PUNK AFTER 'PUNK' IN THE UK: 1978-1984
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This is an unpublished book chapter that was intended to be the introductory chapter of a book on contemporary perspectives on punk and hardcore – after a very protracted process, and all sorts of publisher shenanigans, the book never saw the light of day – so I'm making this available here instead.

> Punk is what you make it. Paradoxically, this is the essence of punk,
> and only 'true' punks realise this.
> (Muggleton 2000: 2)
>
> PUNK ROCK is a receding object; as one approaches, it disappears.
> (Home 1995: 52)

Punk, and in particular UK punk, has no history. That is, more often than not, what passes for UK punk history is a naïve and myopic reiteration of the usual founding myths, and ends in 1978. Inexplicably these myths and half-truths continue to underpin the musical, cultural and political identity of the genre and subculture in music journalism and popular media histories. They gain greater authentic explanatory weight over time, as a snowball indiscriminately gains mass while tumbling down a snow-covered hillside. The belief that UK punk appeared as an autonomous, working class social and cultural movement in the mid to late 1970s, and challenged both the music industry and the British establishment is a caricature that should have long since receded from view. Typical of such erroneous history is the following from Clark (2004), who cites Henry (1989) in support of his outline of the role of class in punk:

> Early punk was a proclamation and embrace of discord. In England it
> was begun by working class youths decrying a declining economy
> and rising unemployment, chiding the hypocrisy of the rich, and refuting
> the notion of reform. In America, early punk was a middle class youth
> movement, a reaction against the boredom of mainstream culture …
> Early punk sought to tear apart consumer goods, royalty and sociability;
> and it sought to destroy the idols of the bourgeoisie.
> (Clark 2004: 225)

In fact, 'English' punk did not rise spontaneously from below on a wave of working class anger. It was invented, constructed and perpetrated by a motley bunch of 1960s counter-culturally informed radicals (Malcolm McLaren, Vivienne Westwood, Jamie Reid, Crass), art school and other species of students (Buzzcock's Pete Shelley and Howard Devoto), middle and working class musicians (public school educated Joe Strummer, self-educated John Lydon) and music journalists bored with stadium rock, and disillusioned by rock's lost radical potentialities (Caroline Coon, Tony Parsons, Julie Burchill). UK punk's early audiences included art school suburbanites (such as Sex Pistols fans the Bromley contingent) as well as a broad socio-economic cross-section of contemporary British youth. In the late 1970s the middle-classes were as likely as the working classes to decry the declining British economy and rising unemployment. In fact, substantial numbers of working class voters joined with the middle-classes in electing the radical, reactionary and hard-nosed Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 - hardly a socialist revolutionary response to the state of Britain (which was governed by socialist-democratic Labour during the early British punk period). The 'rich' do not hold a monopoly on hypocrisy, and economy and reform were arguably abstract concepts that the average punk youth of whatever background had little detailed grasp of, or interest in. Furthermore, the 'idols of the bourgeoisie' were quite often (particularly in the case of the British royal family) also the idols of the working classes.

Clark's characterisation of US punk as a product of middle-class boredom is equally applicable to many punks in the British context. Like Clark, James (1996: 198) suggests that Southern Californian 80s punk culture was a 'diffuse counter-cultural milieu', with much in common with previous middle-class countercultural scenes, rather than the 'tight subculture' of 70s UK punk. However, UK punk was

never so 'tight'. Boredom with mainstream culture and institutions is often a characteristic of adolescence that it is hard to suggest has a specific class or national base. So within the UK punk scene of the early 1980s, youth from various socio-economic backgrounds rubbed shoulders, sharing a common interest in the potential for punk to become a vehicle for their personal, familial, institutional, social, economic and/or political grievances. Some more than others suffered in the prevailing poor economic climate, and there were different levels and types of political commitment in the punk audience. It would be too simple to claim punk was a ferocious slap delivered to the face of 'parent culture' by truculent youths, as the targets of punk's discontent were broader and more far-reaching. Equally, it would be a mistake to suggest punk was a generational knee in the groin of middle-class values. It was an assault of sorts, but one delivered piecemeal by bands and fans with little in the way of a common agenda. More often than not the violence was perpetrated, maliciously or otherwise, on other attendees at punk gigs rather than against the 'the system'.

This brief sketch indicates that class identity in the UK is just too complex to act as a way of explaining the multifaceted and fluid phenomenon that punk was and remains. The challenge to the rigid class identity of UK punk has been taken up by many theorists (e.g. Clarke (1981), Laing (1985), Redhead (1993), Osgerby (1998), Muggleton (2000)), who have convincingly contested simplistic class-based explanations. In the various histories and biographies of punk in London, Manchester or elsewhere it seems evidence of class diversity in punk is present, but usually overlooked as it does not fit the script. Many writers on punk and subculture (still) fail to identify the internal complexity of punk as a genre and (sub)cultural phenomenon, and the diversity and mutability of all youth subcultures. Recent work collected in Muggleton and Weinzerl (2003) and Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004) has attempted to develop a field of post-subcultural studies that identifies how, in the past and present, diversity and fluidity is the norm in youth cultural identities. As such, it is important to challenge rigid and class dependent classical subcultural theory that links subcultures to a neo-Marxist struggle from below (see the Hall & Jefferson (1976), Mungham & Pearson (1976), Willis (1978) and Hebdige (1979)).

Without denying the validity of identifying subcultures such as punk as containing more or less defined communities, it is also crucial to consider the ways in which they are also dynamic and open-ended. As such, even if the popular understanding of 'subculture' was inf(l)ected by problematic ideas drawn from academic work in the past, this does not make the reproduction of these ideas within subcultures invalid. For those trying to make sense of their experiences and beliefs as they experienced punk, they are organising (hi)stories that connect the individual to a wider punk community. However, classical subcultural theory has become an orthodoxy that punks themselves often reject. For example, Clark usefully rethinks the nature of contemporary punk as subculture. He argues that many punks are far too sophisticated to embrace a restrictive subcultural identity, and reject labels (such as punk) as flawed. He states:

> Punks, in my work amongst the anarchist punks of Seattle, don't
> call themselves punks. Instead they obliquely refer to the *scene*
> in which they 'hang out'. They deny that they have rules, and claim
> they are socially and ideologically porous. After three decades, here
> is what has become of many of the CCCS' spectacular subcultures.
> (Clark 2004: 233)

Except three decades ago the mantra of individualism and autonomy propagated by Rotten and others was enthusiastically taken up by nascent punk audiences. This meant they too also felt uncomfortable with easy labels. For example, Paco of anarcho-punk band Conflict in a 1983 interview commented that:

> [t]he original thing about punk was to be an individual. If you're
> admitting to being called a punk then you're coming under a label
> so you're not an individual any more, you're one of a crowd.
> (Paco qtd. in Cross 1983)

Punk as it developed in the UK, as both subculture and music, was socially and politically diverse (from anarchist to liberal to fascist-nationalist to apolitical) (Home 1995). The spectacular subcultures of academic theory (teddy boys, biker boys, mods, skinheads and punks) were too tidy inventions of politically motivated left-wing academics. Youths were, on the contrary, messy and unpredictable in

the way they experienced and consumed cultural materials, and constructed their own fuzzy personal and social identities. Osgerby characterises this by suggesting:

> Instead of making a firm set of stylistic commitments most youngsters have instead cruised across a range of affiliations, constantly forming and reforming their identities … the open-ended, fragmented identities many theorists see as common to the late twentieth century were, perhaps, anticipated by tendencies already present within the youth cultural formations of the 1950s and 1960s.
> (Osgerby 1998: 203)

Muggleton (2000) also demonstrates that this fluidity and transience has always been the default experience of punk. Clark is identifying a characteristic central to the conflict between individualism and social identity that punks have always attempted to square. Punk as a subject under scrutiny is better served by thinking about 'punks' – that is by identifying diverse and conflicting readings of what punk 'meant', including divergent responses not traditionally encompassed in orthodox histories.

Identifying this diversity and heterogeneity raises further questions as to how we should approach punk in the early 1980s after the initial explosion of Pistols-centric punk. In the 1976-78 period there were already many interpretations of punk that were largely sympathetic with the emotional, attitudinal and expressive qualities it seemed to embody. How do we then tell the story of 'punk' after this initial wave of activity? The musicians and audiences of punk were markedly heterogeneous, and the meanings and boundaries of punk were continually reconstructed and traversed, such that it is a mistake to attempt to map a developmental and linear history of UK punk in the early 1980s.

If we view the inspiration of punk as central to the creative processes of musicians who immediately set to making music because of it, or arrived in its wake, it is necessary to look further than the anarcho-punk of Crass, Conflict and The Subhumans, Oi! bands such as the 4 Skins, Last Resort and The Exploited and those 'street punk' bands who seemed to lie somewhere in between (Anti-Nowhere League, Discharge, UK Subs, Action Pact, Anti Pasti, Blitz, Abrasive Wheels et al). It needs to be understood that punk attitudes and rhetoric also resonated within Two-Tone/Ska, Post-Punk, New Romanticism, Goth, the 'New Pop' of ABC, Culture Club and Scritti Politti, and the Frankie Goes to Hollywood phenomenon of 1984. Instead of thinking about the *post*-punk moment, this study aims to examine punk after 'punk'. That is, to examine how the disparate readings of the already complex punk phenomenon of the late 1970s flowed into many areas of music making of the early 1980s in the UK. It can be suggested that such a range of responses was inherent in the *diversity* rather than *uniformity* of those reacting to the nebulous punk phenomenon of the 1970s (and further supports the already outlined notions of the diversity of the punk audience). This study will therefore encompass the range of musical and cultural phenomena that did not historically supersede early UK punk, but that were distinct outcomes and after-echoes of its indistinct identity, and the diverse interpretative readings of the phenomenon. After 1978, the continuing development of punk discourses that retained potency for ensuing youth generations is very clear. UK punk obviously did not die in 1978 anymore than it was really born in 1976, so it makes little sense to talk of a distinct 'post-punk' moment. This study aims to identify continuity and connections, cross-currents and after effects, while simultaneously suggesting punk was still 'in effect', present and (in)correct in early 1980s UK music and popular culture.

The Joy of Punk
Not only was UK punk in the late 1970s diverse in identity, but it was also affectively complex. That is, while fans may have warmed to some of the distinct but usually project-less social commentary of The Clash ('White Riot', 'London's Burning') and post-1978 second wave punks, there was also humour based on a self-deprecating analytical voice (TV Personalities' 'Part-Time Punks', Alternative TV's 'How Much Longer'), as well as punk comedy records (Jilted John's 'Gordon is a Moron'). The Sex Pistols, though usually written about in relation to the political edge of 'Anarchy in the UK', 'God Save the Queen' and 'Holidays in the Sun' obviously had a rich vein of humour running through their work. Arguably, the Pistols became most popular in the UK after Rotten/Lydon left to join PiL in 1978, with the March 1979 double A-side single 'Something Else/Friggin' in the Riggin' the Pistols second most successful single in the UK charts. The irreverent and self-parodying film 'The Great Rock and Roll Swindle', and Malcolm McLaren's surprisingly effective dead horse flogging, ensured the Pistols lived on long after they purportedly disbanded, coming to an initial full stop with their last single release,

'Stepping Stone' in June 1980. As such it often seems that the nihilism and hatred of punk is amplified, while the joy of punk music is somehow relegated as a secondary pleasure. Jones (2002) identifies how the joyful, celebratory and carnivalesque aspects of punk have to be squared with its nihilism, despair and (self-)hatred noting that:

> Punk's "apocalyptic" cry of "No future! …Destroy!" is at odds with the dialectical nature of carnival: abasement *and* affirmation, destruction *and* renewal, and its overall celebratory thrust.
> (Jones 2002: 34)

Obviously the punk audience were drawn to the music's paradoxical nihilism and positivity. Arguably, the reason the Sex Pistols had such a wide commercial appeal (beyond what might later be defined as core punk scenes) was partly due to their irreverent, bawdy and plain funny disregard for convention – in some ways they were a kind of rock Monty Python. The Bill Grundy incident (where Steve Jones of the Pistols let fly at local London TV presenter with a mouthful of 'fucks' causing uproar in the national tabloid press in December 1976) was both shocking and humorous. 'Friggin' in the Riggin' was probably communally and delightedly sung in more school playgrounds and buses than 'Problems'.

The point is that punk was not only about social commentary, but also about leisure, entertainment and enjoyment for large sections of the audience – both fun and politics. In tracing punk's continued post-1978 existence in the UK, we should keep this firmly in mind. The assumption that punk had to be po-faced and politically committed arguably resulted in the anarcho-punk movement (though Crass sometimes traded on humour and 'pranks'), and the stark social realism and depravity of areas of Oi!. But beyond anarcho and Oi!, there were others who responded to punk by focusing on aspects of self-invention and expression (Boy George); on developing alternative club communities (Steve Strange and Rusty Egan); on creating musical art rock hybrids that drew from punk and its precursors (Magazine, Joy Division); who self-professedly and cynically used punk to gain record company backing by extending the Pistols 'swindle' (Gary Numan); who formed unsuccessful punk bands that collapsed and mutated while emerging in a new form still embodying punk attitude and outlandish hedonism (Frankie Goes to Hollywood). All of these interpretations of the meaning of punk, and how to respond to it, were and are valid as punk had and has no authentic nucleus. The Sex Pistols may have prompted much that followed, but Rotten railed against the regimented, uniformed and soon formulaic musical response of certain sections of the punk audience, to what he believed was his individualist message of 'be yourself'. (Albiez 2003). This study will first examine the forms that most closely identified themselves as punk before examining the broader legacy of late 1970s UK punk.

Anarcho, Oi!, Street Punk and Positive Punk

As there was no centre or distinct project inherent in late 1970s UK punk, what followed was the elaboration of various competing strands of Pistols instigated punk, rather than any deviation from a punk norm. However, there were musicians and fans who considered themselves to be true to punk's essence, and felt that their response aimed to fulfil the true potential of the original project of punk. There are three relatively distinct formations usually identified at the time and since, as a framework through which early 80s UK punk can be understood: anarcho-punk (Crass, Conflict, Poison Girls), Oi! (The Blaggers, Cockney Rejects, The Oppressed, The Business) and positive punk (Southern Death Cult, Danse Society, Specimen, Sex Gang Children).[1] Additionally, in-between were a variety of bands who had a large (if not a *larger*) following, but who are not so easily labelled other than as street punk, such as Discharge, Anti Nowhere League, UK Subs and GBH. These scenes and bands most closely and specifically identified themselves in relation to late 1970s punk, while interpreting it in dissimilar ways. Apart from the autonomous, Crass-centred anarcho scene, they also owed their initial identification and theoretical elaboration to music journalists (Oi! – Gary Bushell (*Sounds)*, positive punk – Richard North (*NME)*). In this way, the questionable distinctiveness of these scenes was arguably a music media creation, informed by the rhetorical work undertaken since 1976 in attempting to define the punk phenomenon.

Anarcho, Oi!, street punk and positive punk were contemporaneous, and indicate the struggle taking place in this period over punk's 'true' identity and legacy. Contrary to the earlier argument that working class discontent played little part in the genesis of late 1970s UK punk, the *performance* of an archetypal/stereotypical 'working classness' was central to it. The claims made around the social realism of punk to an extent excuses those who confuse this performance with the realities of the British working classes, and their diverse lifestyles and political opinions. 1970s UK punk immersed

itself in a populist and proletarian aura, and often expressed itself through what was perceived to be a working class voice – accent and all. Laing (1985: 121-125) clearly demonstrates how this performance lacked factual substance in the range of social backgrounds punk musicians (and audiences) emerged from. However, Anarcho and Oi! both attempted to lay claim to this spectral populist heritage, and embedded it in competing political ideologies. The fluidity, diversity and non-specificity of the meanings of punk are perhaps best exemplified in exploring its relationship to UK class politics and the contradictory left-right drives of populist posturing - even if class was not necessarily determinate in punk's genesis.

Crass took punk's indistinct association with anarchism (from 'Anarchy in the UK' onwards) at face value, and from 1978 attempted to formulate an autonomous anarchist punk that provocatively proclaimed first wave punk as corrupt and dead. George McKay succinctly describes the band by stating:

> Crass were a radical anarcho-pacifist, anarcha-feminist, vegetarian
> collective, and the anarchism it espoused was not the anarchy of
> the Pistols … but a lifestyle and world-view they developed through a
> combination of hippy idealism and resistance, punk energy and cheek,
> and some of the cultural strategies of the Situationists.
> (McKay 1996: 75)

Through their DIY approach to their musical, 'entrepreneurial' and other creative activities, they specifically politicised the notion that this form of refusal to work with or within the music industry was a central tenet of punk. Though Buzzcocks released their Spiral Scratch EP by their own efforts in 1977, this was out of necessity rather than a clear sense that they or other early UK punk bands wished to stand apart from the music industry (Buzzcocks, the Sex Pistols and The Clash in one way or another all embraced the possibilities a record contract afforded them). Crass on the other hand who had a record of longer-term counter-cultural activism before punk, saw a record contract as tantamount to sleeping with the enemy, as did their friends and protégées Conflict who started their own label, Mortarhate.

Crass lived (in a commune) and practiced the DIY ethic, while specifically attacking those factors of contemporary society they believed entrapped and inhibited individualism by developing false needs and forms of false consciousness (the media, class, religion, mainstream politics, left and right radical politics, consumerism, racism, patriarchy, war, education et al). Their adoption of aggressive and direct modes of expression in music, language and visual imagery, seemed at odds with the anarcho-pacifist drive of their music. By 1984 (the year of the self-prophesised demise of their initial project), the result of seven years of cultural and physical confrontation was a loss of faith by some in the Crass collective with the power of words and thought, over the attraction of violence in the face of the state of 80s Britain. (McKay 1996: 98-100)

If punk itself had no centre, Crass became the nucleus around which a UK anarcho-punk scene coalesced from their formation in 1978. This scene thrived on autonomous organisation and the development of a wider community of political interest and creative practice. Crass eschewed the outlandish spiked hair, leather jacketed, pierced and studded look of street punks, and instead adopted a 'uniform' of black clothing. They produced music that was recognisably an elaboration of punk, but also experimented with audio collage and tape composition, particularly on *Christ: the Album* (1982). At gigs they created multi-media spaces, with films and banner art displayed alongside their music (often this could be barely glimpsed between the unwelcome audience violence they attracted from supporters and detractors, and which they often physically and verbally directly dealt with) (Rimbaud 1998). For some, Crass represented the full articulation of an authentic punk voice. Alongside Conflict, who combined The Clash and Crass in creating a more accessible anarcho message, and Poison Girls, they spoke with an angry, populist, anti-establishment communal voice that embraced a perceived down-trodden 'us/I/me' in opposition to a powerful, privileged 'them'.

Due to the wide range of political targets Crass and Conflict aimed to demolish, and due to the problem inherent in attacking a system they identified as encompassing all forms of traditional, organised political expression, they embraced nothing other than a call to 'think for yourself', and the anarcho-punk project floundered in the UK. Wells (1987) (a music journalist admittedly more interested

in revolutionary socialism than anarchism) suggests this failure was a result of the inherent weaknesses and contradictions of anarcho-punk, arguing:

> … by the mid '80s, anarcho-rock [sic] was a spluttering, scruffy mess. One reason for its decline was a staggering lack of originality, a smothering blanket of non-conformist conformity. Crass were like the false prophet in *The Life of Brian* – "Piss off!" they'd roar. "And how shall we piss off?" roared back the sheep …

However despite this 'conformity', anarcho-punk also failed to prosper due to what Wells claimed were its intellectual cowardice and patronising, alienating moralistic tone, asserting that:

> the fragmentation of anarcho-punk was the inevitable result of Libertarian Anarchism's crippling weakness – its refusal to prioritise (claiming that abattoirs are as bad as Nazi Death Camps), its paranoiac fear of leadership and organisation, its sectarianism and its dalliance with the dead ends of animalism, vegetarianism, pacifism and moralism.

This is not to suggest that the anarchist strain of punk died in the mid-80s in the UK (or elsewhere) as it clearly remained, and further developed in anarcho-pacifist and ecological dimensions (McKay 1996). It also combined from the mid to late 1980s with other areas of youth cultural activity – most notably within UK rave culture, and DIY punk scenes continue to attempt to find autonomous spaces, practices and networks through which to explore anarchist values and lifestyles. However, anarcho-punk arguably failed to sustain its initial potency and energy due to inherent contradictory drives (to challenge and confront, but not to physically attack – symbolic and actual violence circling each other in a continual and desperate (slam)dance).

In the UK, anarcho-punk had mass youth participation, evidenced by Crass and Conflict's impressive record sales and indie, punk and mainstream chart placings in the early 1980s, but eventually became a minority interest sustained by a hardcore of activists who looked to developments in US punk for a lead. Crass sold around 100,000 copies per album at the time (largely by their own DIY efforts) (McKay 1996: 195), and Conflict similarly reached a wide audience. The anarcho audience may well have numbered many committed anarchists, but others in all probability exploited Crass and Conflict as vehicles for temporary adolescent rebellion, warming to the sloganeering and disdain for bourgeois/parent culture that was prevalent in many areas of punk. Perhaps Crass records merely served the purpose for some that gangster rap or nu-metal have since for rebellious white youth.

However, Crass hammered home valid and enlightening insights into the inequities of the UK in the early 1980s without pussyfooting around. The real problem for the collective and their audience was that despite their best efforts, they acted merely as social documentary. They catalogued and defined the types of oppression the individual faced in early 80s Britain, which was experiencing widespread social and political upheaval (Toxteth, Moss Side and Brixton riots, the repression of the striking miners, rising youth unemployment, dismantling of the post-war social welfare apparatus and consensus). If punk was supposedly the UK working class culturally rising-up, they certainly had much more to complain about in 1984 than in 1976 (and all strands of punk attempted to do so in increasing obscurity throughout the 1980s). Idealists and followers of whatever 'class' were welcomed into the Crass fold (as class was viewed as a debilitating and divisive social construct), though vegetarianism and pacifism were identified by some punks as middle-class causes. Crucially, as Crass clearly harked back to a pre-punk, hippy-related, counter-cultural worldview, they were castigated for being middle-class/bourgeois libertarian appropriators of the populist/working class form that was punk. They were specifically attacked by those punks, and commentators, who identified with the punk/street/kids rhetoric of Sham 69 and Oi!. A perceptible wedge developed between anarcho and Oi! bands, and though we shouldn't simplify this divide, by examining the differences in the discourses of these scenes, we can further identify the diverse tendencies of UK punk.

Oi! and street punk was for many a more logical and recognisable continuation of late-70's punk. It was a scene that developed through the influence and orchestration of music journalist Gary Bushell of *Sounds*. Laing suggests that the popularity and success of Sham 69, and singer Jimmy Pursey, is crucial in understanding the rise of Oi!. He argues that:

> Pursey … presented himself as a mirror of street-level attitudes.
> Although in early interviews he acknowledged the influence of the
> Sex Pistols, the irony, sarcasm and outrageousness of Johnny
> Rotten were absent from Sham 69's music. With them went most
> of the things that had separated punk from the philosophy of that
> earlier 'youth subculture', the skinheads. (Laing 1985: 110)

The Sham 69 audience was a mixture of mainstream record buyers, committed punks and members of the reinvigorated pre-punk skinhead scene. Pursey aimed to be an apolitical voice espousing solidarity for working class street-kids, but his lyrics were rebellious without a political foundation. They proved to be ambiguous as:

> [t]hey had no implicit political message, but offered a politically
> sensitive space for such a message to be added by either (or both)
> the Left and Right. Fascist parties saw no problem in claiming punk
> for their own, arguing that it was 'totally white in origin' and had a
> 'message of frustration of the masses white working class youth'.
> (Laing 1985: 111)

Of course, it has to be stressed that it was not only the political right who appealed to the Sham 69 audience, but as Home argues, punk bands such as Sham 69, Menace and the Cockney Rejects in 1978-79 'quantitatively increased the level of rhetoric about being working class until they brought about a major mutation' within punk (1995: 82). Bushell was key to the development of the Oi! punk subgenre through his championing of bands with a largely working class, street punk standpoint such as Sham 69, The Angelic Upstarts and later Infra-Riot, The Exploited, Criminal Class, Vice Squad and Last Resort. Although Oi! contained elements of a nationalist and fascist discourse, it was also riven with a great deal of ambiguity. In opposition to the (a)political themes of anarcho-punk, Oi! addressed subject matter such as poverty, violence, inter-class/subcultural feuds, *group solidarity* in the face of oppression, drinking, exaggerated masculinity, skinhead fashion, the Union Jack, race, sex, sexism and the perpetrators of sex crimes. It included a diverse group of bands, some left (Home identifies the Oppressed and Blaggers (1995: 85)) and some clearly right (Combat 84, Close Shave), and some who seem in retrospect ambiguous (e.g.The Business when interviewed in the 1984 documentary *UK/DK* seem disinterested in anything other than a Pursey-like desire to bring people together (which people remains vague), though they clearly had a fanatical skinhead following)[2]. However, the conservative, reactionary and contradictory lyrical obsessions of Oi! should be viewed as inherent to working class culture and associated populist political discourse. Particularly it must be stressed that a working class 'identity' does not guarantee a specific subject position. This is why punk cannot alone be viewed as determined by the grievances of the 'working class' in the UK, as these social grievances were disparate, and the attitudes and perceived solutions to such grievances were complex and diverse.

Oi!, and the less clearly aligned street punk bands, may have pandered to popular/populist prejudices, but it is important to consider that this was arguably a self-conscious strategy to build cultural barricades. By attempting to construct clear boundaries, the ultimate aim was to dissuade the co-optation and appropriation of the music by art punks, intellectuals and those extolling pacifist liberal and libertarian values in place of conflict, confrontation and debased behaviour. (Home 1995: 84-85) Like anarcho-punk, Oi! had a popular following that celebrated the nihilist, anti-establishment aspects of its music and image, but offered nothing other than violence, despair, intra-class racist scapegoating, self-pity and groupthink solidarity as a solution.

Anarcho-punk, street punk and Oi! were a vehicle for urgently felt expression, no matter how limited, confused or contradictory their agendas were. However, they seemed to over-emphasise the negative aspects of punk without retaining the humour, pleasure and affirmative aspects of earlier punk (though there was obviously pleasure for some in the cathartic, emotionally violent, sometimes physical release of personal frustration and anger). It is perhaps due to this inherent negativity in areas of UK punk that there simultaneously developed another interpretation of, and response to punk that the NME's Richard North (1983) identified as 'positive punk'.[3]

Arguably, positive punk as a term was a journalistic invention coined to describe a developing tendency in some guitar-based, punk-inspired music to look beyond social and cultural conditions in

early 1980s Britain. However, it soon became a useful handle by which to differentiate a certain element within punk inspired music that was briefly adopted by fans, bands and the music press in 1982-84. This form of punk created music that in its imaginative performance of difference attempted to transcend the present, the norm, the real and the negative. These were anti-realist, proto-gothic bands inspired by Bowie, Bauhaus, UK Decay, The Cure, Killing Joke, Specimen and earlier punk bands, and included the Sex Gang Children, Southern Death Cult (later The Cult) and Brigandage. North describes the scene by stating:

> So here it is: the new positive punk, with no empty promises of revolution, either in the rock'n'roll sense or the wider political sphere. Here is only a chance of self-awareness, of personal revolution, of colourful perception and galvanisation of the imagination …Certainly this is revolution in the non-political sense, but at the same time it's neither escapist or defeatist. It is in fact "political" in the genuine sense of the word …The Oi-sters and their ilk may have taken punk a few millimetres to the right or a centimetre to the left, but not one damn step forward. This is punk – at last built on rock and not on sand.

Kohn (1983), a few weeks after North's article described this new scene by asserting that:

> It's individualistic and positive – though it defines that positiveness negatively against other kinds of punk; pack punk, over committed purist punk, drug and glue swamped punk, punk that cuts its nose off to spite society's face. No doubt some will disclaim the punk label … but they can't escape their roots! …There's a quiet but significant leaning towards political idealism … It's liberal, not radical, and it tends to end up having faith in faith itself.

Unlike the austere apparel of anarcho-punk and skinhead informed Oi!, positive punks, like street punks, developed and elaborated the late 70s punk style. They used a good deal of make-up and hair-dye, vivid clothes, and long, spiked and backcombed hair in what North describes as 'a veritable explosion of multi-coloured aestheticism. So different from the bland, stereotyped Oi! boot boy punk fare of jeans, leather jacket and studs'. He describes a scene where:

> a green-haired spike-topped girl wearing a long black pleated skirt, white parachute top and bootlace tie passes a tasselled, black-haired Mohawk in creepers, white socks, red pegs and self-made neatly designed T-shirt.

The positive punks were androgynous, clearly punk inspired, and in part an elaboration on the look of Siouxsie of Siouxsie and the Banshees. They drew from mystical/metaphysical and gothic imagery, Aleister Crowley and the occult, notions of magickal self-knowledge and individual will, but were not averse to camping up their look in a Rocky Horror pastiche. The 'style' aspect of punk remained, and Kohn suggests that Blood and Roses and Brigandage retained the immediacy and melody of some of the Sex Pistols output, as well as drawing from the music of the Banshees.

However, before we further attempt to identify the possibly specious distinctiveness of this scene, it is worth pointing out that the audiences for this strand of AfterPunk were diverse, and proto-positive UK Decay's Abbo could well have been describing any early 1980s alternative music audience when in 1981 he stated that:

> Well Crass have a very heavy punk audience, Killing Joke
> is slightly more sophisticated, a lot of poseurs you might say –
> can't really tell what kind of an audience us and Killing Joke draw,
> it's a mix between hardcore punks, normal punks, straights, hippies,
> trendy punks …
> (qtd. in Anon. 1981)

If we could resurrect the audiences for positive, anarcho and Oi! gigs in the 1980s, we may well find a similar surprising diversity. Categorical and generic 'textual' or performative conformity by bands does

not guarantee a specific cohort of youth in its audience. It should also be noted that in the early 1980s, audience members were as likely to select from different aspects of 'alternative' (a diverse umbrella label most specifically used at the time in describing punk-inflected music and scenes).

Now, it could be argued that North and Kohn are simply creating a distinct scene where one does not necessarily exist, drawing together disparate but loosely comparable bands into a whole, giving it a pithy name and formulating a theoretical agenda. In both articles we see attempts to forge commonality from difference, by pitting bands against the self-imposed spartan ghettoes of anarcho-punk, street punk and Oi!. However, precisely the same could have been said in 1976-77 of Caroline Coon, Tony Parson's and Julie Birchill's writing on punk - or in 1980-81and Gary Bushell's efforts to galvanise an Oi! scene by writing about it in Sounds, and assembling the Oi! compilation albums such as *Strength Through Oi!*. The mediation and definition of these movements at their 'inception' demonstrates that none of the subgenres of UK punk were necessarily 'underground'. That is, apart from Crass, who wilfully and consistently refused to use the usual media channels without either a subversive agenda or a self-reflexive debate between interviewers and interviewees (Stand 1981).

Positive punk by 1984 was more usually described as goth or gothic. Anarcho-punk, and to a lesser extent Oi!, had by this date lost much of their initial productive energy and wider potency in the UK. Goth went from strength to strength throughout the 1980s, and remains a distinct and substantive scene. Hodkinson (2002) suggests that goths consistent distinctiveness over time, the relatively strong feelings of shared identity of participants in the goth scene, the high level of commitment of many to the scene, and the relative autonomy of its cultural production and economic structures is evidence of the potential consistency and coherence to be found in some youth subcultures. Into the present, Oi!, anarcho and street punk likewise retain a small-scale but organised following in the UK.[5] He suggests that the identifiable substance of goth demonstrates how a scene that is fluid, indistinct and with fuzzy boundaries can still retain a sense of (it)self.

Beyond Punk?
Despite the salience of Hodkinson's argument (as to what makes a *disparate scene* a *distinct subculture*) to anarcho, Oi!, positive punk/goth and DIY scenes, then and now, it is too simple to view the legacy of early UK punk only in these three subcultural formations. They may have partly viewed themselves in competition for the soul of punk, but each can legitimately demonstrate its rootedness in aspects of punk music, style, rhetoric and politics.[4] As such we have to be wary of making claims about the distinctiveness of these scenes, and should consider that there was significant audience interchange between and beyond them.

This study has so far purposely chosen three punk groupings that make sense in attempting to locate distinctive strands of UK punk. It has demonstrated the diversity of interpretations of, and responses to punk even within what might be perceived as the 'hardcore' of the phenomenon. Clearly there was movement between and across these identities, and the followers of punk-inspired bands such as Joy Division, Theatre of Hate, Killing Joke, The (Death) Cult, The Cure and the Cocteau Twins were diverse and not necessarily committed to specific subcultural groupings in this period. Here I humbly offer the evidence of my own and my friends' engagement with these bands in the early 1980s. None of us adopted anything approaching an anarcho, Oi! or goth style per se (though some of us adapted parts of it at times), and others in our group were what I can only describe as 'casuals'.[6] As such, we shouldn't stop here in identifying the continuing legacy of punk in UK popular music after 1978.

For example, we can identify psychobilly as another key subgenre that integrated aspects of Oi! and street punk style, US rockabilly music, clothing and hairstyles, with a punk-like attitude and raucous sound. The Meteors representing the ultraviolent end of the scene, King Kurt the playful and 'anarchic' good-time band element, and the Guana Batz a very competent, relatively reverential and 'positive' updating of early rock and roll in a contemporary context. Also there was UK post-punk (The Pop Group, PiL, A Certain Ratio, The Gang of Four) whose hybrid integration of punk with funk in the early 2000s came back into vogue. Additionally there was an electronic 'art punk' (Magazine, John Foxx/Ultravox, Gary Numan/Tubeway Army), and punk/skinhead/Oi! culture was caught up in the UK Two-Tone/Ska phenomenon of 1979/80.

On another level we should consider the significant role of the 'queer' and carnivalesque aspects of punk in encouraging/liberating gay performers such as Marc Almond of Soft Cell, Steve Strange of

Visage, Holly Johnson of Frankie Goes to Hollywood, and Boy George of Culture Club (and paradoxically, the appropriation of the ultra-masculine skinhead/Oi! look by some in gay scenes).

Moreover, we can indicate how New Romanticism drew from all of the above in bringing a new sensibility to the British pop charts. It can be conceived, as Rimmer (1985) among others have argued, that this sensibility was a 'New Pop'. This was pop that was aware of the fabricated nature of popular music, and had learned from the manipulative aspects of Malcolm McLaren's stewardship of the Sex Pistols. Rimmer suggests that New Pop stars were 'a generation that had come of age during punk, absorbed its methods, learnt its lessons, but ditched its ideals' (1985: 5). Ex-punk Martin Fry of ABC, former art-sex-punks Adam and the Ants, and Green Gartside of Scritti Politti particularly attempted to explore the potential of an 'Entryist', subversive cultural political strategy – that is, instead of opposing and withdrawing from the music industry, they embraced and attempted to expose it's workings from the inside out. Frith (1990) portrayed New Pop stating:

> Fry drew mocking attention to the fact that what is involved in pop is not simply music, but music as articulated through a performer or, rather, through an image of a performer … the basis of pop performance is not spontaneity (which binds rock to nature) but calculation (which binds pop to culture).
> (176)

This self-reflexive, post-modern 'deconstruction' was taken to its fullest extent by Scritti Politti. After their initial DIY post-punk releases, the band changed direction, signed to Virgin Records and produced high-tech white soul. Oldfield suggests that though Gartside (fully aware of Derrida, Baudrillard and the other postmodern theorists as he continually demonstrated in interviews) has been cast as a further example of New Pop Entryism, in fact he went further in exploring pop deconstruction. Oldfield argues that:

> Scritti's departure from the independent business and their change of styles has been interpreted as part of New Pop's entry-ism ... But more than that it was an abandonment of *both* the ideology of independence/alternatives *and* that of entry …Their music exploits the breaches and deficiencies that are already there in the prevailing discourse … [For Gartside] pop music can *always* be a subversion of the imperatives of meaning … Instead of any fulfilment or resolution, Scritti's music delivers the bliss of a lover's discourse in all its ellipses, contradiction and repetition, its endless pursuit of an unattainable object.
> (1989: 259)

As Oldfield admits this subtle deconstruction probably went well over the heads of many Scritti fans, and was difficult to perceive as subversion at all. Though Gartside musically grew from the punk milieu, he looked to academia and esoteric theoretical writing as the source of his creative stance and subversions (the bands name itself the Italian title of a collection of works by Antonio Gramsci). Punk may have opened a cultural space for his early musical practice, but he abandoned it to provide Scritti with a more suitable vehicle. However, we cannot deny that Gartside's project was punk inflected, and as such requires us to think in a more sophisticated way about the range of strategies through which aspects of punk were put into practice.

When examining the New Pop Entryist rhetoric and practices of Scritti Politti and ABC, it is tempting to claim that Gartside and Fry merely tired of punk, turned their backs on it, and looked for other modes of personal expression. Nevertheless, as Muggleton suggests at the beginning of this study 'punk is what you make it'. As such, their reading of the implications of the 1970s punk moment, and the lessons they felt they learned can equally claim a punk heritage – and they were no less idealistic than many 'hardcore' punks were.

Finally, to pursue this point further, it would be instructive to examine Frankie Goes to Hollywood who musically (and popular culturally) dominated 1984 in the UK, and the origins of the Frankie phenomenon in Liverpool's Eric's club, and the 4th June 1976 Sex Pistols gig at the Lesser Free Trade Hall in Manchester. Frankie as a band developed from the Liverpool punk scene (e.g. Frankie vocalist Holly Johnson was a member of the city's Big In Japan). As a concept, they sprang from the mind of

Paul Morley, a fanzine writer whose musical epiphany came in June 1976 when he saw the Pistols play in Manchester, before soon after graduating to the NME. Frankie the band responded to punk, but did not embrace it. They initially drew from a funk/disco sensibility allied to rock guitar and presentationally adopted images drawn from S and M, and leather-clad pornography. They gained limited interest from various record labels, The Tube on television, and John Peel and Kid Jensen on BBC Radio 1. Morley, by 1983 involved in a new label Zang Tumb Tuum (ZTT) recognised in Frankie a vehicle through which he could put his own New Pop and Entryist ideas into practice. While Trevor Horn shaped and polished Frankie's new sound in the studio, Morley devised a marketing campaign that through accident (the controversy caused by the BBC belatedly banning their 'Relax' single due to obscenity) and design (the perverse and complex mix of sources on record sleeves – quoting from or referencing Kierkegaard, Baudelaire, Nietzsche alongside images (and statistics) of sex and war) bemused and enticed the record buying public. Frankie, a combination of Liverpudlian working class heterosexual toughs and 'out' gay exhibitionists, sanctioned Morley's promotional schemes. Paul Rutherford of the band claims:

> Morley had his strategy all worked out, he wanted it to be like the
> Sex Pistols – all the outrage and controversy – but this time with
> all the sex.
> (qtd. in Frith 1990: 173)

In a year that saw the British Conservative government prompting a civil war between the state and striking miners, instead of a Crass incited or street punk uprising, Frankie sold a parody of anarcho-punk sloganeering (and Katherine Hamnett's fashion/political messages about the threat of Pershing nuclear missiles), to large sections of the British public. Emblazoned on large, politicised t-shirts, Morley created a series of slogans that, if taken at face value, suggested a populist embrace of radical politics. The slogans included 'Frankie Say Arm the Unemployed' and 'Frankie Say War, Hide Yourself'. However, quite clearly this marketing device and the bands powerful, driven, but fundamentally vacuous anti-war anthem 'Two Tribes', were highly contradictory in their outcome – they may have attempted to prompt a politicised awakening through subversive practices, but equally this was subversion that could only be delivered through the hyper-consumption of the various/endless Trevor Horn mixes of 'Relax' and 'Two Tribes'. Frankie and Morley were radical in intention, but to what effect?. Frith suggests that:

> From the mid-1970s to 1984 the dominant sensibility was a pop
> sensibility which had, at its cutting edge, an account of itself
> which drew on an avant-garde critique of mass culture … the new
> pop sensibility took artifice for granted … The authority of musicians
> as such was undermined; political interest moved from the reorganisation
> of production to the disruption of consumption … Frankie goes to
> Hollywood were not successful because of Morley's sales campaign;
> rather, his sales campaign became significant because Frankie were
> successful … new pop was easily co-opted because its radical intentions
> were of no consequence for its commercial practices.
> (1990: 175; 178)

Punk informed new pop therefore failed in its project to subvert conventional attitudes and expose industry practices as its radicalism became re-contextualised and meaningless in the selling of Frankie. Likewise, the counter-cultural situationist radicalism that informed late-1970s UK punk through its instigators had little bearing on the consumption practices of many early punks who read, interpreted and responded to it in diverse and competing ways. New Pop was a direct conceptual consequence of McLaren's real or imagined punk swindle. Frankie shared some of the radicalism of punk, not least in the overt exploration of gay sexuality and global politics in their videos and music. But in the same way that John Lydon has recently become the UK's favourite 'Uncle' punk due to his recent reality TV appearances, Frankie as a fully embedded media and music industry phenomenon were hardly menacing in the way Crass tried, but ultimately failed to be in the 1980s. Perhaps the biggest lesson to be learnt from this period of political withdrawal, opposition and entry is that though punk-inspired popular music could fiercely or subtly represent political activism, it had no power other than to challenge and change perceptions in the record buying audience. Even then it did so in a contradictory and purposeless manner due to the sheer diversity and fluidity of the interpretations of punk by British musicians and audiences at the time.

Conclusion

The problem with narrowly focusing on the obvious sub-generic histories of certain aspects of punk is that we misinterpret the impact punk had for a wide range of late 70s youth and popular music culture. By emphasising areas that seem most evidently punk-like, we miss those outcomes that are also dependent on an engagement with and interpretation of the early punk moment. Punk is and always has been diverse and fluid in identity. Any theoretical or interpretive work that resorts simply to class and oppositional politics as an explanatory framework for the genre, at least in this early 1980s period in the UK, miss the point that punk had a wide range of effects on those who adopted, adapted and responded to it. Instead of reducing punk to the usual suspects, and the hardcore of punk theory and activity as outlined by O'Hara (1999) (which itself is not immune to fluidity and change over time), we should look further in developing more inclusive and heterogeneous histories of punk.

In considering the notion of an inclusive punk milieu, we are able to make firmer claims for the wider impact of punk on music-making in the UK in the early 1980s that live up to the widely held belief that punk 'changed everything'. Punk certainly shifted the ground beneath the feet of many late 1970s British youths and musicians, from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds. It is in the creative, passionate and contradictory responses to the challenges of this change that we find punk's continuing legacy. The internal and interminable conflicts of punk continue, and the problems of squaring individualism and communitarianism, music with commerce, polemic with fun, class with class, and right with left (or otherwise) remain. By exploring and recognising the divergent identities of punk, the leaky boundaries between it's sub-genres and the broader popular cultural effects of punk discourse, it may well be possible to stop punk's recession and disappearance into the shadows of intractable myth.

Notes

1. It should be noted that the early 1980s UK context is almost entirely and quite inexplicably absent from academic and popular literature on punk. Many 'punk specials' produced by magazines such as Kerrang - *Noise Pollution: the Punk Magazine* (2000)), *Summer of Punk: Kerrang Legends* (2004), and the NME - *NME Originals - Punk: 1975-1979* Vol.1 Issue 3, either finish before this period or jump from the late 70s UK context across the Atlantic to examine Fugazi/Dischord, Bad Brains, Black Flag and later 1980s developments in US punk. The one exception is the book *Burning Britain – a History of UK Punk 1980 to 1984* by Ian Glasper.

2. Ellis Cashmore (1984) demonstrates that many skinheads involved in active right-wing politics in the early 1980s (with the British Movement or National Front) were actually little interested in political polemic, and tired quickly of regular political meetings in upstairs rooms of pubs. Their involvement was often transient and ambivalent, mainly flirting with politics as a vehicle for their interest in physical violence.

3. Not to be confused with US notions of positivity in punk that led to, for example, straight edge which through its asceticism had very little, if anything, in common with the hedonism of this scene. Perhaps there were parallels with US 'emo' and bands such as Rites of Spring, but UK 'positive punk' had few connections with the types of community and self-help activities of the DC Positive Force organisation outlined by Middleton (2002: 344)

4. In video footage of early 80s performances we can see this competition aggressively played out in practice. For example in *UK/DK*, street punks Chaos UK attempt to bring a disparate Manchester audience together at a gig despite clear evidence of open hostility to the band from a skinhead contingent standing menacingly behind and beside them. But we can also observe evidence of diverse audiences standing side by side, such as at a Chelsea gig in Blackpool around the same time (*Punk & Disorderly*).

5. After the 1996 *Holidays in the Sun* punk festival in Blackpool, interest in many early 80s UK punk bands was renewed, and several have since reformed, remaining active into the present.

6. A 1980s 'aspirational' working/lower middle-class grouping who like mods in the 1960s embraced rather than opposed mainstream consumption practices. Frith describes them as a group who 'at first glance, epitomise the employed half of Thatcher's two nations, neatly dressed in their designer-label sports good' but 'like the punks and skins, the casuals emerged from the dole queues and football terraces, from the delinquent world of drugs and brawls and menace'. They represented a 'stylistic refusal to be *excluded* from dominant images of the good life'. (1990: 179). Casuals were in many ways as much a *refusal* as versions of punk due to the sometimes questionable, or perhaps criminal, methods by which their expensive casual clothing was obtained. The Happy Mondays are perhaps exemplary of a band who grew out of this milieu in the mid-1980s.

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