor’s detailed analysis of the styles of photographic portraiture of jazz groups and individual musicians in the early Twentieth Century still carries a resonance in the design of record sleeves for the rock and pop market. He identifies early group portraits as

72. In fact, even during the punk era, Liverpool retained this sense of harmony in its musical output – Simon Reynolds argues that “...*the city loves melody; always has and always will*”, while Bill Drummond, co-founder of Liverpool’s Zoo label, suggests that music from the city has to be more than simply tuneful, it has to be “...*a celebration*” (Reynolds 2005: 441), and that the resulting ‘Liverpool sound’ is therefore always based on pop harmonies and soaring choruses.

73. See Burgess & Parker (1999) and Wooldridge (2002).

often featuring nervous-looking performers, not used to being photographed, carrying their instruments and wearing the uniform of the band. As jazz spread and took in wider audiences, Taylor suggests that the image of the musicians also evolved, towards an “...*air of social acceptability... induced by a conscious photographic style. The bands are posed. It is no longer sufficient to have everyone present and so make sure that they can be seen. The content of the photograph is now neatly arranged*” (Ibid: 82). A further development featured photographs of the musicians in simulated performance – the formal pose now undermined by an expression of informality, and a music “...*which is of ‘now’, which is fashionable, which repudiates the past*” (Ibid: 82). These visual tropes – the uniformed group, the successful performer and the group in (staged) performance – would form a central theme in the development of the pop record sleeve from the 1950s onwards, and can still be seen widely within music packaging and promotion today. Certainly the marketing of groups through dress codes (uniforms) and images ‘in performance’ carry some resonance across a wide range of record sleeves, including those of a number of punk groups within this study. Also, the attitudes of photographic subjects, from early examples of nervous amateurs, unused to being photographed, to later, more confident ‘performers’, could be seen to be mirrored in those examples of punk sleeves featuring photographs of the group – a visual trope which is discussed further in **Chapter Six: Design Strategies**.

However, the extent to which Taylor’s wider argument might be applied to the punk rock genre is rather questionable. While parallels may be drawn with the aesthetic nature of group photography, and the changes in both musical form and status resulting from a transition from regional (or rural) areas to the major commercial centres (or vice versa, in the case of UK punk), other values applied to jazz cannot be said to be mirrored in punk. Firstly, the shift in perception of jazz from authentic proletarian form to high art is not reflected in the evolution of punk – although the genre has, more recently, been seen as a valid form for investigation and academic scrutiny, its wider public image remains (at best) underground, and later punk developments such as Oi and Hardcore Punk seldom, if ever, figure on the

academic radar. Much Third Wave punk remains a resolutely, and self-consciously, ‘working class’ form of expression: in fact, this theme could be said to form part of the divide between what was to become known as ‘Post Punk’ and the other UK punk sub-genres. While some avant-garde punk and Post Punk artists made moves towards recognition within wider artistic circles (Wire, Gang Of Four, Public Image Ltd), many Third Wave punk groups presented themselves as an authentic ‘voice of the street’. Similarly, punk’s public profile slipped further from view over time, rather than coming to greater prominence, and the evolution of new punk styles in the regions remains largely hidden from view. It may be the case that punk’s peculiar blend of provocation and amateurism make it a particularly unique form of popular music, and that parallels with other genres can only ever be oblique in nature.

5.3 Provincial Voices

The oral traditions of folk music, together with regional forms of music and speech or dialect, are explored in a comprehensive overview of the geography of popular music by John Connell and Chris Gibson, entitled *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place* (Routledge 2003). By mapping the notion of ‘authenticity’ within a geographical and historical model, the authors are able to draw parallels between ancient forms of local musical identity and contemporary, mass-produced commercial rock music. Citing performers such as Bruce Springsteen, Midnight Oil and Cypress Hill, the authors note; “...*more generally, where any form of popular music has provided some link with place and community (including the fans), displayed some sense of history, or claimed some heritage (in instruments, local performers or ethnicity) and evoked lived experience there have been claims to authenticity*” (Connell & Gibson 2003: 43). They go on to note that “...*various slippages always occur, as ‘authenticity’ starts to blend in with what might (for want of a better word) be described as ‘credibility’*” (Ibid: 44). Equally, song lyrics may historically refer to place names, but these are often as much for their poetic or rhythmic qualities as for any sense of specific location. While the towns along Route 66 provided a geography of early rock & roll, “...*the resonance and timbre*

of the words were at least as important as the character and location of the places; onomatopoeia thus contributed to new musical geographies, and states such as Georgia benefited from their disproportionate presence in the lyrics of popular music” (Ibid: 72). Connell and Gibson go on to suggest that references to other small towns and rural areas in popular songs are often made for comic purposes, rather than for any sense of ‘realism’.⁷⁴ Arguably, punk’s adoption of the local vernacular reverses this pattern: one classic example which displays a wry sense of humour whilst documenting the real lives of local people is the Ramones November 1977 single *Rockaway Beach*, which takes the musical and lyrical codes of the (Californian) Beach Boys *Surfin’ USA* and reapplies them to the East Side beaches of New York;

Chewing out a rhythm on my bubble gum
The sun is out and I want some
It's not hard, not far to reach
We can hitch a ride to Rockaway Beach

Connell and Gibson do make some attempt to link between the visual elements related to particular styles of music and a perceived sense of place. As they assert, representation of artists on record covers changed over time from a simple image of the performer to a more elaborate set of visual codes; “*Early record sleeves usually depicted performers, but dress and demeanour were important, maintaining the themes of publicity photographs; country and western performers wore ‘country clothes’ (usually including Stetson hats and boots) and rock ‘n’ roll bands wore black leather... In the 1960s, the era of counter-culture, vast numbers of bands cavorted waist deep in cornfields or otherwise indulged in rustic splendours. This legacy of the folk revival celebrated community and vernacular culture: reflections of the discontents of modernity. Two decades later rappers and punk bands struck angry poses in the graffiti- and garbage-ridden streets of the inner city*” (Connell & Gibson 2003: 84). While their case does offer a generic visual contrast between different popular music subcultures, the stereotype of

74. In the early 1980s, Billy Bragg, formerly vocalist with Romford punk group Riff Raff, began a solo career as a punk/folk protest singer. Among his early repertoire was a rendition of the song *Route 66* repositioned as a journey across Essex to Southend. The revised song lyric, re-titled *A13 Trunk Road To The Sea*, takes in “*Grays Thurrock, Basildon, Pitsea, Thundersley, Hadleigh, Leigh-On-Sea, Chalkwell and Prittlewell*”, before continuing on to Southend and the beach at Shoebury Ness.

the punk urban landscape is one visual trope among many, as will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Like their rock and pop forebears, punk groups were affected by their immediate surroundings, taking on aspects of the local musical vernacular, whether consciously or not. One aspect of the musical development of the UK Hardcore punk sub-genre should also not be overlooked: the popular cultural history of the West Midlands and its connections to the development of Heavy Metal. “*While punk was ambiguously related to economic depression in the inner city, deindustrialisation was a key context for Heavy Metal music, at least in the United States. Originating in the declining English West Midlands in the 1970s, metal found its largest American audiences in the declining industrial towns of the Midwest and North-East, and most of the audience were working-class youth*” (Connell & Gibson 2003: 79). Hardcore appropriated certain aspects of the Heavy Metal form – in particular extreme volume and heavy guitar ‘riffing’ in a similar style to early 1970s groups such as Black Sabbath, a group often cited as central to the development of the Heavy Metal genre. Indeed, some punk musicians moved between the two genres – Grantham Hardcore group English Dogs plied a crossover blend of punk and Heavy Metal, with the punk emphasis of their early career on Clay Records (on releases such as their debut e.p. *Mad Punx & English Dogs*) overtaken by a shift toward full-blown metal by the mid 1980s (as on their *Metalmorphosis* e.p. of 1986).⁷⁵ Other groups on the Clay roster, including Hardcore scene-leaders GBH and Discharge, cited influences from Heavy Metal (such as Black Sabbath and Motörhead) as well as the punk canon – original Discharge guitarist Bones (Anthony Roberts) left the group to form Broken Bones in 1983, again exploring the potential crossover between the genres to successful effect. Musicians had been crossing between the genres for some time – Motörhead bassist Lemmy had been involved in the early punk scene around Stiff Records, at one stage playing bass with The Damned, while subsequent Damned bassist Algie Ward left the group in 1980 to join Heavy Metal outfit Tank. The Clay label also released records by Heavy Metal group Demon (whose sleeve graphics bore striking similarities to those of Discharge), while the

75. Guitarist Gizz Butt, a teenage member of UK punk Third Wave band The Destructors and founder member of punk/Heavy Metal crossover group English Dogs in the early 1980s, could be seen onstage in the mid 1990s as guest guitarist with the massively successful techno dance act The Prodigy.

label Rondelet, which had originally been associated with the New Wave of British Heavy Metal,⁷⁶ signed punk groups Anti Pasti, The Fits and Special Duties. While the new metal genre could not be said to be a solely northern English movement – major NWOBHM group Iron Maiden came from London, for instance – the roots of earlier metal in the north west did lead to a strong sense of connection, and a wide fanbase for the new metal and punk/metal crossover groups emerged in those regions.

As Connell and Gibson suggest, the relationship between Heavy Metal and what they term the “*declining industrial towns*” of the Midlands and Northern regions of the UK, led to a distinct cultural context for music from those areas. While musicians would be influenced by what had gone before, audiences also had certain prior expectations for local music (and this applies equally to venues, promoters, and even the kind of stock in local record shops). Punk music always had a tendency toward rock guitar styles which utilised volume and distortion, and as such the crossover to Heavy Metal was not that much of a distance to travel. It should come as no surprise, then, that the parallel developments of Hardcore and Thrash Metal should arise in the North and West Midlands, or that a local support system and sympathetic audience should exist in those areas. Outside of their localities, however, the originators of Hardcore styles had a certain amount of work to do in order to win over audiences and critics. I can recall seeing Discharge at the Lyceum Ballroom in London in November 1980, on a bill with Killing Joke and Fad Gadget. The gig was only the group’s third outside of the North West (though they had supported U2 at the same venue a month earlier!), and the audience were slightly stunned and bemused by the unfamiliar barrage of sheer noise that the group created. Following mixed reviews in the press – music journalist Simon Dwyer described them as “*...a caricature of a punk band*” and their version of punk as “*...monochromatic, blunt, and macho, rather than bright, incisive and sensual*” (“*We Make Noise Not Music!*”, *Sounds* 1981) – the group secured a place on the Apocalypse Now Tour with The Exploited, the Anti Nowhere League, Anti Pasti and Chron Gen. When I saw them again at the same venue six months later, they had made the Top Ten in the independent chart and

76. The New Wave of British Heavy Metal, or NWOBHM, emerged in the late 1970s, in part as a reaction to the decline of traditional 1970s heavy metal bands such as Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple and Black Sabbath. It was also affected by the growth of the punk movement, with many groups taking on certain elements of the punk style, particularly an emphasis on speed and volume and the potential for DIY record releases. Leading names in the early movement include Iron Maiden, Def Leppard, Girlschool, Saxon, Motörhead, and Judas Priest, though hundreds of smaller groups released records under the NWOBHM banner.

were being presented as leading figures in the new Hardcore punk movement. It is also interesting to note that a crossover existed between sections of the Oi movement and the Heavy Metal scene. The Cockney Rejects formed a close alliance with rock group UFO and recorded the heavy rock album *The Power & The Glory* in 1982 before moving into full-blown metal with the albums *The Wild Ones* (1982) and *Rock The Wild Side* (1984). The group also contributed a cover of an old ZZ Top song, *Francine*, to the *Total Noise* compilation e.p. in 1983 under the pseudonym Dead Generation. The e.p. was strongly promoted by Garry Bushell at *Sounds*, and was intended to be the first in a series of Oi, Punk and Metal crossover releases, though this failed to actually come about.

Other regions can perhaps lay claim to specific developments in punk style, or even to the establishment of new sub-genres. The Pop Group, from Bristol, are credited with the development of a particular blend of dub reggae, dance, funk and punk. Connell and Gibson cite the notion of the ‘Bristol sound’ of the 1990s as a specific musical genre, and while they do not acknowledge the history of The Pop Group as precursors, the involvement of members of groups such as Massive Attack and Portishead in the earlier Bristol punk scene has been widely documented. Sheffield and Leeds can also lay claim to specific Post Punk scenes, with the electronic sounds of The Human League and Cabaret Voltaire and the agit-pop of the Gang Of Four, Mekons and Delta 5 respectively. Ireland produced an interesting range of groups largely in the ‘pop punk’ mould – the most famous being The Undertones and Stiff Little Fingers in the North and The Boomtown Rats and Radiators From Space in the South.⁷⁷ It is interesting to note that the cultural conditions of the location, and specifically the political divide in Northern Ireland, were cited by various Irish punk musicians as central to their musical as well as their lyrical development. Jake Burns, singer with Stiff Little Fingers, recalls; “...*Belfast was quite cut off because of the Troubles. Bands just didn’t come over and play, apart from Rory Gallagher who used to come pretty regularly. Bands in Northern Ireland were like human juke-boxes... To be fair, it was the only way they could get a gig. There were a couple of local bands that were playing better stuff. We had the luxury of being so young that*

77. For further reading, see O'Neill & Trelford (2003) and Robb (2006).

we didn’t have to work: we could be snotty and play what we wanted to” (Robb 2006: 91).

However, when they began playing live themselves, Stiff Little Fingers still relied heavily on cover versions of well-known punk songs – a model followed by many other Irish punk groups – which might indicate that although the music had changed, the notion of the human juke-box showbands playing chart hits had not. Similar geographical and cultural conditions may also be the reason behind Scotland’s success with the ‘pop punk’ format. Both The Rezillos (from Edinburgh) and The Skids (from Dundee) scored national chart hits between 1978 and 1980, while other early Scottish punk groups such as The Subs, PVC2, The Zones and The Valves gained critical praise in the music press. Scotland also figured in punk’s Third Wave success, with Edinburgh’s The Exploited at the forefront of the movement, though by this time punk identities were more firmly fixed, and the genre was recognised as potentially profitable by local promoters and venues.

Rural themes also came further to the fore during the Third Wave of UK punk. A compilation e.p. on the Subhumans’ own Bluurg label, *Wessex ‘82*, included a photograph of the ancient chalk horse cut into the landscape at Westbury Hill, Wiltshire (see Figure 45). This image locates the record in a specific area, and the link to a historical and cultural icon gives the label a strong regional identity. The use of the term Wessex was in itself a political statement, since the region had been broken up after the Norman conquest of 1066, and many local people have since campaigned for its restoration as a distinct region of England. A number of Anarcho Punk groups and labels were based in rural locations, later crossing over with both the Hardcore Crust traveller scene and the emerging ‘folk punk’ movement which involved groups such as The Dancing Did from Worcestershire and The Mekons in the early 1980s, before finding major success through Dexys Midnight Runners (fronted by Kevin Rowland, formerly of Birmingham punk group The Killjoys) and Irish emigres The Pogues – who included ex-members of punk groups The Nipple Erectors and The Radiators From Space in their ranks.⁷⁸

78. Dexys Midnight Runners and The Pogues drew upon their Celtic and Irish roots, updating traditional folk sounds by imbuing them with a punk spirit and building a strong reputation as live performers. Dexys achieved chart success in the early 1980s, transforming their sound to embrace Northern Soul, Celtic folk and pop, while The Pogues eventually found a huge global market for their Irish emigré anthems across the Atlantic. Meanwhile, groups such as the Dancing Did, Blyth Power, The Men They Couldn't Hang and The Mekons were part of a folk punk underground which saw a back-to-basics approach to live music, with the latter groups playing numerous benefit gigs for striking miners during 1984 and 1985.



Fig. 45: Wessex '82 e.p.: Subhumans: *No Thanks*/Pagans: *Wave Goodbye To Your Dreams*/Organised Chaos: *Victim*/A Heads: *No Rule* (Blurg Records FISH1) 1982

5.5 Suburban Studs

The notion of suburbia also features in the history of British rock and pop from the 1960s onwards, and was to be a key element in the foundation of a punk perspective on the city. Suburbia, on the fringes of the city, had been defined in rock mythology as “...a place of contempt and comedy, at least in the British music of the 1960s, with the Kinks’ ‘Well Respected

Man’ (1966) and Manfred Mann’s ‘Semi-detached Suburban Mr James’ (1966)... Suburbia exuded unfashionability and boredom; glamour and excitement necessitated transcending the suburbs” (Connell & Gibson 2003: 75). Connell and Gibson go on to chart the reworking of this metaphorical suburbia in the 1990s songs of Blur and Suede, though they place punk within the city itself, as a voice of protest “...represent[ing] angry inner-city opposition to the global and national economic and political crises that had produced high levels of unemployment in the capitals of Western nations” (Ibid: 77). UK punk’s love/hate relationship with suburbia was far more deeply felt: from the Sex Pistols *Satellite* (a song about a suburban fan – in which the singer sneers “...you know I don’t like where you come from, it’s just a satellite of London”), to the adoption of the ‘Bromley contingent’ of fans from the suburbs of South London as pioneers of punk fashion. The picture of suburbia represented within early punk is overtly negative in tone, with the suburbs depicted as a place of boredom, sterility and conservative repression – what The Clash described in their 1978 song *The Prisoner* as;

...the day to day saga of working people
Hanging out the washing and clipping coupons
And generally being decent

However, by the time The Members had a top twenty hit in February 1979 with the uplifting pop punk anthem *Sound Of The Suburbs* – a song which was to become something of a New Wave classic – suburban areas were being represented in a more positive light by punk’s Second Wave,⁷⁹ at least as a catalyst to action, as The Buzzcocks note in the 1980 single *Running Free*;

Here in suburbia
There’s nothing left to see
Just want to spend my time running free

79. Also The Skids *Sweet Suburbia* (1978), Siouxsie & The Banshees *Suburban Relapse* (1979) and the use of the metaphor as a derogatory term in The Business *Suburban Rebels* (1983).

The gradual shift in punk's emphasis from London to the regions is reflected in the lyrical concerns of certain punk records produced across the period, as well as in visual and textual references on record sleeves. Early examples of punk recordings based on a developing London scene included The Stranglers *London Lady* (1977), The Vibrators *London Girls* (1977), The Maniacs *Chelsea '77* (1977), Television Personalities *Oxford Street W1* and *Posing At The Roundhouse* (1978), Menace *GLC* (1978) and a number of songs by The Clash, including *London's Burning*, *Clash City Rockers*, *White Man In Hammersmith Palais* and *London Calling* (1977-79). Others from outside the metropolis also recorded songs about life and locations in the city, such as The Jam (from Woking) *In The City*, *Carnaby Street*, *A-Bomb In Wardour Street* (1977-78), The Members (from Camberley, Surrey) *Solitary Confinement* (1978) and The Lurkers (from Ickenham, Middlesex) whose debut album was entitled *Fulham Fallout* (1978). Other examples of a direct association with the metropolis include band names such as London SS, Chelsea and London (see Figure 46), and later bands such as London Px, London Cowboys, Local Heroes SW9 and the Leyton Buzzards. The Television Personalities' Kings Road records made direct reference to the street in West London which was becoming increasingly popular as a punk gathering place. While The Maniacs were celebrating the area around the Kings Road on their single *Chelsea '77*, The Vibrators *London Girls* (see Figure 47) features a photograph of a young girl in front of a sex shop window, next to a small plaque declaring "Kings Road, Borough of Chelsea, SW3".

It should also be noted that the Oi subculture in particular had strong connections to south and east London, to the extent that the 'Cockney' accent became something of a cliché within that sub-genre: indeed, if all the Oi groups who referenced their Cockney roots were genuine, then east London must have been almost entirely populated by heavily-accented skinheads in the early 1980s. The East End origins of groups such as the Cockney Rejects (see Figure 48), Cock Sparrer and the East End Baddoes, as well as their outspoken allegiances to local football teams such as West Ham and Millwall (and their hooligan followers), saw a particularly influential strand of Oi which celebrated east London locations, football teams



Fig.46: London *No Time/Siouxsie Sue/Summer Of Love/Friday On My Mind* (MCA MCA319) 1977

and people.⁸⁰ Some of these styles drew on the traditions of Music Hall, in particular the 'coster singers' of the late nineteenth century. These entertainers, such as Alec Hurley (who had a hit song with an early version of *The Lambeth Walk*) and Albert Chevalier, combined comedy routines with singalong songs pitched in the style of the costermonger or 'Cockney barrow boy'. Many 'coster' traditions, such as the highly decorated costumes of the 'Pearly

80. For explicit examples, see Sham 69 *The Cockney Kids Are Innocent* (1978) and The Cockney Rejects *East End*, *The Greatest Cockney Rip Off*, *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles* (from the West Ham football terrace chant), *West Side Boys* and *We Are The Firm* (1979-1980).

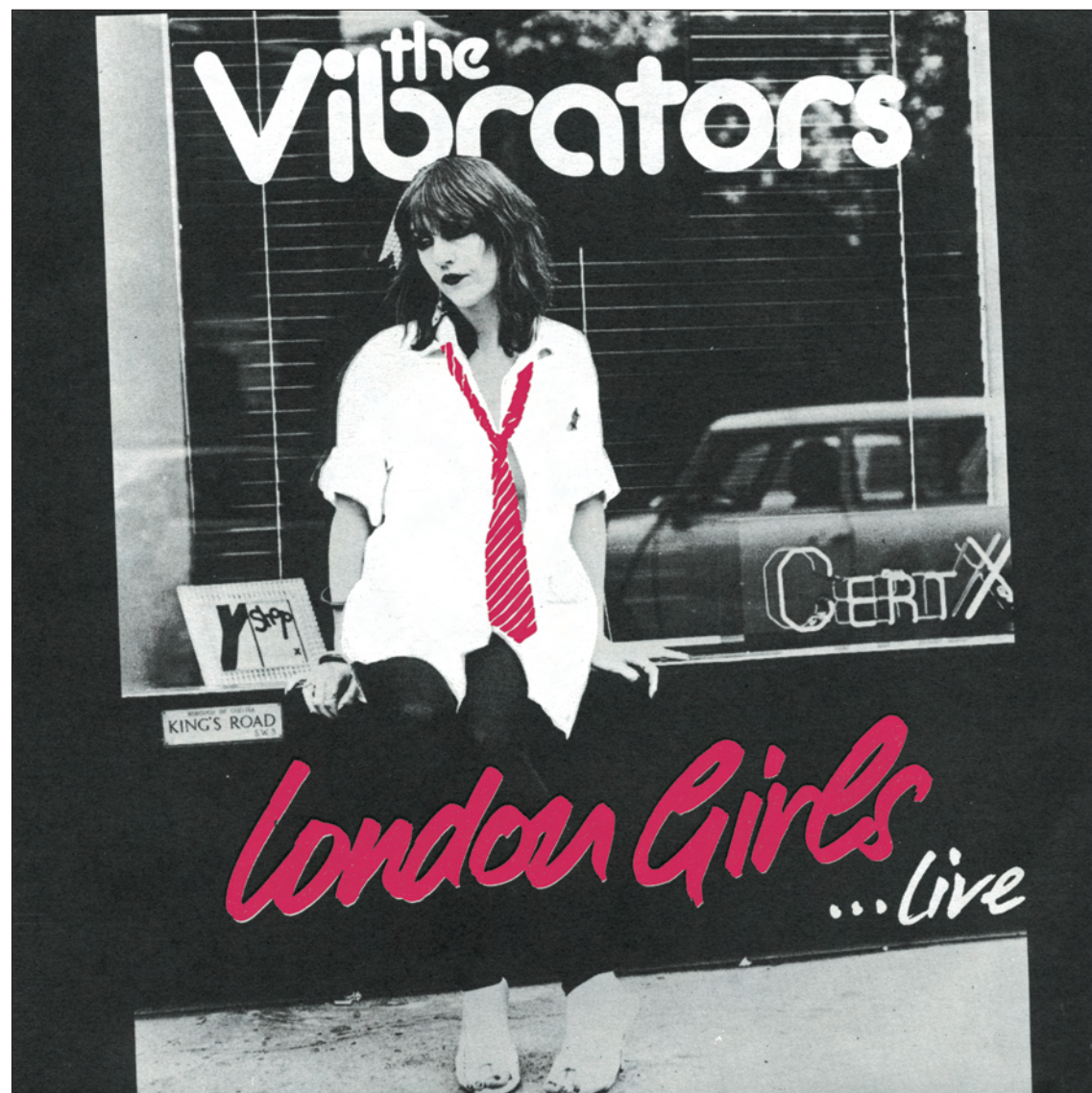


Fig.47: The Vibrators *London Girls (live)*/Stiff Little Fingers (Epic SEPC5565) 1977

Kings and Queens' have continued to this day, and pub singalongs preserve some of the traditional songs. Within popular music, songwriters and performers such as skiffle singer Lonnie Donegan (whose *My Old Man's A Dustman* was a 1960 number one hit), comic variety duo Chas & Dave,⁸¹ and New Wave groups Squeeze and Ian Dury & The Blockheads continued the theme. In the early 1980s, popular Oi artists such as The Gonads and Frankie Flame did

81. Pianist Chas Hodges and guitarist Dave Peacock had been playing as session musicians since the 1960s when they formed the comic duo Chas & Dave around 1974. Their humorous compositions, including titles such as *Boiled Beef And Carrots*, *Ponders End Allotments Club* and *One Fing 'N' Annuver* led to a deal with EMI and numerous Top Twenty hits including *Gertcha*, *Rabbit* and *Ain't No Pleasing You* followed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Interestingly, they have retrospectively come into the Punk/Oi fold, having appeared as special guests at the Wasted punk festival in Morecambe, Lancashire in 2004 and 2005, alongside Oi stalwarts such as the Cockney Rejects, Sham 69 and the Angelic Upstarts.

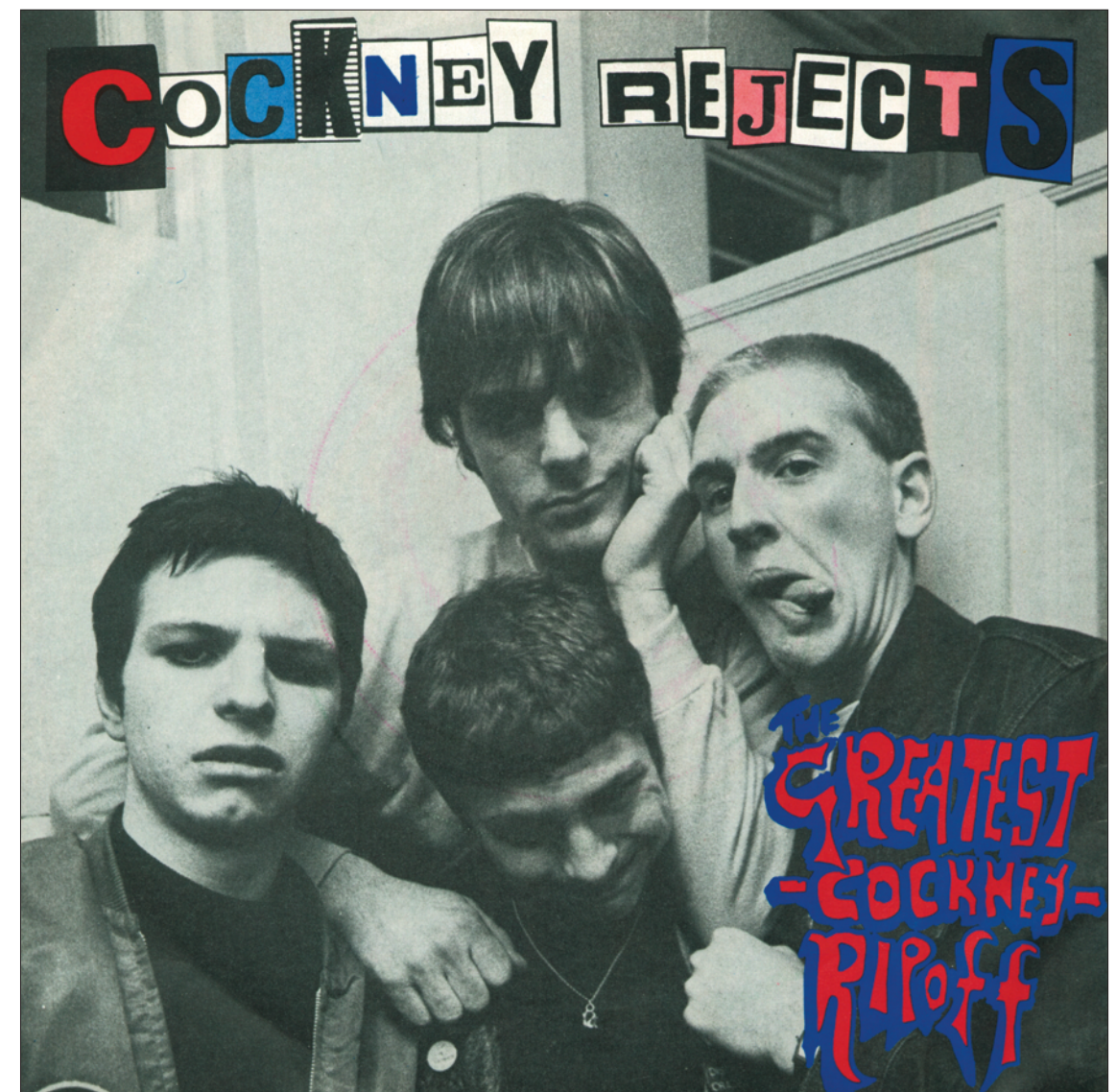


Fig.48: Cockney Rejects *The Greatest Cockney Rip Off/Hate Of The City* (Zonophone Z2) 1980

attempt to link to these traditions, with the latter performing a repertoire of classic Oi songs on the piano at the Firkin chain of pubs.

As David Laing notes, another important precursor of many punk vocal styles and song structures was the “...chorus singing on several hits of the early 1970s” (Laing 1985: 59). He goes

on to cite John Lennon’s Plastic Ono Band (which married the singalong styles of nursery rhymes and pub songs with the chanting of political protests), and early Glam Rockers including Slade (who had 17 chart hits between 1971 and 1976) and Gary Glitter. Glam Rock continued this structural theme, but embraced ‘football terrace’ style chants in the choruses – another development which was taken to its logical conclusion with the preponderance of football songs in the early 1970s, sung by various football teams backed by well-known Glam Rock musicians. The East London Oi style adopted both the ‘football chant’ choruses of Glam Rock, and an even more affected London accent, embracing the traditions of East End cockney rhyming slang and lyrical clichés. This vocal style became a characteristic of many Oi releases, although its natural adoption by East Londoners the Cockney Rejects and Cock Sparrer could be said to be undermined by the stylised mimicking of Oi groups from farther afield. Journalist Garry Bushell’s championing of the East End as historically the home of a kind of ‘salt of the earth’ English working class should not be overlooked as a guiding influence in this regionally-specific pigeonholing, particularly as he was also central to the promotion of Oi in the music press.

It is also interesting to note the diversification of regional accents in punk vocal styles across the First, Second and Third Waves. Although some early UK punk groups did adopt the vocal nuances of generic rock music of the early to mid 1970s – what David Laing terms a ‘mid-Atlantic’ style of accentuation and delivery – many more followed Johnny Rotten and Joe Strummer’s examples and sang in a fairly neutral ‘British’ voice. As Laing points out, this may seem to signify the ‘ordinary’ language of the street, but the result was paradoxical: the ‘everyday’ language of mainstream rock was a mid-Atlantic American accent, and “...*what was ordinary in the streets became extraordinary on record and on radio*” (Laing 1985: 58). A minority of early punk and New Wave singers did retain regional accents – notably Fay Fife of The Rezillos (from Edinburgh), Richard Jobson of The Skids (from Dunfermline, Scotland), and Feargal Sharkey of The Undertones (from Derry, Northern Ireland) – but it is worth noting that these groups were all promoted (at least in part) as embodying a distinct regional

or national identity. Perhaps the ultimate example of this trend might be Welsh punk group Llygod Ffyrnig (‘Ferocious Mice’), formed in Llanelli in December 1977. Their sole vinyl release, *N.C.B.* (the initials of the National Coal Board), backed with two tracks *Sais* and *Cariad Y Bus Stop*, came out on their own Pwdwr Records label in 1978, and was sung in the Welsh language. A number of other Welsh punk groups made it to vinyl over the ensuing years, the most successful being Anhrefn – the first Welsh language band to receive any kind of mainstream attention – and New Wave group The Alarm (formerly going by the name The Toilets in their native Rhyl), who went on to have a number of chart hits in the mid 1980s.

First and Second Wave English punk groups largely adopted the ‘London’ vocal style – notable exceptions include The Buzzcocks and The Fall from Manchester – and it was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that a more disparate range of accents came to the fore. West Country groups such as the Cult Maniax (from Torrington, Devon), Demob (Gloucester), Chaos UK, Disorder and Chaotic Dischord (all from Bristol) sang in heavily accented, though generally not affected, ‘regional’ styles, as did northern groups such as the Angelic Upstarts (South Shields), Abrasive Wheels (Leeds), Anti Social (Blackpool), Discharge (Stoke) and Anti Pasti (Derby). Several West Country thrash punk groups did move into humourous West Country self parody with a number of their later releases, as evidenced by tracks such as Disorder’s *Buy I Gurt Pint*, Chaos UK’s *Farmyard Boogie* and Chaotic Dischord’s *Anarchy In Woolworths, And There Wuz Cows* and *Get Off My Fuckin’ Allotment*.⁸² Scottish accents were again represented in Third Wave punk, though in an even more extreme style – The Exploited (from East Kilbride) achieved strong national chart success, even though singer Wattie Buchan’s lyrics were often indecipherable to the population at large. Later on, examples of ‘provincial’ songwriting became more widespread, with Second and Third Wave punk lyrics describing life in towns and cities across the UK. Second Wave examples include Stiff Little Fingers (from Belfast) *Suspect Device*, *Alternative Ulster*, *Wasted Life*, *State Of Emergency*, *Barbed Wire Love* (all reflecting the troubles in Northern Ireland) (1978-79), The Fall (from Manchester) *In My Area* and *Leave The Capitol* (1978), The Panik (from Manchester) *It Won’t*

82. Chaotic Dischord began life as a comic sideshoot of successful Third Wave Bristol group Vice Squad. Featuring members of the group and their road crew, the group did the live sound checks prior to Vice Squad’s gigs, and recorded some deliberately offensive songs in studio down time, mainly as a parody of the developing thrash punk scene. Their debut album, *Fuck Religion, Fuck Politics, Fuck The Lot Of You*, released in 1983, deliberately set out to offend anyone listening with a combination of tuneless thrash and childish poetry about glue sniffing. The album sold in considerable quantities, with later recordings moving ever further into a comic punk take on The Wurzels.

Sell e.p. on the Rainy City label with the provocative note printed on the label “*We’re so bored with London*” (1977), and The Prefects (from Birmingham) *Bristol Road Leads To Dachau* and *Barbarellas* (about racial problems in the local area and a tribute to the local punk venue respectively) (1978).

Third Wave punk groups often referred directly to their local towns, music scenes and venues, in lyrics and song titles, and occasionally in their sleeve graphics. Many single sleeves included thanks and credits to local friends and fans of the bands, with some groups going so far as to recognise their local scenes in song: one such example was the track *Livi Punkz*, by The Skroteez on their debut *Overspill e.p.*, a tribute to their local crowd in the Scottish new town of Livingston (see Figure 49).⁸³ Sometimes local references were made in more negative terms – another track on The Skroteez e.p., *New Town*, includes the biting lyric “*They should blow it up, or else burn it all down!*”, and the single sleeve shows an aerial photograph of Livingston itself, an ‘overspill’ estate to the south west of the city of Edinburgh. The phrase New Town was a generic name given to a number of post war urban developments designed to offer modern accommodation and workplaces to the former residents of Britain’s inner cities: some were actually designated New Towns by the government, but the term was also adopted more broadly to describe a number of other late Twentieth Century large urban schemes. Official New Town developments included Basildon, Crawley, Harlow, Stevenage, Newton Aycliffe and Welwyn Garden City during the first wave of construction (c1940s-1950s), and Northampton, Peterborough, Milton Keynes and Telford in later schemes (c1960s). Unfortunately the dream living spaces envisaged by the planners were to become fraught with social problems and a perceived lack of community amongst the local population. It is worth noting that many of the twenty-two designated New Towns in the UK produced their own punk groups, particularly during the Third Wave period, including the Newtown Neurotics (Harlow), Anorexia (Hemel Hempstead), The Destroyers (Peterborough), The Membranes and The Genocides (Central Lancashire) and Uproar (Peterlee).⁸⁴

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83. The spelling of the word Punkz here follows a convention developed across many Third Wave releases in the form of group credits: tributes would often be paid to the local “punx” or “crew” who followed the band.
84. There were also a number of links to earlier punk records: First Wave punk group The Slits recorded a song entitled *New Town* in 1979, and the Newtown Neurotics produced a lyrical re-interpretation of the classic Members 1978 single *Solitary Confinement* (itself a song dealing with alienation in the big city), entitled *Living with Unemployment* in 1983 – the sentiment in this case changing from a sense of personal isolation to one of desperation.



Fig.49: Skroteez *Overspill e.p.*: Newtown/Who’s Law/Livi Punkz (Square Anarchy SPILL1) 1982

The territorial allegiances of many punk groups and fans resulted in two particular, and opposing, emergent themes in the late 1970s. Firstly, dress codes which marked out punk fans and made them particularly visible did allow some sense of shared community identity to develop: punks travelling from town to town would often approach groups of local punks to find out more about the local scene, record shops and venues etc. Conversely, there was a

great deal of rivalry between adjacent towns, in a similar fashion to that displayed by local football supporters. It does seem to be the case that local punks would often be far more tolerant and open with strangers coming into town than with their own near neighbours. Music journalist John Robb, who published a music fanzine and played in punk bands in and around Preston in Lancashire in the late 1970s and early 1980s, describes the rivalry between local scenes as a virtual battleground, exacerbated by the way that provincial punks were often ostracised by their communities far more directly than in the big cities: *“Because of the virtual siege mentality, scenes were bound to get very clannish and every town in Britain is pretty clannish anyway – everyone always hates the town that’s just next to them; it used to be Blackpool v Morecambe v Preston punks in a bizarre punk rock civil war! Also punk rock seemed to be about describing who you were and where you were in the world, and that was reflected in the music and the artwork. Songs that describe someone’s life and their world are always much more interesting than generic pap. After years of American reference points like Route 66 it’s great to get a record that celebrates Scunthorpe!”* (Interview with the author, 2nd September 2004). This also demonstrates an important point with regard to locality and punk: while many groups recorded songs which were critical of the ‘boredom’ of their immediate surroundings, a sense of celebration of the local punk scene was often also evident. It is also interesting to note that some groups – notably The Boomtown Rats and Radiators From Space (both from Dublin) and Stiff Little Fingers (from Belfast) faced strong criticism from their local punk scenes for ‘deserting’ the area and relocating to London to boost their careers – thus breaking two unspoken punk codes of conduct: turning their backs on their original supporters and pursuing a commercial agenda.⁸⁵

The Cult Maniax, from Torrington in Devon, gained some local notoriety in 1982 with the release of their *Frenzie* e.p., featuring the track *Black Horse* which documented the group members’ series of disagreements with a local pub landlord.⁸⁶ Other songs such as *Colchester Council* (1980) by Special Duties and *Nottingham Problem* (1983) by Resistance 77 targeted local government policy and the lack of venues for bands to play in their local areas. The

85. Conversely, groups such as The Rezillos (from Edinburgh) and The Undertones (from Derry) cite the fact that they remained close to their hometown as having had a negative effect on their long-term musical careers. See also O'Neill & Trelford (2003) and Robb (2006).
86. Only around 200 copies had been sold when the single was banned by Bristol High Court, and all remaining copies were seized and destroyed. One note of personal interest – I bought a copy of this single from a local record shop in early 1982, but my mum took exception to the lyrics and broke it in half. A copy recently sold at auction for £130.

sleeve for the latter single features a photograph of the group standing in front of a local venue, which is itself advertising a concert by a classical orchestra (see Figure 50). Another notable example of this genre, a live favourite which was recorded in 1980 though not released at the time, is the track *We’re From Bradford* by The Negatives – its chorus chant of *“We’re from Bradford, not from London. B-R-A-D-F-O-R-D!”* captures the provincial sentiment perfectly.⁸⁷

5.6 In My Area

The emphasis given to London in the lyrics and titles of early punk releases was also reflected in the design of some record sleeves. The Clash used photographs of confrontations between the police and crowds at the Notting Hill carnival in 1976 on the reverse sleeve of their debut album *The Clash* (CBS 1977), and featured photographs of punk youths in London streets for their fourth single *Clash City Rockers* (CBS 1978). The cover of the first Lurkers single, *Shadow* (Beggars Banquet 1977), included a photograph of the group standing outside the Red Cow in Hammersmith, a popular early punk venue, while The Rings *I Wanna Be Free* (Chiswick 1977) pictured the group in front of the Rock On record shop – the original home of the Chiswick label – and Menace’s *GLC* (Small Wonder 1978) featured a torn photograph of the civic offices of the Greater London Council (see Figure 51). In a humourous and self-deprecating manner firmly in tune with the anti-star status of the First and Second Wave punk groups, the reverse sleeve of Croydon group The Banned’s *Little Girl* (Harvest 1977) incorporated a close-up photograph of stone-cut lettering from the South London H.M. Coroner’s office and a badge stating ironically *“Today Croydon, Tomorrow Bromley”*.

Once punk had developed into a widely popular style, visual associations such as these became more frequent, again mirroring the lyrical trend to first focus on London and later on regional locations. The sleeve of the third single by the Gang of Four, *Outside The Trains Don’t Run On Time* (Zonophone 1980) (see Figure 52), designed by Jon King and Andy Gill, features a black and white publicity photograph of Leeds Town Hall. A further cutting of the building’s

87. Simon Reynolds quotes Sheffield Post Punk group 2.3 with the lyric *“London’s burning’ they all shout, but I wouldn’t even piss on it to put the fire out”* on the song *(I Don’t Care About) London* (Reynolds 2005: 150). Also see Peter & The Test Tube Babies (from Brighton) *Peacehaven Wild Kids* (1982) and Red London (from Sunderland) *Sten Guns In Sunderland* (1983) (a response to The Clash’s famous 1977 *White Riot* lyrical pronouncement *“Sten guns in Knightsbridge”*).



Fig.50: Resistance 77 *Nowhere To Play* e.p.: Nottingham Problem/Join The Army/Collars & Ties/Nuclear Attack (Riot City RIOT18) 1983

official description is reproduced on the centre record label, defiantly placing the band in a specific (northern England) location outside of London. Similarly, Stiff Little Fingers, a politically outspoken group from Northern Ireland, chose to use an image from the streets of Belfast on their second single, *Alternative Ulster* (Rough Trade 1978). The black and white photograph depicts a British soldier in full body armour crouching, rifle in hand, while a

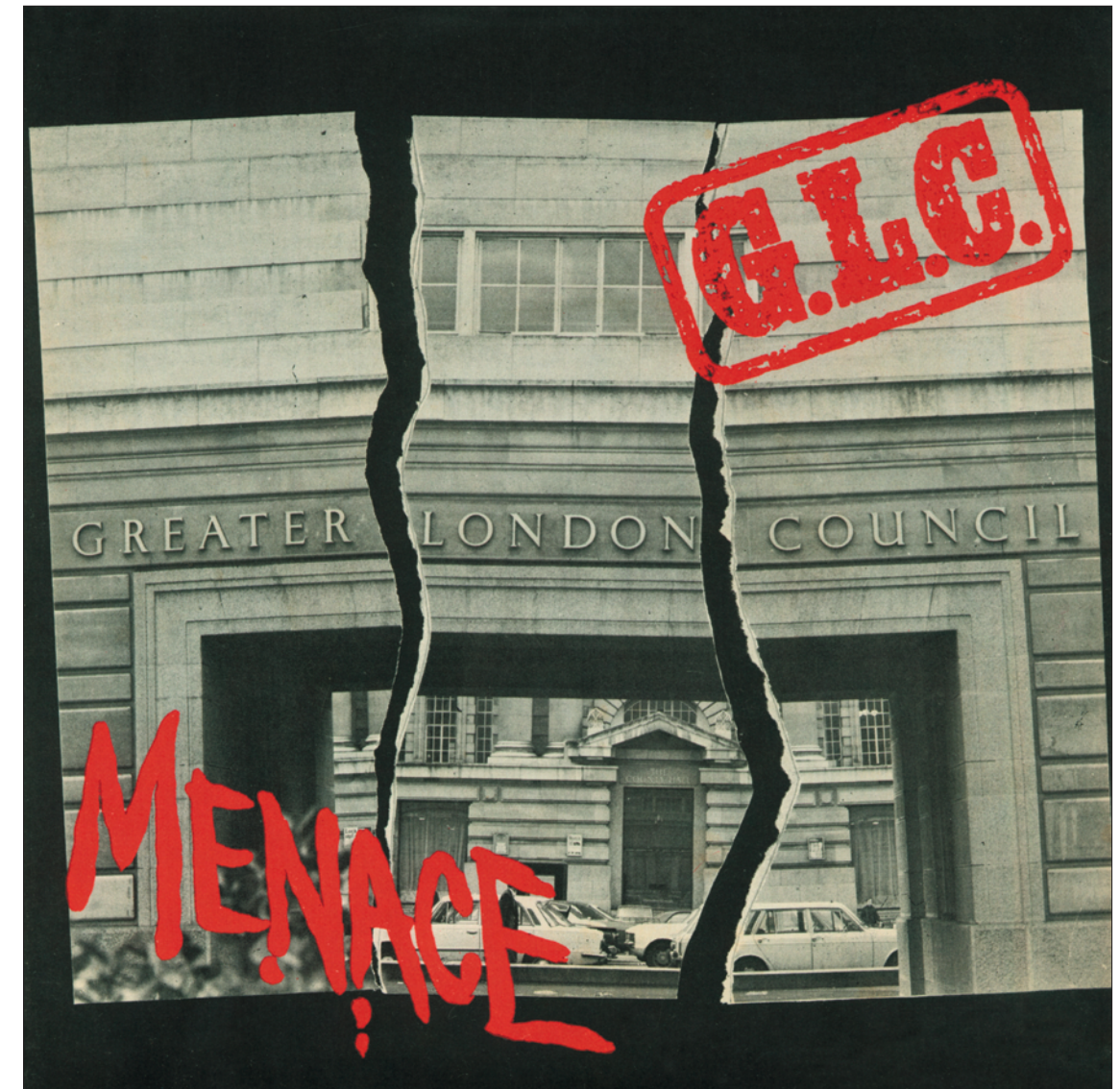


Fig.51: Menace G.L.C./I'm Civilised (Small Wonder SMALL5) 1978

small boy leans over a wall behind him, laughing at the camera. A similarly dark-humoured use of images, though again centred on the capital, was displayed on the front and reverse sleeve of the second single by South London group The Straps. The front cover of the single, *Brixton* (Donut 1982), includes a black and white photograph of an overturned vehicle and rioting black youths taken during the Brixton riots of April 1981, while the reverse features a

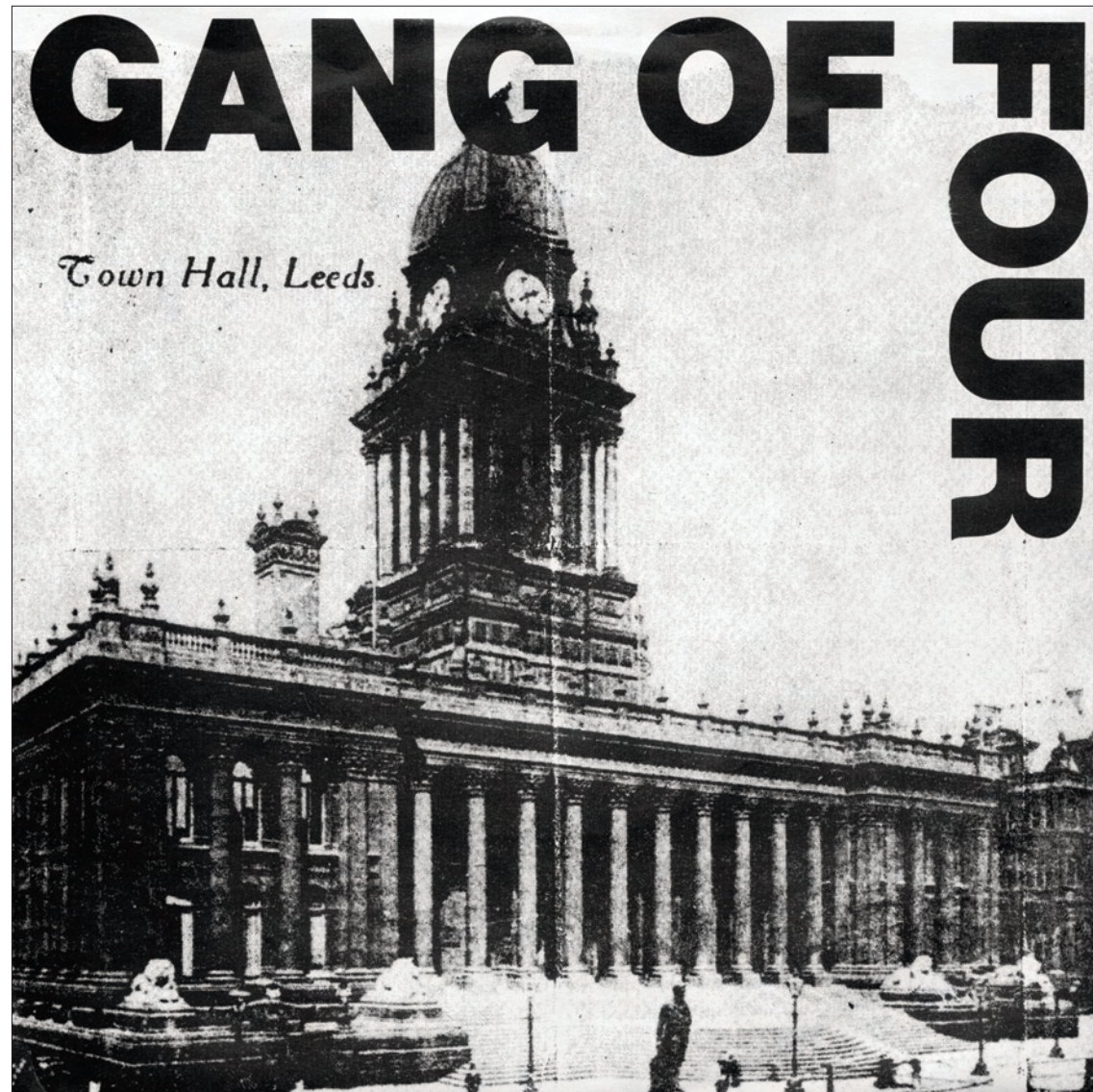


Fig.52: Gang Of Four *Outside The Trains Don't Run On Time/He'd Send In The Army* (EMI Z1) 1980

photograph of the railway bridge over the main street, emblazoned with the motto “*Welcome to Brixton*”. Other groups used photographs of themselves in front of local landmarks, but in a less overtly provocative or ironic way. Photographs of the band in an urban setting, often black and white and showing the group against a decaying brick wall or demolished building, were commonplace – echoing the early publicity photographs of The Clash by

Kate Simon and Caroline Coon, which in turn had some connections with portraits of 1960s groups such as the Rolling Stones and the Small Faces.

Two examples of group portraits against a background location stand out as interesting anomalies in this regard. The third single by The Lurkers, *Ain't Got A Clue* (Beggars Banquet 1978), featured a pencil drawing of the group on the front cover in a rural setting, with trees, rolling fields and hills in the background and a road sign pointing in three directions toward ‘Kingston’, ‘Ickenham’ and ‘Fulham’ (see Figure 53). This depiction of the group outside of the inner city urban environment, but with directions towards West London, seems to show a link to the punk scene from a position outside the city. The group had originally formed in Ickenham, Middlesex, and their debut album was entitled *Fulham Fallout* – due to their rehearsal space and record label being located in Fulham. By contrast, the front cover of Sunderland band Red Alert’s *In Britain* (No Future 1982) used a photograph of the group leaning against a wall in front of Big Ben in London, a generic reference to a stereotypical ‘Britain’ rather than a direct connection to the group’s home town.

The sense of locality expressed by individual groups was also reflected in the names and graphic approaches of certain punk-oriented record labels, particularly during the Third Wave of UK punk. Clay Records, a label founded in 1980 by Mike Stone, a former employee at Beggars Banquet Records in London (itself an early punk-centred independent) who had just relocated to Stoke in the north west of England and opened a local record shop, was one such example. The town of Stoke has a long historical association with the ceramics industry in England, and the 18th Century Staffordshire potteries of Josiah Wedgwood, Joseph Spode and Thomas Minton made the area world famous for high quality production, placing it at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution. The area around Stoke subsequently became known as “the Potteries”, a term which lasted well into the Twentieth Century, even when local industries were in decline and other manufacturing and service industries were becoming more important to the area.⁸⁸ The municipality of Stoke-on-Trent brought together the

88. See www.thepotteries.org and www.stoke.gov.uk for further information, including links to local museums and historical databases.

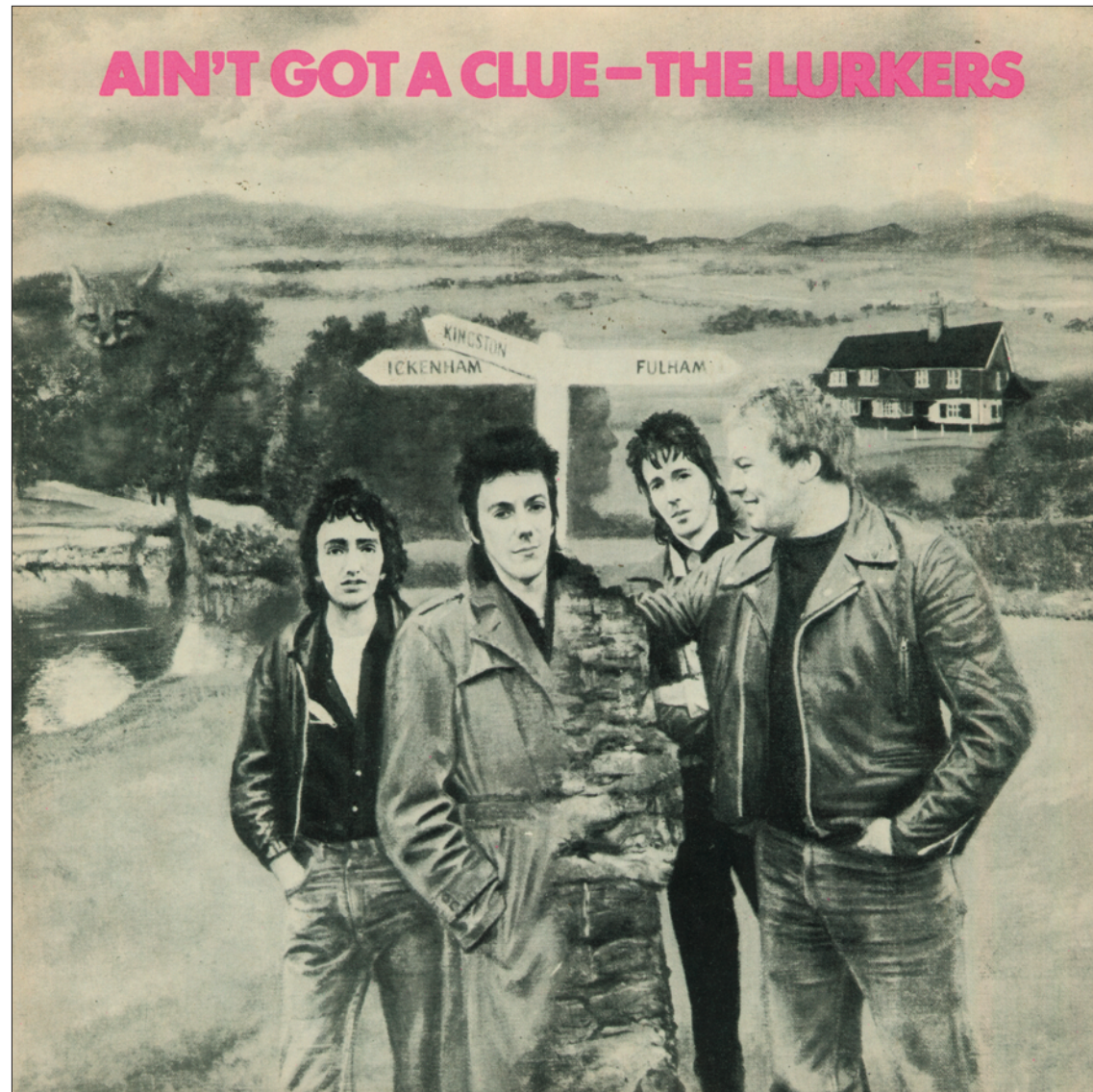


Fig.53: The Lurkers *Ain't Got A Clue/Ooh Ooh I Love You* (Beggars Banquet BEG6) 1978

boroughs of Hanley, Burslem, Longton and Stoke, and the districts of Tunstall and Fenton, in 1910, and Stoke-on-Trent gained city status in 1925. Local residents still refer to the area as the Potteries, recognising the historic distinctions between the six towns that make up the city. There are also numerous slang terms in the north west for the inhabitants of Stoke, including the terms “Stokies” and “Clay Heads” – the latter being a derogatory term used by inhabitants



Fig.54: Label design, Clay Records, Stoke 1980

of the surrounding area, perpetuated through the ‘local derby’ football rivalry between Stoke City and Crewe Alexandra.

Stone’s identity for his new label, Clay Records, derives directly from these local associations, relating to both the local history and inverting the derogatory nature of the Clay Heads term.



Fig.55: Logo design, Clay Records

Meanwhile, the centre labels of records released by Clay featured an illustration of three 'bottle kilns' set in perspective (see Figure 54). From the 18th century until the 1960s, these brick chimneys were a dominating architectural feature of the Staffordshire Potteries, when over two thousand such structures had towered above the local skyline. The use of this image on the label identity therefore gives a strong local connection, which would be instantly recognisable to anyone familiar with

the area. As Clay Records became more established, following chart success with early Hardcore record releases by local group Discharge and GBH from Birmingham, the label illustration was distilled to create a simple graphic identity for the company (see Figure 55). This approach was not entirely new, and a number of other early independent punk labels had used their locality as a basis for a graphic identity. The Deptford Fun City label, based in South East London and home to Squeeze and ATV, was not only given an ironic name based on its location, but also used photographs of the local high street on record centre labels (see Figure 56). The fact that the photographs were simply mundane 'snap shots', featuring dull shop fronts, advertising hoardings and to-let signs, only adds to the sense of ordinariness and mundanity sarcastically implied in the label name. Similarly, Brighton label Attrix Records, established by local record shop owner Rick Blair, used a stylised hand-drawn silhouette of the local skyline, featuring the neo-classical domes and minarets of the Royal Pavilion as both the company logo and on centre labels (see Figure 57). The Attrix label was to release three compilation albums documenting the local punk and new wave scene, entitled *Vaultage '78*, *'79* and *'80*, named after The Vault, a local band rehearsal and performance space. The covers for *Vaultage '78* and *Vaultage '79* followed the silhouette theme, incorporating elements of the buildings incorporated in the label identity, together with the town's central Clock Tower and Palace Pier, set against a brightly coloured two-tone wash background. With the third and final album in the series, *Vaultage '80*, the image changes to



Fig.56: Label design, Deptford Fun City Records, London 1977

depict the West Pier, fallen into ruin and capped with spirals of barbed wire. The West Pier had closed in 1975 on the grounds of public safety, and had been subject to persistent local government wrangling regarding its future ever since. In the ensuing years, it fell rapidly into decay, and was fenced off to prevent access. The album artwork depicts the rooftops in the town as similarly distressed and ruined, reflecting a wider sense of decay and the decline



Fig.57: Label design, Attrix Records, Brighton 1979

of the West Pier as symbolic of the town itself. It is also interesting to note that the cutting of silhouettes had been a seaside tradition on the West Pier from its opening in 1866 through to the early 1970s, and their use on the Attrix identity and sleeve artwork thus reflected a local craft history.

5.7 All The Young Punks

The notion of a self-referential meta-punk, or 'punk about punk' songwriting style, forms a strong undercurrent throughout the history of the movement, both in terms of reflections by punk songwriters, and in the production of comic novelty records by outsiders wishing to cash in or to criticise the new 'craze', often in the form of Novelty Punk recordings. The Television Personalities and their alter-egos The O-Level released records which passed ironic swipes at the way the punk movement was developing into a fashion style – songs such as *Part Time Punks*, *Everybody's On Revolver* and *Posing At The Roundhouse* (Kings Road 1978) mocked groups and individuals within the London scene, parodying the way punk followers gathered around certain venues and in London's Kings Road, and criticising the establishment of fashion, clothing, television shows and record markets specific to the genre. However, as the visual and verbal codes which would come to define the generic punk look and attitude became more fixed, especially during the Second and Third Waves of UK punk, these accusatory lyrical styles took on a more direct – and antagonistic – meaning. The ironic and amusing parodies of early punk were replaced with openly hostile criticism of those who were perceived as being on the fringe of – or completely outside – the 'tribe'. This was especially true of the New Punk and Oi subgenres: some song lyrics were openly aggressive towards outsiders, marrying the sentiments of gang membership to an attack on those the groups saw as being uncommitted to the scene. Songs such as *New Punk* by Anti Social (Beat The System 1982), *Poseur* by Combat 84 (Victory 1983), and *Suburban Rebels* by The Business (Secret 1983) followed this pattern, adopting a more malicious stance than the earlier critics of the punk bandwagon. Lyrics to The 4-Skins' *Clockwork Skinhead* (1981) are typical of the style:

Wearing braces, the red, white, and blue

Doing what he thinks he ought to do

Used to be a punk and a mod too

Or is it just a phase he's going through?

The tendency of punk songwriters to reflect their immediate surroundings and to comment on common, everyday experiences led to the development of a more long-lasting style of reflective songwriting. The Adverts released their first single, *One Chord Wonders*, on Stiff Records in April 1977 – a song which celebrates the evolving punk scene while at the same time offering a direct retort to critics of the group’s lack of musical ability, ending with the chanted lyric “...*the wonders don’t care, we don’t give a damn!*”. This sense of an evolving community was reflected in the lyrics of London group Generation X, whose debut album, released in March 1978, featured the track *One Hundred Punks*, a homage to the early punk scene leaders. Ever fond of mythologising both themselves as punk heroes, and the punk movement in general, singer Billy Idol intones;

*A hundred punks run with London town
Down Wardour Street to the Soho Sound
Don't sleep all week only when they fall down
Check out any wall
One hundred punks rule*

A number of singles and album tracks by the hugely influential First Wave punk group The Clash, such as *Garageland*, *Clash City Rockers*, *Complete Control*, *All The Young Punks* (*New Boots And Contracts*), and *Last Gang In Town* also pass direct comment on the group (while also building on the band’s own self-image and mythology) and their fans. Along with the Sex Pistols, The Clash were at the forefront of the First Wave of successful London-based punk groups, and their critical support within broad sections of the music press and consistent radio airplay, together with a perceived ‘down to earth’ identification with their fans, led to the development of a wide fanbase throughout the UK. Their style of songwriting, often personal and reflecting their own social environment, was widely imitated by Second and Third Wave punk groups formed in their wake. Later in their career, The Clash were one of the few early punk groups to retain a strong following despite changes in their own musical

direction, and in the contextual shifts around them within popular music towards new styles and fashions. The group continued to pay homage to both their musical roots and external influences by appropriating musical and visual styles from reggae and ska, rock ‘n’ roll, jazz, hip hop and funk. The design of several record sleeves for The Clash also show an intertextual relationship with earlier records across other genres. The sleeve of their first single, *White Riot* (1977), designed by Sebastian Conran,⁸⁹ featured a photograph of the group from behind, assuming a hands-against-the-wall stance with their legs spread as if about to undergo a police body search (see Figure 58). The photograph had been taken the previous November by *NME* journalist Caroline Coon, the pose being copied from a reggae sleeve for the album *State Of Emergency* by Joe Gibbs and the Professionals (which had entered the UK reggae charts in September 1976). According to Marcus Gray, who later interviewed Conran for the book *Last Gang in Town*, the sleeve designer changed the slogan painted on the reverse of the singer’s clothing from “*Hate And War*” to “*1977*” (thus matching the title of the record’s B-side), and the distressed typography of the group’s logotype was inspired by the cover of the Big Youth 1973 reggae album *Screaming Target*. (Gray 2001: 216). References to sleeves by other artists can also be seen in a number of later Clash records. The sleeve of the group’s third album, *London Calling* (1979) featured a photograph by Pennie Smith of bassist Paul Simonon smashing his instrument onstage, with typography by *NME* cartoonist Ray Lowry and the choice of colour echoing the sleeve for Elvis Presley’s 1956 debut album.⁹⁰ The retro theme was carried through with the *London Calling* single sleeve which used illustrations of dancing couples taken from early HMV 78rpm record packaging of the 1950s.

One group who embraced some aspects of the songwriting style of The Clash were to become central to the direction many Second and Third Wave punk bands would take. Sham 69, formed by Jimmy Pursey in Hersham, Surrey in 1976, produced a series of records which embodied a generic punk musical style, lyrical preoccupations with ‘working class’ themes (pubs, sex, football and poorly paid work), and football terrace-style ‘singalong’ choruses. Songs such as *If The Kids Are United*, *Angels With Dirty Faces* and *Tell Us The Truth* (Polydor

89. Sebastian Conran, son of famous British designer and retailer Terence Conran and author Shirley Conran, was a close friend of Joe Strummer. He designed three early single sleeves for the band, together with gig flyers, t-shirts and backdrops. Following criticism of the links between the self-styled working class “garage band” Clash and the millionaires’ son in both the national and music press in early 1978, the group distanced themselves from Conran and he played no further part in their career.

90. This was not the first time that the Elvis Presley typographic reference had been made within a punk context. The debut single by Johnny Moped *No One* (Chiswick Records 1977) utilised almost exactly the same approach, with red and green type overlayed on a black and white photograph of the singer – though in this case the type was set at a 45 degree angle and to the right of the image, rather than following the left and bottom edges as in the Elvis and Clash examples.

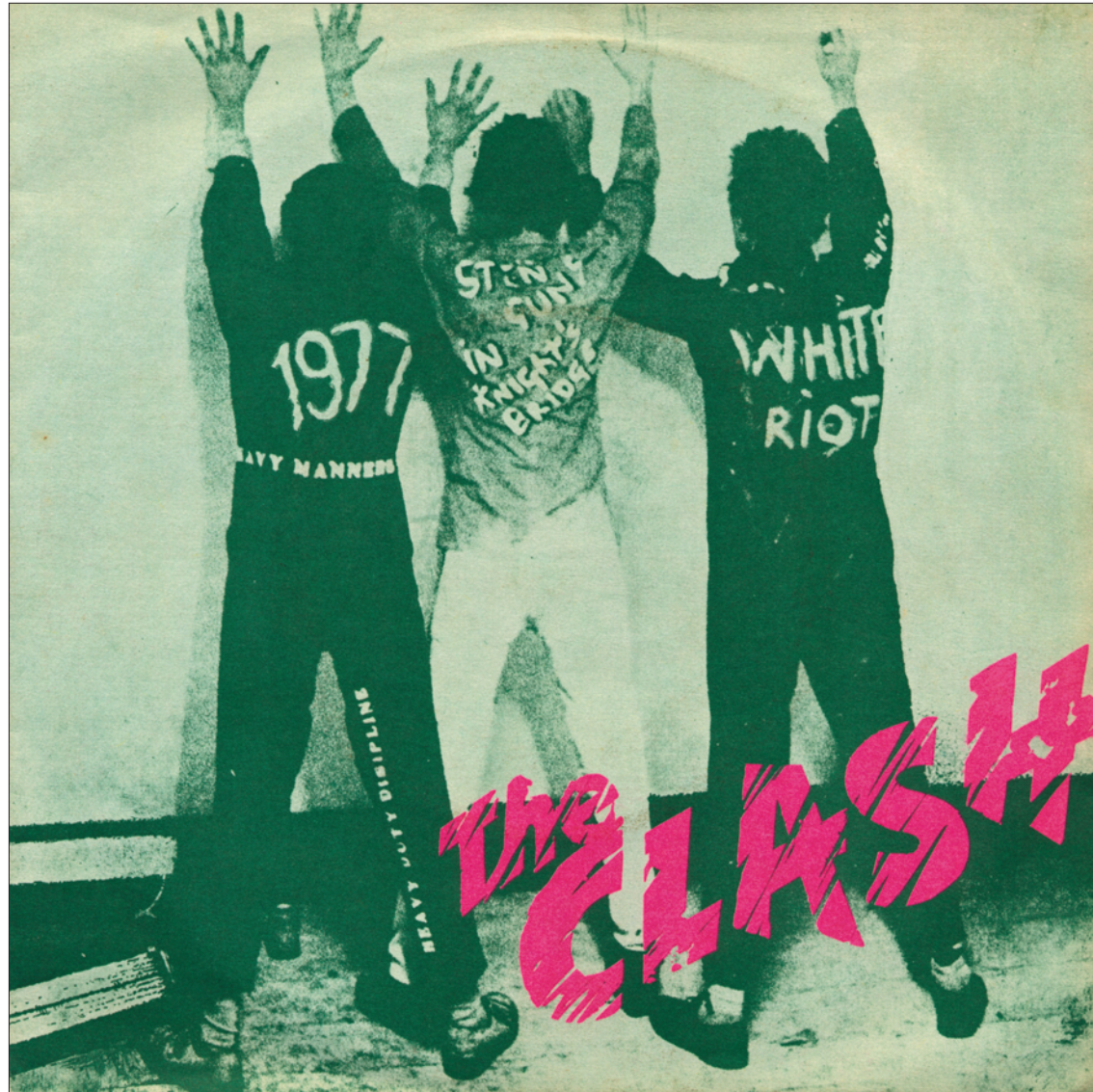


Fig.58: The Clash *White Riot/1977* (CBS 5058) 1977

1978) were an attempt to unite a disparate movement within a wider framework of youth rebellion, and achieved some commercial success in both singles and album charts.⁹¹ The group would become known as one of the central precursors to the Street Punk and Oi movements of the early 1980s. David Laing asserts that a continuity between Sham 69's output and the lyrical obsessions of Third Wave punk groups such as The Exploited and Vice

91. The second album by Sham 69, *That's Life* (Polydor 1978) featured their trademark anthemic songs interspersed with a kind of 'kitchen sink drama' dialogue based on characters trying to deal with 'everyday' issues. This awkward blend of concept album and soap opera was not a runaway success, though the singles taken from the album did well in the charts.

Squad is slightly superficial, and that the Oi bands that emerged in the early 1980s; "...represented a form of musical ghettoization which Pursey had tried to avoid... Instead, they seemed determined to reflect only the terms in which the mainstream social discourse rejected them" (Laing 1985: 112). Laing refers here to the lyrical preoccupation of many of the early 1980s Real Punk groups – the sense of injustice and oppression felt by those involved, at the hands of the police, the courts and wider society in general. Even many of the group names during the Third Wave reflected this sense of desperation, including The Exploited, Dead Wretched, The Defects, The Ejected, Chron Gen ('chronic generation'), No Choice, The Enemy, The Expelled, The Oppressed and Public Disgrace, among many others.

The notion of songwriting about the growing punk movement and reflecting the community which was evolving around the groups – and the establishment of what could be regarded as a gang mentality between certain factions and followers – reached an apposite conclusion in the early 1980s Real Punk, Hardcore and Oi movements. The humorous reflection on current punk trends could be seen in songs such as *Have You Got 10p?* by The Ejected (Riot City 1982), and *Yet Another Dole Queue Song* by Action Pact (Fallout 1984) but more evident were a number of commentaries on a group or collective experience – particularly how hard it was to be a punk or a skinhead, and how the members of those groups were subject to brutality from the police and authorities. Record sleeves also mirrored this theme, often including photographs and drawings depicting the group and their followers as aggressive, embittered and embattled urban street warriors. Others defiantly rallied against media proclamations of the end of punk, and this became a central theme of the Real Punk identity: The Exploited released their *Punk's Not Dead* album in May 1981 on Secret records, a rallying call for the Real Punk movement, gaining a place in the Top Twenty national charts and a Top Of The Pops appearance in October the same year. This call to arms was followed by releases such as *The Enemy Punk's Alive* (Fallout 1982) and *Special Duties Punk Rocker* (Expulsion 1983). The latter, like many of the records in this genre, also expounded certain regulations on what it meant to be a punk, and included an attack on what could be seen as hangers-on and those

not completely identified with the movement: being a 'punk' is typically identified as a life-long choice, not something that follows the vagaries of mere fashion. Faction fighting and jostling for position between different punk sub-genres was rife, and proclamations of 'authentic' punk identity were commonplace. References were often made in lyrics and press interviews to the longevity of the groups' affiliation with the punk movement, namechecking bands and events from earlier times – 1977 became something of a mythical period in punk legend, and the attacking, rhetorical question “*where were you in '77?*” became a commonplace lyrical concern. Special Duties are also an interesting case in providing a link between the First and Third Waves of punk: formed in 1980, their debut album ‘77 in ‘82 (Rondelet 1982) makes direct lyrical and musical references to earlier punk groups and records, even going so far as to include fourteen ‘classic’ punk single sleeves by bands such as the Clash, The Stranglers, The Vibrators and the Sex Pistols on the album cover – a tactic repeated on the *Punk Rocker* single sleeve a year later, with the copy line this time altered to “‘77 in ‘83” (see Figure 59). Interestingly, The Clash adopted a similar strategy for the sleeve of their 1981 single *Hitsville UK*, a song which celebrates the growth of the DIY independent UK record labels. The record sleeve features centre labels from a number of early (1978-79) independent releases on labels such as Fast Product, Factory, Rough Trade and Small Wonder (see Figure 60).

Third Wave Punk record sales can also be seen in relation to live tours and gigs across the country. Radio played a fairly minor role in distributing the punk ‘message’ at this stage – though John Peel at Radio One was still a key supporter of many of the groups involved – while contact between (potential) fans and groups could certainly be facilitated by the playing of smaller venues in towns which were usually ignored by larger groups and the ‘official’ live music industry. Multiple acts on the same live billing, and the punk package tour, whereby four or five lesser-known bands would tour together to play single nights in towns around the UK, once again became a popular phenomenon in the early 1980s. The Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Heartbreakers and The Damned had made a similar journey in



Fig.59: Special Duties *Punk Rocker/Too Much Talking* (Expulsion OUT1) 1983

December 1976 with the notorious (and mostly cancelled) *Anarchy In The UK* tour, but with the success of many First and Second Wave punk bands, many had reverted to traditional rock tour formulae and management, headlining larger venues with one or two support acts. The return to smaller venues and a perceived value for money by offering four or five bands at a reduced admission price was another aspect of the ‘back to basics’ ideology espoused by



Fig.6o: The Clash Hitsville UK/Radio One (CBS 9480) 1981

the new punk groups in the early 1980s. One of the most successful Third Wave punk groups, The Exploited, headlined the Apocalypse Now tour of the UK in 1981, alongside Discharge, Anti Pasti, Chron Gen and the Anti Nowhere League: it is significant to note that these groups came from East Kilbride, Stoke, Stevenage, Derby and Tunbridge Wells respectively, rather than London or the major metropolitan centres. The tour was branded a success by the bands

involved and sections of the music press (notably Garry Bushell in *Sounds*, keen to promote his new vision of a 'Real Punk' identity for the groups concerned), and each of the groups went on to release records which achieved minor placings in the national charts.⁹²

This chapter has described a number of ways in which punk groups and sleeve designers reflected local environments and punk 'scenes' away from the capital, and the evolution of a range of distinct punk sub-genres. As UK punk gained a favourable critical reception and developed a strong commercial market, the record industry was keen to cash in on the subculture, using a range of novel marketing techniques, many of which were drawn from innovations in the independent DIY avant-garde which thrived in the late 1970s. Punk's internal discourse also highlighted the ways in which the subculture was fragmenting during the early 1980s, with 'punk about punk' record releases, lyrical and visual references, and a puritanical 'backlash' against the commodification and recuperation of what many saw as an 'authentic' punk ideology. While it would be wrong to make clear connections between many of the evolving sub-genres of UK punk and certain distinct visual strategies, it is clear that a number of 'punk' graphic codes and design approaches were common across various periods, regions and sub-groups of the subculture. Punk's visual style, like the music, was often aggressive and contemporary, reflecting and commenting on its surroundings. A number of design themes can therefore be associated with the movement, though they should not be seen in isolation from other forms of design with similar messages to convey. The use of parody and pastiche, for instance, has been a common design strategy in political satire for hundreds of years, while certain visual codes to denote disposability or the quick dissemination of polemical ideas have been a feature of political propaganda and 'agit prop' art throughout the Twentieth Century. However, a number of common 'punk' design principles are detailed in Chapter Six, and the mapping of quantitative data within the interactive section of this thesis will allow the reader to evaluate their use and effectiveness across the range of material under review.

92. National chart placings for groups on the Apocalypse Now tour include: the Anti Nowhere League *Streets Of London* (reached number 48/remained in the chart for 5 weeks), *I Hate... People* (46/3 weeks), *Woman* (72/2 weeks), and *We Are The League* album (24/11 weeks), The Exploited *Dogs Of War* (63/4 weeks), *Dead Cities* (31/5 weeks), *Attack* (50/3 weeks), and the albums *Punk's Not Dead* (20/11 weeks), and *Troops Of Tomorrow* (17/12 weeks), Discharge *Never Again* (64/3 weeks), Anti Pasti *The Last Call* album (31/7 weeks), and Chron Gen *Chronic Generation* album (53/3 weeks).

Chapter Six: Design Strategies

This chapter seeks to evaluate a number of common visual codes, or tropes, which were employed by UK punk sleeve designers across the period in question. Sections will focus on key thematic approaches as indicated below:-

- *Typographic Approaches – The use of “ransom note” styles, hand-rendered type and written letterforms, Letraset, blackletter and stencil type styles.*
- *Parody and Plagiarism – The theme of détournement, together with collage and references to earlier punk iconography.*
- *Xerox Machine – Repetition, themes of commercial production and the age of the machine.*
- *Electronically Yours – The new and evolving electronic music, together with accompanying graphic styles and identities.*
- *Kids Of The 80s – Key visual references to the sub-genres of UK punk, the notion of the wider punk ‘community’ and the tribe.*
- *Inflammable Material – Innovative uses of materials, DIY print methods and pre-press artworking conventions.*

UK punk sleeves often adopted a number of visual conventions in order to communicate to potential record buyers, and this chapter aims to describe a number of common themes, both in terms of aesthetic principles and design approach. This section cannot be exhaustive, but the inclusion of case study examples to illustrate the interconnected themes described above, together with visual matrices displaying the original artwork and a quantitative analysis of key design conventions in the next chapter will enable broad conclusions to be reached.

The Second and Third Waves of UK punk (1978-84) saw many developments, both musically and in terms of fashion and design. The graphic design of the period, though highly influential – within music packaging and fashion, if not within the wider commercial graphic design arena – has remained largely invisible within accounts of contemporary graphic design history. Some key examples of punk design, notably the original paste-up artwork produced by Jamie Reid for the Sex Pistols, have been collected by museums (the V&A has a large collection of Reid’s work),⁹³ but in many cases the work is treated as an artefact from contemporary fine art rather than a mass-produced piece of packaging such as a record sleeve, promotional flyer or poster. This attitude towards graphic material is reinforced by John A Walker in his overview of Radical Art in 1970s Britain, *Left Shift*; “...*Malcolm McLaren and the Sex Pistols were far more successful than the fine artists who were working in parallel. In part, this was due to the presence of a youth subculture of fans and to the greater economic importance and visibility of graphic design and the popular music and fashion businesses*” (Walker 2002: 188). What Walker fails to acknowledge is the distinction between graphic design, popular music and fashion: while the latter produce products which have an economic value (records and clothes), graphic design produces a visual identity (the record sleeve, poster or flyer) but usually no artefact or product which is sold in its own right. The ground may be muddied here by the fact that many posters and record sleeves may eventually become collectable, either as pieces of contemporary art or as pop memorabilia, but the case does need to be made that mass-produced, printed ephemera such as record sleeves – in essence simply another form of packaging – are quite distinct from the Jamie Reid ‘originals’ collected by the V&A. Where other work from the period has been documented, it has tended to emphasise the work of the now more famous graphic designers, such as Malcolm Garrett, Peter Saville and Barney Bubbles.⁹⁴ Away from the widely publicised sleeve designs of these key individuals, a great deal of work was produced by untrained, and often uncredited, designers responding to punk as a complex series of ideas, mediated through the music press, fanzines, record distribution and the mainstream media. In provincial towns, fans had limited direct access to punk records or gigs: smaller league

93. See Nicola Clayton: *Folk Devils In Our Midst: Challenging The Modernist Museum Paradigm*. PhD thesis, Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 2002. See also McQuiston (1993) and Timmers (1998).

94. Eye magazine featured individual articles on the work of Barney Bubbles (*Eye* no.6 vol.2), Malcolm Garrett (*Eye* no.12 vol.3) and Peter Saville (*Eye* no.17 vol.5), whilst published collections of graphic design such as Hollis (1994), Livingston (1992), McQuiston (1993) and Poynor (2004) all feature the same designers in relation to both punk and late 1970s graphic design history.

bands, labels and networks of activity grew in response to the wider media coverage of punk – graphic design (in the form of fanzines, posters, flyers and especially record sleeves) was to be an essential, though often overlooked, aspect of this development.

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. Their design 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.⁹⁵

The visual languages of many of the New Pop groups of the early 1980s did closely parallel that of certain punk and Post Punk groups: the use of bold, flat colours and geometrical grids mirrored earlier designs for groups such as The Buzzcocks and Magazine. This is hardly

95. A self-supporting ‘underground’ market exists worldwide in the field of ‘alternative’ music and fashion. While there are grey areas where this market overlaps with more ‘mainstream’ commercial ventures and businesses, the low overheads associated with DIY ‘cottage industry’ approaches, together with the widespread capacity for online sales and marketing via the internet, ensure the survival of many ‘punk-based’ businesses in the 21st Century. For further reading, see Thompson (2004).

surprising when the identity of the graphic designers involved is made explicit. Malcolm Garrett's Associated Images studio, which had been responsible for the graphic identities of a number of early Manchester punk groups, went on to work on a range of sleeves for labels such as Radar Records, before scoring major success with the graphic identity for New Pop supergroups Duran Duran and Culture Club. During this period, Garrett developed something of a 'signature style', combining ironic themes of consumerism and 'product' with geometric shapes and simple line art illustrations – a style that was to become widely emulated. Other designers were following a similar path: Neville Brody, Terry Jones and Peter Saville all worked within the field of Post Punk sleeve design, and would go on to become highly respected graphic designers during the early 1980s, particularly in the field of magazine design centred on the growing youth fashion market. Jones founded *iD* magazine, while Brody and Garrett went on to art direct *The Face* and *New Sounds New Styles* respectively, and their stylistic approaches were to prove highly influential across the graphic design profession. Conversely, illustrators such as Russell Mills and Vaughan Oliver helped to establish new styles which offered a colourful, flowing, image-led counter approach as “...the contrary tendency to the cool, hard-edged post-punk look of Peter Saville, Neville Brody and Malcolm Garrett” (de Ville 2003: 187) – itself also leading to a graphic trend in early 1980s youth-centred design. The commercial success of many of these new design styles also helped to create a generic 1980s 'look' which could be adapted by designers for a range of youth-oriented projects, and many examples of sleeve design across the Post Punk, electronic and New Pop genres appear quite similar. This does lead to a number of retrospective glaring errors, as in the book *This Ain't No Disco: New Wave Album Covers*, where American author Jennifer McKnight-Trontz fails to note any difference between The Buzzcocks, ABC and Culture Club.

The subsequent success of certain graphic designers and styles in the mainstream has also helped to distort the history of punk and post punk design. Famous examples of sleeve design, such as Saville's artwork for the Joy Division albums *Unknown Pleasures* and *Closer*

(designed in collaboration with Martyn Atkins) or Garrett's later New Wave and Post Punk sleeves, can be linked at least stylistically to a broader range of work within music packaging, magazine and editorial design of the early 1980s. While this does indicate a level of importance for certain individuals and design approaches within the history of *graphic design* as a profession, it does not necessarily reflect their importance within the field of punk-related *sleeve design*. These designers could move across musical genres, and could produce work for bigger clients (such as the major labels and successful chart acts), thus ensuring both mainstream recognition and higher fees. As Nick de Ville notes, the shift from sleeve design to magazines and the youth-oriented mainstream was deep-seated; “...encouraged by the success of *i-D* magazine and *The Face*, youth-oriented magazines multiplied, celebrating the burgeoning street culture of a new generation and catering to its numerous musical tribes: technopop, ska, heavy metal, hip-hop, rap, thrash... Not for the first time the graphic subversions rising up out of this ferment found themselves readily adopted by the graphic design establishment. But this time it was no passing fad. The effect was more profound; design for music, effervescent, iconoclastic and quintessentially representative of the dismissal of stale design mores, rejoined the design mainstream for the first time in many decades” (de Ville 2003: 168). The adoption of this new aesthetic to sell everything from music to clothes and cosmetics to the 'youth market' ensured the place of certain designers within the design aristocracy, but also hides the reality of sleeve design for those evolving punk sub-genres which remained (deliberately) underground.

Punk's understanding and articulation of itself also forms a basis for an analysis of the genre. Themes related to 'intertextuality', such as 'punk about punk' song lyrics and sleeve artwork were widespread throughout the period under review, both in relation to punk's internal discourse and commentary from outside of the subculture – from the aggressive assertion of individual 'authenticity' through to the humorous observations of punk identity within the Novelty Punk sub-genre. A range of punk discourse is reflected through a 'knowing' use of image appropriation or visual parody, the use of punk identities and symbols – such as 'punk'

conventions in typography (ransom note, hand-rendered lettering etc) or the détournement of media images – and this led to the evolution of a generic visual language based on collage, parody and direct reference to symbols which the punks themselves wished to negate (war, politicians and authority figures, the police etc). Again, while earlier punk sleeve designers were aware of these graphic methods and conventions – particularly within the work of Jamie Reid, for instance – later, often untrained, designers may well have been reflecting the visual codes of ‘punk’ itself through their use of collage, appropriation or détournement (a phrase in itself probably unfamiliar to many), and were adopting the ‘punk’ visual languages of the moment.

Although the following design strategies and visual tropes are outlined separately, it is important to note that they were often utilised in combination – in the use of certain punk typographic styles as homage or pastiche, for instance, or in the combination of iconic visual elements together with a machine aesthetic – and as such, they should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive. Visual examples are given in each case in order to illustrate key features or techniques, and the interactive visual matrices produced in conjunction with the thesis allow further themes to be highlighted. This chapter therefore focuses on a *qualitative* analysis of a range of generic design approaches within punk single sleeves, based on the matrix of analytical methods outlined in Chapter Three. An overview of developments based on a *quantitative* analysis of the totality of work under review follows in Chapter Seven:

Design Strategies – Applied Analysis.

6.1 Typographic Approaches

While it is the intention of this research to demonstrate a range of distinct graphic and typographic approaches adopted by punk record sleeve designers, it is clear that certain conventions have become so closely associated with the subculture that they may be considered central to punk visual language and discourse. The first of these, ‘ransom note’ typography, will be shown in the next chapter to have been rather more limited – in terms of frequency of use – than might otherwise be assumed, given the weight of critical discussion regarding the approach and wider public awareness of the style. This misinterpretation may well be because of its powerful visual impact, making it far more apparent to the casual observer – along with safety pins, razor blades and swastikas, ransom note typography quickly became symbolic of early UK punk in the mainstream media.

The cultural theorist Dick Hebdige did make an attempt to link early punk’s graphic output – in particular the punk fanzine culture – with an attempt “...to provide an alternative critical space within the subculture itself to counteract the hostile or at least ideologically inflected coverage which punk was receiving in the media” (Hebdige 1979: 111). As such, punk fanzines provided a communal voice and helped to bring the subculture together in the face of wider media criticism. This does make some sense in respect of the writing within the fanzines, presenting a critical overview – or at least a public voice and promotion – to the evolving scene, but Hebdige’s argument is less convincing in terms of the visual language itself. He goes on to make some broad assumptions about the design of punk record sleeves, making links between his defined punk ideology and the visual form of the objects themselves; “...even the graphics and typography used on record covers and fanzines were homologous with punk’s subterranean and anarchic style. The two typographic models were graffiti which was translated into a flowing ‘spray can’ script, and the ransom note in which individual letters cut up from a variety of sources (newspapers, etc.) in different typefaces were pasted together to form an anonymous message. The Sex Pistols’ God Save The Queen sleeve [...] for instance incorporated both styles: the roughly assembled legend was pasted across the Queen’s eyes and

mouth which were further disfigured by those black bars used in pulp detective magazines to conceal identity (i.e. they connote crime or scandal)” (Ibid: 112)

Whilst this attempt by Hebdige to define ‘punk typography’ has some merit, and his interpretation of the visual codes employed is fairly persuasive, his suggestion that there were “*two typographic models*” adopted by sleeve designers is not supported by the examination of a wide range of examples of punk record sleeves from the period. Hebdige seems to be referring to early sleeves by Jamie Reid for the Sex Pistols – in particular the *God Save The Queen* and *Pretty Vacant* singles and the *Never Mind The Bollocks* album cover, and also perhaps to some of the other promotional material produced by Reid, such as posters and press advertisements, which sometimes used these typographic styles. The use of handwritten text (which Hebdige suggests is based on graffiti) is fairly common, though it could be argued that this was often a case of necessity driving the design decisions – with the need to produce lines of text quickly and without the cooperation of a type compositor, the use of handwriting would seem to be an obvious course of action for the fanzine writer or sleeve designer. However, the second style of typography he cites (ransom note) was almost unique to Reid’s work, and was not widely used on other record sleeves until some time later, and then often either as an homage or an ironic comment on the development and/or commercialisation of punk. The style has since become something of a cliché as a symbol of punk graphics – Malcolm McLaren, interviewed in 2006, even attempted to place some personal ownership on it, whilst at the same time giving it a rather unusual retrospective justification as an artistic statement: “*...look at the Sex Pistols’ ransom note lettering – classic example of how you make something ugly become beautiful”* (*Q Magazine*, March 2006: 73). More recent punk histories have also attributed the origins of the visual style not to Jamie Reid, but to Helen Wellington-Lloyd, an early associate of McLaren who produced graphic material for the group with Nils Stevenson during the Summer of 1976. Interviewed by John Robb, Stevenson suggests that the design was born of necessity; “*The punk aesthetic was simple. Me and Helen Wellington-Lloyd were doing the handouts for the*

Pistols, and we ran out of Letraset so we cut up a newspaper and pasted it. If we hadn’t run out of the Letraset there wouldn’t have been the blackmail lettering. We made things from what was available” (Robb 2006: 207). This version of events contradicts earlier statements, including those of Reid himself, who attributes the first use of the ransom note style to a flyer he produced for a gig at the 100 Club on August 31st 1976 (Reid & Savage 1987: 51). Paul Stolper and Andrew Wilson also note that the design of flyers changed radically in the autumn of 1976, when Jamie Reid took over full design direction for the group (Stolper & Wilson 2004: 32).

The ransom note style was used by a small number of Second and Third Wave punk groups to denote a range of intentions and meanings – its adoption by the Television Personalities on their *Where’s Bill Grundy Now?* e.p. (1978) (see Figure 61) and Honey Bane on the *You Can Be You* e.p. (1979) (see Figure 62), for instance, was an ironic comment on punk’s ‘selling out’, whilst its regular use by the Angelic Upstarts (1979/80) (see Figure 63) and Special Duties (1982/83) on their early record output was an attempt to retain its original aggressive signification and to provide a direct visual link to earlier punk records. In terms of early UK punk, contemporary sleeves to the Sex Pistols by other well known punk groups such as The Damned, The Clash, The Buzzcocks, X Ray Spex and The Stranglers adopted a wide range of visual and typographic approaches which sometimes had certain elements in common with Reid’s work (such as dayglo colours and the use of collage) but did not generally follow Hebdige’s suggested typographic rules. The ransom note style was actually limited largely to Reid’s designs for the Sex Pistols, and few other designers adopted it for their own sleeve designs, possibly because it was recognised as a strong brand identity with the Sex Pistols themselves: their debut album, *Never Mind The Bollocks*, released in November 1977 featured a purely typographic cover.⁹⁶ Expediency in design should also not be overlooked – much as the original ransom note style may have been due to simply using available materials, as Nils Stevenson suggests, other designers, particularly in the DIY arena, may have adopted similar strategies. This could possibly account for the choice of similar methods by electronic pioneer

96. A notable exception was the sleeve for The Stranglers’ second single, *Peaches/Go Buddy Go*, released by United Artists records in May 1977. The original artwork for the sleeve featured a photograph of the band and the titles in the ‘ransom note’ style as described by Hebdige, but this was withdrawn by the label before the record was released, purportedly because it was deemed ‘offensive’ by workers at the sleeve printing press. This is more likely to be because of the ransom note style becoming closely associated with punk around this time, while punk itself was receiving bad publicity in the national press, than because of any associations with the visual style in itself.

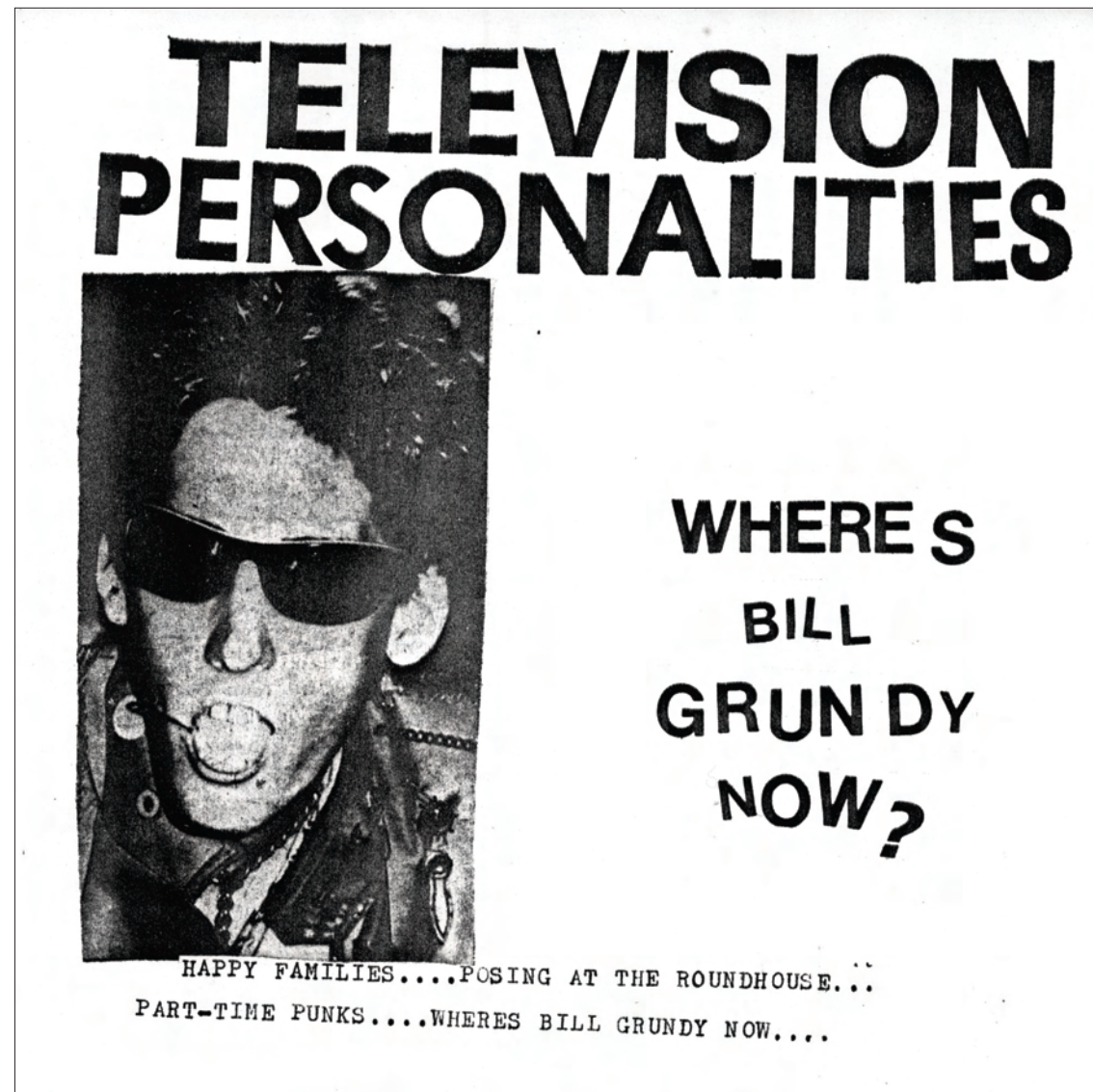


Fig.61: Television Personalities *Where's Bill Grundy Now?* e.p.: *Happy Families/Posing At The Roundhouse/Part-Time Punks/Where's Bill Grundy Now* (Kings Road LYN5976/7) 1978

Thomas Leer on his debut single *Private Plane* in November 1978: many others within the same musical field were adopting a particular look based on clean lines and a machine-made aesthetic, and Leer's single appears to be rather out of step with the zeitgeist. Technological developments also played a key role in the way sleeves were designed. Bubbles and Garrett were renowned for their use of the range of pre-press facilities available to the commercial

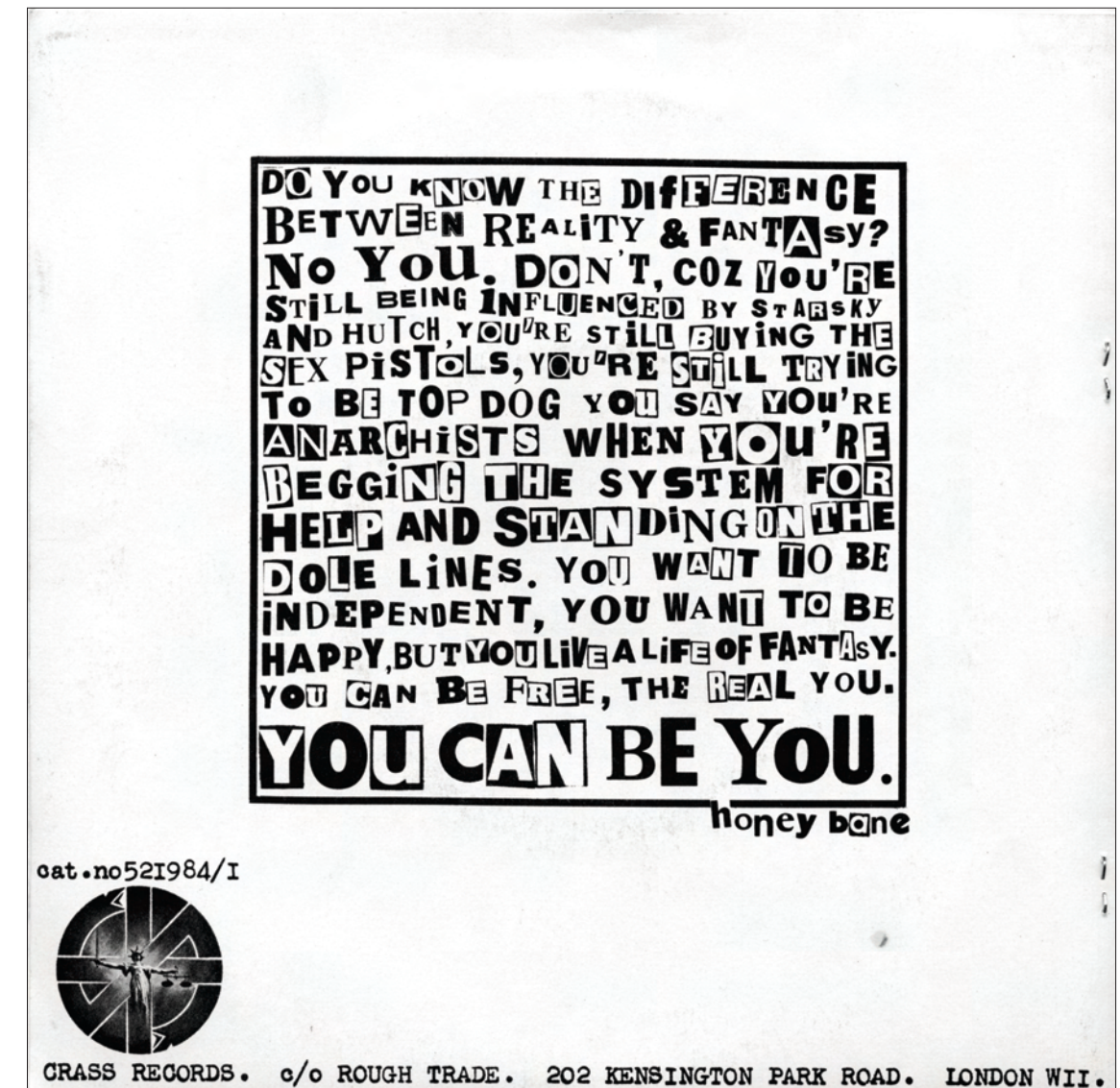


Fig.62: Honey Bane *You Can Be You* e.p.: *Girl On The Run/Porno Grows/Boring Conversations* (reverse of sleeve) (Crass 521984/1) 1979

designer, including recent developments in PMT (Photo Mechanical Transfer) copy camera technology, and a strong familiarity with design specification for print. Following the trend towards photolithographic printing and phototypesetting which had been ongoing since the early 1960s, designers in the late 1970s were able to work with pre-press operators to produce complex overlays which allowed a direct manipulation of text and image, line and tone.



Fig.63: Angelic Upstarts *I'm An Upstart/Leave Me Alone* (Warner Bros K17354) 1979

Professional sleeve designers could layer films to produce sophisticated designs incorporating interwoven blocks of flat colour and bold halftone images – often using found objects and stencils to create complex solid shapes and outlines. As Richard Hollis notes, this freedom enabled designers a great deal more control over the construction of artwork than before; “...previously, with letterpress printing, the designer had given separate instructions for

typesetting and picture reproduction. After the designer had prepared instructions for their assembly, changes in size and position were difficult to make. Now the designer made ‘artwork’ (called ‘mechanicals’ in the United States) ‘camera ready’ for the printer to make printing plates, with the illustrations, half-tones and advertisements all in place. Using the PMT camera the designer could enlarge or reduce headlines, reverse them to white on black, vary the contrast of images and improvise with last-minute amendments” (Hollis 1994: 189).

The effect of these technological changes was felt across the range of punk sleeve design, and also enabled amateur designers to create simple designs without having to negotiate all of the complex systems of (professional) design specification – though this also led to something of a distinction between what designer Paul McNeil describes as “...those [sleeves] produced by designers who had the knowledge to make use of these specification techniques, and could therefore use them advantageously in their work, and those who didn’t. It separates the pros from the amateurs, the commissioned from the vernacular” (Interview with the author, 4th May 2006). The use of photographic pre-press processes, including copy cameras such as the ‘Little John’, allowed designers to work on flat artwork, usually at full size for reproduction (abbreviated in printers’ instructions as S/S, or “same size”), which could then be passed to the printer for photographing prior to making up plates. In this way, novice designers could create sleeve designs by hand, using cut and paste techniques and either hand-written or stencilled text, typewriter or Letraset dry transfer rub-down lettering.⁹⁷ However, pre-press operations were still complex and involved a number of separate specialist sub-contractors in advance of the actual printing process: this aspect will be explored further in Section 6.7: Inflammable Material.

The use of Letraset is of key importance in many sleeve designs. The laborious nature of rub-down lettering techniques, combined with the expense of materials, meant that it was useful for limited copy only, often at a fairly large size, such as headlines and titles in magazines. This means it also lent itself well to record sleeve design, as copy is usually

97. The Letraset company was founded in London in 1959, and launched its instant lettering dry transfer product in 1960. Professional-looking lettering could be laid out quickly and easily, and demand for the product was high. Letraset went on to develop an extensive typeface library encompassing dry transfer and later digital formats. In the 1970’s the Letragraphica range of dry transfer lettering provided innovative typefaces designed by the world’s leading designers.

limited to titles (artist, tracks) and little additional information. Letraset (together with a number of derivative copies of the product) could be purchased fairly widely from print supply retailers and art materials shops, and the transfer system was relatively easy to master (at least in a rudimentary fashion) by most would-be designers. The Letraset company expanded their product range during the 1970s to include architectural figures, texture patterns (Letratone) and borders, signs and symbols and a large range of type designs in a number of standard sizes. Letraset display type, hand-rendered typography and the use of simple lettering stencils available from many high street newsagents were commonly used techniques for titles on the front of UK punk record sleeves of the period, particularly those produced by smaller labels and DIY enterprises.⁹⁸

Variations do exist in the different production values afforded by major labels and independents, and within the visual languages of distinct punk sub-genres. Many Anarcho Punk and Hardcore record sleeves, for instance, were produced in black and white, and employed a strong typographic emphasis which was often hand-rendered, whist Oi and Street Punk sleeves were often image-heavy and used decorative or gothic Letraset typefaces such as Old English, Walbaum Fraktur (see Figure 64). Simplicity was usually a pre-requisite for these designs – often created in black and white on one original layout. Second colours would require a separate flat layout which when printed would integrate directly with the first; image registration was a particular concern, and many multiple coloured sleeve designs go no further than the use of a black and white image set against simple coloured background shapes or grids, as in the sleeve for The Nightingales *Paraffin Brain* (1981), which uses both simple stencil lettering and Letraset titles (see Figure 65). Interestingly, some sleeve designers combined the visual approach of ransom note typography with the Letraset method, incorporating a mixture of type styles and sizes in order to achieve a rough and ragged effect, as in the reverse sleeve for Uproar’s *Die For Me* e.p. (1983) (see Figure 66), which is typical of the output of the Blackpool based Beat The System label during the early 1980s. This style, whilst appearing to be ‘thrown together’ quickly, would have actually been highly

98. Most Letraset typefaces were produced in a range of display sizes, from 24pt to 72pt. A more limited number of specific text faces were produced at smaller sizes, usually from 6pt or 8pt minimum size. Plastic lettering stencils, such as those produced by the Helix company in the UK, were manufactured in a limited range of sizes – commonly 10mm (0.5”), 20mm (0.75”), 30mm (1.25”) and 50mm (2”).



Fig.64: Letraset Type: Old English and Walbaum Fraktur

labour-intensive, as different type styles and sizes would need to be gathered from different sheets of transfer lettering, meaning that the designer would need to select a different Letraset page for each individual character, rather than being able to continue the line of type from the transfer sheet in hand.

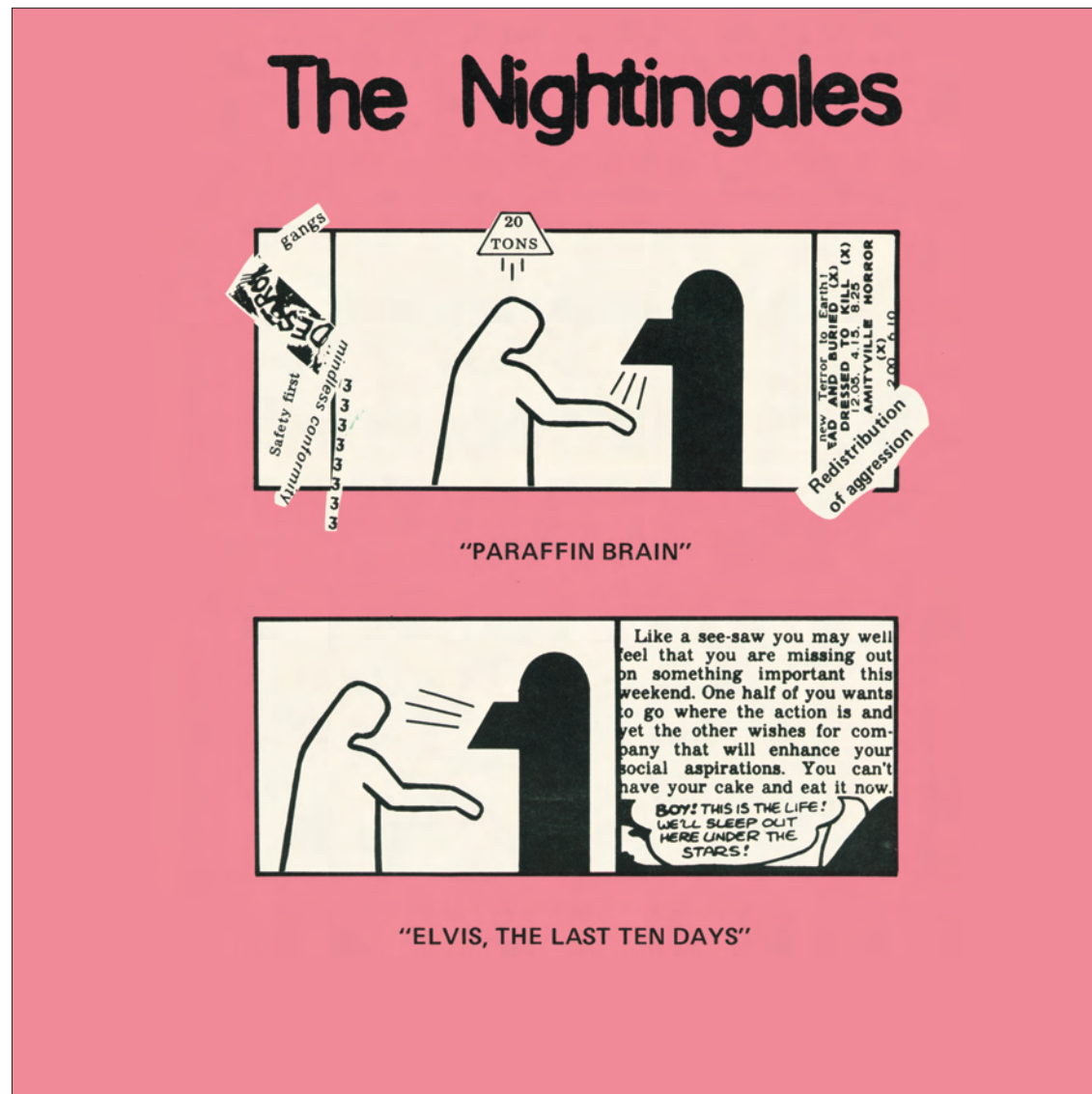


Fig.65: The Nightingales Paraffin Brain/Elvis, The Last Ten Days (Cherry Red CHERRY38) 1981

Typographic hierarchies also tended to follow quite simple rules on the front of punk single sleeves, and while the type itself may be hand-rendered, stencilled, 'ransom note' or Letraset, the cover often includes fairly limited textual information. The name of the group is usually included in fairly large characters, together with the title of the record. Such distinctions may be denoted through variations in type size, weight, colour or position on the page: in the case

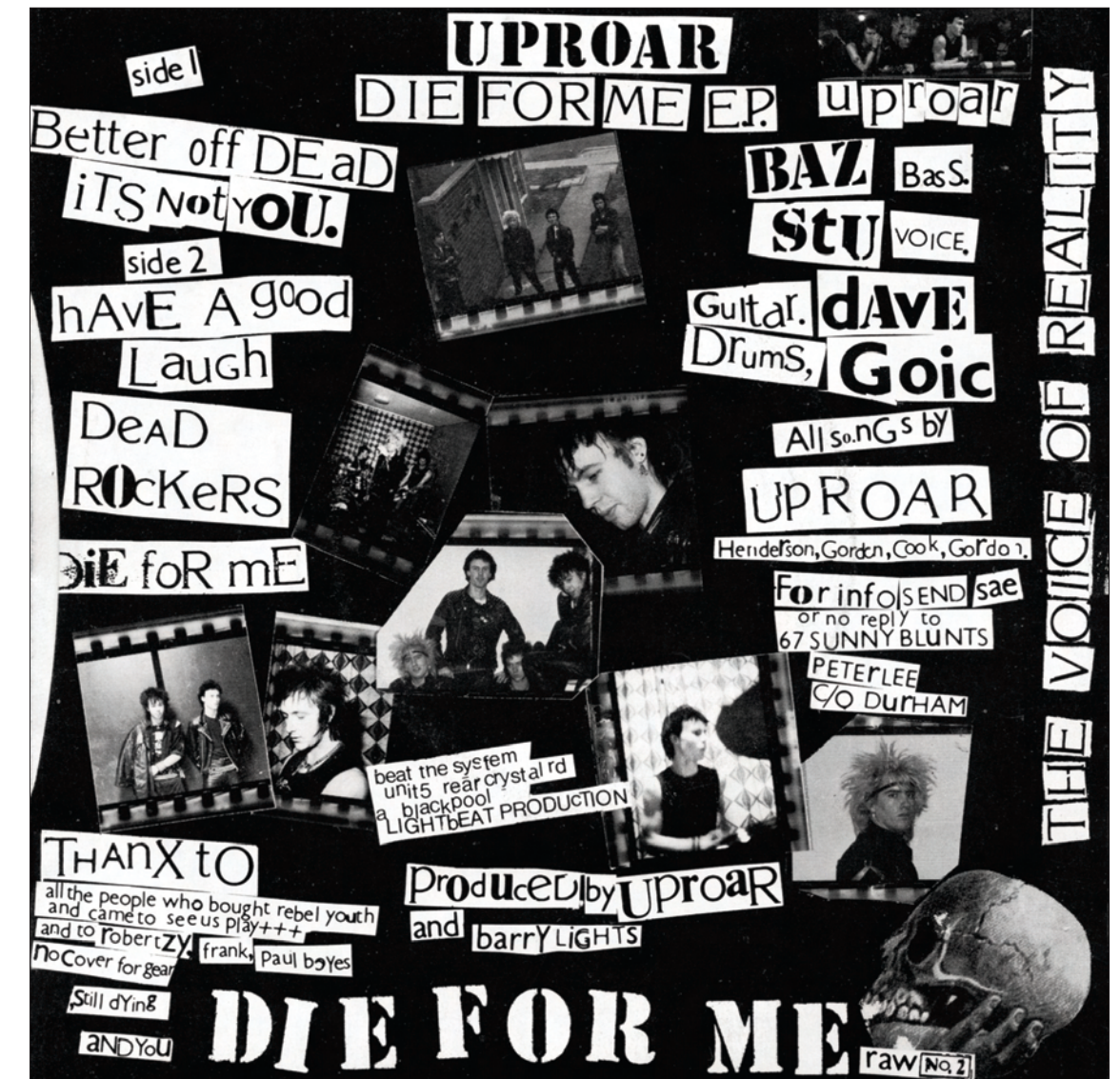


Fig.66: Uproar Die For Me e.p.: Better Off Dead/It's Not You/Have A Good Laugh/Dead Rockers/Die For Me (reverse of sleeve) (Beat The System RAW2) 1983

of most UK punk sleeves, the name of the group is set in the largest type size, and often occupies a position within the top third of the cover, while the title is usually smaller and placed within the bottom two thirds. In this way, the name of the group dominated, and could be read when the records were displayed in sales racks and boxes in record retailers, mirroring the construction of magazine and newspaper mastheads and headlines. This

simple compositional hierarchy also reflects the traditions of record sleeve design since the 1950s, even though the 1960s had witnessed a more image-led, photographic approach to sleeves which continued into the subsequent decade. As Spencer Drate notes, sleeve designs of the 1960s began to mirror “...*the sensibility of all those fan photos and magazines teens so eagerly devoured*” (Drate 2002: 57): though punk’s use of image was more diverse, with many groups (most notably the Sex Pistols) not actually photographed for their record sleeves. Drate also suggests that the 1960s saw a standard approach to typography on the reverse sleeve which continued into the 1970s: “...*back covers were often egregiously ugly informational treatments in black type*” (Ibid: 57). Again, this standard format is common across the range of punk sleeves – even where typographic variations exist, as in the ‘ransom note’ and mixed type sizes of the previous examples, a clear hierarchy of information is still visible, and type sizes are kept within fairly precise limits so as not to disrupt the reader through a complete interruption of the line.

Techniques of type and image composition were also usually very simple, particularly in the case of ‘untrained’ design approaches, with type either overlaid on a flat colour background (often in the simplest form of either black type on a white background or reversed white out of black), or as Letraset or stencil applied directly over a halftone image.⁹⁹ In the simplest cases, the type was laid out on white strips of paper and stuck down over the background image as camera ready artwork. Hand-cut letter stencils and hand-rendered text also featured heavily on many punk sleeves, to the extent that typographic treatments based on the stencil became a popular visual style rather than just a simple necessity. The problem with using real stencils was one of availability: while cutting an original stencil required a certain degree of care and attention to detail, a very limited range of lettering stencils were widely available on the High Street – typically the plastic sets produced by the Helix company for School and College use. The rounded figures of these particular letterforms gives them a fairly quaint, home-made aesthetic, and associations with School work or arts and crafts are hard to avoid – though this aspect was also embraced by some in the DIY

99. A limited range of Letraset typefaces were also available in white, for application against a black or coloured background. As such, some examples of reversed-out type on sleeves would have been produced through the use of the PMT camera, whilst others were prepared as camera ready artwork through overlaying white type on a background image.

sub-genre, such as The Nightingales (see Figure 67). As such, the use of these devices is fairly limited, and most punk stencil type adopts a harder, angular style.

One of the most common Letraset type styles used on punk sleeves (and also widely available as a generic rub-down typeface from other high street stationery suppliers such as WH Smith and Woolworths) was Stencil Bold, which was a harsh, almost military-looking serif face, available in upper case only and in a limited range of sizes (commonly 36pt and 60pt) (see Figures 68 and 69). Given that many sleeves were designed for same size print reproduction, this means that a number of UK punk sleeves have similar size type headings, often utilising the same typeface. The employment of stencil lettering, whether hand-rendered or through the use of rub-down faces such as Stencil Bold or Glaser Stencil Bold (a Letraset alternative to the former, being sans serif and comprising less condensed and more angular figures) also helped to fulfil a secondary purpose. Along with stencilled logos and high contrast images, they could be fairly easily copied and reproduced by fans, particularly on clothing. The early 1980s saw a developing trend among punk fans in spraypainting the backs of leather jackets with band names and logos, and the use of fairly simple, easily replicated typographic styles and graphic figures certainly helped to facilitate this. The militaristic appearance of various stencil forms was also of importance to the reading of the intended message: many punk groups had flirted with uniforms, army surplus clothing and the military ‘look’, in particular First Wave group The Clash and numerous Anarcho Punk and Hardcore bands.

In a similar fashion, the use of Gothic and blackletter forms could be said to connote a number of key themes, such as war, militarism, tradition, Germany and the Nazi party, and even black magic, as well as referencing earlier ‘extreme’ musical forms such as the darker side of Heavy Metal.¹⁰⁰ Gothic letter styles had been used within the visual identities of early 1970s rock by groups such as Black Sabbath – particularly on the 1973 album *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* – and Heavy Metal/punk crossover group Motörhead, whose adoption of an umlaut also signifies a German or Teutonic quality. The ‘heavy metal umlaut’, which is designed to

100. “For current music and youth cults, blackletter is a means of proclaiming multiple identities: a collective, a people, a race, a nation, heavy metal, black metal, gothic – all of which celebrate brutality, or in a highly artificial way, the symbolism of death and destruction... Blackletter, Celtic crosses, swastikas, hammers, and crucifixes portrayed as swords are fetishes of these emotionally-charged identity cults. These are not only restorative stylistic quotations from the Nazi past, but above all, survival strategies that demonstrate clan membership through iconographic means.” (Bain & Shaw 1998: 64). Other connotations are less relevant or desirable to the punk sleeve designer, including the use of Old English on ‘traditional’ crafts and such things as home-made jams and marmalade labels at village fêtes.

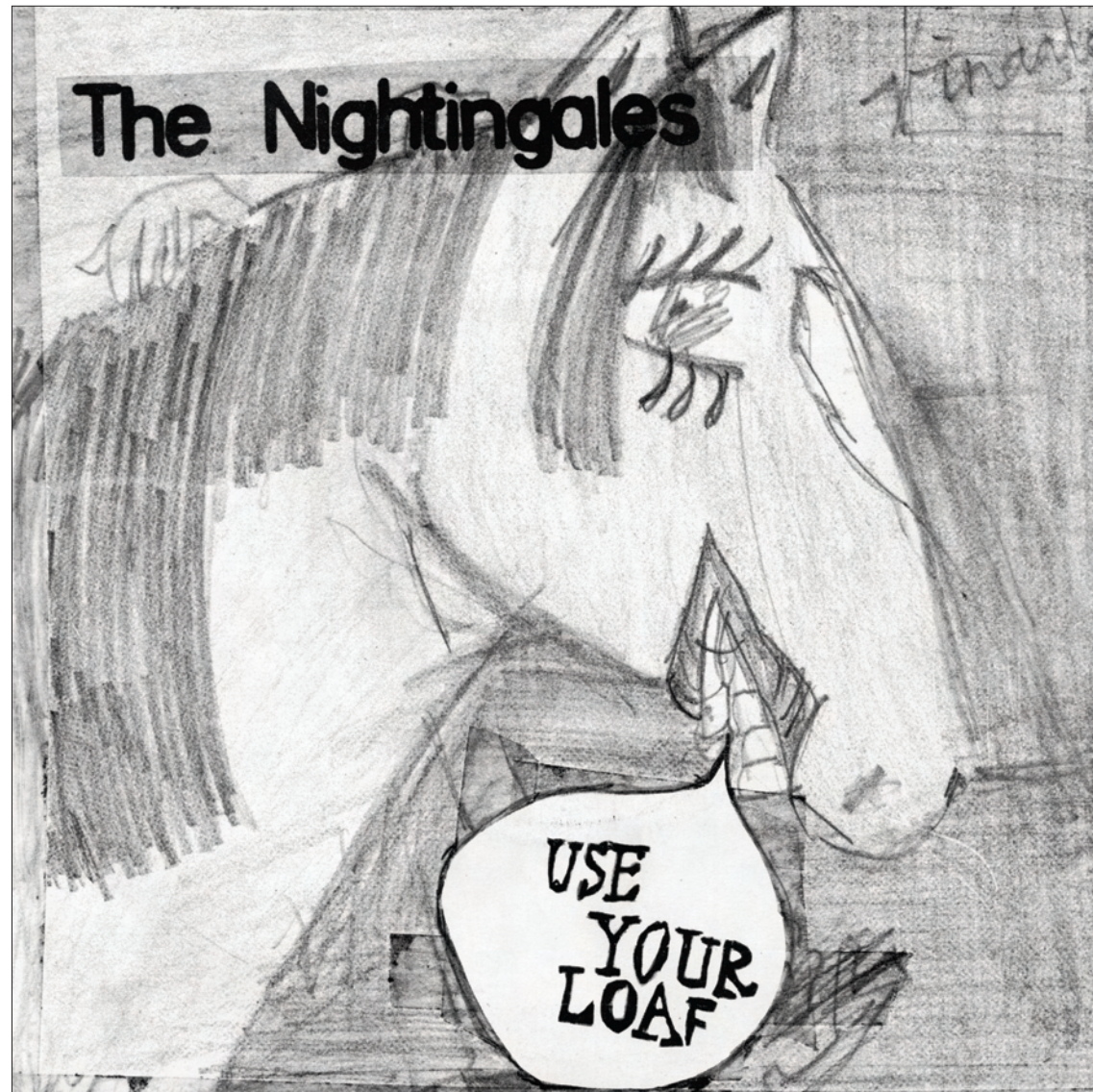


Fig.67: The Nightingales *Use Your Loaf/Inside Out/Under The Lash* (Cherry Red CHERRY34) 1981

act as a visual device without actually giving an inflexion in the pronunciation of the letter, was first used by American heavy rock group Blue Öyster Cult in 1970 and has become a significant device in the heavy metal genre in itself, being adopted by later groups such as Mötley Crüe and Queensrÿche among many others – Scottish NWOBHM group Hölöcäust even went so far as to include three gratuitous umlauts in their name on their debut single



Fig.68: Red London *Sten Guns In Sunderland e.p: This Is England/Soul Train/Revolution Times* (Razor RZ5105) 1983

Heavy Metal Mania released in July 1980! While both Heavy Metal and the Hardcore punk sub-genre would widely adopt blackletter typographic styles, it is only the former which practices the widespread use of umlauts as signifying devices in themselves.

The use of blackletter styles in punk would appear to originate largely during the Third

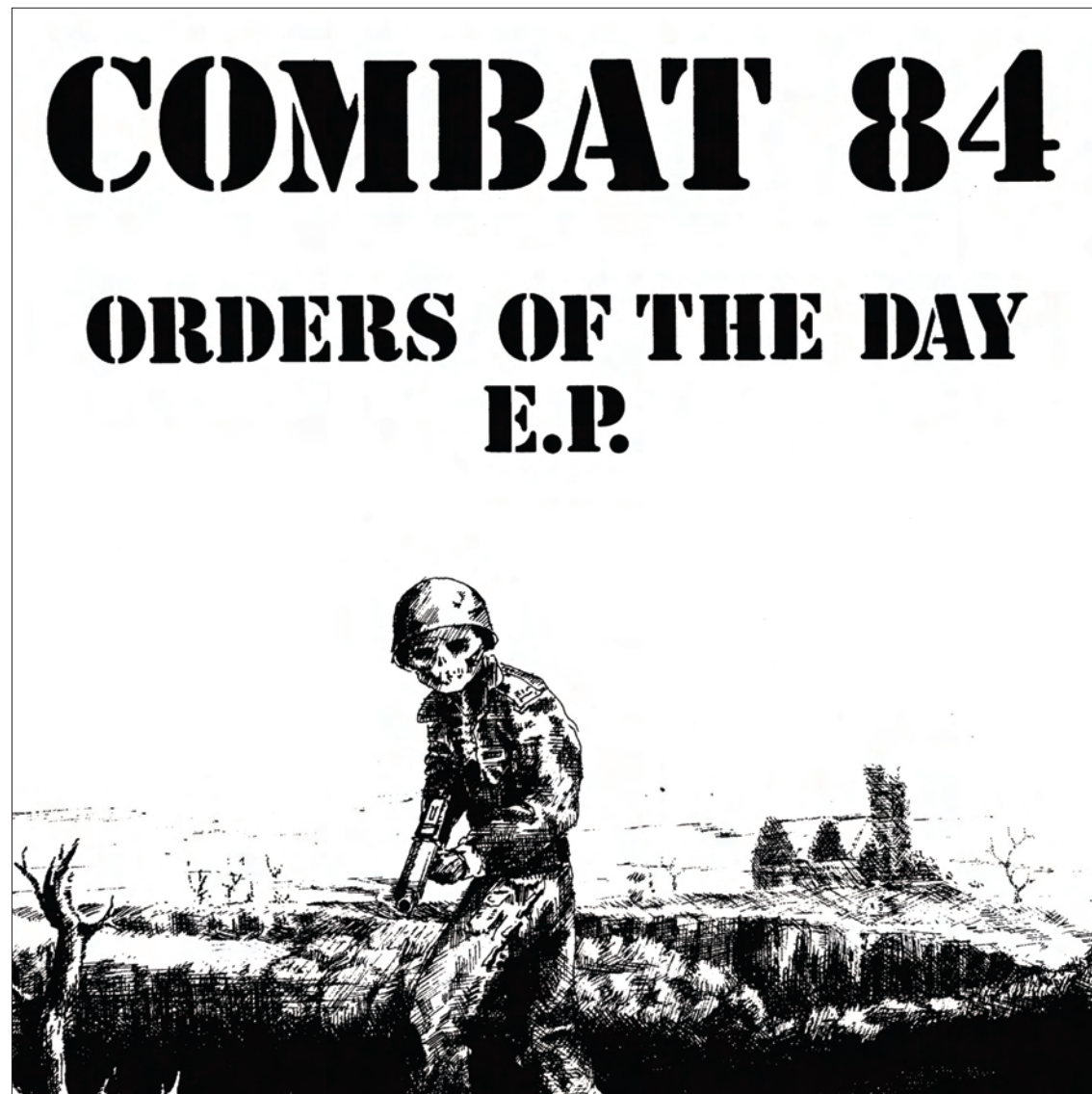


Fig.69: Combat 84 *Orders Of The Day* e.p.: Poseur/Skinhead/Violence/Combat 84 (Victory VIC1) 1983

Wave, particularly within the Hardcore and Oi sub-genres. Gothic type had been used earlier – notably on The Damned’s fourth single, *Don’t Cry Wolf* (Stiff 1977) and, notoriously, on The Skids second album *Days in Europa* (Virgin 1979), which depicted a muscular, ‘aryan’ athlete being crowned with a laurel wreath by a blonde woman in a scene reminiscent of the 1936 Olympics. The cover was swiftly withdrawn soon after release, and the album reissued with



Fig.70: Blitzkrieg *Lest We Forget* e.p.: Lest We Forget/Warfares Heroes/Abuse Of Power/Destruction (No Future OI8) 1982

new artwork. Both of these examples relate the use of Gothic styles directly with the group identity or the specific record contents – The Skids album was based on songs about war, for instance – within later examples, the use of the blackletter style can be seen to be more explicitly used as a direct signifier, relating to the subcultural group or musical sub-genre. Hardcore, which in itself shares some common roots within Heavy Metal, widely adopted the

style in the early 1980s, while its use within the Oi and developing Neo-Fascist scenes could be seen to have other antecedents and potential interpretations. The more recent use of Gothic type in Rap and Hip Hop is also interesting, though connections through Hispanic vernacular styles also help to cloud the picture. During the Third Wave of UK punk, sleeve designers choosing to use Gothic and blackletter styles faced a limited range of options. Within the Letraset range, Walbaum Fraktur was derived directly from German gothic styles, though the relative inaccessibility of the style in comparison with the widely available (and copied) Old English saw the latter more commonly adopted as a substitute. Others chose to draw their own interpretation of Gothic text, as in the main title on the debut e.p. by Merseyside New Punk group Blitzkrieg, *Lest We Forget*, released on the No Future label in April 1982 (see Figure 70). In this case, the letterforms were hand rendered, though they are clearly recognisable as being derived from Gothic characters.

6.2 Parody and Plagiarism

Punk graphics, during the establishment of the First Wave at least, were generally diverse in their use of images, typographic elements and colour. Jamie Reid's successful graphic design styles for the Sex Pistols can be seen to be iconic, but it may be just that fact that precluded their wider use by anyone else. Reid's graphics were fairly unique in many respects, and while other groups may have wanted to be a part of the new punk scene, they were wary of adopting a visual style which could be said to be a direct plagiarism of the Sex Pistols: the difficulty lay in visually presenting themselves as a part of the new scene but at the same time remaining distinct, with their own visual (and musical) identity. However, a number of design *strategies* (rather than *styles*) utilised by Reid can be seen to have been used more widely by other sleeve designers. The first of these is the détournement of existing visual imagery from popular culture – a tactic which Reid, in turn, had adopted from the Situationists in the late 1960s and used extensively in his work at Suburban Press between 1970 and 1975.¹⁰¹

Much of the graphic language of punk drew on found material and the use of either collage or a visual/verbal contrast, and the use of visual parody mirrors certain attitudes embodied in the music of many punk groups – for instance, in their adoption of lyrical or musical codes from earlier genres of popular music. The design for the Sex Pistols' fourth single *Holidays In The Sun* (October 1977) was an adaptation of a holiday brochure produced by the Belgian Travel Service. Reid took the comic strip story of a family enjoying their holiday, re-arranged the sequence in an irregular grid, and simply replaced the words in the speech balloons with the lyrics of the song – ending with a frame of a smiling young couple, with the man repeating the song's opening lyrical refrain, "A *cheap holiday in other peoples misery*" (see Figure 71). The visual language of the package holiday brochure is quite generic – the reader does not need to know that the original refers to holidays in Belgium, for instance – and Reid also adapted visual devices such as the smiling sun and the decorative type styles and colour palette of the original. Glitterbest management and Virgin Records were presented with an

¹⁰¹. "Détournement: The integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu... in a more primitive sense, détournement within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which testifies to the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres." (Internationale Situationiste No.1, June 1958 – cited in Blazwick 1989: 22). Much has been made of the supposed connections between the Situationist International and the First Wave of UK punk. It is not the intention of this project to retread this territory, but the term détournement is useful as a summary of a method of agit-prop collage which utilises powerful media imagery in order to attack the core values of the status quo.



Fig. 71: Sex Pistols *Holidays In The Sun/Satellite* (Virgin VS191) 1977

injunction by the owners of the plagiarised tourist brochure, and the *Holidays In The Sun* sleeve was withdrawn, with Reid being required to destroy the artwork in the presence of the company's solicitor. The single was subsequently issued in a plain white sleeve, and quickly dropped out of the charts, with the original sleeve becoming a collectors' item. A similar fate beset Reid's artwork for the Sex Pistols *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* single released two

years later: the sleeve featured a mock Sex Pistols credit card copied directly from the American Express card design. Once again, Virgin were forced to withdraw the sleeve, though not before around 80,000 copies had been sold.

After the original Sex Pistols split in early 1978, production continued for the film *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, with Sid Vicious, Paul Cook and Steve Jones still involved in producing music for the soundtrack. Jamie Reid was still part of the production team, and his graphics during this period reflect a growing dissatisfaction with the music industry and an open and deliberate antagonism towards the group's label and its owner Richard Branson. While many of the sleeves for later Sex Pistols record releases were made with fairly high reproduction values – single sleeves were full colour, and featured a series of stills from the film and parodies of consumer advertising – Reid went back to basics with posters and press ads, using crude collage and distressed photocopy techniques. He even revisited the swastika – a symbol whose relationship to punk had been short-lived, usually misconstrued and ultimately discredited several years earlier – in a series of collages including one swastika symbol made up of cannabis leaves beside the Virgin logo and the message “*never trust a hippie*” (one of many direct attacks on Branson). The final straw came with the release of the *Flogging A Dead Horse* singles compilation album in October 1979. For his initial sleeve design, Reid took the sleeves of the two previous albums, *Never Mind The Bollocks* and *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, and scrawled the new title on top of the original artwork. The design was rejected by Virgin, so Reid found a stock image of a model from a cheap agency and based the cover on that: “*...it was just taking the piss out of my own artwork and out of the whole Sex Pistols phenomenon. I got paid £2,000 for five minutes work. When Virgin rejected it, Trevor Key and I found the most tacky photo we could find of a model from a tacky agency. We just used the most boring sort of rope Letraset... Like the swastika sleeves and the Who/Monkees sleeve, it was a final fuck off to Virgin*” (Reid & Savage 1987: 104)

The methods of détournement adopted within Jamie Reid's work were also used by a number

of other designers, in more or less overt ways. Collage was a familiar, cheap and easy graphic language for many punk fanzines, flyers and record sleeves, but the way in which a specific reference to the original image is necessary to the communication of the intended message varies.¹⁰² For instance, the range of news clippings and images which are collaged to make up the cover of the sole release by The Front, *System* (1978), includes war scenes, riot police and comic strip frames, but the images themselves are generic – they may symbolise conflict or an attack on the suburban dream, but the people and places do not need to be recognised to get the (rather ambiguous) message (see Figure 72). The combination of photographs with cartoons, daubed with flashes of colour also mirrors early Situationist work such as Guy Debord and Asger Jorn's *Mémoires*, published in May 1959, and the (uncredited) sleeve appears to have been carefully designed by someone with at least some training in the visual arts – a fact supported by the incorporation of fairly complex colour overlays in the design.

A less sophisticated approach was used on the sleeve of the debut e.p. by Bristol group The Pigs, *Youthanasia* (September 1977) (see Figure 73). While the use of a hexagonal grid does show some attempt has been made at a formal composition, the images are rather randomly cropped and the typography, using overlaid white strips cut at an angle, ignores the underlying grid structure altogether. The collage does include some generic 'punk' visual references – a photograph of policemen, the Union flag and a notice regarding a cancelled punk gig – but these are not intended to be closely read or to denote specific meanings, and it can be assumed that the connotations of specific individual images are less relevant to the intended message than the overall collage composition itself. The sleeves for singles such as Red Alert *Take No Prisoners* (1982) (see Figure 74) and Court Martial *Gotta Get Out* (1982) can be said to be fairly representative of a number of early 1980s Third Wave releases: both use photographs from the Second World War, a common visual trope during this period. In the first instance the images are used within a strongly composed collage of bombed cities and dead bodies, while the second features a simple black and white photograph of a decaying body on a battlefield – in both cases any further description of the places and events is

102. The principles of détournement are based on the use of generally recognisable and iconic images, often from advertising and the media. Reid's use of a tourism brochure, for instance, relies on the audience's recognition of the generic visual language and authority of the original – it is not important to know that the original advertises holidays in Belgium, but it is necessary to recognise the visual language of holiday advertising. Some key images in collage may be used for their denotative meanings – i.e. they need to be recognised from their original context – while others may be connotative, in that their implied meaning is based on a broad understanding of the image genre, as in the use of war photography or reportage.



Fig.72: Front *System*/Queen's Mafia (The Label TLRoos) 1978

missing. War imagery was commonly used on Third Wave record sleeves, particularly within the Anarcho Punk and Hardcore subgenres, and was very seldom credited or given any further contextual support – one key exception being the use of contemporary news clippings regarding the Falklands War by the group Crass on their series of anti-war releases between 1982 and 1984.



Fig.73: **The Pigs** *Youthanasia/They Say/Psychopath/National Front* (New Bristol Records NBR01) 1977

One particularly striking and original sleeve was designed by a group of teenagers from Torquay, Das Schnitz, who released one single, *4AM*, on the Ellie Jay label in 1979 (see Figure 75). They couldn't afford to produce a sleeve for their record, so they decided on an unusual strategy which – unknowingly to them – takes Jamie Reid's concept for the last Sex Pistols album one stage further. The group got hold of record sleeves for a range of contemporary



Fig.74: **Red Alert** *Take No Prisoners/Empire Of Crime/Sell Out* (No Future Ol13) 1982

chart releases – including releases by Chaka Khan, Darts, Chic, The Shadows and Funkadelic – and wrote their own titles on the covers with marker pens, together with comments related to the wording on the original sleeve. Guitarist Nadi Jahangiri remembers it was a spur of the minute decision: *"From what I remember, incredibly there was a stall at a local market that just sold picture sleeves in bulk from singles of the day. I can't think if he sold anything*



Fig.75: Das Schnitz 4AM/Getting Nowhere/My House (detourned sleeve) (Ellie Jay EJSP9246) 1979

else but that's where we got the sleeves. It was purely a financial decision as there was not enough money to get our own sleeves printed. We then de-faced them one Saturday afternoon at the drummer's house" (Interview with the author, 14th March 2005). The record release did lead to some local publicity for the group: "...the single went straight in at number two on the local chart on April 21 1979, where it stayed for a number of weeks. It was not distributed



Fig.76: Ian Dury & The Blockheads Sueperman's Big Sister/You'll See Glimpses (label) (Stiff BUY100) 1980

nationally." The sleeve design also gave the group some wider notoriety: "...fans and record buyers loved the idea. It meant that the band had personally been involved in a record that they had bought. Chaka Khan's record label wrote to us threatening to sue us if we carried on selling the single in her sleeve but nothing came of it." The group split the following year when the individual members went off to college, but the record itself has become a

highly-prized collectors' item, selling for up to £200 at record fairs, and featured in Record Collector magazine's *100 Most Collectable Punk Records* in May 2006.

A humorous use of détournement – or, more accurately, self-parody – also accompanied the release of Stiff Records 100th single, *Sueperman`s Big Sister* by Ian Dury & The Blockheads in October 1980. The single was issued in a picture sleeve, but the centre labels on the record itself playfully adapted the labels from Stiff's first single release, *So It Goes* by Nick Lowe (issued in August 1976), crossing out the original title details and adding the new information by hand (see Figure 76). Stiff had always been fond of playful word games across their record catalogue – many of their single releases featured a cryptic message scribbled into the run-out grooves of the vinyl alongside the Matrix number, and marketing schemes were often based on humorous copywriting. Early company sleeves were rubber stamped by hand, with slogans such as “*Artistic breakthrough! Double “B” side*”, while later sleeves proclaimed “*If it means everything to everyone, it must be a Stiff*” and “*Today's sound today.*” Along with Chiswick, Stiff pioneered the use of multiple formats and unusual gimmicks to gain a foothold in the collectors' market, realising that a humorous visual and verbal consistency across the catalogue would encourage buyers to collect ‘the set’. Label credits were also occasionally adapted to reflect the record release at hand: Wreckless Eric's 1978 single *Take The Cash (K.A.S.H.)* was issued in a company sleeve, but the label details altered the company identity from Stiff Records to “*Stiff Wrecords*”, and the usual Stiff tag-line (a homage to the golden age of rock and pop records produced in the early 1960s) “electrically recorded” was altered to “*Erically Recorded*”.

6.3 Kick Over The Statues

Another punk visual trope developed from Jamie Reid's designs was based around the use of an iconic image, which could be appropriated as a symbol of authority, tradition and the state. This is a more direct form of détournement than those detailed in the previous section, as it utilises the range of cultural connotations of the original image more directly. With the *Holidays In The Sun* sleeve, Reid had détourned a holiday brochure, the ‘readings’ of which were communicated through its generic visual form. In the case of the Sex Pistols *God Save The Queen* single (May 1977), however, the image of the head of state is central to the communication principle at stake. By taking an iconic image, such as the Cecil Beaton photograph of the Queen, which had been reproduced for the 1977 Silver Jubilee celebrations on everything from stamps to posters, mugs, T shirts, badges and flags, and adding another visual element to alter its context, the power of the original image could be inverted. Reid made a number of graphic adaptations of the portrait: the sleeve of the single featured the image with strips torn across the eyes and mouth, bearing the song title and name of the group (see Figure 77), while further versions for press advertisements and publicity posters incorporated a safety pin through the Queen's lips, set against a union flag background. A version that incorporated swastika symbols placed on the Queen's eyes was withdrawn, but later published in the retrospective of Reid's work *Up They Rise* in 1987.

The *God Save The Queen* sleeve has been widely cited as a key example of ‘punk’ design, and is documented as something of a 20th century graphic design ‘classic’. Rick Poynor argues that the sleeve is an early example of the appropriation of postmodern theories of ‘deconstruction’ within graphic design (Poynor 2003: 39), while Dick Hebdige gives a cultural reading to the use of blackmail typography and torn strips, asserting that together they “...connote crime or scandal” (Hebdige 1979: 112). The sleeve has also featured in numerous publications of music graphics, including *Q Magazine: The 100 Best Record Covers of All Time* (2003), Seiler, Burkhardt & Friends (1998), Mulholland (2002) and de Ville (2003). Reid spent a great deal of time working on variations of the image, with the ‘safety pin’ version for press



Fig.77: Sex Pistols *God Save The Queen/Did You No Wrong* (Virgin VS181) 1977

advertisements and posters becoming the most widely recognised; “...I must have done literally hundreds of different images around that particular photo of the Queen’s face. Which was an official Cecil Beaton portrait that I got from the *Daily Express*. I did two days of photographic sessions with Carol Moss until I came up with the safety pin” (Reid & Savage 1987: 65). In fact, the variations in Reid’s promotional artwork have led to some confusion,

and it has become something of an accepted truth that the ‘safety pin’ version appeared on the record sleeve itself: Garry Mulholland, for instance, refers to “...the safety pin through Liz’s nose on the sleeve, courtesy of Jamie Reid” (Mulholland 2002: 32), despite the fact that a photograph of the sleeve appears on the facing page.

In the early 1980s, the new political agenda of the Conservative government had a massive impact on the UK, and was widely perceived to be both authoritarian and discriminatory towards the working class. Unemployment soared, while a major overhaul of the welfare and tax systems had a direct impact on young people and the poor. It was natural, therefore, that Margaret Thatcher should take on a central role as a negative figure of authority within oppositional politics and satire, and within punk’s language of protest. Conservative Secretary of State for Employment Norman Tebbit put forward a range of new, hard-line rules regarding access to unemployment benefits, with the aim of forcing young people into work – a move which also resulted in attacks from both the opposition and protest groups across the country. The 1982 Falklands War resulted in a rift between pro- and anti-war activists, and these attitudes were also played out within the punk scene. Thatcher and her cabinet provided a common enemy for many punk groups and fans, and their iconic status as the *bêtes-noire* of the political underclass was utilised in countless song lyrics and record sleeves.

In much the same way that the Silver Jubilee of 1977 had provided the Sex Pistols with an iconic image to attack, the Third Wave punks took Margaret Thatcher as a figurehead for their collective anger. Anarcho Punk scene leaders Crass made repeated lyrical references to both Thatcher and the Conservative government, and used her image on several sleeves. The sleeve to their 1984 single *You’re Already Dead* (see Figures 78 and 79) featured photographs of Thatcher and Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine, with Thatcher’s eyes and Heseltine’s mouth crudely scratched out. While this visually emulates the style of Reid’s Sex Pistols artwork, particularly the ‘swastika eyes’ version of *God Save The Queen*, the political context of the defaced imagery is different. In this case, the attack is more direct, making a dual



Fig.78: Crass *You're Already Dead/Gotcha!* (Crass 1984) 1984

reference: firstly to the blindness of Thatcher's drive to war and Heseltine's failure to question the reason for conflict (his duty as a minister), and secondly as a direct mutilation of the politicians themselves.

The lyrics to the 1983 Crass song *Gotcha!* – the title of which is a direct reference to *The Sun*

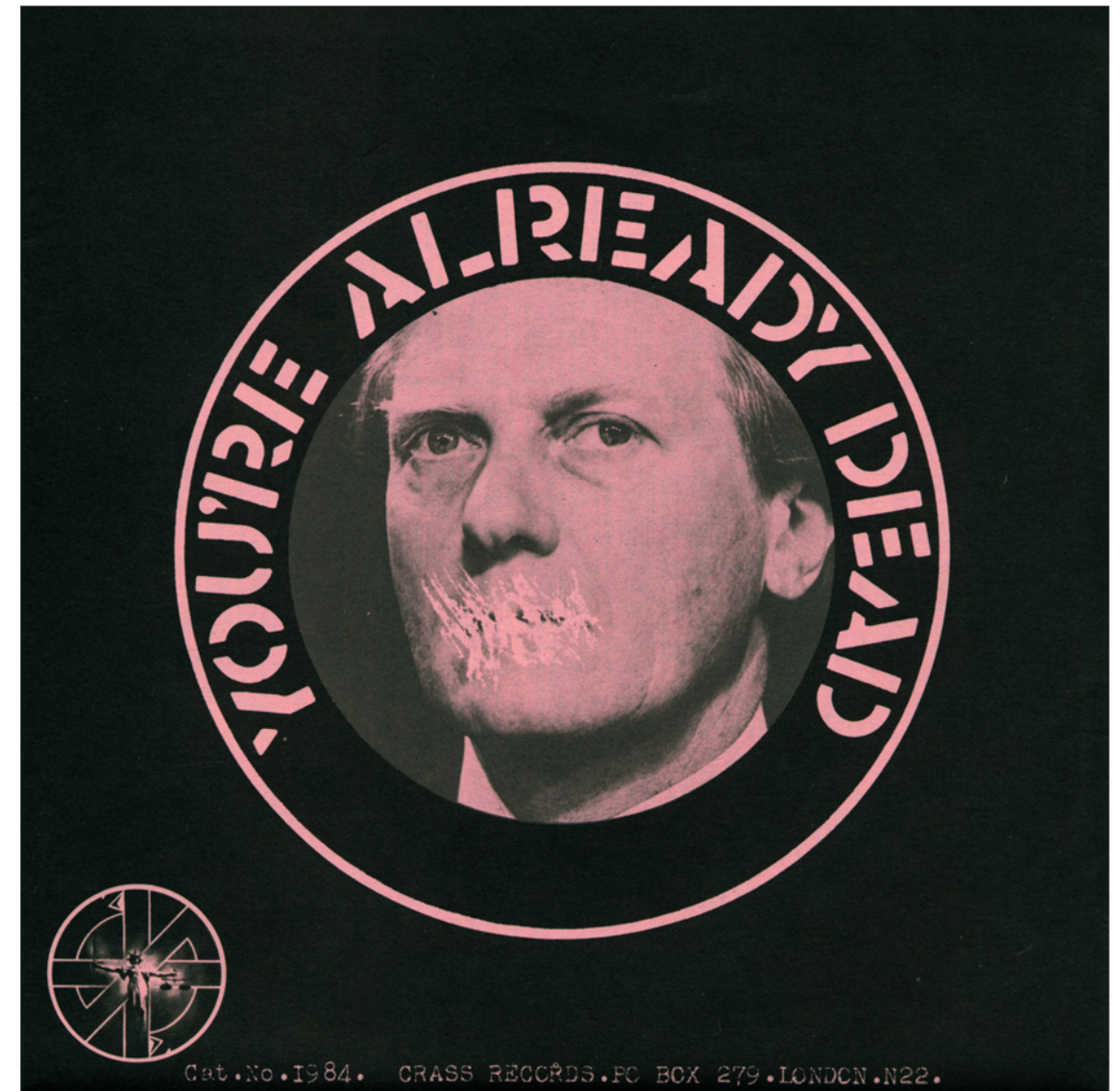


Fig.79: Crass *You're Already Dead/Gotcha!* (reverse of sleeve) (Crass 1984) 1984

newspaper headline following the sinking of Argentine ship *The Belgrano* during the Falklands War – are indicative of their stance:

*That is Thatcher's Britain built on national pride,
Built on national heritage and the bodies of those who died*

*To wave the flag on the Falklands, to protect us from the Irish hordes,
 To support the rich in their difficult task of protecting themselves from the poor
 Yes, this is Thatcher's Britain, so let's increase the strength of the police
 Let's expand the military, let's all arm for peace
 Let's suppress all opposition, let's keep the people down
 Let's resurrect past histories for the glory of the crown*

Thatcher's status as a hate figure had become cemented by the time of the IRA bombing of the Grand Hotel in Brighton during the Conservative Party conference in October 1984 – an event which was commemorated in song by the Angelic Upstarts on their *Brighton Bomb* single. The group had earlier launched a searing attack on Thatcher; the single *Woman In Disguise*, released in November 1982, featured a distorted halftone newspaper photograph of the Prime Minister on the sleeve (see Figure 80). Like Reid's earlier work and the examples used by Crass, the use of coarse halftone image is also important – it denotes the process of print reproduction in the news media, rather than an 'original' photograph. While the above sleeve designs indicate an extension of the détournement principles of earlier work, Thatcher's status as a figure of hate among the punk community led to further developments more closely resembling satire, notably through the adoption of illustrative approaches and the use of caricature. Riot Squad's 1982 single *Fuck The Tories* (see Figure 81) featured a crude drawing of a punk defacing an image of Margaret Thatcher on the sleeve, and could be said to be fairly representative of the mood of many participants in the Third Wave punk movement. While the imaginary scene is simplistic – Thatcher's image was not used on political posters in 'real life' – the message is abundantly clear.

The use of simple line drawing and caricature, mirroring the traditions of political satire, enables the communication of complex messages within a visual form that could not be easily reproduced using photography or other graphic means. A similar cartoon style was used on the sleeve for The Exploited's 1983 single *Rival Leaders* (see Figure 82) – caricatures of

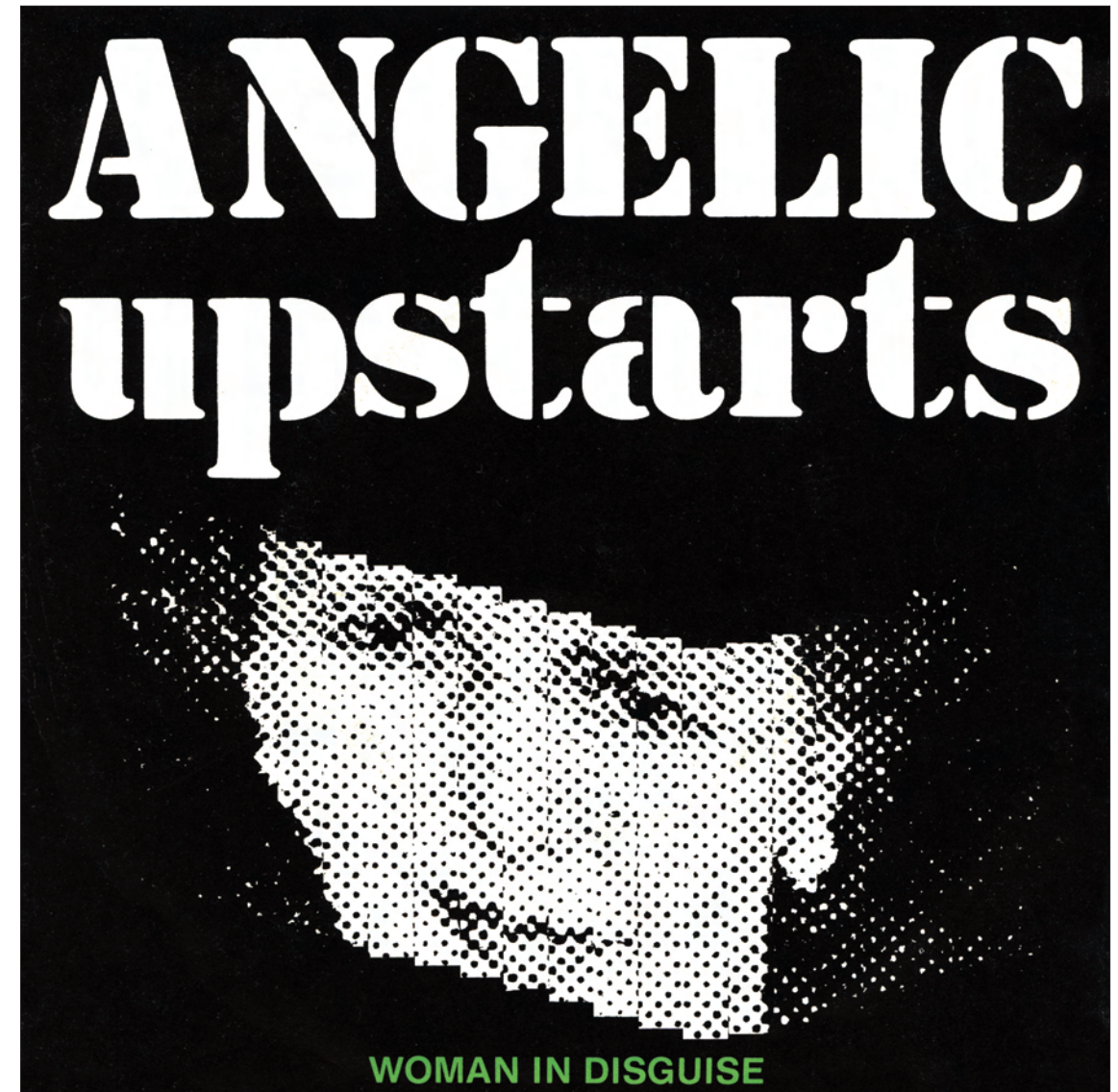


Fig.80: Angelic Upstarts *Woman In Disguise/Lust For Glory* (Anagram ANA3) 1982

Margaret Thatcher, US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev¹⁰³ as puppeteers controlling riot police, soldiers, tanks and warplanes, offer a critical view of politicians as participants in a game of world destruction within which ordinary citizens are mere puppets. The call-to-arms chorus of Anti Pasti's *No Government* single, released three years earlier, had declared "*No Maggie Thatcher and No Government!*". The apposite

103. Brezhnev had, in fact, died in office a year previously. He was succeeded by Vasily Kuznetsov as acting premier between November 1982 and June 1983, and subsequently by former head of the KGB, Yuri Andropov. Brezhnev had, however, effectively been head of the Soviet state since 1964, and was clearly a recognisable figure in world politics.



Fig.81: Riot Squad Fuck The Tories/We Are The Riot Squad/Civil Destruction (Rondelet ROUND23) 1982

conclusion of this style of songwriting may well be Portsmouth Hardcore Punk group Ad Nauseum's *Thatcher*, released in 1984, the lyrics of which are a vitriolic and at times virtually incomprehensible rant which simply repeats the phrase "*Thatcher Thatcher Thatcher Thatcher!*"¹⁰⁴

104. A more direct assault was provided by The Exploited on their 1985 album track *Maggie*, the chorus of which leaves little to the imagination; "*Maggie, Maggie you cunt! Maggie, Maggie you cunt! Maggie, Maggie you cunt! Maggie Maggie Maggie Maggie you fucking cunt!*" One amusing alternative position was provided by Burnley punk group The Notsensibles in 1979, with their debut single *I'm In Love With Margaret Thatcher* on the Snotty Snail label. This was an ironic love song about the Prime Minister, which featured an early press shot of Margaret Thatcher on the cover.



Fig.82: The Exploited Rival Leaders/Army Style/Singalongabushell (Pax PAX15) 1983

By contrast to this use of a single iconic figure, the sleeves for The Exploited *Exploited Army* (1980) and *The Partisans 17 Years Of Hell* (1982) both feature collaged portraits of some well known figures from the media and popular culture, interspersed with anonymous characters from magazines and photos of the band or their fans. The latter sleeve features politicians including Margaret Thatcher, Harold Wilson, Ted Heath, Michael Foot, Edwina

Curry, US Presidents Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, and former Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev, together with members of the Royal family (Princess Anne, the Princess of Wales, Prince Charles, Prince Philip and the Queen), and celebrities such as US television soap character JR Ewing, Telly Savalas, Sid Vicious, Johnny Rotten and Barry Manilow. These photographs are mixed in with anonymous faces from war reports, a baby seal, images of policemen and snapshots of the group themselves (see Figure 83). It is interesting to note that the eyes of each member of the Royal Family have been obscured with a black line – a direct reference to the Sex Pistols *God Save The Queen* sleeve. Apart from this and the inclusion of Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious, a more subtle meta-punk reference is communicated through the inclusion of London Councillor Bernard Brook Partridge (bottom left of sleeve), who had appeared on television in 1977 to denounce the Sex Pistols and the punk movement in general with the infamous words “...the Sex Pistols would be vastly improved by sudden death, they are the antithesis of human kind. I would like to see someone dig a huge hole and bury the lot of them in it.” Although the collage does carry some significance simply through its visual form, as could be seen in the previous section, in these cases it is important to recognise at least some of the individuals portrayed in order to understand the underlying message.

The use of similar meta-punk references within punk sleeve graphics was not unusual. During the First Wave of UK punk, such devices could imply that the group were a part of the emerging scene, or could be used on Novelty Punk records to satirise the new visual language of punk. As the movement progressed and became more widely recognised, later punk sleeves incorporated visual references to earlier punk ‘icons’ as either a form of homage, as on Special Duties *Punk Rocker* (1983), or as a negative comment on the ‘selling out’ of punk’s original ideology and the ways in which those who had originally attacked the establishment had become a part of the establishment themselves (for instance, on the 4 Skins *Yesterdays Heroes* (1981), which featured ‘crossed-out’ portraits of Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, Mick Jagger and Johnny Rotten). A satirical image which combined the détournement



Fig.83: The Partisans 17 Years Of Hell/The Power And The Greed/Bastards In Blue (No Future Ol12) 1982

of punk icons and authority figures was designed by Gee Vaucher for the joint Crass/Poison Girls single *Bloody Revolutions/Persons Unknown*, released by Crass Records in 1980 (see Figure 84). The image, a gouache illustration by Vaucher, is based on a publicity photograph of the Sex Pistols from 1977, reconfigured with the individual’s heads substituted by those of the Queen, Pope John Paul II, the statue of justice and Margaret Thatcher. The record sleeve

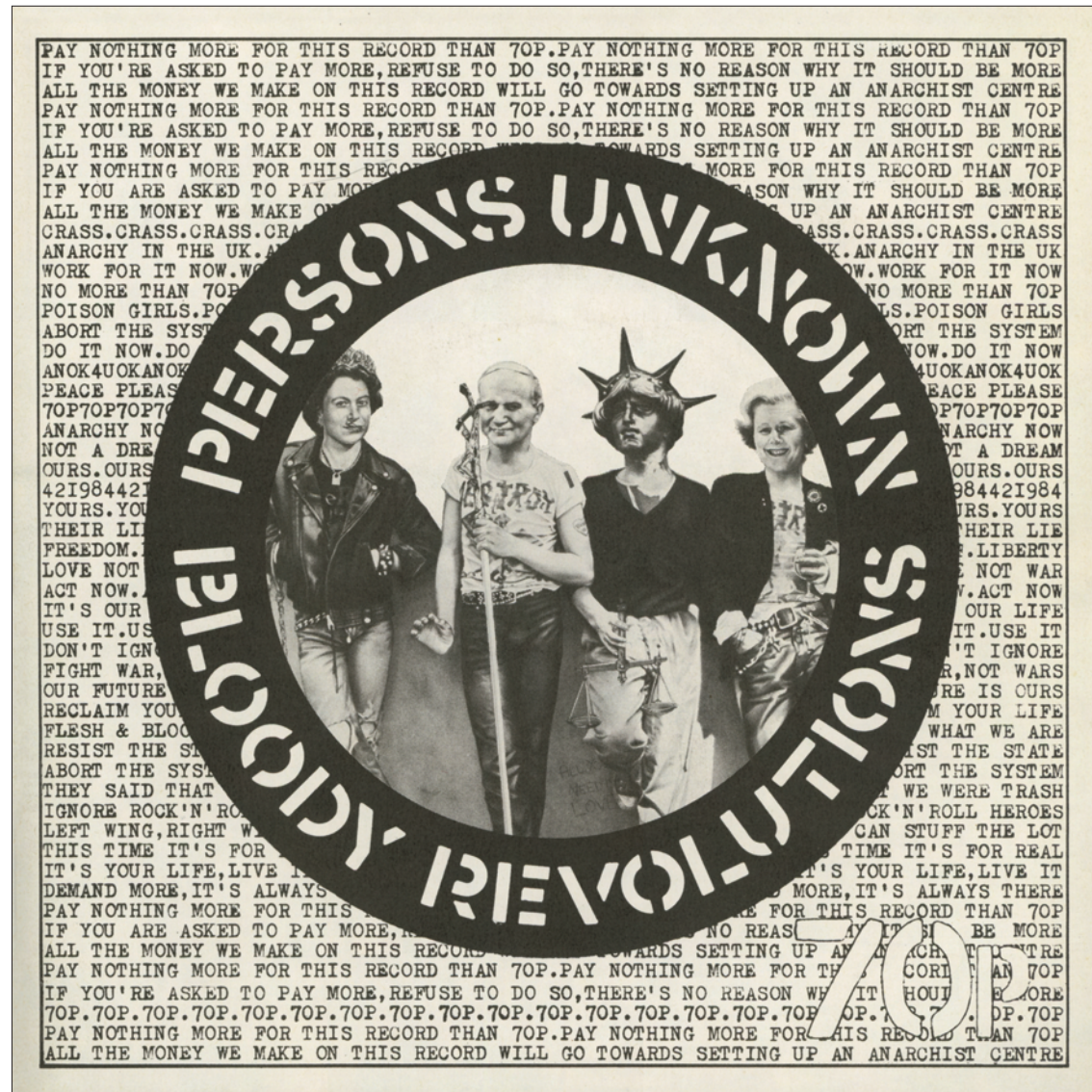


Fig.84: Crass/Poison Girls Bloody Revolutions/Persons Unknown (Crass Records 421984/1) 1980

folds out to reveal a poster of the original image, which sets the figures in the context of a decaying street scene. This complex image works on a number of levels: primarily, it satirises the Sex Pistols themselves as figures of authority and the state, passing an ironic comment on their failure – and that of the punk ‘establishment’ – to live up to a ‘revolutionary’ ideal. However, the use of iconic individuals for the heads of the figures also works as a direct



Fig.85: Special Duties Bullshit Crass/You're Doing Yourself No Good (Rondelet ROUND24) 1982

détournement of those icons themselves, within the context of a punk rock record. Crass strongly criticised the failure of the punk movement in general to engage with a political direction, satirising The Clash, the Sex Pistols and other punk ‘heroes’ in their lyrics, and this attitude was reflected in their early artwork. During the Third Wave of UK punk, they also attacked the New Punk and Oi movements, both in lyrics and press releases. Their flexidisc

single *Rival Tribal Rebel Revel* (Crass 1981) even presented this argument within a song mocking the ‘Cockney bootboy’ Oi stereotype. The counter argument was taken up by Special Duties lead singer Steve Arrogant; Special Duties releasing the single *Bullshit Crass* on Rondelet records in 1982, which reached number seven in the independent chart (see Figure 85). The lyrics parodied the Crass chant “*Fight War, Not Wars*” with a chorus of “*Fight Crass, Not Punk*”, and the sleeve featured the group’s name in a circle of stencilled type reversed out of a black background – a direct reflection on the visual identity of Crass records.

6.4 Xerox Machine

Another strategy adopted by Reid, particularly during the later phase of the Sex Pistols’ musical career and the filming of *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, centred on the presentation of the group as a cynically marketed ‘product’, without any creative or artistic merit. The sleeves for a series of singles were designed to ram the point home: while some featured stills from the film itself, others such as *Silly Thing* (April 1979) (see Figure 86) and *C’Mon Everybody* (June 1979) (see Figure 87) featured examples of graphics developed for the fake products created by Reid as props for various scenes in the film. While *Silly Thing* featured ‘Sex Pistols Pop Corn’ packaging, *C’Mon Everybody* had an image of a ‘Vicious Burger’ on the front of the sleeve. Other bogus products used in the film included ‘Gob Ale’, ‘Piss Lemonade’, ‘Rotten Bar’ chocolate and ‘Anarkee-Ora’ (a pun on Kia-Ora, a brand of soft drink often sold in cinemas). The full range of dummy packages were featured in a scene at a snack kiosk in a cinema foyer when audience members arrive to see the new Sex Pistols film, with veteran comic actress Irene Handl and singer Eddie Tenpole as ushers. They were also photographed for the cover of *Some Product: Carri on Sex Pistols*, a compilation album of outtakes and interviews, released by Virgin in July 1979.

The underlying ironic wit of Reid’s work for the group at this point is often overlooked, as design historians and critics tend to focus on earlier iconic work such as the *God Save The Queen* sleeve and *Never Mind The Bollocks* album cover. By the time the film had gone into full production the Sex Pistols had split up and Sid Vicious was dead, and Reid found himself increasingly at odds with Virgin Records over his graphic output. After a court case in March 1979, McLaren and Reid also found themselves forced out of their controlling interest in the Glitterbest enterprise which managed the Sex Pistols, and though he produced a wide range of graphic material for the film, much of it never saw the light of day – including posters declaring “God Save Myra Hindley”, graphics for “The Cambridge Rapist Hotel” and a number of pieces of work based around the theme of the swastika. In the same way that other groups were taking swipes at the legacy of punk, Reid began to mock his own position and the



Fig.86: Sex Pistols *Silly Thing/Who Killed Bambi?* (Virgin VS256) 1979

nature of the Sex Pistols 'brand'. As he later noted to Jon Savage; "...as far as I'm concerned, I thought the best Sex Pistols product was *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*. I think in a way we jumped too far ahead of ourselves. It was meant to be a loud and blatant statement about pop consumerism and who buys pop records and what a pop band is – just a factory churning out things for people to buy, but surrounded by myth" (Reid & Savage 1987: 85). The 'Vicious



Fig.87: Sex Pistols *C'Mon Everybody/God Save The Queen Symphony/Whatcha Gonna Do About It?* (Virgin VS272) 1979

Burger' campaign was a deliberate extension of an earlier spoof work Reid had done relating to Elvis Presley's death in 1977, when he had produced a fanzine entitled *Pick of the Posers*, stating that Presley's body had been stolen and turned into hamburgers. Since *C'Mon Everybody* was the second posthumous Sid Vicious single, the approach seemed appropriate. This notion of punk music as machine-made 'product' was not limited to Reid's work with

the Sex Pistols. Several other First Wave punk groups had explored the theme of consumerism and the tensions brought about by the marketing and selling of punk music and fashion. X Ray Spex, fronted by former Kings Road boutique assistant Poly Styrene, produced a string of singles and an album, *Germ Free Adolescents*, with lyrics reflecting the developing punk scene in London and satirising consumer culture. Their songs included *Identity*, *Warrior In Woolworths*, *The Day The World Turned Day-glo* and *Art-I-Ficial*, the latter of which featured lyrics which revolved around the theme of modern consumerism and domestic appliances:

*I know I'm artificial
But don't put the blame on me
I was reared with appliances
In a consumer society*

*When I put on my make-up
The pretty little mask not me
That's the way a girl should be
In a consumer society*

*My existence is elusive
The kind that is supported
By mechanical resources*

*I wanna be instamatic
I wanna be a frozen pea
I wannna be dehydrated
In a consumer society*

Similarly, The Buzzcocks had begun to explore themes of musical and lyrical repetition from the outset. Songs such as *Boredom*, on their debut *Spiral Scratch* e.p. featured deadpan vocal phrasing and simple, repetitive musical themes – in the case of *Boredom* a two-note guitar solo which builds tension “...in its fixated refusal to go anywhere melodically.” (Reynolds 2005: 16). Guitarist Pete Shelley, who took over the lead vocal role after the departure of original singer Howard Devoto in February 1977, had a long-standing interest in electronic music by the likes of German pioneers Kraftwerk, and his songwriting for The Buzzcocks explored both melodic pop punk and repetitive rhythmic structures. Songs such as *Moving Away From The Pulsebeat*, *Why Can't I Touch It?* and *I Believe* (which repeats the staccato phrase “*There is no love in this world anymore*” fourteen times in the final verse) played with the notion of ‘mechanical’ music and the removal of the pretence of any artistic or creative musical value, and the theme was continued within some of the graphic design approaches for the groups’ sleeves, designed by Malcolm Garrett’s Associated Images studio. Early copies of the debut album *Another Music In A Different Kitchen*, released in March 1978, were packaged in a silver carrier bag printed with the word *Product* in bold, sans serif type.

Many other First and Second Wave punk groups set out to explore the theme of machine music, and themes of robotics, science fiction and computers became popular. Early punk songs such as The Valves *Robot Love* (1977) and The Saints *Do The Robot* (1977) tied the concept neatly to certain trends in First Wave punk clubs for robotic dancing, blank stares and a rejection of ‘human’ emotions, perhaps best encapsulated in the debut single by Welsh group The Table, *Do The Standing Still* (1977). The punk fanzine aesthetic, incorporating simple collage and Xerox copier reproduction, was also reflected in the music: Adam & The Ants recorded a song entitled *Zerox* in 1979, and the Desperate Bicycles sang that “...*Xerox music's here at last!*” on their second single, released in February 1978. Even some of the more traditionally melodic punk groups followed suit: the final track on the debut album by Stiff Little Fingers, entitled *Closed Groove*, is a highly repetitive mantra semi-spoken by a fictional “*answering machine*”, following certain musical themes explored by The Buzzcocks and Wire.

Experimental American New Wave pioneers Devo, from Akron, Ohio, issued their influential debut album of what they termed “*mechanical music*” (produced by Brian Eno), *Are We Not Men?*, on the Virgin label in September 1978, following minor chart success with three singles on Stiff Records. The combination of simple musical structures and a futuristic vision drew on a number of traditional rock & roll themes dating back to songs such as *Telstar* by Joe Meek & The Tornados – named after a communications satellite – which reached number one in the UK in September 1962 (and reportedly Margaret Thatcher’s favourite song), and an entire sub-genre of early rock & roll music.¹⁰⁵ Artists such as David Bowie had worked on similar themes throughout the 1960s and early 1970s – Bowie’s *Space Oddity* single was a major hit in 1969, and his *Low* and *Heroes* albums, both released in 1977, had a wide musical impact on many of the up and coming punk and New Wave artists at the time, including Ultravox, Tubeway Army and Magazine. Devo certainly had an influence on the songwriting of successful UK punk groups such as The Stranglers, while John Lydon’s post-Sex Pistols group Public Image Limited embraced the sonic approaches of experimental electronica and dub, in turn influencing a vast array of DIY experimental groups. Manchester avant-garde pioneers The Fall included a song on their debut single entitled *Repetition*, which included a caustic self-reflection on the nature of the groups’ musical approach:

We're gonna get real speedy
We're gonna wear black all the time
You're gonna make it on your own
Cos we dig
Cos we dig
We dig
We dig repetition
We dig repetition
We dig repetition in the music
And we're never going to lose it

105. The Soviet Union had first successfully launched the Sputnik satellite in 1957, and both atomic energy and space travel were becoming a potential reality. Stories of aliens and flying saucers had also fuelled popular mythology in the USA throughout the 1950s and 1960s, at a time of increasing paranoia at the height of the Cold War. These influences led to the production of a range of successful Sci-Fi films, including *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Invaders from Mars* (1953) and *War Of The Worlds* (1953), and to a huge number of B-Movies in the same vein such as *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers* (1956) and *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959). Rock & Roll artists also adopted these themes, as exemplified in songs such as *Flying Saucer Boogie* by Eddie Cletro (1952) and *Flying Saucers Rock ‘n’ Roll* by Billy Lee Riley (1957).

All you daughters and sons
Who are sick of fancy music
We dig repetition
Repetition in the drums
And we're never going to lose it
This is the three R's
The three R's:
Repetition, Repetition, Repetition

These ‘mechanical’ themes were influential on the graphic styles adopted by sleeve designers. Malcolm Garrett utilised a range of geometrical forms and flat colours for the early Buzzcocks single sleeves, adding iconic visual elements including figures from the Letraset architectural catalogue. Wire used ‘technical drawing’ style figures on a number of sleeves, including *I Am The Fly* (February 1978) and *Dot Dash* (June 1978), and a similar graphic approach was developed across a range of avant-garde DIY releases by groups such as Spizzoil, The Mekons and Cabaret Voltaire. The front sleeve for the debut single by The Mekons, *Never Been In A Riot* (1978), designed by Bob Last, features hand-rendered typography on graph paper and a montaged image of a microphone and stand, while the reverse continues the microphone lead to a pair of speakers, with directions indicating “...to record” and “...to you” – a simple illustration of the recording and production process (see Figure 88).

Crossovers between avant-garde Post Punk and the newly evolving Disco scene should also not be overlooked – the release of Donna Summer’s *I Feel Love* in 1977, the first hit song recorded with an entirely synthesized backing track, took the machine aesthetic and blended it with dance rhythms. Produced by Giorgio Moroder, the song inspired mainstream rock artists such as David Bowie as well as influencing the later New Wave and Post Punk styles of groups as diverse as Blondie and Joy Division. Simon Reynolds even asserts that “...for many



Fig.88: The Mekons *Never Been In A Riot/32 Weeks/Heart And Soul* (reverse of sleeve) (Fast Product FAST1) 1978

of the post-punk persuasion, 1977's most significant singles weren't 'White Riot' or 'God Save The Queen', but Kraftwerk's 'Trans-Europe Express', a metronomic, metal-on-metal threnody for the industrial era, and Donna Summer's Giorgio Moroder-produced porno-Eurodisco smash 'I Feel Love', a track made almost entirely from synthetic sounds" (Reynolds 2005: xxii). The 1980s New Pop and electronic dance remix culture led by New Order, Depeche Mode, Soft

Cell, Frankie Goes To Hollywood and the Human League also drew heavily from these synthetic musical styles. It was in the field of electronic music, in fact, that the strongest impact of new technologies and the machine age was felt: the introduction of cheap programmable synthesizers in the late 1970s fed directly into the home recording and DIY record industry. Drum loops and synthesized bass and keyboard sounds could be synchronised together to create fairly complex arrangements, and could be controlled by one or two musicians. While the original punk DIY pioneers such as the Desperate Bicycles and The Buzzcocks had used traditional studio set-ups to record their songs, a new batch of musicians could take the entire recording and production process in-house, alongside the graphics and packaging – the only area left which could not be self produced being the record cutting and pressing process, which in itself could be accessed via the numerous small pressings services which had begun to advertise in the music press. The success of New Pop in chart terms in the early 1980s meant that these DIY approaches were to be fairly short lived but still highly influential – the machine aesthetic became a visual trope in the sleeve design of the new electronica which continues to this day within certain techno recordings and label identities, albeit in a more sophisticated visual form. During the mid 1980s, the crossover from early hand-made styles to computer-generated forms (designed by professional designers) mirrored the shift in musical production from the home studio to the major labels: the ragged, hand-made nature of early DIY electronic graphics reflected the home studio approach to music making and recording, and the more complex and glossy image which followed was in keeping with the highly polished musical production of artists such as The Art Of Noise and Trevor Horn's ZTT label.

6.5 Electronically Yours

The debut single by Daniel Miller, *T.V.O.D./Warm Leatherette*, issued under the guise of The Normal in February 1978 on Miller's own Mute Records label, was recorded in Miller's bedroom on a four track studio. The sound was hard, dry, repetitive, explicitly electronic and synthetic, and helped to set the scene for an entire musical movement that was to follow. Miller's label went on to release a successful catalogue of electronic music by a range of artists including Fad Gadget and Depeche Mode. The sleeves for many of these electronic music pioneers were a further development from the technical/machine aesthetic pioneered on earlier punk cover designs by the likes of Malcolm Garrett's Assorted Images studio, which blended a modernist graphic style with an ironic appropriation of advertising imagery and very clean, highly technical images. Letraset architectural figures provided easily replicated illustrations which utilised a clean use of line, and these were adopted by sleeve designers with an ironic wit – stylised illustrations of 'modern' living from the 1960s and early 1970s were incorporated into the reverse sleeve design of Miller's debut single (see Figure 89), set against a clean white background and within ruled boxes with rounded corners, mirroring the frame of a television screen. The front sleeve, meanwhile, featured a still photograph taken from a car crash test: two dummies, strapped into car seatbelts, are about to be thrown forward at the point of impact, the image credited to the Motor Industry Research Association.

Similar illustrated Letraset figures were used by Sheffield electronic pop pioneers The Human League in their artwork: the cover their debut single, *Being Boiled*, released by Fast Product in June 1978, shows a dancing couple in 1960s party clothes set against a towering cityscape (see Figure 90). The skyscrapers are used to denote a musical scale, with stylised notation terms such as *legato*, *staccato* and *cresc.* offset against the skyline. The reverse sleeve repeats the process, this time using Egyptian pyramids surrounded by musical time signatures and symbols, including crotchets and quavers. The ironic strapline "*electronically yours*" accompanies the name of the group on the front and reverse of the sleeve, further



Fig.89: The Normal *T.V.O.D./Warm Leatherette* (reverse of sleeve) (Mute MUTE001) 1978

emphasising the machine-made aesthetic, whilst parodying the rhetoric and advertising language of the 1950s and 1960s record industry. The dancing figures were taken directly from the Letraset architectural symbols range (sheet AA115). Similarly, the Mute Records logo was a simple geometrical Letraset figure of a man walking, viewed from above (sheet ASH1055), and has remained the label's graphic identity to this day (see Figure 91).

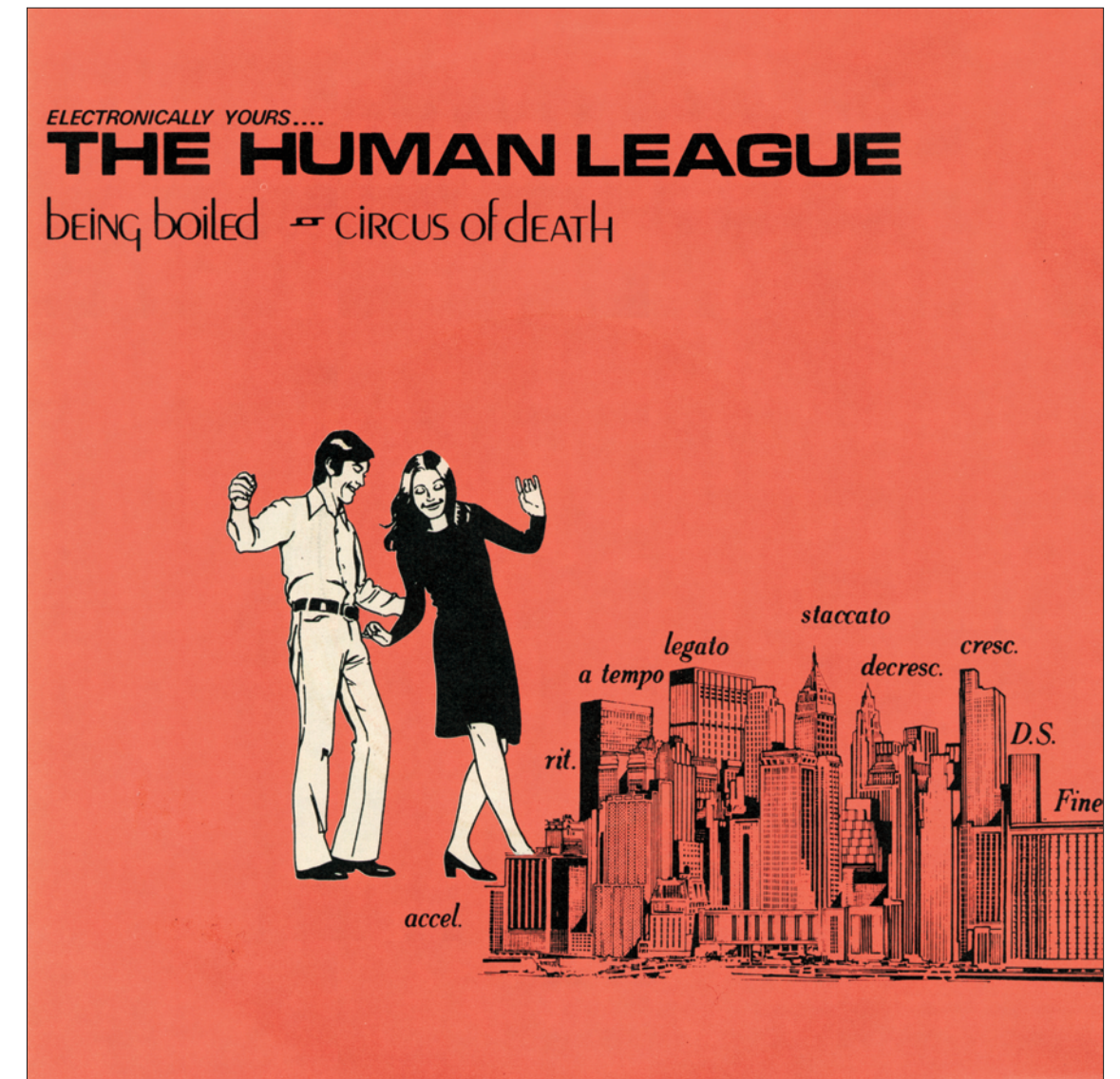


Fig.90: The Human League *Being Boiled/Circus Of Death* (Fast Product FAST4) 1978

Other electronic artists embraced the 'machine aesthetic' of technical drawing, ruled line work and the visual language of technical instruction manuals. The second single by Fad Gadget, *Ricky's Hand*, another release on the Mute Records label, incorporates a sequence of crudely hand-drawn line images (with halftone film 'shading') of a hand being shredded in a liquidiser (see Figure 92). The front cover is bordered by red and yellow striped 'warning tape',

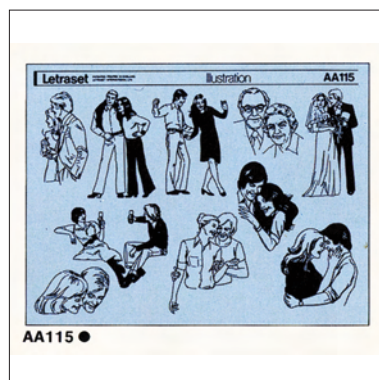
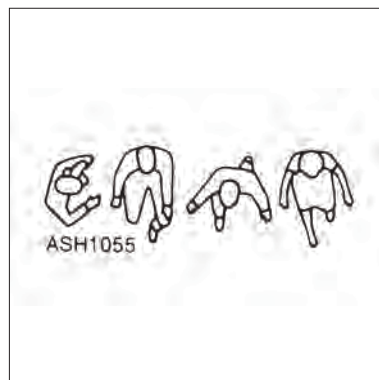
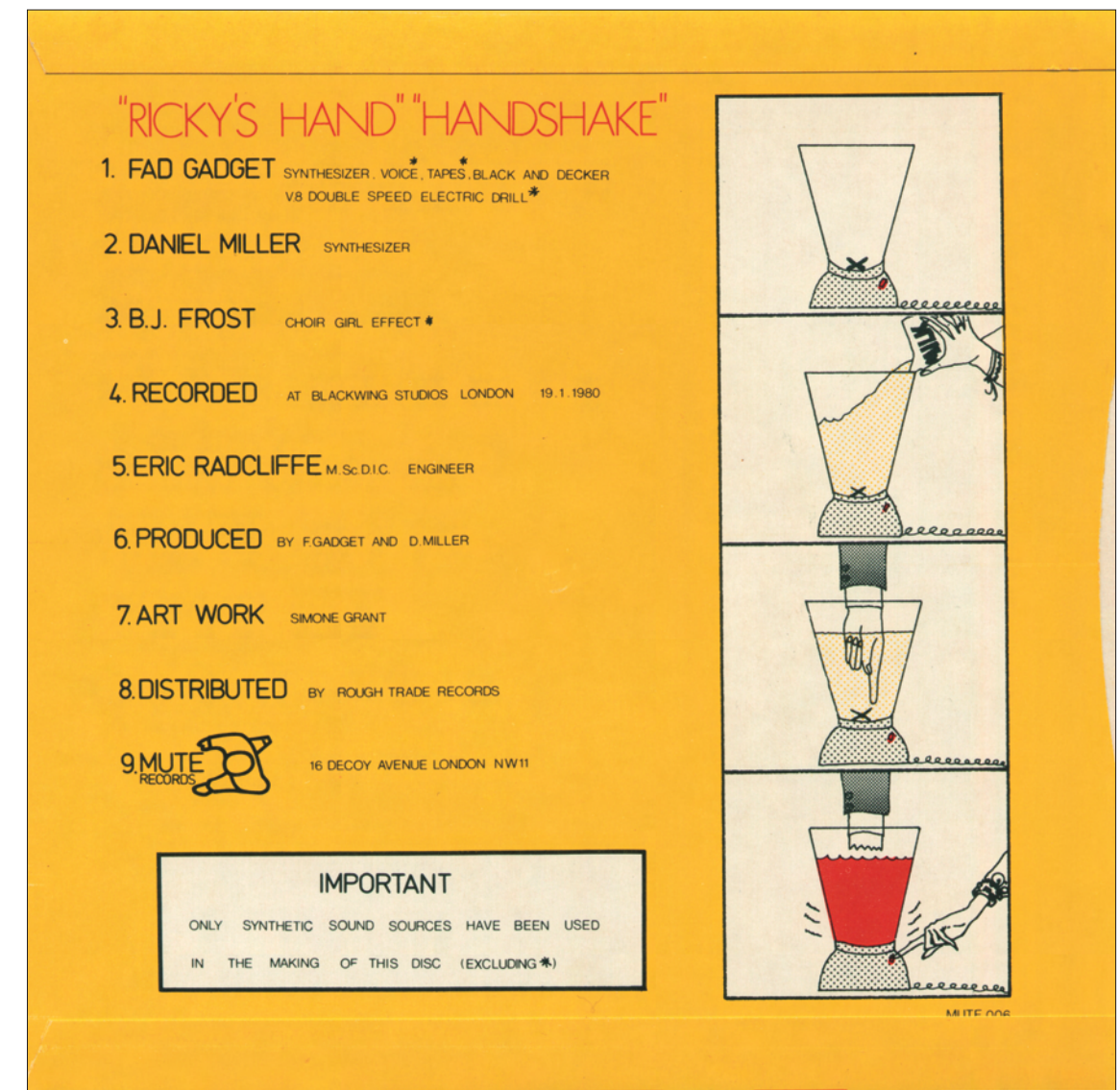


Fig. 91: Letraset Figures

and both front and reverse use typography from the Letraset catalogue. The record featured Mute Records founder Daniel Miller on additional synthesizer, along with Fad Gadget's use of "synthesizer, voice*, tapes*, Black & Decker V8 double speed electric drill*", and a label on the reverse sleeve proudly declares that "only synthetic sound sources have been used in the making of this disc (excluding *)."

Similar visual styles were adopted by other groups and artists who were also developing their own styles of synthesized and electronic music. Cabaret Voltaire, an experimental group founded in Sheffield as far back as 1973, signed to Rough Trade records in 1978, releasing a series of increasingly 'electronic' singles and albums in the ensuing years. Early singles such as the *Extended Play* e.p. (November 1978) and *Nag Nag Nag* (June 1979)

combined heavy, driving, distorted guitars with synthesizers and drum loops, forging a new direction in avant-garde Post Punk. The group's record sleeves paralleled their development musically, from raw, amateur, punk-influenced origins towards a more sophisticated machine aesthetic. The reverse sleeve of their debut *Extended Play* e.p., with artwork credited to the group, includes stencil, Letraset and hand-rendered typography, along with simple shading produced by masking and spray painting: the overall effect is raw and immediate. By the time of the group's fourth single release, *Seconds Too Late* (November 1980), more complex photomontage effects were evident, and the sleeve was printed in two colours, in contrast to the simple black and white sleeves of earlier releases (see Figure 93). Typography was still rub-down Letraset, and was still poorly registered, but an aesthetic development was evident. By 1981, the group had begun to work with graphic designer Neville Brody, art

Fig. 92: Fad Gadget *Ricky's Hand/Handshake* (reverse of sleeve) (Mute MUTE006) 1980

director at *The Face* magazine, and a dramatic shift in the visual style of their records ensued. Alongside the shift towards more complex, full colour, professionally designed sleeves, the group's sound moved more into funk and dance grooves, and their transformation out of the punk arena was complete.



Fig.93: Cabaret Voltaire *Seconds Too Late/Control Addict* (Rough Trade RTo60) 1980

Parallel shifts occurred across the nascent electronic music scene. Following the underground success of their first two singles, the Human League signed to Virgin Records and began a highly successful chart career, their sleeves documenting the transition from abrasive Post Punk parody to the mainstream pop market, where glossy full colour photographs of the group wearing the latest outfits were more important than arty visual rhetoric. A similar

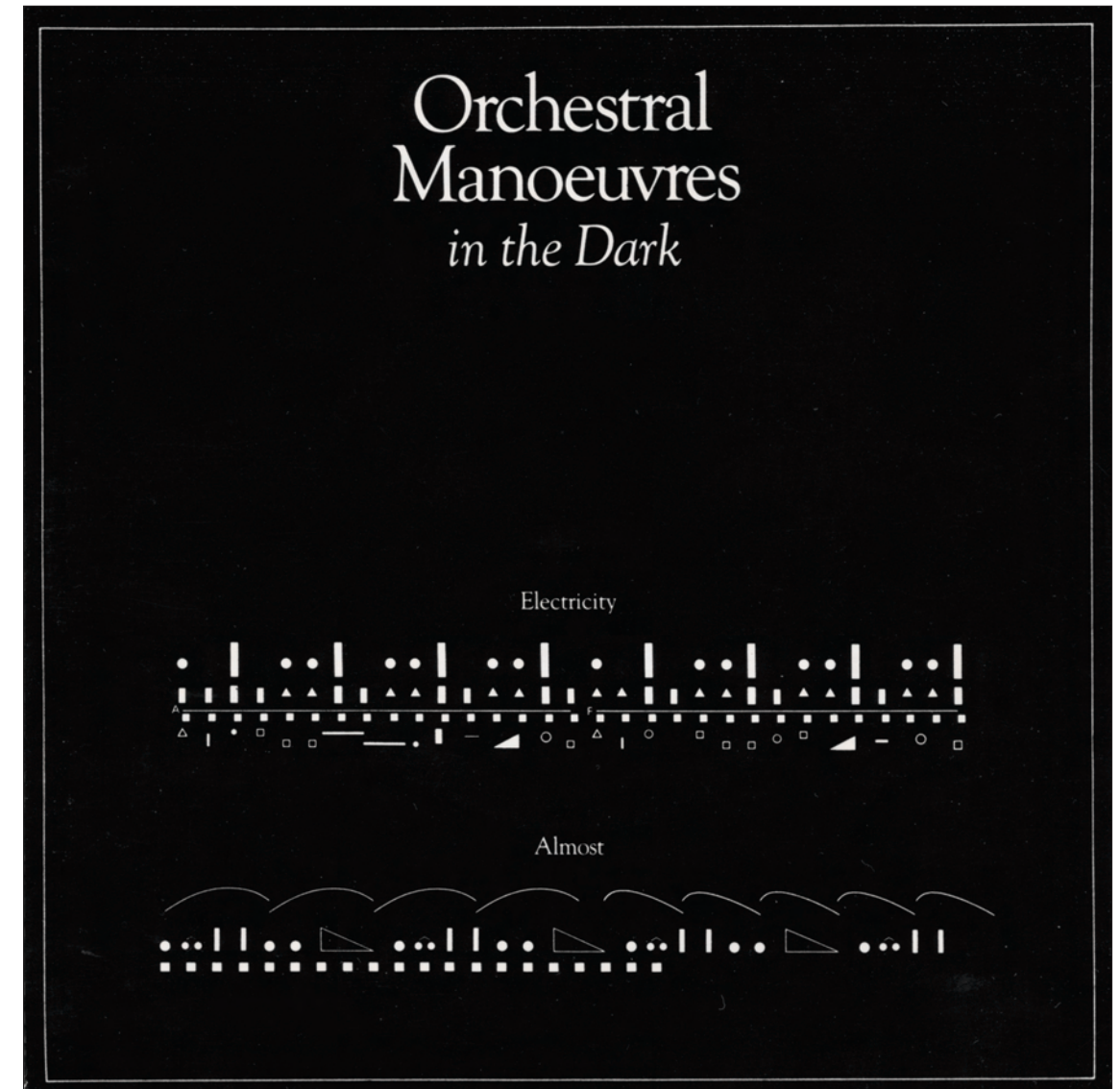


Fig.94: Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark *Electricity/Almost* (DinDisc DIN2) 1979

fate beset Liverpool electronic duo Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark – their debut single, *Electricity*, was released by Factory Records in May 1979, with a special 'black on black' thermographed sleeve design by Peter Saville. Following some good airplay and critical acclaim for the record, they then signed to the new Virgin subsidiary Dindisc, reissuing the single in a revised format – with a white reversed out of black cover (see Figure 94) – and

going on to achieve chart success with their debut album and a string of very successful pop singles in the early 1980s. Like The Human League, the group saw their success reflected in a rebranding for the pop market, and a move away from the earlier visual and musical simplicity that had allied them to the Post Punk electronic field.

Other artists produced electronic and experimental records in a similar style to The Normal and The Human League, but chose not to adopt the visual style of the developing genre. Whether this was due to a conscious choice, an unawareness of the developing visual aesthetic, or even simply the result of expediency and a lack of available tools it is difficult to know. The first single by Thomas Leer, *Private Plane*, recorded like so many others in a small home studio and issued on his own Oblique label in November 1978, followed similar musical directions to the new electronic experimentalists, but retained the visual style of the earlier punk DIY movement, replete with ransom note typography. Leer's friend, Robert Rental, recorded his debut single at the same time, and followed a similar path: setting up his own label, Regular, Rental issued the single *Paralysis* in the autumn of 1978, and later went on to record an album with Mute Records founder Daniel Miller. Both Leer's and Rental's debut singles can be placed firmly within the Post Punk DIY milieu – many of the sounds on the records were produced by electronically processing sounds from traditional instruments, rather than generated by a synthesizer. The sleeve artwork for both singles was based on a raw, black and white photocopy style more in keeping with the punk legacy than the new electronic age. In many ways, these aspects mirrored other crossover groups such as Cabaret Voltaire, and it was not until the early 1980s that a more commonly accepted and recognised visual style for electronic music became widespread.

Prior to the development of a specific electronic pop market in the early 1980s, the most successful of the early electronic artists was Gary Numan, who helped to establish the music within the mainstream, opening the way for many successful electronic pop acts to follow. A multi-instrumentalist who recorded much of his music as a solo artist, he recruited other

musicians to play live. Numan was formerly a member of London punk group Mean Street, whose *Bunch Of Stiffs* was included on the *Live At The Vortex* compilation in November 1977. He released three singles and an album under the guise of his follow-up project, Tubeway Army, on the Beggars Banquet label between February 1978 and March 1979, all of which used suitably android-like and futuristic imagery (see Figure 95), before hitting the national number one spot with *Are 'Friends' Electric?* in May the same year. The accompanying album, *Replicas*, also hit the top of the charts, as did Numan's next single, *Cars* – now credited to the solo artist Gary Numan – and album, *The Pleasure Principle*, the following autumn. The earlier records had featured a blend of standard 'rock' instrumentation (electric guitars, live drums etc.) with synthesisers, but by this time Numan was moving into a far heavier use of electronic composition. Although he attracted heavy criticism in the music press for his outspoken support for the Conservative government, Numan became a high profile exponent of the new electronic music styles, and gained a great deal of publicity in the national press. His chart career was to see diminishing returns from 1982 onwards, as other groups such as Depeche Mode, Yazoo, Soft Cell and The Human League came to the fore.

While certain 'crossover' artists such as Numan, Daniel Miller, Cabaret Voltaire and The Human League took on a range of new opportunities opened up by punk – particularly the independent spirit of the DIY movement, allied to a new found audience acceptance for such material – the relationship between earlier UK punk, these Post Punk electronic pioneers, and subsequent chart-friendly electronic pop groups does present some difficulties for genre definition. While early, iconic Post Punk records, such as those by The Normal and The Human League, showed a way forward and fitted within the general Post Punk avant-garde, many later groups and records operated within a burgeoning electronic music genre which should be seen as distinct and separate from the punk movement. For this reason, this study includes a range of early crossover Post Punk, electronic releases by The Normal, Fad Gadget, The Human League, Cabaret Voltaire and Tubeway Army, up to around the middle of 1980, by which time the new electronic genre was becoming firmly established in its own right.



Fig.95: Tubeway Army *That's Too Bad/Oh! Didn't I Say* (Beggars Banquet BEG5) 1978

Indeed, some of the new developments in synthesizer technology were lambasted by the punk old guard. When First Wave stalwarts The Damned recorded a John Peel radio session in October 1979, their final song, *I'm So Bored*, ran into a shambolic studio jam session lampooning current chart trends, including a take on The Specials ska hit *Gangsters*, and a version of Gary Numan's number one single *Cars*, re-titled *Gay Bars*. Successful Irish pop

punk group The Undertones named The Human League directly in their March 1980 hit *My Perfect Cousin*. The song concerns the fictitious character Kevin, a goody-two-shoes swot who has “a degree in economics, maths, physics and bionics” and who starts a pop group. Kevin is his mother's pride and joy, unlike the narrator, singer Feargal Sharkey, who appears to bond with his audience in their assumed ‘ordinary’ status;

*He thinks that I'm a cabbage
Cos I hate university challenge*

In a swipe at the newly developing pop formula, the song continues;

*His mother bought him a synthesizer
Got the Human League into advise her
Now he's making lots of noise
Playing along with the art school boys
Girls try to attract his attention
But what a shame it's in vain total rejection
He will never be left on the shelf
Cos Kevin he's in love with himself*

Electronic pop was thus portrayed as the preserve of effeminate art school poseurs and technical science geeks, in direct contrast to the more traditional rock & roll forms of the by now established punk mainstream. Like punk before it, the new electronic pop genre also saw a host of imitation and comedy records from across the entertainment spectrum: established guitar groups either mocked the new styles or jumped onto the electronic bandwagon, while comedians saw it as a fertile ground for new routines and a large number of one hit wonders sprang up to grab their fifteen minutes of fame with an ‘electropop’ record. Some, like Buggles, whose *Video Killed The Radio Star* reached number one in the UK

in September 1979, and was the first video to feature on MTV in America, Yazoo and Landscape lasted less than a year, while others such as Depeche Mode made the transition from the teenage pop to the more serious rock market and were to prove surprisingly long lasting. These developments are well outside the bounds of this study – though it is interesting to note that certain visual codes in respect of electronic music developed during the early Post Punk period have endured throughout much of the history of the genre. Mute Records proved highly successful in the mid 1980s to 1990s, retaining their signature style and original Letraset logo, while the visual signifiers of technology and machine-made or computer output remained in place across a broad range of sleeve artwork. These themes were to become more sophisticated with the advent of desktop publishing and the Apple Macintosh as a design tool, but certain codes persisted and can be traced back to a pre-computer age. Even the backlash against electronic music by some of punk’s ‘old guard’ has continued to bubble under the surface – numerous campaigns for ‘real music’, from Grunge to Nu Metal and even the new Folk and Americana movements, have promoted the ‘human’ element of their musicianship as a counterpoint to synthesizers and sampling.

6.6 Kids Of The 80s

Graphic design strategies also employed visual codes specific to different audiences, often reflecting the dress styles of a particular fan base. The incorporation of a photograph of the group on the front of the sleeve – a practice stemming from the sleeve designs of the 1960s – is prevalent in many punk single covers. The practice had been rejected by some First Wave punk groups, including the Sex Pistols, The Buzzcocks,¹⁰⁶ Magazine, Ultravox, Siouxsie & The Banshees and Wire, precisely because of its association with the music industry mainstream and the past. Meanwhile, others such as The Damned, The Stranglers, The Clash and The Jam displayed no such qualms, and cover shots of these groups helped to establish some common tropes in the punk sleeve design of the Second and Third Waves. An image of the group standing in a street, backed by a grubby and decaying brick wall, as in the second single by The Clash, *Remote Control* (1977) (see Figure 96), became an archetype for punk photography which would last well into the next decade. This pose, together with the style of photography and reproduction, can also be traced to the cover of the first album by US punk progenitors The Ramones, released by Sire Records in July 1976. This featured a high contrast, heavily grained black and white photograph by Roberta Bayley (an amateur photographer who was a regular contributor to *Punk* magazine) of the group standing in front of an ageing, weathered and graffiti-strewn brick wall. The album was highly influential on the nascent UK punk scene, sartorially and graphically as well as musically, and the cover stance has been replicated by countless other groups since.

This high contrast photographic style can be traced further back to the covers of records such as The Beatles *With The Beatles* (1963)¹⁰⁷ and The Rolling Stones *Aftermath* (1966), and to fashion and publicity photographs of the 1960s, though the image on The Ramones album is grittier; the urban setting and background being far dirtier and the group themselves less well groomed than in these earlier examples. The photograph on The Clash single (and debut album) is composed in a strong perspective: shot by *NME* photographer Kate Simon outside the group’s rehearsal space in Camden, it features three members of the group – they didn’t

¹⁰⁶. The Buzzcocks debut e.p., *Spiral Scratch*, did in fact feature a photograph of the group, though this practice was eschewed by the time they had signed to the United Artists label and begun working with Malcolm Garrett and Linder Sterling on their visual identity.

¹⁰⁷. This sleeve was actually satirised by Stiff Records for the debut e.p. by Proto Punk group Roogalator, *All Aboard*, in September 1976. Faced with pressure from EMI Records, the label withdrew the record soon afterwards. An early publicity shot of the Sex Pistols also saw the group looking down from a balcony at EMI’s London offices, a direct parody of the sleeve to The Beatles *Please Please Me* album of 1963.



Fig.96: The Clash *Remote Control/London's Burning* (CBS 5293) 1977

have a permanent drummer at the time – and is reminiscent of the The Rolling Stones *Out Of Our Heads* (1965) sleeve in its composition. Again the combination of very high contrast, gritty urban surroundings and, in this case, torn picture edges (butting up against an irregular Letratone border) mark it out as closer to The Ramones album in its visual style. In contrast, the sleeve for the debut single by The Damned, *New Rose* (1976) (see Figure 97),



Fig.97: The Damned *New Rose/Help* (Stiff BUY6) 1976

follows earlier conventions more closely. In this case, the group were photographed in a studio setting, again using strong lighting, and the image is quite similar to a number of sleeves and publicity shots from a decade earlier. The individual musicians also hold their instruments as if ready to perform, a common pose adopted within earlier pop music photography. One other photographic style which mirrors earlier sleeves is the live



Fig.98: The Stranglers *Something Better Change/Straighten Out* (United Artists UP36277) 1977

performance shot, as used on the sleeve of the Stranglers *Something Better Change* (1977) (see Figure 98). This was a common feature in sleeve artwork for rock groups of the 1960s and 1970s, and featured on a number of punk sleeves. However, perhaps because of the technical difficulties of performance photography (particularly with lighting and the physical position of the photographer relative to the group in small clubs), many 'live' sleeves



Fig.99: The Lurkers *Ain't Got A Clue/Ooh Ooh I Love You* (live p/s) (Beggars Banquet BEG6) 1978

are actually collaged from a number of shots of the individual performers, as in the sleeve for *The Lurkers Ain't Got A Clue* (1978) (see Figure 99).

By far the most common visual trope in the depiction of the group is the 'Ramones-style' line-up against a wall or similar urban background. This can be seen in various other First

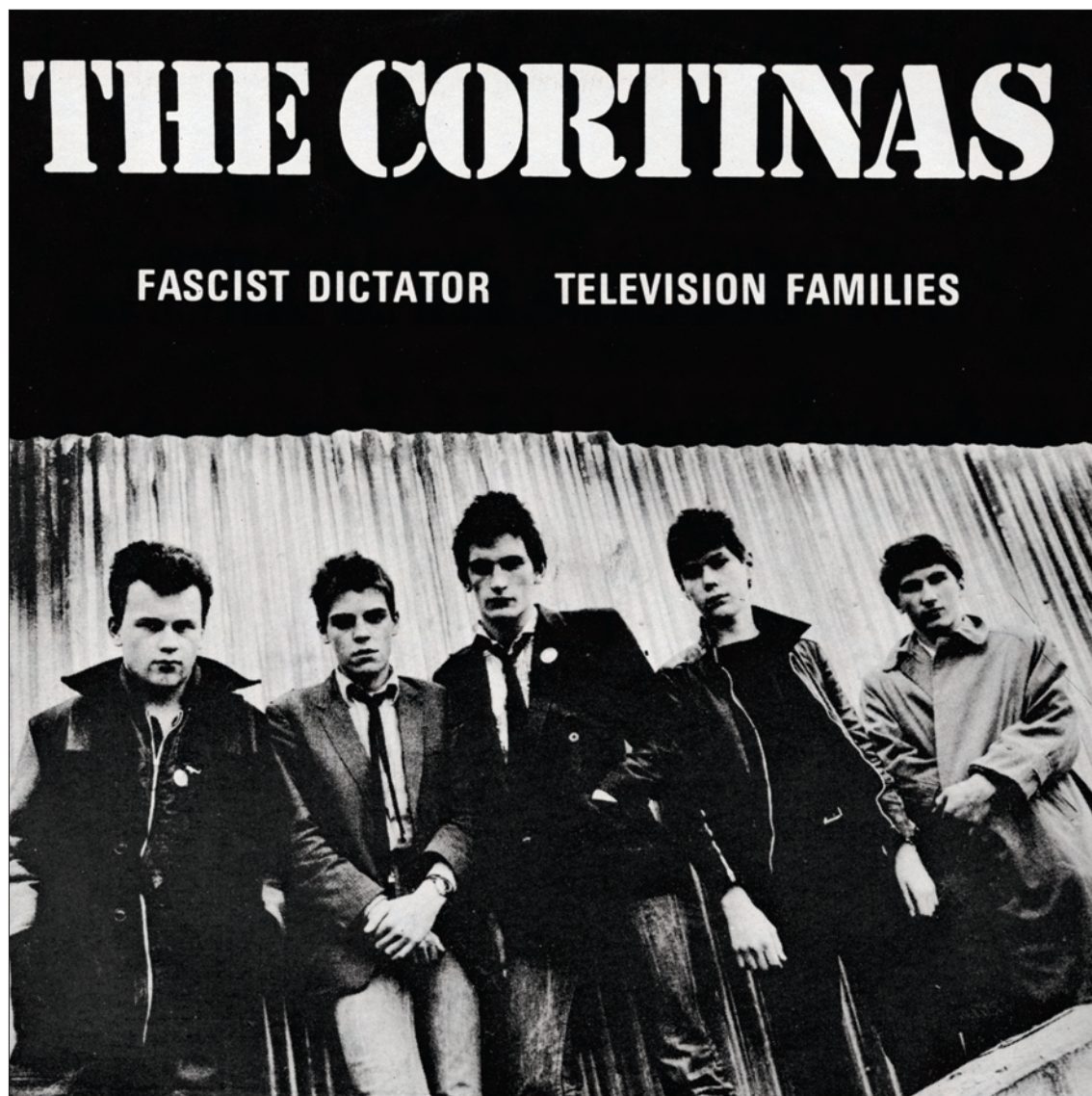


Fig.100: The Cortinas *Fascist Dictator/Television Families* (Step Forward SF1) 1977

Wave sleeves, such as The Cortinas *Fascist Dictator* (1977) (see Figure 100), which features a corrugated iron fence as a suitably harsh background, as well as in numerous Third Wave sleeves from across the range of punk sub-genres – especially within Oi, New Punk and Hardcore (see Figures 101 and 102). It is also interesting to note that there are few, if any, clues as to the specific location of many examples within the visual trope of ‘against the wall’

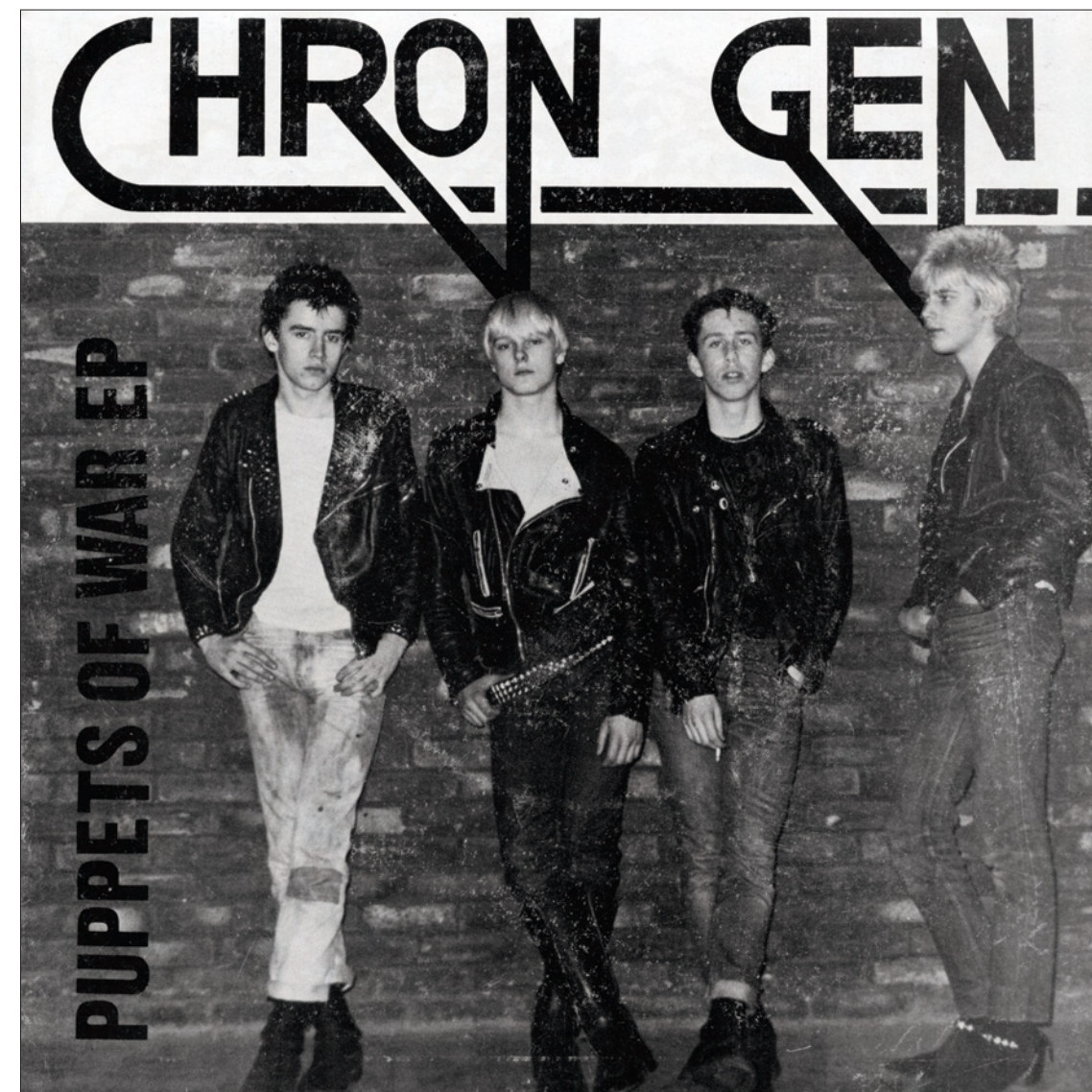


Fig.101: Chron Gen *Puppets Of War* e.p.: *Mindless Few/Chronic Generation/Lies/Puppets Of War* (Gargoyle GRGL78o) 1981

sleeve photographs, in contrast to those images which placed the group within a clear geographical context. While some First Wave groups had been depicted in front of known ‘punk’ locations – The Rings in front of the Rock On record shop and The Lurkers outside the Red Cow pub in Hammersmith, for instance – the visual style of the ‘band against the wall’ image was generic and non-specific, a decaying urban environment which could be

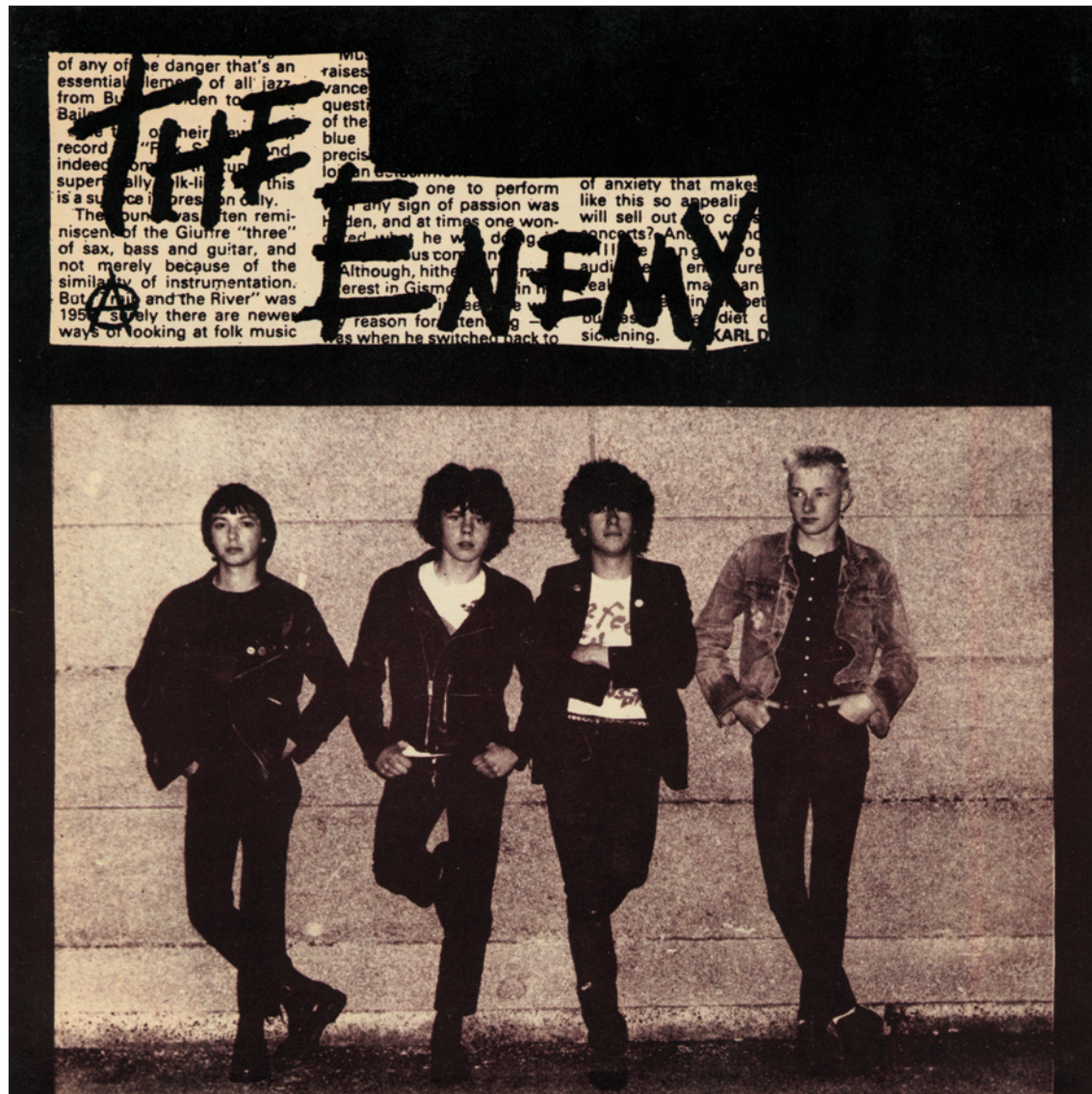


Fig.102: The Enemy 50,000 Dead/Societies Fools/Neutral Ground (Tin Tin NM1) 1981

anywhere. The stance of individuals in the photograph is also worthy of note: First Wave groups such as The Rings and The Sports were very active in their group shots, and portraits of The Strangers, The Clash and The Damned show the group looking direct to camera in an often aggressive or confrontational manner, but Third Wave depictions often display a relaxed, almost 'lazy' attitude to being photographed. Group members often adopted a

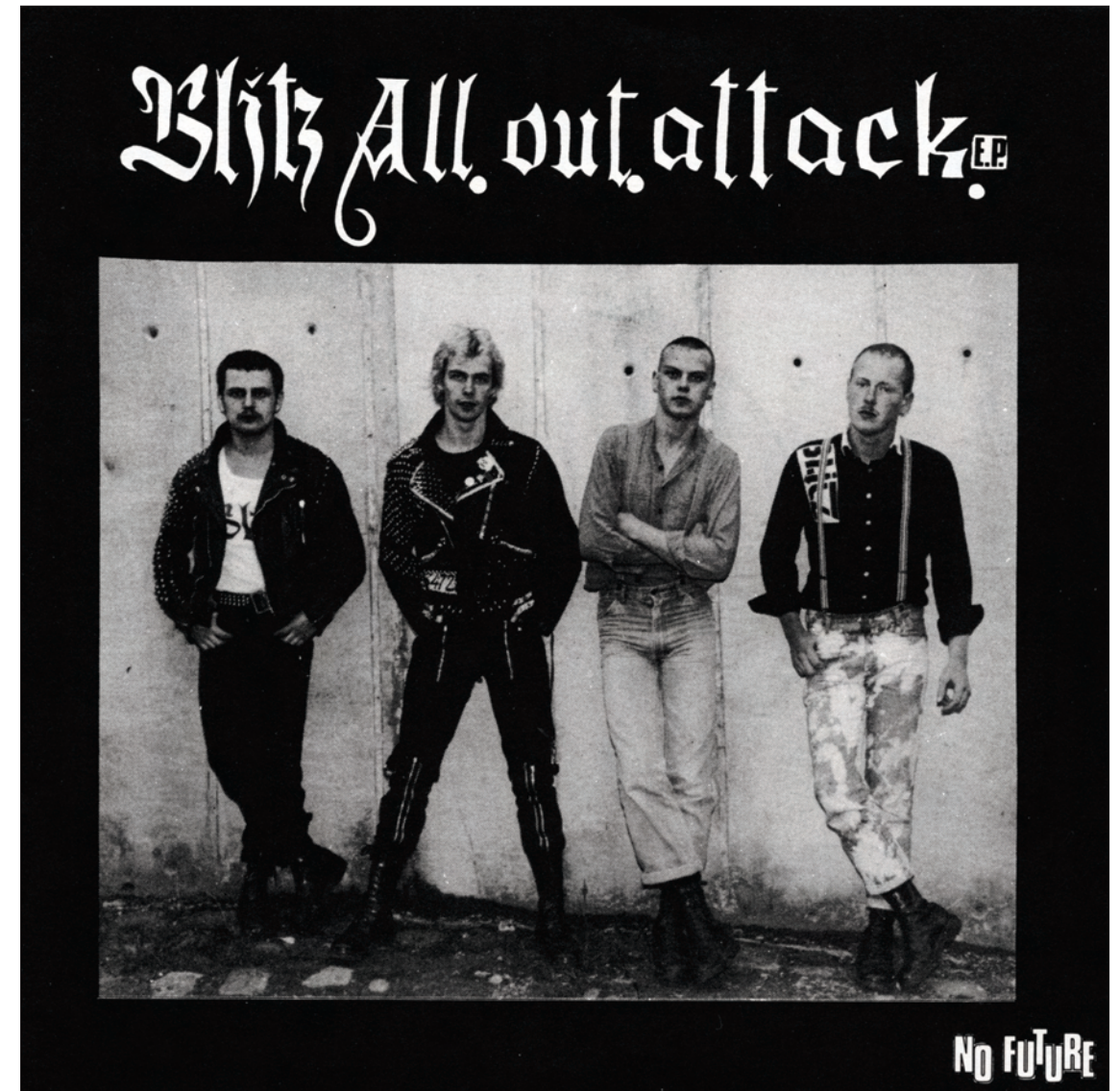


Fig.103: Blitz All Out Attack e.p: Someone's Gonna Die/Attack/Fight To Live/45 Revolutions (No Future OH) 1981

disinterested pose, leaning against the background wall, legs crossed, or casually looking away from the camera. It should not be overlooked that this style of group photography was also one of the most easily imitated by those amateur photographers and designers who produced many Second and Third Wave record sleeves, and expediency may also have played a part in the choice of visual approach. Sleeves of this type were often black and white rather

than full colour, and were photographed outdoors in daylight, thus avoiding the need for lighting or flash photography. Although certain conditions, such as composition, pose and the direction of light and shadow would need to be taken into account, other aspects (such as depth of field, film speed and grain) were less significant. Photographs could therefore be taken with widely available equipment, such as a 35mm or 120mm instamatic camera, rather than requiring professional expertise or technology, and could be cheaply processed at local chemists and High Street stores or by post. As with other aspects of punk sleeve design, this reflects the widespread adoption of DIY and the ‘anyone can do it’ ethos.

Dress codes on the sleeves were also very important in these examples, as they helped to establish group connections and reflected the fashion styles of the developing sub-genres. Given that the group photograph had become a well-used cliché on record sleeves since the 1960s, and that there is little other visual information contained in a photograph with a flat plane as a background, these codes were of central importance in communicating with potential buyers of the record, and in establishing or supporting communal punk identities. Some of these fashion tropes became quite formalised during the early 1980s – examples might include the ‘boot boy’ styles and codes of Street Punk, or the studded leather jackets, bondage trousers and mohican hairstyles of Hardcore Punk. The ‘uniforms’ of various Third Wave factions and sub-genres played an important part in the process of differentiation between groups. There was even an ill-fated attempt by Garry Bushell to bring the skinhead and New Punk factions together under a united ‘Skunk’ banner, and some Third Wave groups (notably Blitz, see Figure 103) featured both punk and skinhead performers on stage together.¹⁰⁸

108. The scene even had its own club, Skunx, which opened in 1982 at the Blue Coat Boy in Islington, to cater for punks, skins and ‘herberts’ and was run by Dave Long, founder of Syndicate Records.

6.7 Inflammable Material

The role of the designer, particularly in relation to the preparation of artwork for print production, changed radically between the mid 1960s and late 1970s. A shift towards photolithography in the UK and Europe after World War II led to the widespread adoption of photographic techniques in engraving and platemaking. As Henry C Latimer noted in his guide to contemporary design procedures and techniques in 1977, “...*the unusual feature of this change in the use of printing processes requires the printing user to transfer much of production planning to the creative planning stage in order to take advantage of the extra capabilities of the photomechanical processes. Time and cost factors are now controlled in the creative planning stage... the user or the user’s advertising agency or art studio prepares camera-ready art and copy in the form of paste-up mechanicals*” (Latimer 1977: vii).¹⁰⁹ The relationship between the designer, printer and pre-press artworkers was therefore key to the design and construction of printed material, including record sleeves.

The process of design in this period could be described as in some ways collaborative – the designer’s activities would be based on a process of *specification*, whereby other skilled professionals in what was termed ‘art production’ (such as phototypesetters, metal type compositors, illustrators, photoengravers and platemakers, printers and print finishers) would be instructed in order to achieve the desired results. The crucial stage of the pre-press process involved the making of film separations for platemaking: this was the point where a prototype one-off was converted to a mass produced artefact. Such pre-press operations were usually, though not always, owned by printers as a front end to their activities, and were much more advanced technologically than artwork production houses, using a combination of photographic processes and very precise manual procedures. Technicians would use parallel motion light box drawing boards to ‘comp together’ film negative separations of various types (halftone images, line work, halftone mechanical tint screens), which could then be produced as plates for the various colour separations on the printing press. The designer would supply the pre-press departments with a variety of origination (line work

109. Note that the technical terminology for pre-press material varied between countries: arrangements of work compiled by the designer and pre-press department to be photographed were called ‘mechanicals’ in the USA, or ‘camera-ready artwork’ in the UK.

and continuous tone work), usually with line work (type, line illustration, brush work and rules) in situ and with only keyline indications of colour areas and images to be placed by the artwork department. Tone copy, which would include photographs or other artwork that involves the reproduction of shades of grey or colour, would be photographed separately using a halftone screen, which separates the continuous tone into gradations of fine dots or lines of varying size. Areas of tint and pattern could also be specified by the designer – a range of mechanical tints could be pre-selected and the area to be filled indicated by a keyline, with the platemaker then inserting the correct pattern at the pre-press stage using cut pieces of halftone film. Alternatively, this task could be done at the artwork stage, typically through the use of Letratone dry transfer sheets, as can be seen in the sleeve for the *Programme Love* e.p. by The Outcasts (see Figure 104).

Some professional artwork also utilised another Letraset product, Pantone colour overlay, which was available in continuous tone flat or graduated colour sheets. While pre-press artwork for simple two or three colour sleeves would be supplied as black and white separations, with the individual colours specified in writing by the designer, the use of colour overlays could assist the designer in the visualisation of design jobs at the pre-press stage, both for print specification and as presentation roughs to show the client. One other very simple, but highly effective new technology introduced to design studios around this time also had an effect on the composition of camera-ready artwork: spraymount, an aerosol-based glue which allowed for the placing and repositioning of elements on the drawing board, replaced cowgum and other more permanent rubber-based adhesives. This allowed a greater flexibility in composition, simplifying the process of mounting work at the design stage.

A significant aspect of the translation of the artwork to film separations and hence to printed proof was in communicating to the individuals involved exactly how to assemble the various parts supplied by the designer. These instructions were usually written and drawn onto



Fig.104: Outcasts *Programme Love/Beating & Screaming I & II/Mania* (Outcasts Only .00001) 1981

tracing paper overlays to the artwork, which were registered and held in place with pins or tape (see Latimer 1977 and Cherry 1976). The designer's role was to plan, predict and specify required outcomes, rather than to originate them in their entirety by craft at the drawing board stage. While some skilled designers could make use of the flexibility offered by such pre-press tools as the PMT camera, most design studios were more limited in terms of the

technology available, and the superior economy of scale of print meant that such facilities were more often than not reserved for major artwork departments rather than acting as a design ‘tool’ for production. One key distinction between the professional designer and amateur and DIY producers was in their detailed knowledge of the range of pre-press artworking processes and specification techniques available, as Paul McNeil, formerly Creative Director of London-based design consultancy McNeil & Craig Limited between 1977 and 1990, notes; “...the work you’re examining can be classified according to those produced by designers who had the knowledge to make use of these specification techniques, and could therefore use them advantageously in their work, and those who didn’t. It separates the pros from the amateurs, the commissioned from the vernacular” (Interview with the author, 4th May 2006). Punk sleeve design was in part technologically driven, with artwork often reflecting the availability of materials together with the skills and training of the designer.

Much sleeve artwork for major label single releases, especially during the First Wave of UK punk, was produced in-house by professional design teams, who clearly demonstrated an awareness of the techniques described above. Sleeve designs such as the second single by X Ray Spex, *The Day The World Turned Day-Glo* (EMI 1978) (see Figure 105) display a complexity and awareness of colour separations and composition far beyond the capabilities of those amateur or DIY-designed examples such as The Snivelling Shits *Terminal Stupid* (Ghetto Rockers 1977) (see Figure 106). Both examples were professionally printed, as indeed were most punk single sleeves across the range of material analysed: the printing, cutting, folding and finishing of the sleeve required professional equipment to be done in bulk. A central distinction in the design of the two sleeves lies in the fact that the former would have required the creation of complex overlaid photographic separations and the specification of fluorescent inks, while the latter sleeve was photographed as line art in one piece, with the type already applied to the original artwork on strips of paper.¹¹⁰ As Paul McNeil notes, this technique was common in many graphic design studios: “...the application of Letraset to paper which is then trimmed and mounted to a base artwork is motivated by the fact that it was

110. The image in this case was taken from a newspaper report entitled ‘Punk Rock Jubilee Shocker’ in the *The Sunday Mirror*, published on June 12th 1977, and shows the face of a girl in the audience at a gig by The Stranglers in Manchester.



Fig.105: X-Ray Spex *The Day The World Turned Day-Glo/I Am A Poseur* (orange vinyl) (EMI INT553) 1978

virtually impossible to Letraset direct to the base artwork, because you could never accurately predict the end point of the text. It was standard practice” (Interview with the author, 4th May 2006). It is also important to note that the X Ray Spex single had the weight of a major label behind its production and marketing – EMI Records, the largest and most successful music organisation in the UK, had originally signed the Sex Pistols in 1976, and subsequently made



Fig.106: The Snivelling Shits *Terminal Stupid/I Can't Come* (Ghetto Rockers PRE2) 1977

speculative inroads into the punk market with the Tom Robinson Band, the Rich Kids, The Flys and Wire among others, while the Snivelling Shits single was released as a one-off on an independent label.

This distinction between professional and amateur design extends beyond the production of

camera-ready paste-up artwork for professional reproduction. Some DIY sleeve designers chose to print, as well as design, their sleeves, thus taking the entire production process in-house. This strategy led to the creation of some extremely simple sleeves, as in the folded insert included with the debut single by The Newtown Neurotics, *Hypocrite* (No Wonder 1979), which is a basic, black and white, one-sided Xerox copy (see Figure 107), and the silkscreen printed coloured stripes on the Manchester Mekon single *Not Forgetting* (Newmarket Records 1979) (see Figure 108). The Newtown Neurotics insert was copied directly from flat artwork, and some attempt has been made to make the hand-written text tonally distinct from the background photographs. In comparison, the Manchester Mekon sleeve required access to more technical equipment (a silkscreen print facility), but was even simpler in its design. Three stripes were screenprinted directly onto white, plain paper record bags, which were already factory folded and glued, and the reverse was printed in one colour. The omission of any text or image on the sleeve itself means that factors such as registration or tone and contrast (and hence readability) are unimportant – textual information (such as titles and catalogue number) is included on the professionally-printed centre labels, and on a separate photocopied insert.

The silkscreen printing process is quite labour-intensive, and large batches of prints in more than one colour, particularly where accurate registration is required, demand a great deal of time. This tends to make anything more than a very short run not economically viable, or in the case of home-made sleeves, something of a labour of love. Simple silkscreen printed sleeves include The Adicts *Lunch With The Adicts* e.p. (Dining Out 1979), Disco Zombies *Here Come The Buts* (Dining Out 1980) and Blank Students *We Are Natives* (Dexter Records 1980), which were all printed in one colour on a folded piece of card. Other sleeves based on a simple folded A4 photocopy include the *Last Bus To Debden* e.p. by The Epileptics (Spiderleg 1981), *God's Got Religion* by The Fifty Fantastics (Dining Out 1980) and the *Don't Feed Us Shit* e.p. by Icon A.D. (Radical Change 1982).



Fig.107: The Newtown Neurotics Hypocrite/You Said No (A4 photocopy insert) (No Wonder A45) 1979



Fig.108: The Manchester Mekon Not Forgetting/Have A Go-Go/Jonathon Livingstone Seafood (Newmarket NEW102) 1979

Access to silkscreen print technology could lead to more elaborate and sophisticated sleeve designs, although the mechanical problems of cutting, folding and glueing sleeves meant that many DIY producers chose to print on a 14" x 7" flat piece of card, folded and wrapped around the record – which was usually housed in a separate white inner bag. The record and sleeve would normally then be inserted in a plastic cover: without this there was nothing to

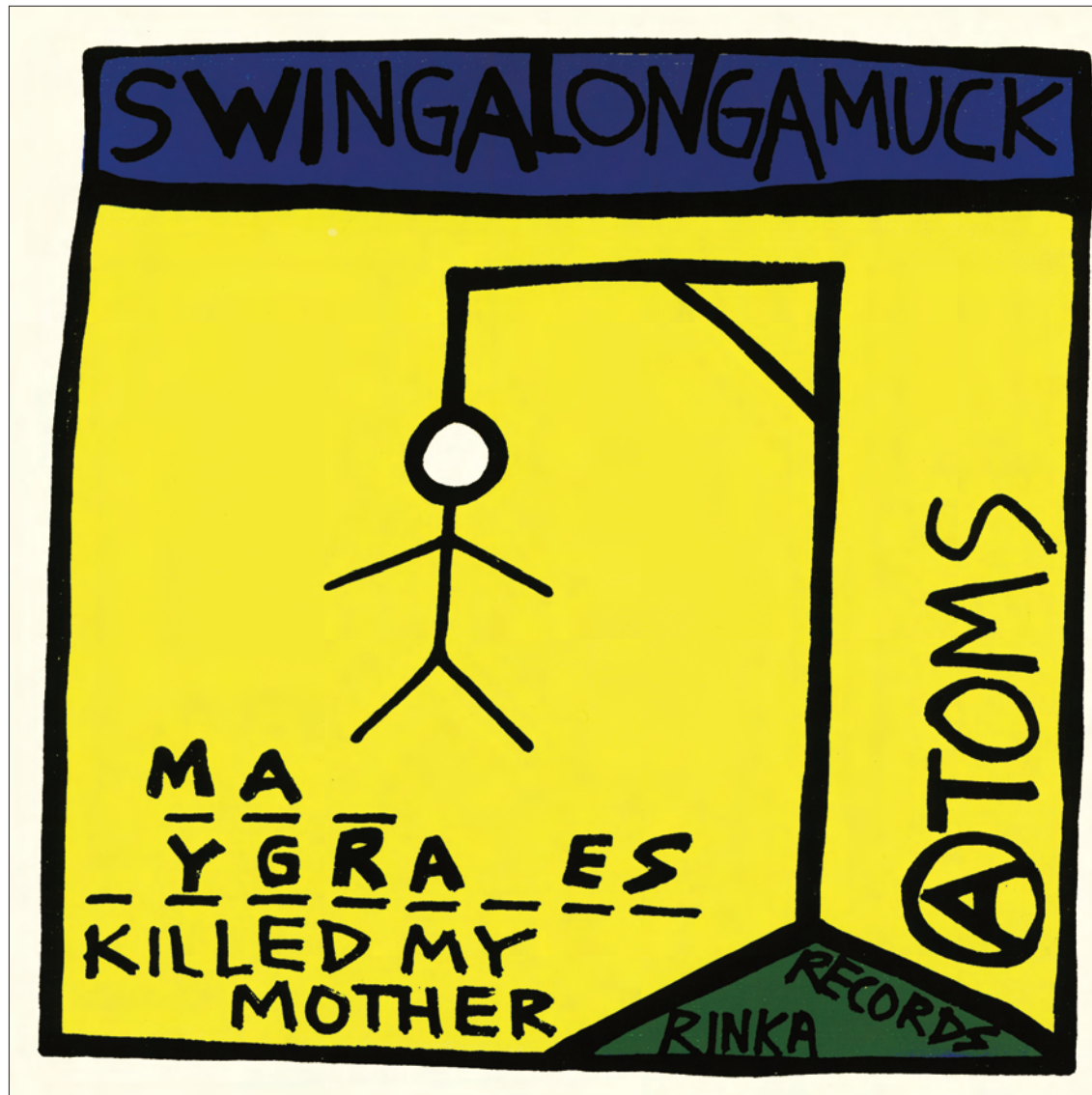


Fig.109: Atoms Max Bygraves Killed My Mother/Beatle Jacket (with inserts + cards) (Rinka Records) 1979

stop the record and sleeve becoming detached. This form of simple packaging was to be widely imitated, and still continues across the range of DIY releases to this day. One highly elaborate DIY production, a package for the single *Max Bygraves Killed My Mother* by The Atoms (Rinka Records 1979) (see Figure 109) included two separate seven inch square, silkscreen printed front and back cards, together with screenprinted sticky centre labels to

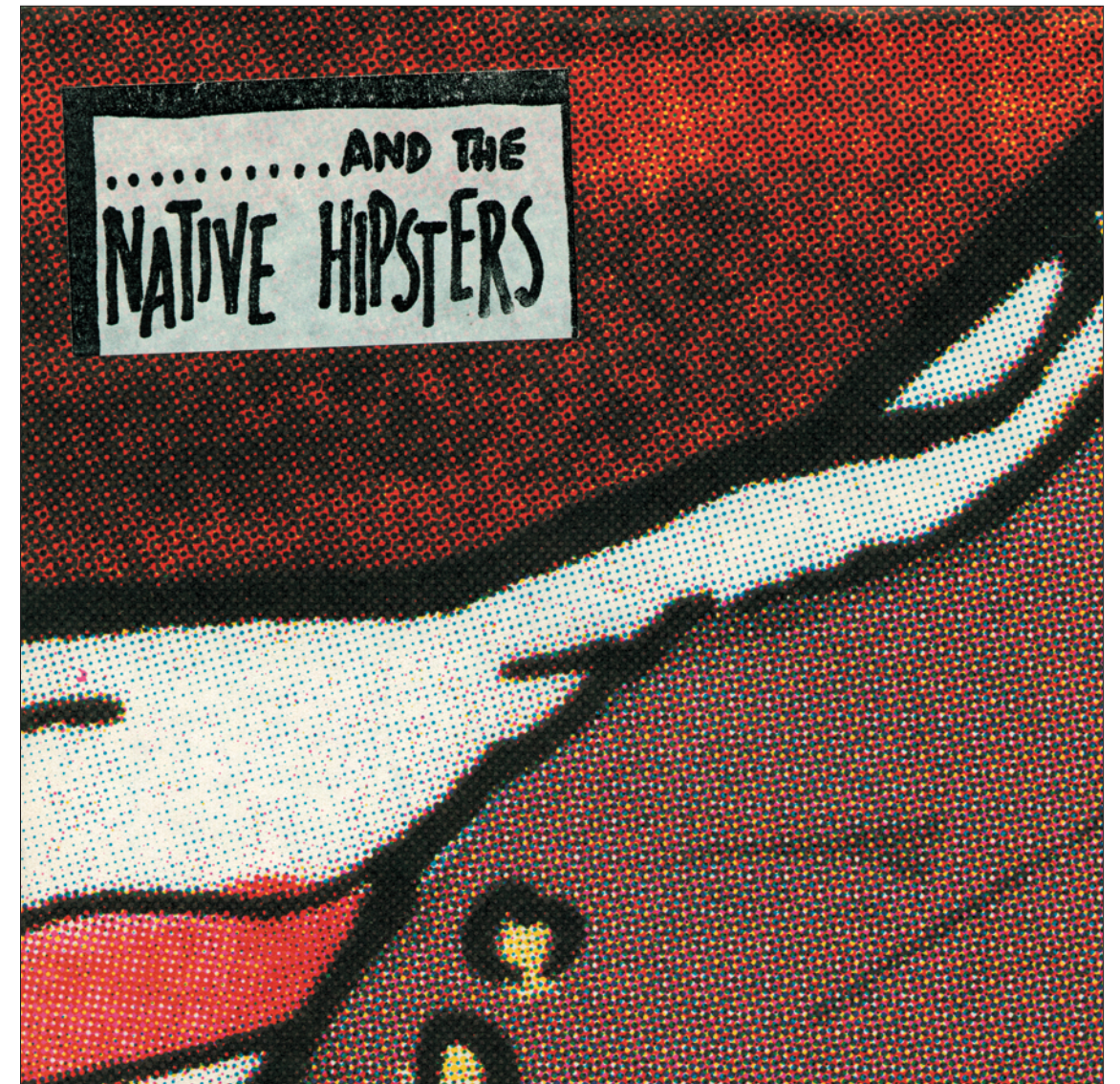


Fig.110: And The Native Hipsters *There Goes Concorde Again/Stand, Still The Building/I Wanna Be Around (Paul)* (wrap around picture sleeve) (Heater Volume HVR003) 1980

glue to the record, and a number of printed, photocopied and handwritten postcards and inserts – all contained in a PVC sleeve. This level of detail and hand-made material would be very difficult, and uneconomical, to achieve with a large-scale release, and such excesses were generally limited to small-scale independent labels.

The fact that many DIY sleeves were produced by amateur designers does not mean that they were uninventive. The debut single by celebrated DIY group ...And The Native Hipsters, *There Goes Concorde Again* (Heater Volume 1980) (see Figure 110) used a number of hand-crafted materials, though in this case the coloured pattern on the sleeve was created by cutting out 14" x 7" folded sections from large sheets of printed billboard material. Each sleeve was unique – the group rubber-stamped the record centre labels and added a small photocopied name label to the front of the sleeve, together with a photocopied insert. Once again, this ‘wraparound’ sleeve was housed in a PVC record sleeve in order to keep the individual elements together. This use of found or pre-used material was mirrored in other designs, such as the debut album by Warsaw Pakt (itself something of a critically-acclaimed publicity stunt, having been recorded, mixed, cut to vinyl, packaged and distributed within 24 hours), which used a cardboard record mailing envelope as a sleeve, decorated with stickers and rubber stamps. Similar envelopes were silkscreen printed for the outer packaging of the 1982 twelve inch e.p. *The Crunch* by Birmingham group The Nightingales. An even simpler lo-tech approach was adopted by two other groups: East London New Wave group Secret Affair’s debut, *Time For Action* (I-Spy 1979), featured sleeves constructed from brown paper bag material, printed with titles on the reverse, while Novelty Punk group Heavy Cochran simply used folded brown paper bags, handwriting the title of their single, *I’ve Got Big Balls* (Psycho 1978) on the front.

Design Strategies – Case Studies

This section describes a close analysis of a number of individual sleeves, making reference to comparative contemporary punk single releases and precursors, and mapping design strategies and formal visual codes. While some graphic approaches could clearly be said to carry specific meanings – such as the use of war imagery to denote an anti-war message, or the machine aesthetic as shorthand for a synthetic musical approach – it is not the purpose of this thesis to deduce the range of wider meanings or intentions. Rather, through the identification and mapping of common visual tropes in punk sleeve design, the general visual vocabulary of the subculture might be described, and the evolution of individual regional identities and punk sub-genres can be shown to have been both influential and far-reaching.

The individual sleeves can also be seen in a wider context within a number of interactive visual matrices describing the chronological and geographical distribution of the range of punk singles under review (see **Appendix One**), and set against other examples from within the same musical sub-genre (see **Appendix Two**). In this way, the evolution of graphic styles and their relationship to specific regions of the UK can be described, and the visual language of each developing punk sub-genre can be identified either in parallel or in opposition to the others.



Case Study One

Blitz *Razors In The Night/Never Surrender* (No Future OI6) March 1982

This was the second single by Blitz, a group from New Mills, Derbyshire, with a crossover punk/skinhead identity, though they were reluctant to be too closely associated with the burgeoning Oi sub-genre – despite the fact that the No Future label’s standard catalogue prefix was ‘OI’. Though their career was short-lived, Blitz became figureheads for the

ultimately unsuccessful ‘Skunk’ movement, and the B-side, *Never Surrender*, is credited on the reverse sleeve to “...*punx & skins everywhere who have stuCk to there guNs*”. The sleeve was professionally printed in black on heavy white coated card, and features a line drawing of a skull wearing headphones, framed with hand-drawn barbed wire and both group name and song titles originated using Letraset. No designer is credited, though a similar full colour illustration was used on the debut album, *Voice Of A Generation* (No Future PUNK1) released in October 1982, and credited to Howard Oliver and Richard Jones (one of the co-founders of the label). No Future was founded in Malvern, Worcestershire, in 1980 by Chris Berry and Richard Jones, who worked on local live music promotions and saw an opportunity to start up a new punk label: Berry placed an advertisement in *Sounds* asking for demos from ‘punk and skinhead bands’, and Blitz were the first group to be signed.

BLITZ

Group Name: Letraset Stencil Bold 48pt set at 45° angle to top left corner of sleeve – all characters in this typeface are Upper Case. Song Titles (Double A-side): Letraset Monotype Old English, Upper Case 48pt.

♦ NEVER SURRENDER ♦
♦ RAZORS IN THE NIGHT ♦

B&W skull and barbed wire frame line drawing, titles applied direct to original artwork with Letraset and No Future label logotype bottom right corner. Artwork prepared S/S (actual size for repro), PMT photographed as line work for litho printing – one colour black on white stock. Note that in the second title on the actual sleeve, both the letters ‘R’ in RAZORS have been replaced with alternative versions adapted from the letters ‘P’ and ‘Y’, presumably due to the designer running out of the letter ‘R’ during the production of first title.¹¹¹ Sheets of

111. This method was actually not unusual in the field of DIY and punk graphics, and neatly reflects some of the non-conformist attitudes to design and music of the time – individual characters could be made up from parts of other letters, or certain characters could be adapted to create new letters (it was common for the letter ‘U’ to be inverted to create a lower case ‘N’, or for an upper case ‘R’ to be cut down to create a letter ‘P’ for example).

Letraset were expensive, and while they were designed to reflect the frequency of individual characters commonly used, it was not unusual for a designer to run out of certain letters of the alphabet. The fact that four letter 'R's are used in the first title, *Never Surrender*, would seem to suggest that this was the case, and that the designer chose to mutilate some of the remaining letters to make up the substitute characters.

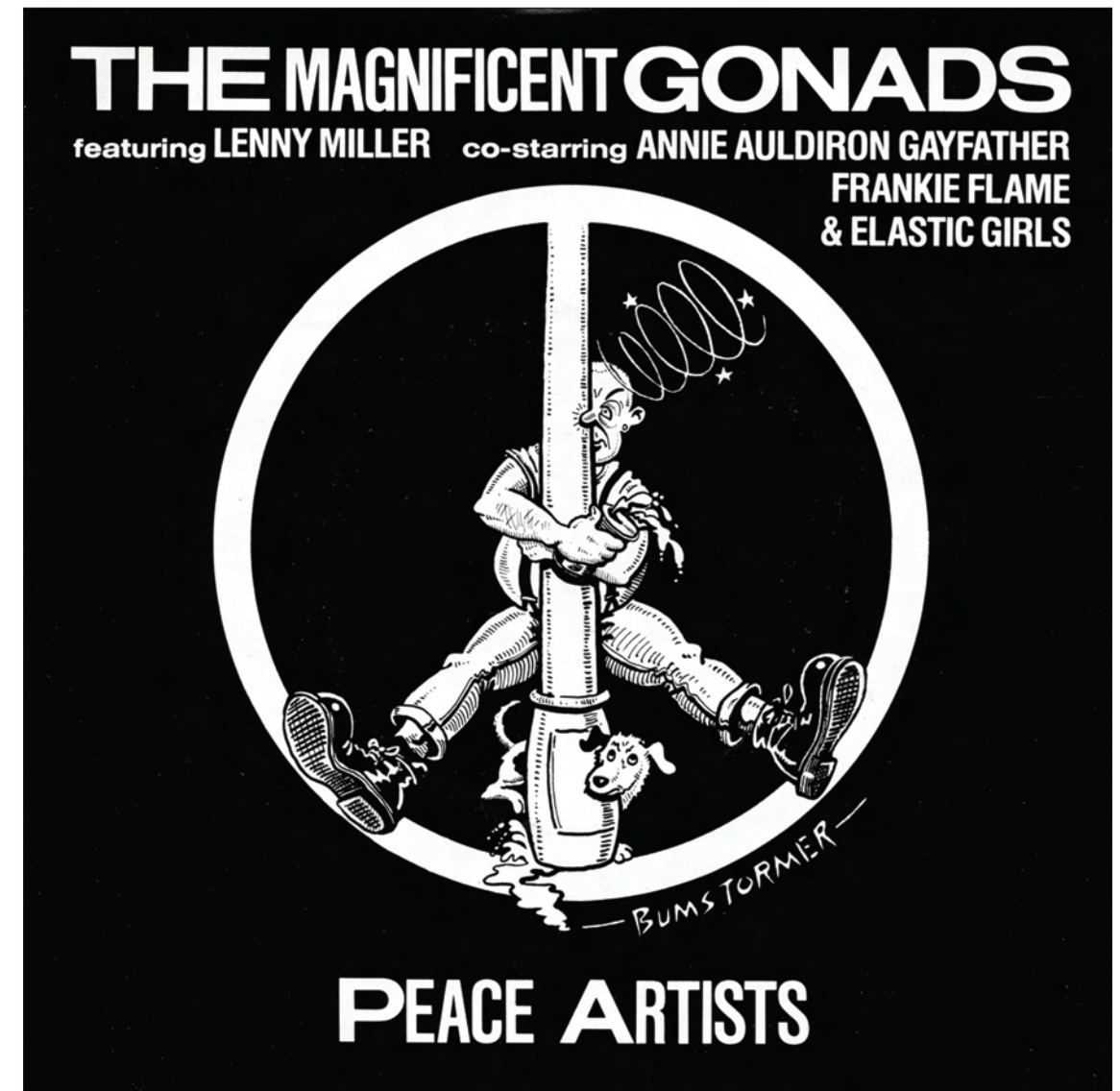


The sleeve continues a number of graphic themes used in the band's first e.p. *All Out Attack*, released seven months previously, including the staring skull motif and the use of hand-drawn barbed wire and blackletter type. Similar graphic and typographic elements occur on a number of other contemporary New Punk releases, including Soldier Dolls *What Do They Know?*, The Destroyers *Senseless Violence* and Uproar *Nothing Can Stop You*.



Top row, left to right: Blitz *All Out Attack* e.p. (No Future Oh) (August 81), front cover plus inserts.

Bottom row, left to right: The Destroyers *Senseless Violence* e.p. (Carnage BOOK2) (June 82), Soldier Dolls *What Do They Know?* e.p. (Scream SCREAM01) (December 83), Uproar *Nothing Can Stop You* e.p. (Volume VOL9) (January 84).



Case Study Two

The Gonads *Peace Artists* e.p: *She Can't Whip Me/Punk City Rockers/Gonads Anthem/S.L.A.G.* (Secret SHH134) July 1982

The sleeve was professionally printed in black on heavy white coated card. The front cover features a line drawing of a cartoon skinhead clinging drunkenly to a lamppost, reversed white out of a black background, with the illustration signed 'Bumstormer'. The cartoon is

framed by a white circle, and the character's legs are splayed out to meet this frame, forming the impression of the peace symbol, which was also the identity for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The mode of dress – turned-up straight leg jeans and boots – is also typical of the skinhead style. Titles applied to original artwork with Letraset, in a combination of Helvetica Medium, Medium Extended and Compact at 36pt, 20pt and 12pt, again reversed out of black (presumably at the pre-press photography stage). While the typographic treatment of group name and credits appear to have been given some careful thought, the e.p. title, *Peace Artists*, uses a rather clumsy combination of Helvetica Medium Extended opening characters combined with Helvetica Compact. It is clear that the cartoon, and the title *Peace Artists*, is intended to parody the Anarcho Punk movement, and scene-leaders Crass in particular. The circular motif not only makes reference to the CND/peace symbol, but clearly mirrors the visual identity of the Crass Records label, as well as a large number of groups who adopted the peace symbol in their own artwork (see below).



Top row, left to right: Conflict *The House That Man Built* e.p. (Crass 221984/1) (June 82), Crass *Nagasaki Nightmare/Big A Little A* (Crass 421984/5) (February 81), The Mob *No Doves Fly Here* (Crass 321984/7) (April 82).
Bottom row, left to right: Alberto Y Lost Trios Paranoias *Cruising With Santa* (New Hormones ORG30) (December 82), Disrupters *Young Offender* e.p. (insert) (Radical Change RC1) (December 81), Icon A.D. *Don't Feed Us Shit* e.p. (Radical Change RC3) (September 82).

The play on words is also in many ways self-referential, the group being central to the developing Oi movement and led by *Sounds* journalist Garry Bushell – the movement was well known to be based around a working class drinking and pub culture, with a large skinhead following. The Secret label, which had originally been established in 1978, became closely associated with Oi in the early 1980s through signings such as The Business, The 4 Skins and Infa Riot. The e.p. features several well-known Oi 'names' including Frankie Flame and Lenny Miller, and was produced by Micky Geggus of the Cockney Rejects. Other Oi groups used similar visual and verbal references: cartoon sleeves were used on a number of Third Wave Oi and New Punk records including Peter & The Test Tube Babies *Banned From The Pubs*, The Oppressed *Never Say Die*, Anti Nowhere League *Streets Of London* and The Ejected *Have You Got 10p?*. Links between the evolving Oi scene, drinking culture and 'working class' humour can be traced back to earlier releases such as Sham 69 *Hurry Up, Harry* and *Hersham Boys*.



Top row, left to right: Peter & The Test Tube Babies *Banned From The Pubs* (No Future OI4) (January 82), The Oppressed *Never Say Die* e.p. (Firm NICK1) (early 83), Anti Nowhere League *Streets Of London* (WXYZ Records ABCD1) (December 81).
Bottom row, left to right: Sham 69 *Hurry Up, Harry* (Polydor POSP7) (October 78), Sham 69 *Hersham Boys* (Polydor POSP64) (July 79), The Ejected *Have You Got 10p?* e.p. (Riot City RIOT14) (September 82).

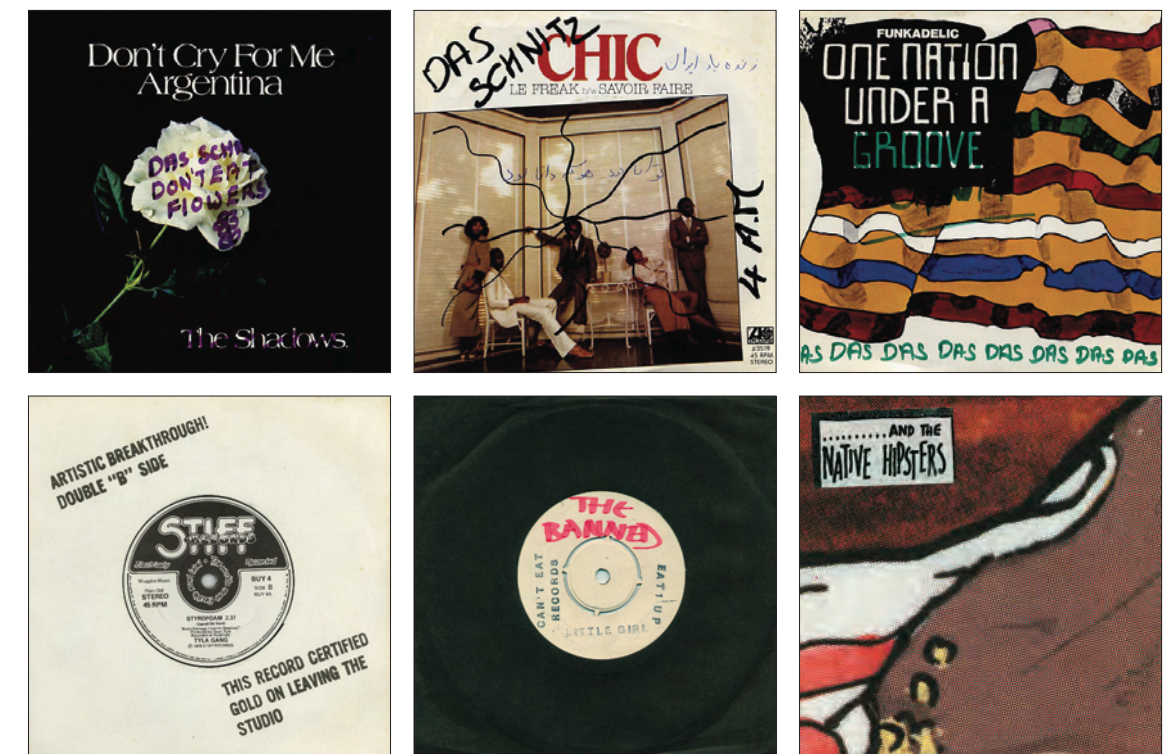


Case Study Three

Das Schnitz *4AM/Getting Nowhere/My House* (Ellie Jay EJSP9246) May 1979

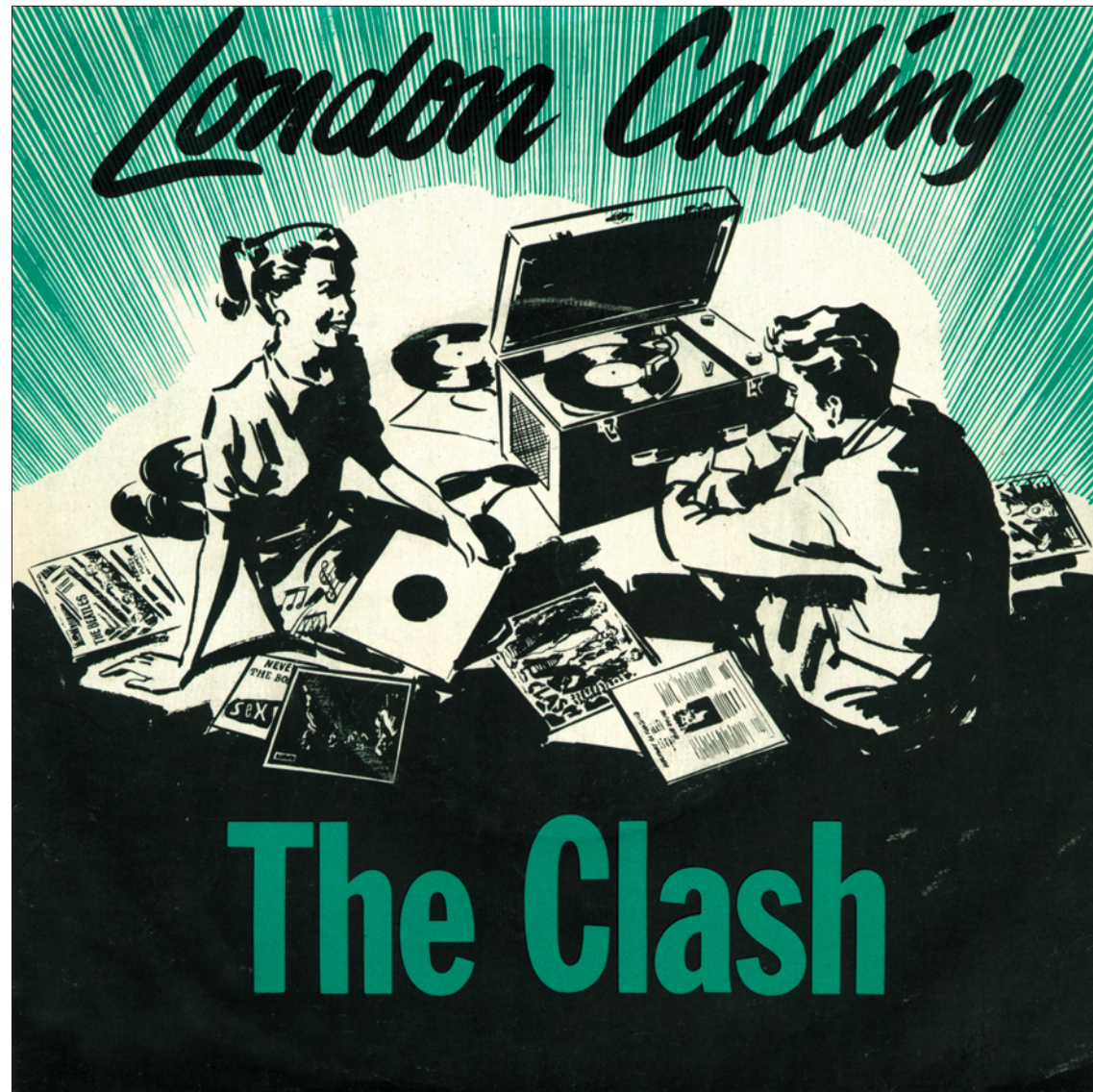
This sleeve is an example of DIY production, in that the group members produced their own sleeves from found materials. Das Schnitz released one single, *4AM*, through the Ellie Jay label in 1979. Having paid for recording and production, the group had no budget to produce a professional sleeve for their record. They managed to acquire a number of sleeves for a

range of contemporary chart releases from a local market stall, and simply wrote their own titles on the covers with marker pens (see below). As such, there is little evidence of design production – at least not in the sense of machine reproduction and the printing process – though there is a strong sense of design thinking and conceptual approach. This method of working has a number of parallels in punk design, and several examples incorporated similar methods of image acquisition and cheap hand-made production techniques. Stiff Records initially used rubber stamps to hand print humorous messages on plain white factory sleeves, while The Banned released their own debut single in the autumn of 1977 with hand-written and rubber stamped labels. DIY experimental outfit And The Native Hipsters again used rubber stamps, together with photocopies and hand-crafted materials on their debut release *There Goes Concorde Again*, though in this case the coloured pattern on the sleeve was created by cutting out 14" x 7" folded sections from large sheets of printed billboard material.



Top row, left to right: Das Schnitz *4AM* (Ellie Jay EJSP9246) (May 79), three alternative sleeves.

Bottom row, left to right: Tyla Gang *Styrofoam* (stamped sleeve) (Stiff BUY4) (September 76), The Banned *Little Girl* (hand stamped labels) (Can't Eat EAT1UP) (September 77), ...And The Native Hipsters *There Goes Concorde Again* (Heater Volume HVR003) (August 80).



Case Study Four

The Clash *London Calling/Armageddon Time* (CBS 8087) December 79

This sleeve is based around a line illustration featuring a young couple listening to records on a portable record player, in a 'retro' 1960s style, and the illustration playfully mimics company sleeves of the era produced by labels such as HMV and Columbia. The reverse sleeve actually lifts a series of dancing couples directly from the artwork for generic 1960s HMV

company sleeves – the original had the larger figures arranged around the standard centre hole, with the words “*His Masters Voice: For The Tops in Pops*” above, and in the case of The Clash they have been rearranged slightly so as to balance across the full width of the sleeve (see below). Typography also closely mirrors the original artwork of the 1960s Columbia company sleeve, with the group name set in 96pt Franklin Gothic Extra Condensed and song titles in a calligraphic script.

The Clash sleeve was professionally printed in three colours (green/black for the front and red/black reverse) on coated card, and was designed in-house at their label, CBS, although no design or illustration credit is given. The front sleeve was actually issued in the UK with a yellow background, and in Holland with a green background, though many of the latter found their way into the UK market. Although the sleeve plays ironically with the visual language of an earlier era, it also contains a hidden joke – among the record sleeves surrounding the teenagers are covers for the Sex Pistols’ *Never Mind The Bollocks* and the debut album by The Clash, together with several classic albums from the 1950s and 1960s: Elvis Presley’s debut album *Elvis Presley*, The Beatles *Please Please Me*, The Rolling Stones *Aftermath* and Bob Dylan *Highway 61 Revisited*. The Clash had famously sung the line “...no Elvis, Beatles or Rolling Stones in 1977” on the song 1977, the B-side of their debut single *White Riot*, and this sleeve displays a tongue-in-cheek rebuff to the group’s critics as they expanded their musical palette to include elements of rhythm & blues, rock & roll and ska.



Left to right: The Clash *London Calling* (reverse sleeve) (CBS 8087) (December 79), HMV Records standard company sleeve (1960s), Columbia Records standard company sleeve (1960s).

In fact, visual references to earlier forms of popular music were not uncommon in the design of punk single sleeves. The Clash featured examples of a range of punk and post punk DIY labels, including Fast Product, Small Wonder and Rough Trade, on their tribute to the UK independent scene, *Hitsville UK*, released in 1981. New Wave group The Doll took a slightly more negative approach toward groups in the First Wave of UK punk on their single *You Used To Be My Hero*, which featured the spines of ‘classic’ albums on the front cover and a collection of punk badges on the reverse. Johnny Moped’s debut single, *No One*, released by Chiswick Records in August 1977, featured typography emulating Elvis Presley’s debut album – coincidentally, Presley died the same month. A similar typographic approach was taken by Ray Lowry for the sleeve of the third album by The Clash, *London Calling*, in December 1979. More sympathetic uses of iconic images were used for the sleeve of the Wreckless Eric single *A Popsong* in January 1980, and the Special Duties punk tribute *Punk Rocker* in May 1983.



Top row, left to right: The Clash *Hitsville UK* (CBS 9480) (January 81), The Doll *You Used To Be My Hero* (front and reverse sleeve) (Beggars Banquet BEG31) (January 80).

Bottom row, left to right: Johnny Moped *No One* (Chiswick NS15) (August 77), Wreckless Eric *A Popsong* (Stiff BUY64) (January 80), Special Duties *Punk Rocker* (Expulsion OUT1) (May 83).

Design Strategies – Summary

A number of general punk sleeve design methods, attributes and themes have been identified in the course of this study. Punk graphics, like the music, tended to embrace elements of protest and agit-prop or ‘street’ politics, and these themes have become entrenched as the stereotypical – or perhaps archetypal – punk approach. However, though the list is not exhaustive, punk design also included parody, humour, satire, self awareness and a particular kind of ironic, self-effacing and reflective wit. The formal properties of these concepts were played out in the use of collage, contemporary media images, détournement and lo-tech materials and production processes. Some of these graphic approaches might be termed quite ‘natural’, in that accepted visual codes to denote certain principles and values had existed long before the advent of punk: the visual language of agit-prop dates back perhaps hundreds of years, and the use of hand-rendered, high-impact graphic messages can be seen in the work of the Dada movement, the early Surrealists, the Situationists and beyond, as well as in the vernacular of 20th century protest movements. Similarly, parody and satire have specific graphic codes which could be emulated by punk sleeve designers to reflect similar aims.

Each of the sleeves in this study has been categorised according to a range of criteria regarding historical context, musical sub-genre and design and production techniques. While a close analysis of all individual graphic elements would not be possible within the timeframe of the project, a general categorisation of recurring graphic elements, as described in the previous chapter, was used in the production of a data spreadsheet based on textual and numerical information, details of which are covered in Chapter Seven: Design Strategies – Applied Analysis. The production of visual matrices related to musical sub-genre and regional and chronological developments allows the reader to form contextual associations as described in the above case studies, and the development of an interactive programme with which to highlight ranges of sleeves based on search criteria from the database demonstrates specific patterns of development.

Chapter Seven: Design Strategies – Applied Analysis

During the course of this research, a broad range of examples of UK punk sleeves were analysed in order to determine specific design categories and thematic structures. This chapter demonstrates an overview analysis of the totality of objects under review, based on quantitative data, including diagrams and visual examples to show the development of graphic styles chronologically and regionally, and a series of visual matrices relating to each of the specific punk sub-genres, as defined in Chapter Four: Key Categories in UK Punk. A range of interpretations drawn from the design analysis are defined, giving particular emphasis to three broad themes:-

- *The mapping of generic punk sub-genres by visual design strategy, demonstrating formal and stylistic inter-relationships.*

- *Changes in visual style across the period in question, displaying an evolution of design strategies based on the adoption and adaptation of punk's visual languages.*

- *Developments in visual approach mapped geographically, to demonstrate regional variations and adaptations.*

7.1 A Cross-Relational Model of Analysis

As suggested in the previous chapter, each of the themes identified can be used to analyse individual sleeves within a cross-related framework. Some punk visual codes became quickly redundant, and were parodied from both outside and within the punk community: the early adoption of the safety pin and razor blade as key punk fashion ‘signifiers’ was mirrored by punk sleeve designers, but the style was quickly picked up by the mainstream media and subjected to much derision, becoming something of a visual cliché in the process. Similarly, the use of swastikas on clothing caused initial outrage, but following widespread press coverage became associated with the second generation, less ‘authentic’ stereotype of ‘Daily

Mirror punks’. The use of certain visual styles in punk sleeves needs, then, to be understood in context, and a range of subtle variations in intended meaning between uses of the same visual elements across different sleeves should be anticipated. As prominent punk symbols quickly became punk clichés, it is important for the reader to be familiar with the wider context of the record itself. This is particularly evident in the way that ‘ransom note’ typography could be used as an original punk visual strategy (early graphic work by Jamie Reid for the Sex Pistols), homage (Special Duties, Angelic Upstarts), or a barbed and ironic commentary on punk itself (Television Personalities, Honey Bane). Certain graphic codes, or the use of particular materials or reproduction methods might also utilise elements of parody and plagiarism, or could form an attack on the development of punk, as in the sleeve for the Crass single *Bloody Revolutions/Persons Unknown*.

7.2 The Punk Diaspora

A quantitative review of the totality of material in this study allows the reader to visualise both the volume and distribution of punk activity, in terms of record production and output, between 1976 and 1984. While the range and number of punk sub-genres varied across the period, and hence the specific nature of the musical (and graphic) output changed over time, the immediate impression from the visual matrix of sleeves placed in a chronological and geographical layout (see **Appendix One**) is that punk’s ‘centre of gravity’ shifted from London in the period 1976-77 to the wider regions of the UK in 1981-82. The bulk of First Wave singles were produced by groups based in and around London, though Manchester was important between 1978 and 1980 (largely through the output of a relatively small number of groups including The Buzzcocks, Magazine and Slaughter & The Dogs), and other cities such as Newcastle and Birmingham were also quite active between 1977 and 1979.¹¹² By contrast, many Third Wave releases originated in the provincial regions of England, in particular the North, West Midlands and the South West, and had a core influence in Scotland and Northern Ireland via Hardcore scene-leaders The Exploited and successful groups such as Stiff Little Fingers, The Undertones and The Outcasts. It is also clear that, while the peak period of UK

112. The nascent punk scenes in Scotland and Ireland during the First and Second Waves of UK punk, which are evident along the bottom rows of the matrices, have also been largely overlooked in recent accounts for their not insignificant contribution to the development of the genre.

punk activity occurred during the period 1977 to 1979 then tailed off during 1980, the Third Wave peak between 1981 and 1982 can be seen to have been significant, at least in terms of the number of record releases, sales and chart placings.

The diaspora effect in relation to UK punk can also be compared with the geographical spread and evolution of other music genres, and this does lead to some interesting conclusions. Firstly, punk’s migration did *not* follow the more ‘traditional’ pattern from rural areas towards the major commercial centres (as had happened in the development of country music, jazz and blues in the USA, for instance), but rather as a largely inner-city urban style which shifted over time away from the city centres and out to the regions of the UK. Equally, punk did not encompass a general shift toward either commercial acceptance (as with country music and rock & roll) or a growing status as a form of high art (as with jazz) – although certain styles such as New Wave were to evolve from the genre as a more acceptable commercial interpretation of punk style. Given the dominance of the USA in the international record industry, punk can be seen to have had little immediate global impact – some US groups adopted a ‘skinny tie’ look and a souped-up R&B sound reminiscent of the 1960s beat boom, leading to some success for New Wave and ‘Powerpop’ styles in international markets, but it was not until the advent of Grunge in the early 1990s that an immediate descendent of ‘punk’ itself could be said to have achieved widespread commercial and critical acclaim.

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, 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.

7.3 Punk and the Record Market

It is also interesting to note that the pattern of record releases tended to follow mainstream trends of scheduling and marketing. The peak of punk activity, in relation to numbers of records released, occurred during the Spring and Autumn each year – reflecting the traditional peaks and troughs of the retail music market. Groups tend to tour in the Spring and Autumn, usually reflecting the scheduling of new album releases. Singles are seen by many major labels as a marketing and promotion device for the (higher priced and more prestigious) album, and as such the seven inch single would usually act as a precursor for a new album release, or to further bolster sales, supported by a promotional tour. The peak period of sales activity, in terms of the High Street retailers, covers the run-up to Christmas: major album releases are scheduled for late October or early November in order to gain most advantageously from the Christmas market. Independent releases are less affected by these market trends, at least in terms of scheduling for the Christmas period, but are affected in other ways: major High Street retailers tend to buy bulk copies of anticipated big selling

releases, which then dominate the sales shelves and leave little, if any, room for more specialised recordings. Smaller labels would then need to avoid an overlap with the market saturation by the latest Cliff Richard, Abba or Bee Gees million-seller if they were to expect some kind of visible presence in the retail market. Major label punk acts were more directly affected by the patterns of the industry, and this was perhaps reflected in the release dates of a number of key punk albums. The biggest selling First Wave UK punk albums were scheduled for release as follows:-

The Damned: <i>Damned Damned Damned</i> (Stiff Records)	Feb 1977
The Clash: <i>The Clash</i> (CBS)	Apr 1977
The Stranglers: <i>Rattus Norvegicus</i> (United Artists)	Apr 1977
The Jam: <i>In The City</i> (Polydor)	May 1977
Ian Dury: <i>New Boots & Panties</i> (Stiff Records)	Sept 1977
The Stranglers: <i>No More Heroes</i> (United Artists)	Oct 1977
Sex Pistols: <i>Never Mind The Bollocks</i> (Virgin)	Nov 1977
The Jam: <i>This Is The Modern World</i> (Polydor)	Nov 1977
The Damned: <i>Music For Pleasure</i> (Stiff Records)	Nov 1977
Buzzcocks: <i>Another Music In A Different Kitchen</i> (United Artists)	Mar 1978
The Stranglers: <i>Black & White</i> (United Artists)	May 1978
Tom Robinson Band: <i>Power In The Darkness</i> (EMI)	May 1978
Buzzcocks: <i>Love Bites</i> (United Artists)	Sept 1978
The Jam: <i>All Mod Cons</i> (Polydor)	Nov 1978
The Clash: <i>Give ‘Em Enough Rope</i> (CBS)	Nov 1978
X Ray Spex: <i>Germ Free Adolescents</i> (EMI)	Nov 1978
Siouxsie & The Banshees: <i>The Scream</i> (Polydor)	Nov 1978

Single releases therefore were scheduled around these albums: the first single by The Stranglers, *Grip*, was released in January 1977, and the debut by The Clash, *White Riot*,

followed in March. After the launch of debut albums by both groups in April 1977, follow-up singles were issued – The Clash *Remote Control* in May and The Stranglers *Peaches* in June, both designed to build on their previous chart success and to help to promote the album.¹¹³ Similar patterns governed the marketing of other early punk groups: a single release with a view to a position in the charts, followed by an album, and one or two follow-up singles a month later to try to maintain public visibility and interest. The Sex Pistols debut album may have been delayed due to their leapfrogging from one label to another in the Spring of 1977, but they had signed to Virgin Records in April 1977, nearly eight months earlier than the eventual release date. Legal wranglings and media pressure may also have played a part in this extended time-frame: other First wave punk groups had recorded and released their debut albums within three or four months of signing to a major label, partly because the labels themselves saw little long-term future in the genre. However, it should not be overlooked that what was seen as one of the highest profile album releases of the year was scheduled to fit neatly into the lucrative Christmas market. Released on 12th November 1977, *Never Mind The Bollocks* went straight to number one in the national album charts, outselling the previous top releases of the autumn, all of which had been greatest hits packages: the rush-released posthumous collection *Elvis Presley's 40 Greatest Hits, 20 Golden Greats* by Diana Ross and The Supremes and *40 Golden Greats* by Cliff Richard and The Shadows. It was overtaken a fortnight later by *The Sound Of Bread* by Bread, itself another hits collection, and the Christmas number one *Disco Fever*, a various artists' compilation album on the budget K-Tel label. The second album by The Stranglers, *No More Heroes*, had peaked at number two the previous month, and the second album by The Jam, *This Is The Modern World*, also managed a top thirty place over the Christmas period, meaning that punk was visible in the national charts during one of its busiest periods at the end of 1977.

Many of these facts regarding release dates are unsurprising, given the nature of the record industry. Even though many punk groups and labels professed an outwardly oppositional voice to the marketing of their goods, in keeping with the anti-establishment rhetoric of

113. The Clash famously protested at the release of *Remote Control*, as the track had already been included on the debut album and the group wished to release only new recordings and non-album tracks as singles – they recorded the following single, *Complete Control*, as a public rebuke to their label CBS. While this sentiment may appear admirable, and in keeping with the group's street-level image, accepted forms of promotion within the record industry would usually mean the release of an album track as a single a month or so after the album's release. This was precisely the case with The Stranglers, The Damned, The Jam and most other big-name punk groups – indeed, all four Sex Pistols singles appeared in their original form on the debut album.

the subculture, they found that they were often at the mercy of a recording and promotions industry far beyond their control. Major labels, at least, had other client groups to serve, and work practices developed over many years were unlikely to change simply due to the demands of some new, flash-in-the-pan young upstarts. Even though some UK punk record sales were good by national standards, they were a drop in the ocean in terms of global figures. The promotions industry also ran to its own, well-refined timetable: Spring and Autumn tours, avoiding the peak holiday periods in the Summer, potential Summer festival appearances or overseas tours, and a major retail 'push' in October, just before the festive season. Tours, like singles, were scheduled around the release dates for new albums. Major venues for live music followed similar rules, with activities mapped across the calendar year. It is perhaps ironic, but unsurprising, to note that many First and Second Wave punk single and album releases were forced into similar practices. The rise of the independent labels, and the development of punk specialist markets, did at least lead to a partial move away from this model: the Third Wave peak between 1981 and 1982 saw increased activity during the summer months, with new single and album releases by groups such as Vice Squad, Discharge, The Exploited and the Anti Nowhere League spread throughout the year.

7.4 Doing It Yourself

Many picture sleeves of UK punk releases of the First and Second Wave periods, between late 1977 and early 1979, feature high production values, often professionally designed and utilising multiple colour printing. Earlier punk single sleeves had tended to feature one or two colour prints (the picture sleeve was itself still something of a novelty at this time), but by 1979 chart successes and major label investment saw many produced in full colour or limited edition alternative versions, with many records pressed in coloured vinyl. Between 1981 and 1983, many sleeve graphics returned to the visual style of simple one or two colour prints featuring iconic elements such as stencil or blackletter typography and images of war and death. In part, these developments mark the distinction between the release of punk records by the major labels and the subsequent specialism of the independents, who sought

to move away from ‘mainstream’ consumerism toward specific niche markets. Major labels often employed in-house design teams and the production of sleeve graphics, particularly in the case of singles rather than albums, was a routine activity. Smaller independent operations were less likely to incorporate a design team, and graphics were usually either produced by the groups themselves, or through freelance contracts and in commercial pre-press studios. Another factor playing a part in both record and sleeve production was the evolution of a DIY independent sub-genre, whereby groups took control of the whole process of recording, production and sleeve artwork. Independence thus became an ideological position as well as an example of self-initiated ‘cottage industry’. As Kev Lycett of The Mekons notes: “...*the aesthetic you identify was also shaped by an ethical instinct, the DIY letrasetting and collage came from a strongly held stance – no way were you going to let a designer near your artwork. You knew what you wanted to say and you were going to say it. No designer was going to come and pretty it all up and mess with what you were saying, making it just a pose*” (Interview with the author, 8th September 2001)

It could be argued that production values on UK punk records mirrored the economic development of the movement as a whole. Early First Wave singles were often packaged in simple one or two colour sleeves and were recorded in low-budget studios. They were also largely released on small labels, or were by groups signed speculatively to major labels which viewed the movement with some scepticism, and therefore avoided any heavy commitment until a good financial return was clearly achievable. The success of punk in the retail market saw major label investment and a subsequent increase in the overall quality of production. Later recordings were made using ‘name’ producers and better studios, and sleeves were professionally designed and printed in full colour. While many major label releases featured sleeves designed by in-house design teams, who were often uncredited, some new designers and studios came to the fore during this period and made their name through their work within the music industry. Jamie Reid quickly became the most prominent punk design ‘name’, though he worked solely with the Sex Pistols. Malcolm Garrett’s Assorted Images

studio produced graphic work for a range of groups including The Buzzcocks, The Yachts, The Members and Magazine, before broadening into the design of other printed material and establishing a place at the cutting edge of the early 1980s graphic design profession alongside other punk-influenced designers such as Peter Saville, Barney Bubbles, Chris Morton, Terry Jones and Neville Brody. Other designers and illustrators were prominent within UK punk sleeve design but were less widely celebrated in the professional arena, including Jill Mumford (who designed sleeves for The Depressions and The Skids), Gee Vaucher (the Crass Records label), Mike Coles (Killing Joke and the Malicious Damage label) and independent DIY designers such as Bob Last (the Fast Product label). A distinction does need to be made, then, between those sleeves designed by already established designers and studios, those by upcoming designers who would go on to work in the wider graphic design industry, and those which were centred tightly within the punk genre, often designed by either the group themselves or an associate who did not seek to enter the professional design environment.

As industry interest in the genre waned, the independent labels took over as the natural home of Third Wave punk, and thus low-cost recording, design and printing once more came to the fore. Some punk graphics could then be seen to have been as much a product of market forces as an ideological vehicle: the black and white, brutal aesthetic of many Anarcho Punk and Hardcore sleeves may have mirrored the back-to-basics return to an ‘authentic’ punk austerity in the early 1980s, but given the lack of financial investment and low-budget operations of many Third Wave labels, this choice was not exactly completely open. The success, in chart terms, of sub-genres such as Oi and New Punk did lead to some glossy full colour sleeve designs (by the likes of the UK Subs, GBH and the Anti Nowhere League), and even a few picture disc releases (a very un-punk format, often aimed at teenage pop fans), but most sleeves were designed for suitably low budget reproduction. At the same time, a few remaining successful First Wave artists (The Clash, Siouxsie & The Banshees and The Stranglers) used higher budgets to produce more complex and varied music, with their

labels employing more sophisticated visual design strategies to match. The other remaining First Wave major player, The Damned, moved between several independent labels during this period, and production values varied accordingly, but groups such as The Stranglers and The Clash enjoyed significant chart success during the early 1980s, and their single sleeves were often designed in full colour or utilised metallic inks (as in the single *Golden Brown* by The Stranglers, which reached number two in the national charts in January 1982). Other ex-punk and New Wave artists moved on to new territory during this period: Elvis Costello, Ian Dury, The Jam, The Police, Ultravox, Adam & The Ants and Simple Minds all gained a foothold in the music industry through punk, but managed to transform themselves commercially in order to dominate the pop charts during the early 1980s. The stark contrast between the high value production of successful punk and New Wave artists on major labels and the lo-tech, brutal aesthetic of the New Punk groups is most evident between 1981 and 1982. It is also interesting to note that many of the latter sleeves were for groups based in the wider regions of the UK: during 1982, the divide is clearly as much aesthetic as it is geographic, and the distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ punk styles and values is quite marked at this point.

Other stylistic trends can be mapped across the full range of examples, and quantitative analysis can reveal some interesting results. The shift in graphic styles between 1977 and 1984 demonstrates the development of new and innovative punk aesthetics, often centred on the growth of new punk sub-genres. Street photographs of the group, a common visual trope derived from earlier rock and pop portraiture featured heavily during the First Wave (1977-78), but became less common in the Second Wave (1978-80), eventually enjoying something of a renaissance during the Third Wave of UK punk (1981-83), largely within the Oi and Hardcore sub-genres. The evolving sub-genres also offered something of an avant-garde in both music and graphic approaches: innovations in DIY production were reflected in subsequent major label releases, as both established labels and groups attempted to keep abreast of new styles and developments.

The relationship between a number of successful smaller independent labels and the majors is complicated, in that many supposedly ‘DIY’ enterprises were funded or distributed by the bigger labels, who tended to view them as useful market research for potential new signings. EMI were quick to sign a number of New Punk and Oi groups to their Zonophone subsidiary in 1980, developing a graphic style which reflected the harsh Third Wave aesthetic. Even some long established punk groups attempted to follow the trends of the newly emerging punk sub-genres – The Damned, UK Subs and Chelsea continued to enjoy a strong level of support within the Third Wave punk fraternity, gigging with many up-and-coming groups such as the Anti Nowhere League, Discharge and The Exploited. The Clash (by this time reduced to singer Joe Strummer, bassist Paul Simonon and three new musicians) found themselves stuck between an increasingly glossy and vacuous New Pop/New Romantic market and the back-to-basics Third Wave punk underground. Facing declining sales and media criticism, they attempted to get back to their street cred beginnings: the sleeve for their 1985 single, *This Is England*, featured a kind of digitised punk graphic style, incorporating strong, flat colours, bizarrely bitmapped blackletter typography and heavily contrasting halftone photography (see Figure 111), reflecting the hybrid (and confused) nature of the recording itself. Their new direction received poor reviews and the records sold badly, forcing the eventual split of the group later the same year.

7.5 The Interactive Matrix

Working with interactive designer Rob Bevan, of XPT Design, a system was developed which displays the chronology matrices on screen, and which allows the user to select different categories from the database to display. The visual development of each emerging sub-genre can be shown individually, as can the regional origin of the groups themselves and their relationship to the First, Second and Third Waves of UK punk. This series of filters for viewing the material is by no means exhaustive, and it is hoped that the basic material and structures might be adaptable to further study: as Charles Harvey and Jon Press suggest, “...*data gathering, organisation, sorting and searching, are tasks routinely carried out by historians.*”



Fig.111: The Clash *This Is England/Do It Now* (CBS A6122) 1985

Each is made less burdensome through the use of powerful computers and database management software, and the time and effort saved in this way have served to inspire ambition... the recurrent idea is that rich collections of data of this kind should form a collective resource, serving the needs of many scholars and many projects over many generations” (Harvey & Press 1996: xi).

The database includes the following information for each sleeve:-

- Artist
- Song
- Label
- Catalogue number
- Region (UK region where the group were originally based)
- Date of release
- Release number (by group)
- Chart entry (independent or national chart placing)
- Top Of The Pops appearances
- Wave (First, Second or Third)
- Punk sub-genre
- Sleeve designer
- Number of print colours
- Print method (professional, DIY or photocopy etc)
- Artwork (photograph, illustration, détournement etc)
- Typography (ransom note, blackletter, Letraset, hand rendered etc)
- Format (coloured or black vinyl, picture disc etc)

This allows not only for a range of quantitative analyses of the material, but when placed within an interactive display can demonstrate key design trends and the relationship between the sleeve graphics and the music itself (see Figures 112 to 117). While the author makes no claim that the relatively limited database constructed within this course of study might serve such a grandiose purpose, it is hoped that the material has been catalogued and detailed in such a way as to form a flexible platform for further investigation, and that the re-purposing of the visual material and subsequent re-thinking of historical narratives might lead to new discoveries in the evaluation of UK punk design. The adoption of a simple grid

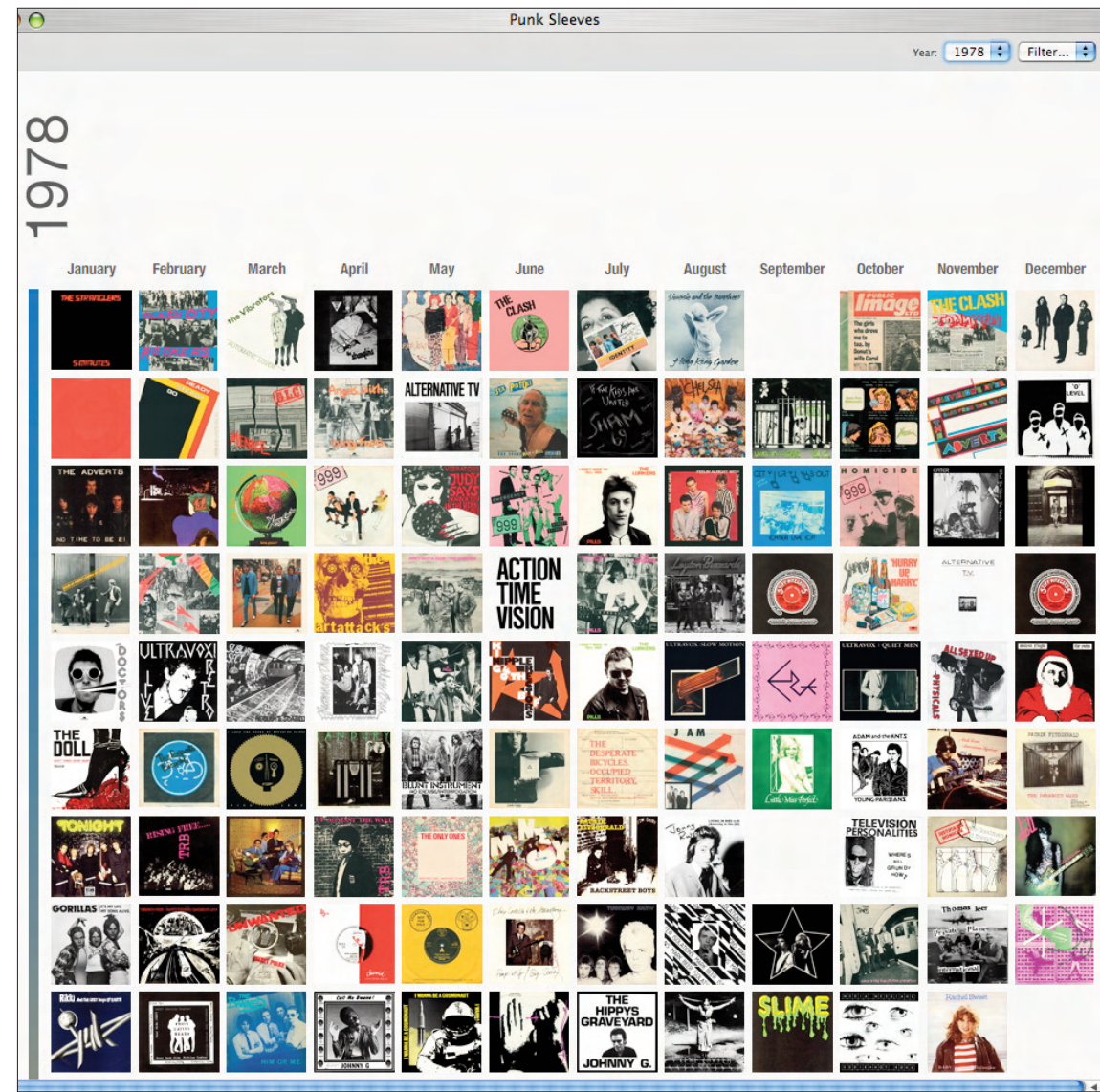


Fig.112: Screenshot of Interactive Matrix: 1978

layout relating to record releases across a chronological and geographical framework is intended to display graphic information clearly along with certain quantitative data (the ‘clustering’ of releases by date and/or region, for instance). Working with a database which can ‘extract’ key information, based on simple but extensive selection criteria, the visual work is intended to show a clear picture of the range of work categorised within each

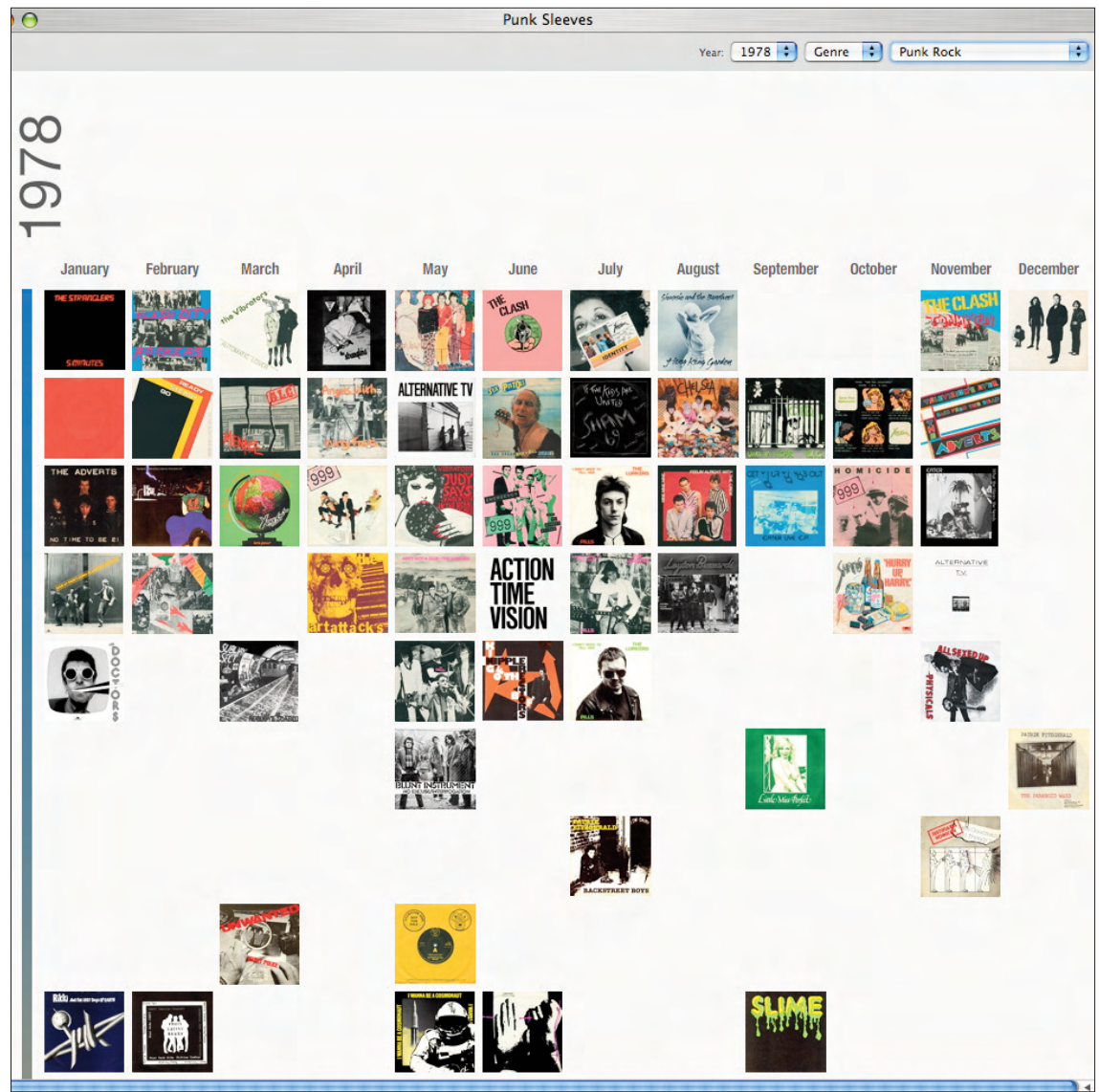


Fig.113: Screenshot of Interactive Matrix: 1978>Genre>Punk Rock

sub-genre, along with its chronological and regional axes, and – importantly – the graphic codes used on record sleeves within that category. As such, both historical and cultural developments can be revealed as well as formal properties of the work (number of colours, print method, designer, artwork, typography).¹¹⁴

114. The interactive display was developed by Rob Bevan using the database software MySQL (<http://www.mysql.com/>), web application framework Ruby on Rails (<http://www.rubyonrails.org/>) and a Flash application (<http://www.adobe.com/software/flashplayer/>). The programme can then respond flexibly to redraw the visual matrices in response to the data input via MySQL, which in turn is derived from the Excel and XML databases. A working model of the system is provided as a CDR with this thesis.

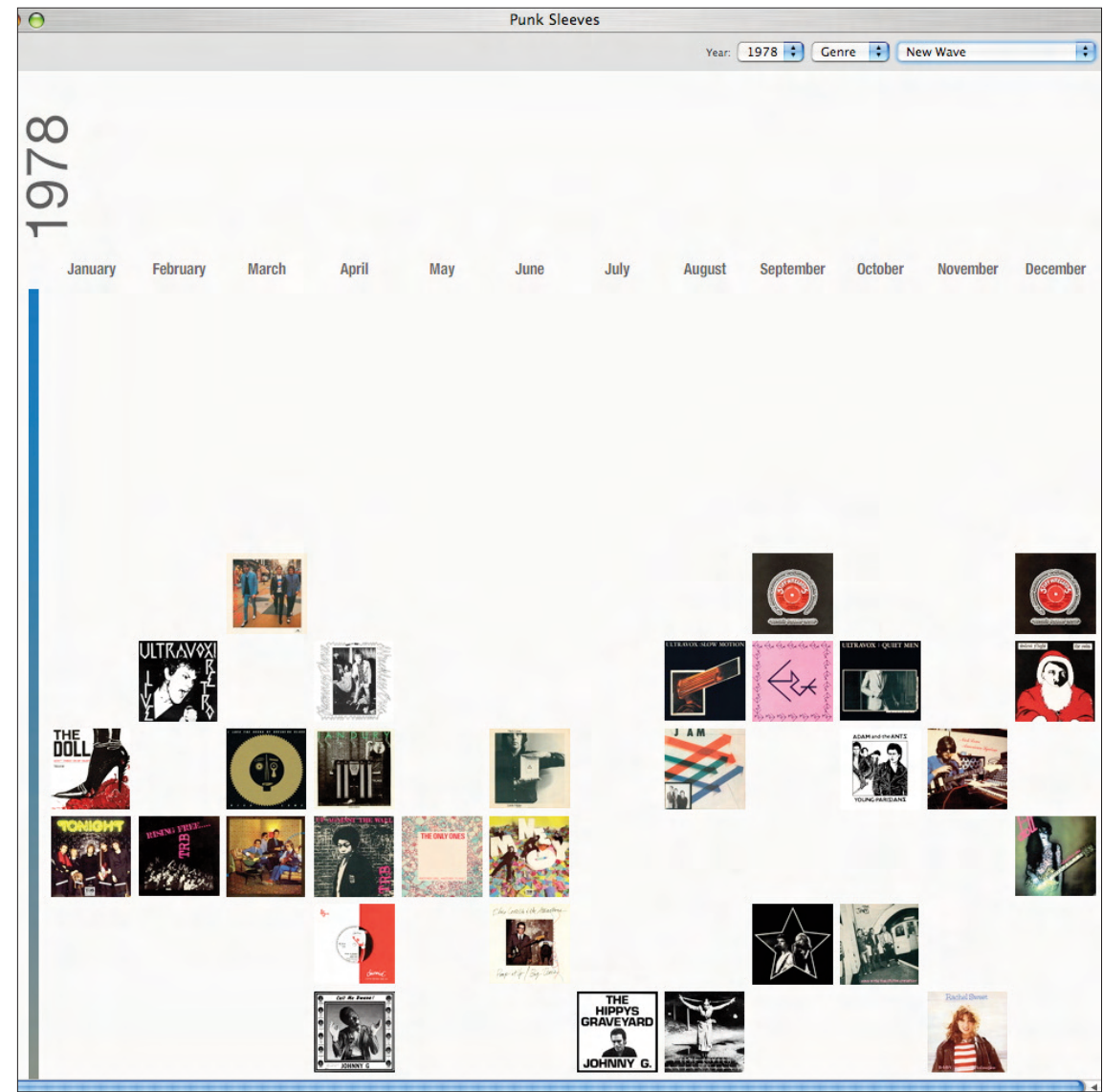


Fig.114: Screenshot of Interactive Matrix: 1978>Genre>New Wave

A standalone, computer-based version of the interactive matrix was shown as part of the Hitsville UK: Punk in the Faraway Towns exhibition at the Millais Gallery, Southampton and the British Film Institute, London, during the spring and summer 2007. In this format, the matrix allows the user to select individual years to view, and to then apply filters to view sleeves by wave, sub-genre and region. By clicking on an individual sleeve, the viewer is able

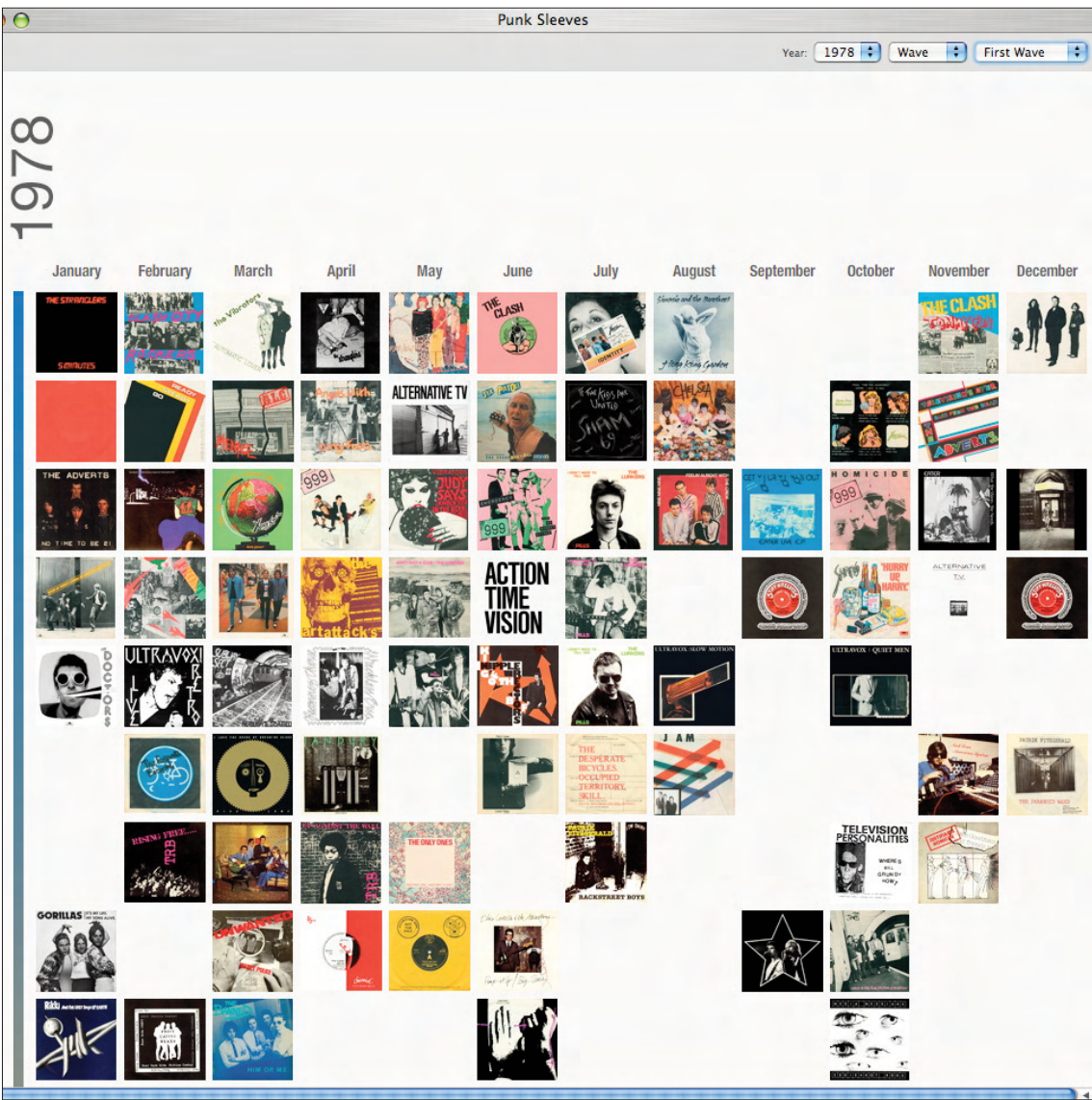


Fig.115: Screenshot of Interactive Matrix: 1978>Wave>First Wave

to see a large scale image of the sleeve artwork, together with information regarding the artist, song titles, label, catalogue number, year of release, sleeve designer, style of artwork, number of print colours, print method, vinyl format and use of typography. The music from the lead track on the record also plays at the same time. This system proved to be very popular at each of the exhibitions, and it allows users to hear, as well as see, aesthetic

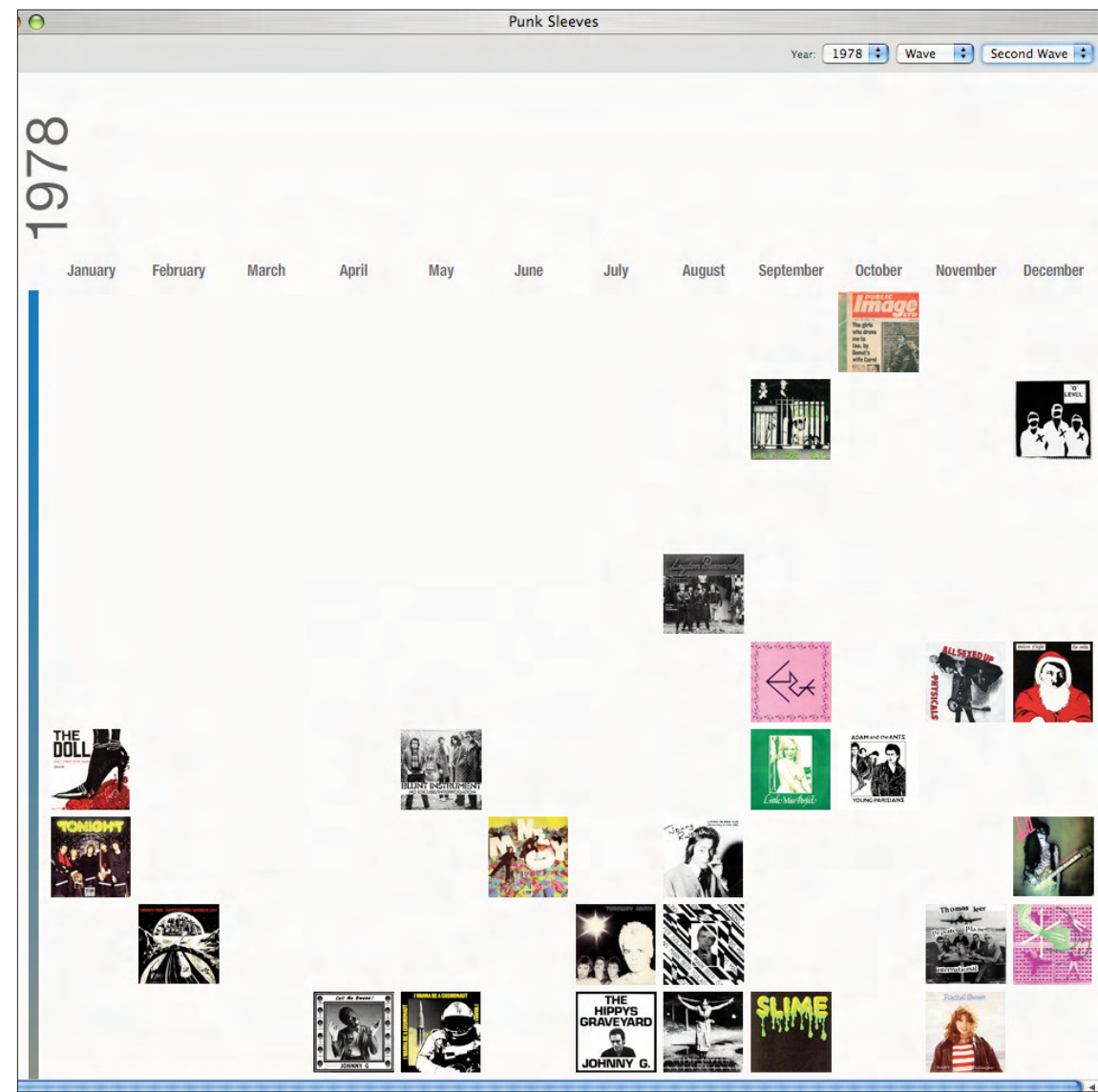


Fig.116: Screenshot of Interactive Matrix: 1978>Wave>Second Wave

distinctions between records from different punk sub-genres. The next stage of development for the interactive material will be to publish the matrix online as a fully functional web resource, where a number of more sophisticated filtering tools can be incorporated into the design and the work can be viewed remotely.

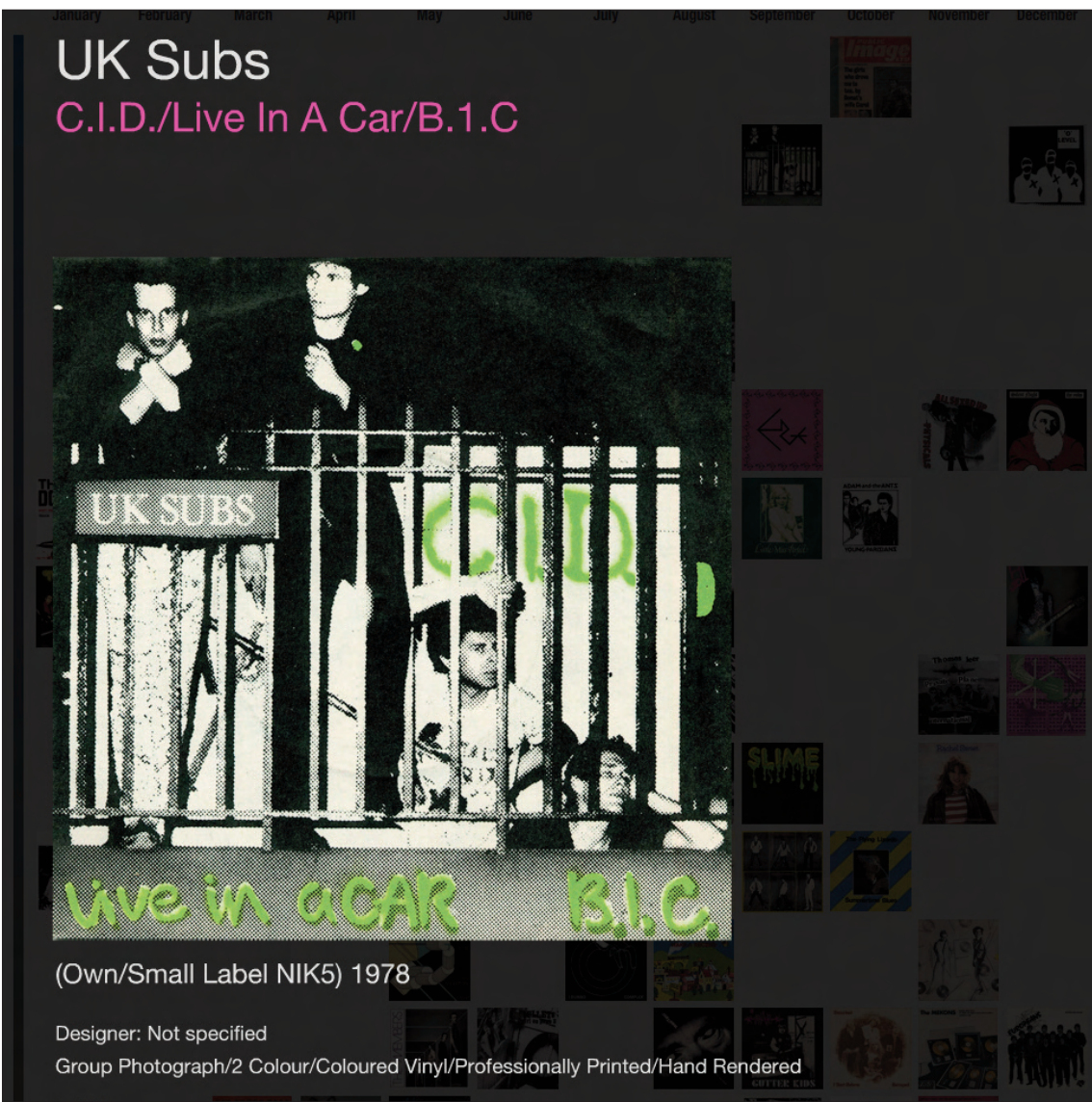


Fig.117: Screenshot of Interactive Matrix: 1978>UK Subs CID>Sleeve Details

7.6 Quantitative Values

A number of quantitative values can be ascertained through the database. It is possible to show some limited mathematical data which can be placed alongside published analyses of punk graphics in order to test their accuracy, or to support the range of category definitions outlined in the previous chapter. Within this study, 1127 seven inch single sleeves were

identified and catalogued. By defining the principle elements of the sleeve design, some general categorisations and values can be ascertained:-

<u>Total number of sleeves reviewed</u>	<u>1127</u>	
Group photograph on front of sleeve	349	(31.0%)
Collage or photomontage image	81	(7.2%)
Détournement or iconic media image	86	(7.6%)
Ransom note typography	34	(3.0%)
Machine/professionally typeset	328	(29.1%)
Black & White artwork	371	(32.9%)
Professionally printed	1072	(95.1%)
Letraset typography	121	(10.7%)
Typewriter	19	(1.7%)
Blackletter typography	15	(1.3%) ¹¹⁵
Stencil typography	63	(5.6%)
Hand rendered typography	500	(44.4%)
Coloured vinyl	53	(4.7%)
Inner London region	143	(12.7%)
Outer London region	414	(36.7%)
 <u>Total number of groups in sample</u>	 <u>401</u>	
Only one record released	190	(47.4%)
Two or more records released	211	(52.6%)
Three ore more records released	127	(31.7%)
Four or more records released	97	(24.2%)
Five or more records released	76	(19.0%)
Ten or more records released	23	(5.7%)

115. Note that even though this figure is quite small, most of these sleeves are situated disproportionately within the Hardcore and Oi sub-genres, implying a much higher use within these sub-categories. Blackletter has since become widely adopted as the typography of choice to denote Streetpunk or Hardcore styles worldwide, as well as gaining prevalence in graphics related to Hip Hop culture and a continued use in Heavy Metal. Certain subtle variations, including the use of umlauts and Latin, rather than Germanic, references (the more rounded Rotunda form, which originated in Italy, rather than the more angular north European Textualis) help to distinguish between the different subcultures.

A number of punk clichés, such as the supposed dominance of ransom note and typewriter typographic styles, can therefore be called into question.¹¹⁶ Hand rendered typography does dominate in the above table, and while this definition would include the “...*flowing ‘spray can’ script*” identified by Dick Hebdige, it would also refer to hand-rendered group logotypes, which were fairly dominant across much rock and pop sleeve design of the era – and indeed can be seen to have been a legacy of the 1960s, when brand identities and logotypes were applied to most major rock and pop groups as the teen-oriented popular music industry developed into a globally successful business.

One surprise from the above data is the abundance of professionally typeset lettering on nearly 30% of sleeves, a fact which calls into question the often assumed distance between punk and the commercial music, and graphic design, industries. In fact, contrary to popular belief, even the sleeves of ‘classic’ examples of the independent DIY punk genre, such as the debut *Spiral Scratch* e.p. by The Buzzcocks, were professionally typeset and printed (see Figure 118). Even Jamie Reid makes the mistake of associating the Buzzcocks e.p. with the newly evolving punk philosophy and agit-prop graphic style surrounding his own work. Certainly Reid’s assertion that punk sleeves need not feature a photograph of the group is directly contradicted in this example,¹¹⁷ together with the fact that the reverse sleeve information is commercially typeset, rather than hand-rendered or home made; “...*one thing that became very clear was that there wasn’t any need to have pictures of the band on any of the graphics... The idea was that everything should be accessible, including the music, and I was happy to see the Sex Pistols’ music and the graphics being imitated. Obviously there are good imitations and bad imitations, but there were some especially strong emulations that we felt were part of what we were trying to articulate. The Buzzcocks’ ‘Spiral Scratch’ was a very good example*” (Reid & Savage 1987: 57). Some of this apparent confusion stems from the fact that ‘*Spiral Scratch*’ was a celebrated example of the emerging DIY punk philosophy, and the legend surrounding its origins – self-financed and sold by the group at gigs and through mail order – certainly helped to establish a mythology of hand-made production. It is possible that Reid is

116. Certain lo-tech typographic styles, often based around the typewriter and found lettering, did dominate other forms of punk graphic output – notably in the production of fanzines and flyers. However, the use of such styles in the design and production of record sleeves was very limited by comparison.
117. The cover photograph was a Polaroid shot, taken by the group’s manager Richard Boon in front of the Robert Peel statue in Manchester’s Picadilly gardens (McGartland 1995: 38).



Fig.118: The Buzzcocks *Spiral Scratch* e.p.: *Breakdown/Time's Up/Boredom/Friends Of Mine* (New Hormones ORG-1) 1977

confusing it with the group's second single, *Orgasm Addict*, their first release on the major label United Artists in October 1977, which featured a sleeve designed by two students from Manchester Polytechnic, Linder Sterling and Malcolm Garrett (see Figure 119). However, while this later example may have demonstrated the punk DIY 'look', based around photomontage and leterset typography, it is perhaps ironic that the print process, pressing, marketing and



Fig.119: The Buzzcocks *Orgasm Addict/Whatever Happened To?* (United Artists UP36316) 1977

distribution, as well as recording and production costs, were covered by a major label. In terms of print production, over 95% of all sleeves sampled were professionally printed, rather than hand-made, silkscreen printed or photocopied. Overall, it would appear that the commercial (batch) production of punk singles and sleeves, from DIY to major label releases, was largely handled by professionals – from cutting and pressing plants to printers and

sleeve manufacturers – although some aspects of the graphic design process were taken in-house by groups themselves.

7.7 The Division of Labour

The impact of home made, DIY activity on the record manufacturing process mirrors that of the marketing and distribution aspects of the subculture: groups could set up their own label, and could sell direct to customers either locally (at gigs or via local outlets) or by mail order, but they were largely at the mercy of a national distribution system, together with long-established procedures for music publishing, promotion and marketing, in order to reach a wider audience. There is, therefore, a distinct division of labour in the production of punk records, and the ‘anyone can do it’ DIY ethos of punk could only have a nominal impact on this range of activities. Many punk groups, for instance, would not have had access to sound recording and mixing technologies, and even if they did, would certainly have needed to hand over the cutting of masters, vinyl pressing and label production to a professional outfit. Similarly, while the design of the sleeve could be taken on by untrained members or friends of the group, the actual printing, folding and glueing was often left to the services of a professional print studio. The fact that such a high number of sleeves in the survey were professionally printed, together with the widespread adoption of record industry ‘norms’ such as the inclusion of a group photograph on the front cover, locates punk within the music industry once more. Although innovations did occur, and the punk avant-garde found new directions in both musical and visual aesthetics, links to other earlier, and contemporary, popular music genres are still very much in evidence. Whether these links were self-regulated, in that punk groups wished to emulate their own rock music heroes, or imposed, in that the industry itself adopted punk as simply another new music development to profit from, it is clear that punk’s ‘year zero’ approach was not to overturn the entire music business, and the famous call to arms by The Clash; “*...no Elvis, Beatles or Rolling Stones in 1977*” was ultimately to prove empty rhetoric.

7.8 Punk Legacy

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.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions

This research set out firstly to question prevailing definitions of punk, including its timescale and geographies, and secondly to provide a framework for analysing the graphic design aspects of that quintessential punk artefact, the seven inch single. In relation to this second point, the research also aimed to develop and test a model of graphic design analysis which could be adapted to the study of other graphic artefacts related to visual manifestations of youth culture in the late 20th century and beyond.

A number of repeated assumptions regarding UK punk history have become entrenched over time, including a narrow and limited timescale and an emphasis on the major metropolitan centres. Through the production of visual material which locates the origins of punk record releases nationally and regionally, this research offers a counterpoint to this stereotype. It also encompasses a broader timeframe than that which is usually associated with the genre, from the First Wave of UK punk to the regional diaspora of the Second Wave, and new interpretations of the musical, visual and political aspects of punk within the early 1980s Third Wave. Later trends, such as the harsh black and white graphic styles of Third Wave Hardcore and Anarcho Punk, have seldom been addressed within published accounts, though they are significant both quantitatively and in terms of later influence. The analysis of a range of punk artefacts, in relation to methods of production, material, graphic and compositional aspects of their sleeve design, demonstrates a wider and more inclusive interpretation of punk's visual themes and methods. A number of key visual tropes associated with UK punk have been identified and compared, alongside the evolution of a number of distinct punk sub-genres, several of which also encompassed geographical and regional 'hubs' of activity well away from the capital.

While **Chapter One** of this research acted as a literature review, setting out a range of recent historical positions in relation to UK punk, **Chapter Two** offered some counter-arguments based on empirical evidence, in order to test a number of theories and broad assumptions

regarding punk identity, politics and philosophy. This extended overview of punk discourse was important to the development of the research: in order to construct a framework for the microanalysis of key design elements and methods used in the production of UK punk record sleeves, the origins and meanings of these structures needed to be placed within a clearly defined context. Punk graphic design can be confusing to the uninitiated viewer – the use of particular visual codes and metaphors can carry different meanings on different sleeves, and the underlying satirical humour and internal critical discourse of the genre is often overlooked. However, although an attempt has been made to indicate a range of key ‘punk’ graphic design strategies and visual codes, any wider ‘meanings’ implied by those visual devices have not, generally, been subjected to interrogation. The relationship between evolving graphic styles, punk sub-genres and regions of activity is articulated through the print-based graphic matrices and interactive design, each of which offers a different emphasis. The printed chronology matrix shows the range of graphic material by region, allowing the viewer to identify the development of local stylistic approaches (the North and South West of England were, for instance, prominent in the development of Third Wave punk styles), and the series of individual sub-genre panels relates the sleeve artwork to the development of particular categories of UK punk which had political and cultural significance, particularly within a local framework. The interactive matrix also allows the viewer to filter visual material by Wave, sub-genre and region, to view further sleeve details (artist and title, record label, catalogue number, designer, style of artwork, number of print colours, black or coloured vinyl, print method used and style of typography).

A number of punk graphic tropes have been identified within the course of this research. Some, such as the use of ‘ransom note’ typography and the détournement of existing imagery, have been widely documented within published work on punk graphic design, but as a consequence their importance has been overstated. Conventions drawn from traditional pop record sleeve design, such as the group photograph, band name logotype, professional typesetting and printing methods, were far more prevalent across the range of punk record

output than has previously been acknowledged. The fact that record sleeves can be analysed in relation to theories of branding, identity design and packaging, as well as the availability or otherwise of technical processes (in physical terms and the designer’s knowledge or skill-base), means that evidence of design training – and, conversely, the untrained DIY approach – features heavily in the qualitative review. Although much punk artwork was hand-made and DIY in nature (particularly in the case of fanzines, flyers and posters), the skills and equipment necessary to produce and manufacture a vinyl record remained largely outside of the scope of most punk groups. DIY producers could get involved at a number of stages in the process – recording, the creation of original artwork, and perhaps the folding and gluing of sleeves, but other key stages – the mastering, cutting and pressing of the vinyl, production of printing plates, typesetting and sleeve and label printing – were usually left to the services of professionals.

8.1 Punk Art Styles

Certain graphic conventions do exist in punk record sleeve design, and some of these may be attributable to design training and an awareness of visual culture, but care needs to be taken not to attribute stylistic qualities which may be apparent to the art historian or design critic as signs of either causality or historical reference. New punk graphic styles were often developed by untrained designers, and it would be erroneous to assume an art historical context or intention, rather than seeking parallels elsewhere within popular visual culture or considering the expediency of designing with available techniques and materials. The relationship between rock and pop music production and art school training has been investigated by a number of writers, including Frith & Horne (1987), Marcus (1989) and Walker (1987, 1999, 2002). Connections have been made between punk and earlier art movements, notably to the Situationist International during the 1960s, in part borne out by interviews with Malcolm McLaren and Jamie Reid, who both had a strong interest in the movement (Reid & Savage 1987), but it is erroneous to extrapolate this personal interest as being reflected by other punk sleeve designers. Similarly, connections between the early

work of Peter Saville or Malcolm Garrett and Twentieth Century modernism have been well established (King 2003, Poynor 2003), but again a direct relationship between the work of later sleeve designers and, for instance, Russian Constructivism, is harder to pinpoint. The sense that some sleeve designers were simply picking up on the contemporary zeitgeist, rather than appropriating from or echoing the themes of past art movements, could be said to be reflected across a wide range of punk and Post Punk design.

The generally increasing level of sophistication and production values within punk single sleeves across the First Wave period, 1976 to 1978, reflects the success of the punk genre within the wider music industry, and subsequent financial investment by the major corporations. During the Second and Third Waves, a clear backlash against what was seen as the commodifying of the movement can be observed within the DIY punk sub-genre and then through the publically-declared ideologies – and subsequent graphic identities – of Anarcho Punk, New Punk and Hardcore. The development of specific graphic languages relevant to the evolving UK punk sub-genres is a complex story, which can be studied through a range of design strategies and models of analysis. This research offers a comprehensive model of design analysis which allows the reader to explore the relationship between graphic form, subcultural groups and regional locations within a specified timeframe. The interactive display allows formal comparisons to be made between different artefacts, and the quantitative analysis indicates that a number of punk ‘myths’ do not stand up to close scrutiny.

8.2 A Model of Graphic Design Analysis

Links between punk lyrics, record sleeves and locality are evident throughout the range of artefacts under review. While early UK punk records tended to reflect more national and/or international concerns (including the assertion of a British rock music identity), later releases included more locally specific agendas, in some part due to the wider punk diaspora and the development of regional punk fanbases, venues and outlets. The success of punk music as a

marketable commodity, and the establishment of a punk underground economy, had a direct influence on this trait. In a similar way to folk, blues and other ‘roots’ music genres, evidence of locality could be seen as a badge of authenticity, and punk’s very public preoccupation with grass-roots politics and ideology sits neatly within this field.

The relationship between the different visual models in this research – the chronology/ geography matrix and the individual punk sub-genres – allows for the comparison of individual visual artefacts in relation to the wider collection. Precursors in design style, and the evolution of particular graphic languages relating to specific sub-genres, are identified, as well as the regional ‘hubs’ around which different styles developed. The matrix also shows the overlapping relationship between a number of different evolving punk sub-genres, emerging patterns in marketing and production methods (and consequently budgets), and the often overlooked relationship between punk and the operations of the wider music industry calendar – important punk record releases still followed the traditional commercial peaks and troughs around key periods. The incorporation of sound files into the database and interactive display also enables comparisons to be made between visual style and musical composition – although this area is left open to further study and is considered beyond the remit of this project.

The graphic design strategies employed are intended to act as both a system of display and an analytical tool in themselves. The use of a computer-based, interactive system for selecting and viewing sets of visual data can lead to unexpected or unpredictable results, and can assist in quantifying particular stylistic trends and patterns. The gradual diaspora of punk styles over the course of the material under review can be effectively viewed through the selection of data by region and sub-genre, while the incorporation of ‘actual’ sleeve designs in the matrices allows for some measure of qualitative comparison. The variation in graphic styles, and the material evidence of rising and falling production costs, present something of a subtext to the overall story, allowing the punk historian a better

understanding of the relationship between small-scale DIY producers and the wider industry. A ‘trickle down’ effect, in the manner of Dick Hebdige’s early work on youth subcultures, could be said to be very much in evidence as punk evolved from London into the wider regions. However, the transition in musical and visual styles towards new sub-genres and forms of ‘punk’, often originating in those regional areas, shows that, in the case of UK punk at least, the diaspora was not a one-way process.

The system employed during the course of this project could be utilised in the study of other forms of graphic material, in particular those related to popular and youth culture in the late 20th century. The use of a database to record and visualise key variations in graphic style and approach is highly relevant to the material under review – central themes explored include the nature of the geographical and temporal diaspora of punk styles, and the evolution of new punk sub-genres, each with their own graphic codes and conventions. The nature of popular record sleeve design, as an aspect of both branding and packaging, also allows for an interrogation of visual elements aimed at specific audience groups. Although the wide range of potential connotations is not explored here, the fact that graphic design operates in a space between client, message and audience allows for an analysis of visual form in a specific context beyond openly subjective, or ‘artistic’ expression.

8.3 Opportunities for Further Research

This study offers a micro-history of a particular youth subculture through a particular passage in time, together with analytical methodologies which incorporate theoretical and historical approaches and information design methods, in order to test the validity of arguments and interpretations. Further research could apply this investigative model to the sleeve design of other genres of popular music, though it should be noted that the particular themes emphasised in this course of study – the relationship between graphic design, geographical location and time – may not be the most appropriate areas to explore in those cases. As such, although the database and visualisation process is flexible enough to describe

a number of specific inter-related variables, those variables do need to be carefully considered in relation to each subject under review.

The research has been limited to a period of nine years, and to the UK punk genre, in order to remain within manageable constraints. Further research could involve internationalising the study to include other punk record releases from around the world, or extending the timeframe to cover a broader period. The decision to limit this analysis to seven inch single sleeves also excludes other artefacts, such as albums, cassettes, posters and flyers, which may offer the researcher a rich source of visual information. A number of previously undocumented punk sleeve designers have come to light during the course of this research, including Jill Furmanovsky, Michael Beal, David Jeffery, Phil Smee, Bill Smith, Jill Mumford, Vermillion Sands, Russell Mills, Mike Coles and Shane Baldwin, all of whom were responsible for a number of punk single sleeve designs from the sample reviewed. Some, such as Jeffery, Furmanovsky, Mumford and Smee, were fairly prolific in their punk output, and would merit further investigation in their own right.

The concepts suggested in the thesis have been tested at various venues, through a number of public presentations and exhibitions. The historical position was evaluated through a paper given by the author at the Institute of Contemporary British History, London, and through a number of public talks and presentations at the University of the Arts, London, the British Film Institute, London, the Millais Gallery, Southampton and at Southampton Solent University. The visual material was developed into the exhibition *Hitsville UK: Punk in the Faraway Towns*, shown at the London College of Communication, Millais Gallery, Southampton, British Film Institute, London, and the Rebellion Punk Festival, Blackpool during the Spring and Summer of 2007. The response to each of these developments has been very positive and has led on to other outputs, including a definition of *punk music* in the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World, consultation on a number of books and articles, and the development of the interactive work into a web-based resource.

Theories of a diaspora in relation to popular music have been used to investigate punk's shift to the provinces during the Second and Third Waves, but have only been discussed briefly within this thesis and could therefore be developed further. More work on the parallels between punk and other genres of popular music may also offer the researcher a fruitful line of enquiry, particularly with reference to local political aspects of folk and protest music. The role of television and radio broadcasting, and of the national media and music press, in relation to regional interpretations of punk could also provide a substantial field for further enquiry. There could even be an opportunity for an investigation of personal reminiscences sparked by the graphic material, as an oral history project for example – one key aspect of the public exhibitions has been the feedback from fans of the music who have used the work as a trigger to their own memories of participation in the UK punk scene. Not only does this indicate the power of punk to promote a sense of identity in the first place, it also shows how important the graphic devices employed by sleeve designers were in communicating and embedding those values within the minds of the fans.

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