Understanding the Politics of Punk Clothing from 1976 to 1980 Using Surviving Objects and Oral Testimony

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Synopsis

The research presented in this dissertation aims to develop an understanding of the reasons why young people dressed in punk clothing in the late 1970s, as well as explore the relationship between punk clothing and politics in both its production and consumption. Chapter 1 undertakes a semiotic analysis of two punk T-shirts produced and sold by Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren and clothes designer Vivienne Westwood at their shop at 430 King’s Road in London. The framework for this analysis is informed by Roland Barthes’ theory of myth in order to understand the recycling of images, and conducted according to Howells and Negreiros’ three-part methodology for decoding signs. In treating the visual imagery on the T-shirts as signs, the analysis uncovers a relationship between the punk T-shirts and Situationist politics. Chapter 2 utilises oral testimony interviews conducted by the author with three people who self-identified as punks in the late 1970s, the same time period in which the T-shirts were produced. With reference to the interviews, the research discovers that the T-shirts were too expensive for many punks to afford, and dissected ideas surrounding authenticity in punk and the preference amongst many for ‘DIY’ practice rather than off-the-peg punk clothing such as that sold by McLaren and Westwood. The chapter also explores the theme of politics in order to challenge the association between punk and Situationist theory, and attempts to comprehend the extent to which each of the interviewees were interested, resulting in an advanced understanding of the varying levels of conscious political involvement in the punk subculture. Finally, further reasons for the adoption of punk clothing are considered in this chapter through themes of liberation and gender in punk clothing.
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Introduction

A general misconception about the clothing we wear is that it falls outside the realm of politics. In fact, as pointed out by Tim Edwards, the political potential of clothing is two-fold, firstly in relation to its production, and secondly to its consumption.¹ The research presented in the following chapters will explore both of these areas in order to understand how politics and clothing interact, specifically in the case of clothing worn by those in the punk subculture in the late 1970s.

To understand what punk is, an understanding of subculture must first be established. The academic discipline of the study of youth subcultures in post-war Britain began with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in the 1970s and led to the publication of a body of literature on the subject including Resistance Through Rituals. Within this, John Clarke et al. provide us with an explanation of subculture. They describe culture as ‘the peculiar and distinctive “way of life” of a group or class that shares values, customs and belief systems, which encompasses the way members of the group interact both with each other and the material world.’²

For Clarke et al., class was fundamental to their theories surrounding youth subcultures, an over-emphasis which has since been criticised. Despite this, early subcultural theory does succeed in placing subculture in a position opposed to the dominant culture, which helps in developing an understanding of punk. For Clarke et al., subcultures are subsets within the larger class-cultures, but they are all subordinate to the dominant bourgeois culture, and they use their subcultural practices – dress, leisure pursuits, and (in the case of punk) music – as a ‘solution’ to class differentiation and resistance to the dominant ‘parent’ culture.³

Further, Dick Hebdige argues that punk allowed a largely working-class youth to ‘restate their opposition to dominant values and institutions’ through the transformations of commodities and attitudes.⁴

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In punk’s case, it achieved this partly through clothing and appearance. Punk historian Jon Savage explains that the punk aesthetic drew a line in the sand: ‘short hair versus long hair; straight legs versus flares...’

Edwards suggests that the reading of subculture as completely divorced from the dominant culture is flawed because it reduces the relationship between the two to a one-way flow of influence, when in fact they are mutually influential. Nonetheless, the idea that punk as a subculture attempted to distance itself from the dominant, mainstream culture will inform later analysis.

A definition of punk is much harder to come by, mainly because as Matthew Worley et al. write, ‘punk meant and means different things to different people’. At its core, punk is a predominantly working-class youth subculture, but the following research will focus on the distinctive ways of dressing the body that punks undertook with the aim of determining why young people dressed in punk clothing and whether there is a link between punk clothing and political ideology.

To do this, the primary research will consist of a multi-methodological approach that utilises both a semiotic analysis of imagery on punk T-shirts in Chapter 1, as well as oral testimony interviews conducted by the author in Chapter 2.

Oral testimony is deeply personal and is therefore unlike any other methodology. It is valuable in the study of dress history because it provides a way of discovering information that would otherwise be ignored in history books. As Yuniya Kawamura argues, using oral testimony allows the researcher to engage with the consumer of dress and question sources directly.

However, there are also dangers in using oral testimony as a methodology. Lou Taylor highlights some of these: ‘romanticism, every sort of personal, political and gender bias, and the dangers simply of confused dates and jumbled events.’ For this reason, the oral testimony research presented in the coming chapters is supported by secondary sources including academic texts and biographies. Both Kawamura and Taylor stress the importance of an interdisciplinary approach.

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When using oral history as a research tool, Yawamura quotes Jo Turney, who explains that interdisciplinarity serves to ‘widen the sphere of reference’ that in the field of dress history ‘goes beyond designer intent and notions of the avant-garde’.9

In this study, oral testimony achieves this by offering an alternate narrative to the one provided by object-based research that consists of an analysis of surviving objects in the form of punk T-shirts produced and sold by Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood in the late 1970s. Further, the use of interviews in this study offers interviewees a voice which would otherwise remain unheard in the field of dress history.

Additionally there are other issues that act as barriers when using oral testimony, such as difficulty in finding interviewees willing to share their personal memories. Claire Lomas’ chapter “‘I know nothing about fashion. There’s no point in interviewing me’: the use and value of oral history to the fashion historian” underlines the fact that interviewees often undervalue themselves as sources of information, even though researchers are more interested in their daily lives than any specific subject knowledge.10 Whilst there is no established ideal number of interviewees in oral testimony research, it has been suggested that five to ten interviewees provide an adequate sample to research a specific period.11 This implies that the three interviews conducted in this study are not sufficient to paint a picture of the period being studied, and so further research would be required to be able to extrapolate the findings to apply to larger groups of people.

Additionally, further reading is used to support the findings of the primary research in this investigation, including the work of theorists Roland Barthes and Guy Debord as well as academic texts and biographies. Jon Savage’s in-depth history of punk England’s Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock has also been

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10 Claire Lomas, “‘I know nothing about fashion. There’s no point in interviewing me’: The use and value of oral history to the fashion historian,” Fashion Cultures: theories, explanations and analysis, eds. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (Oxon: Routledge, 2000) 367.

11 Esther Newton, Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America’s First Gay and Lesbian Town (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 304, quoted in Lomas, “‘I know nothing about fashion. There’s no point in interviewing me’: The use and value of oral history to the fashion historian,” 369.
helpful in providing information about the partnership of McLaren and Westwood, although Jane Mulvagh, author of *Vivienne Westwood: An Unfashionable Life* explains that when Savage was conducting research, Westwood refused to be interviewed (unless paid, which Savage refused), which has resulted in a disproportionate importance being attributed to McLaren in the creative processes.\(^\text{12}\)

As discussed, the oral testimony research presented below is complementary to the semiotic analysis of punk T-shirts in the Brighton Museum dress collection. The choice to look specifically at T-shirts stems from an idea presented by Bonnie English, who refers to the T-shirt as a ‘political poster [that] has become a mandatory means of sartorial protest for the young’.\(^\text{13}\)

Whilst the humble white T-shirt began as an item of men’s underwear in the American navy and was thus rarely seen on land, it has since become a staple item in the global modern wardrobe.\(^\text{14}\) The transformative potential of the T-shirt is an outcome of both its highly visible position on the body and modern printing processes. English explains that the popularisation of the T-shirt was in part due to the invention of Plastisol in 1959, a plastic-based ink that when printed onto fabrics couldn’t be washed out again.\(^\text{15}\) Manufacturers recognised the commercial viability in the visual pluralism offered in the T-shirt, and exploited it. However, Chapter 1 focuses on the communicative power of the T-shirt as a tool of political propaganda rather than on product marketing.


\(^{13}\) Bonnie English, A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century: From the Catwalk to the Sidewalk (Oxford: Berg, 2007) 91.


\(^{15}\) English, A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century: From the Catwalk to the Sidewalk, 92.
Chapter 1. A semiotic analysis of punk T-shirts in the Brighton Museum dress collection

This chapter will analyse two punk T-shirts from the Brighton Museum dress collection in order to establish how the imagery conveys political messages or meanings, and why.

The provenance of both T-shirts, part of a collection of punk clothing donated by Tony Lord, states that he bought them directly from Seditionaries, the shop owned by Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood. When they first opened the shop in 1971, it was under the name ‘Let It Rock’ and sold 1950s style clothing and memorabilia before being re-branded in the spring of 1973 as ‘Too Fast to Live, Too Young to Die’ when the stock turned to biker clothing and they began to make and sell provocative T-shirts. Savage explains: ‘this was the first of many attempts by [McLaren] and Vivienne Westwood to get rid of an unwanted clientele by changing their shop’s name, design and attitude.’\(^\text{16}\)

The third incarnation of the shop, ‘Sex’, began in 1974 and specialised in rubber fetish wear. It was during this time that McLaren began to manage the punk group the Sex Pistols, who would create a platform for their designs. Savage states that when they were coming up with ideas for the new shop, Westwood ‘wanted to expand the sleeveless T-shirt line to take on more complicated ideas, mixing sexual taboos with Situationist slogans’.\(^\text{17}\)

Here, Westwood is referring to the work of the revolutionary political organisation The Situationist International (SI). Following on from Marxist thought and influenced by Dada and Surrealism, Sadie Plant explains that the SI was established in 1957 and saw capitalist society as an ‘organisation of spectacles [in which] people are removed and alienated not only from the goods they produce and consume, but also from their own experiences, emotions, creativity, and desires’.\(^\text{18}\)

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Both McLaren and his associate, graphic designer Jamie Reid, who helped with the Sex Pistols campaigns, had links to the Situationist movement; McLaren through involvement with the UK Situationist cell King Mob, and Reid through his own work as a graphic artist. Reid released six issues of his Situationist publication *Suburban Press* in 1970, which mixed his own graphics with Situationist texts.

Plant explains that the SI placed importance on the revolutionary role of the proletariat (the working classes). Additionally, theorist Guy Debord discusses youth rebellion in his pioneering Situationist text *The Society of the Spectacle*:

‘rebellious tendencies among the young generate a protest that is still tentative and amorphous, yet already clearly embodies a rejection of the specialized sphere of the old politics, as well as of art and everyday life.’

These ideas of youth and working class rebellion provide an important link to the discussion of punk, which could be said to encompass both.

In December 1976, the King’s Road shop was reincarnated again as ‘Seditionaries’ and continued to sell bondage-inspired clothing as well as more controversial and explicit T-shirts. The shop became Worlds End in 1980, the name it retains to this day.

Mulvagh explains the name Seditionaries:

‘The word “seditionaries”, which I used to rename the shop, has always meant to me the necessity to seduce people into revolt,’

Vivienne explained. The clothes were labelled ‘Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood Seditionaries, Personal Collection’, and sold under the enticing slogan ‘Clothes for Heroes’. The anarchist symbol, a capital A within a circle, appeared on many garments, along with the tag, ‘For soldiers, prostitutes, dykes and punks’. The punk army now had a uniform.

The fact that the T-shirts in Brighton Museum have no labels, unlike other garments sold at Seditionaries in this period, suggests that they could have been

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bought elsewhere, in one of the places that sold copies of the T-shirts.\footnote{Gorman, personal interview, 16 Feb 2016.}

However, for the purpose of this analysis, whether they are original Seditionaries items or just identical copies isn’t integral to the discussion, as they are stylistically and visually the same as the T-shirts sold at Seditionaries, and therefore can be read in the same way.

Essentially, the idea of ‘myth’ outlined by French writer and critic Roland Barthes in his *Mythologies* can provide an investigative structure for dealing with the recycling of existing images and words, and the ways that these things are imbued with new meanings, an idea which will inform the visual analysis of the imagery on select T-shirts from the Brighton Museum dress collection below.

The analysis aims to decode the imagery on the T-shirts by treating the separate visual components as signs that constitute a signifier and signified, as dictated by Barthes’ semiotic approach. Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros explain: ‘the ‘signifier’ is something that stands for something else; the ‘signified’ is the idea of the thing it stands for; and the ‘sign’ is the union of the two.’ \footnote{Howells, Richard and Joaquim Negreiros, *Visual Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012) 113.}

Although Ferdinand Saussure outlined semiotic theory in relation to language, Barthes extended it into the realm of visual culture, whereby the visual image takes the place of the signifier. In the following analysis, semiotics is used as a tool for understanding the meaning of symbols on punk T-shirts.

However, whilst Barthes’ theories are crucial in the process of understanding said signs, he fails to set out a formulaic technique for analysing them. Howells and Negreiros critique Barthes’ un-scientific approach, stating that it’s ‘selective, subjective and interpretive’. \footnote{Howells and Negreiros, *Visual Culture*, 126.}

It will therefore be beneficial to conduct the investigation in accordance with the analytical framework outlined by Howells and Negreiros in *Visual Culture*. Howells and Negreiros propose a three-part technique for conducting a visual analysis that leads the viewer from the overt to the covert meanings behind an image to understand any underlying messages that are at first hidden. Whilst this framework is applied with reference to advertisements, it is helpful in
gaining a comprehension of visual signs in general, like those on the T-shirts in this study.

The first level of this process involves the facts that are immediately accessible at face value, such as the product in an advertisement or in this study, the images on the T-shirts. At the second level, the researcher delves deeper into the covert suggestions, or what the advertisement is really trying to sell. It could be that the advertiser is suggesting that to buy the product will bring you happiness.

The third level goes deeper into what ‘goes without saying’. According to Howells and Negreiros, this notion is the most useful in Barthes’ *Mythologies*, because it allows the researcher to question things that would otherwise be taken for granted. This final part of the analysis attempts to ‘call into question that which contemporary visual culture seems to present as natural’. To give an example, again in the realm of advertising, this underlying assumption could be the suggestion from a perfume advertisement that women are sexually attracted to men who smell good, or even that we live in a heteronormative society in which men want women to be sexually attracted to them.

This framework provides a method for dealing with the imagery that appears on T-shirts designed and sold by McLaren and Westwood in their shop at 430 King’s Road.

### 1.1 “Destroy” (1977)

‘Vivienne [Westwood] had this wonderful idea for the T-shirt which was to be done in muslin. I designed the “Destroy” image, the swastika with the cross upside down and the broken head of the Queen and then the big word “Destroy”; they went on those marvellous T-shirts with the extra-long sleeves that you could pull back with dog clips. They were all elements that we were taking from the fetish things and we were adapting them.’

- Malcolm McLaren

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26 Howells and Negreiros, *Visual Culture*, 132.


Mulvagh’s description of the design process is in keeping with the above quote from McLaren, as she explains that although Westwood designed the clothes, McLaren was more skilled in selecting the graphics and slogans.\textsuperscript{29} The Destroy T-shirt (Figure 1) appeared in a few different forms after its creation in early 1977, but Sex Pistols frontman John Lydon popularized this muslin bondage-style shirt by wearing it in publicity images taken by photographer Dennis Morris. The example from Brighton Museum is made from cotton muslin and features the long sleeves that McLaren describes above. Unlike the more typical ‘T-shirt’ styles in the museum collection, this shirt is created in the bondage style that was sold in Seditionaries from 1977. The largest symbol that appears on the shirt is a yellow swastika in a blue circle in the centre, and although it has faded slightly, an inverted image of Jesus on a crucifix in red is still clear, overlapping with the swastika. Red letters at the top of the shirt spell out the word ‘Destroy’ and a small image of a stamp with the Queen’s severed head on it can be seen on top of the swastika, although this isn’t very clear in the example from Brighton Museum due to the fading of the garment’s colours. In the bottom right hand corner, on an area that is now ripped, are lyrics to the Sex Pistols song \textit{Anarchy in the UK} in small handwritten red lettering. The largest and most visually striking symbol in this design is the swastika, an equilateral cross with each stem bent at 90 degrees, and so I will address this component first.

Using the method of examining visual culture as described by Howells and Negreiros, at the first level this is a geometric shape. To use semiotic terms, this shape is the signifier. Moving onto the second level, and therefore a deeper understanding of the suggested, or signified, meaning, we know that the symbol, known as the swastika, has become widely recognised and understood in the West as the symbol at the forefront of the Nazi party, and has strong associations with fascism. According to Malcolm Quinn, ‘the construction of the swastika as the icon of a supposedly immemorial and indivisible race identity began in the

\textsuperscript{29} Mulvagh, \textit{Vivienne Westwood: An Unfashionable Life}, 113.
mid-nineteenth century and reached its height in the Nazi period in Germany', when Germany was controlled by the Nazi party from 1933 to 1945.\textsuperscript{30}

The third level, 'what goes without saying' according to Barthes, is the most complex level of understanding, and will take some consideration in order to understand the signified meaning. This is where Barthes' theory of myth can aid us in understanding the recycling of images such as the use of the swastika here:

Mythical speech is made of a material which has \textit{already} been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of a myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance.\textsuperscript{31}

In myth, a sign, made up of signifier and signified, becomes in itself a signifier for something else. In this way, myth is a 'second-order semiological system'.\textsuperscript{32}

Barthes refers to this second system as 'metalanguage' because it is a second language which speaks about the first, whilst the sign of the first system, now part of two systems, is split into two distinct parts, and is therefore given two names. As the final part of the first system it is referred to as 'meaning' and as the first part of the second system, it becomes 'form'.

When 'meaning' becomes 'form' it is emptied of its history as it regresses from the linguistic sign to mythological signifier. Instead, it takes on a new meaning to be part of a whole new sign, thus meaning is destroyed and created in this second, mythological system. Whilst the original meaning is still there, it no longer has value in the mythological system. The new sign in this system is known as the 'signification' and this is the myth itself.

Barthes’ theory of myth can be applied to the swastika even before its adoption by punks in the 1970s. The origin of the symbol was religious, as Barbara G. Walker describes: ‘it is one of the oldest, most widely distributed religious symbols in the world. Swastikas appear on Palaeolithic carvings on mammoth

\textsuperscript{30} Malcolm Quinn, \textit{The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol} (Oxon: Routledge, 1994) x.


\textsuperscript{32} Barthes, \textit{Mythologies}, 114.
ivory from the Ukraine, dated ca. 10,000 b.c. [sic] Swastikas figure on the oldest coinage in India... Sanskrit svastika meant “so be it” or “amen”.’

When the swastika was adopted as a symbol of Aryan supremacy from the mid-nineteenth century, its history as a religious symbol was removed and appropriated. Whilst the original meaning of the symbol still exists and is recognised, it is always secondary to the signification of the mythological system, which here would be the swastika as an emblem of racial purity. Thus, the swastika had already been mythologised prior to its usage in punk clothing. According to Barthes, the best way to vanquish myth is to create another myth by using the signification as the first term in a third semiological system, to create an ‘artificial myth’. One of the key points that Barthes makes in his discussion of myth is that unlike the linguistic system, which is naturally occurring and arbitrary, myth is ‘never arbitrary; it is always in part motivated and unavoidably contains some analogy’. For Barthes then, motivation is an essential part of myth. It could be argued that by using the swastika in their designs, McLaren and Westwood’s intention was to again mythologise the swastika, and thus create a new meaning for the sign.

This could be seen as an example of the Situationist tactic of détournement, which Plant describes as ‘a turning around and a reclamation of lost meaning: a way of putting the stasis of the spectacle in motion’. By re-using images that already exist within society, such as the swastika, punk is subversive because it presents ‘a challenge to meaning’. Here, the punk use of the notorious symbol questions the symbolic meaning of its form by offering what Plant would call a ‘renewed emptiness’. However, it has been argued that it was the existing meaning of the swastika that lent itself to punk appropriation, rather than the creation of a new meaning. Quinn discusses this with reference to the work of anthropologist and

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archaeologist Ian Hodder. Hodder argues that whilst punk effectively changed the meaning of the swastika, it did so in reference to its association with Nazism:

While the distant origin of a particular trait may be of little significance in a present context, the more immediate history is relevant. The total history of swastikas is less relevant to the present meaning of this sign than its more recent associations. In general, the choice of a symbol as part of a present strategy must be affected by at least its immediately previous use. But as soon as a symbol is used in a new context its meaning and history are altered.39

Further, Quinn argues that the use of the swastika in punk actually preserved its meaning.40 He goes on to argue that punk’s use of the swastika was meant as a ‘barrier’, elaborating that ‘punk did not use the swastika as a way of opening debates on the image, but instead as a device for slowing down its own assimilation into the wider culture’.41

This belief that punk used the swastika purely as a means to distance itself from mainstream culture is in direct opposition to the reasons for its adoption given by Savage, who explains that punk’s use of the swastika occurred at a time when the National Front was rising in Britain, and that although it appears to have been written out of history, ‘the British had shown a distinct penchant for fascism, whether through Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists or the policy of appeasement run by Lords Rothermere or Astor of Cliveden’.42

David Renton discusses the rise of fascism in Britain in the 1970s with reference to the fascist National Front party, which won 119,000 votes in the Greater London Council elections of 1976 and seemed at one time as if it could ‘replace the Liberals as Britain’s third main party’.43 This statistic demonstrates the powerful presence of the National Front in Britain in the late 1970s when the punk subculture emerged.

Furthermore, Savage quotes Sex/Seditionaries shop assistant Jordan as saying that when asked about why they were wearing the emblem, McLaren and

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40 Quinn, The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol, 11.
41 Quinn, The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol, 11.
Westwood had told them to say: ‘We’re here to positively confront people with the past.’ This would suggest that McLaren and Westwood were using the image of the swastika as a form of political statement, rather than purely on the basis of its shock factor.

Thus, the use of the swastika could have been meant as a comment on the existence of fascism in Britain, highlighting the issue as a critique of current politics or the attitude of the British people towards fascism, which exists on two levels according to Savage – denial and support.

Moving on to the other aspects of the T-shirt design, the juxtaposition of the symbols is as important as the content. Mulvagh explains that McLaren drew the crucifix from Mathias Grunewald’s 1515 *Crucifixion*, one of his favourite images. Jamie Reid apparently created the image of the Queen’s severed head on a postage stamp, and the word ‘Destroy’ in capital letters was hand drawn by McLaren, who wanted to make it look as if the letters were ‘crumbling’. In subverting the everyday image of a stamp by depicting the Queen’s head as decapitated, this component is shocking in itself, and could be seen as an affront to British values of patriotism and the monarchy.

Whilst the Queen’s head represents the monarchy, or the state, the inverted crucifix is a religious symbol that represents Christianity. By overlapping these symbols with the swastika, there is a suggested equivalence between what the symbols signify: the monarchy, religion, and fascism.

The implied relationship between fascism and the Queen is also brought up in the Sex Pistols song *God Save the Queen*, with the lyrics “God save the Queen, the fascist regime”. Released in May 1977, the year of Queen Elizabeth II’s Silver Jubilee, Savage explains: ‘In a country submerged in nostalgia, this was a serious breach of etiquette.’

Situationist theorist Guy Debord saw fascism as ‘a violent resurrection of myth calling for participation in a community defined by archaic pseudo-values: race, blood, leader’.

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The idea of the leader as an archaic pseudo-value is represented in this design with its conflation between the head of state and fascism. Because of this, and because of the fact that, as Plant states, ‘The situationists saw the dissemination of propaganda to this effect as the central task of a revolutionary organization’, we could view the Destroy T-shirts produced by McLaren (with the help of Reid) as a form of Situationist propaganda.49

1.2 “Prick Up Your Ears” (1978)

The Prick Up Your Ears T-shirt (Figure 2) was one of the last produced by McLaren and Westwood whilst their shop was known as Seditionaries. It features a large illustration of a gay orgy, with male punks performing sexual acts on each other on a blue background. It’s not clear how many bodies are involved, as the nature of the image is obscuring and confusing. Large text at the top states ‘Prick Up Your Ears’, a phrase taken from the title of John Lahr’s biography of the playwright Joe Orton, released in October 1978. Underneath the image, are seven lines of text from the Orton biography.

Mulvagh states: ‘A cultural magpie, [McLaren] did not create his own political statements or visual iconography but plundered other sources.’50

We have seen this previously in the case of the Destroy T-shirt, but the illustration on this T-shirt is another example of McLaren’s visual plagiarism. According to Paul Gorman, the orgy illustration was based on a T-shirt that McLaren bought in January 1978 at The Pleasure Chest, a sex shop on Santa Monica Blvd in Los Angeles.51 The T-shirt, a close up section of which can be seen in Figure 3, resides in Gorman’s personal archive. Gorman explains: ‘it is interesting to note the ways in which [McLaren] adapted [the image] to reflect the Mohican hair-styles etc. then just coming in when the shirt was first published in late 1978.’52

When the close up of the original illustration is compared to the corresponding figure in the top left corner of the Prick Up Your Ears T-shirt we can see that the

49 Plant, The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age, 2.
52 Gorman, personal interview.
simple line drawing of the man has been directly copied, but various punk features have been added, such as arm and face tattoos, a heavier chain necklace, and a spiky hair style. Other figures include details such as a swastika tattoo, Mohican hairstyles, studded wristbands, and armbands with anarchy symbols. This isn’t the first example of McLaren and Westwood using pornographic or sexual imagery in their T-shirt designs. The Cowboys T-shirt, sold during the shop’s incarnation as ‘Sex’ featured two cowboys facing each other, naked from the waist down, led to the arrest of Sex shop assistant Alan Jones July 1975, an incident which made front page news and led to the police seizing a selection of items from Sex. McLaren and Westwood were charged with ‘exposing to public view an indecent exhibition’.53

Savage discusses the use of pornographic imagery by McLaren and Westwood, explaining that the imagery isn’t as simple as it first appears. He states that the effect of the blown up graphic images ‘could be curiously asexual [and] were polemical, a comment on the images’ primary use’.54 He exposes the imagery as ‘an abstraction of sex [which] reflected the deadening of the sexual impulse in the newly industrialised sex districts like Soho’, where once-liberating sexual practices had become typical and manufactured.55 If the sexual imagery such as the illustration on the Prick Up Your Ears T-shirt is meant as an abstraction, as Savage suggests, then this is another example of détournement, a challenge to meaning.

Further, it’s important to consider that the nature of this specific imagery was particularly taboo because homosexual acts in private had only recently been legalised in the Sexual Offences Act of 1967.56 Homosexuality was therefore still regarded as indecent by many of the older generation who grew up knowing it was an illegal act, but further, this legalisation did not include sexual acts with more than two persons taking part, so the T-shirt was still depicting an illegal act, making it all the more controversial.

To return to the method of analysis proposed by Howells and Negreiros, whilst at face value this is an image of a group of men performing sexual acts on each

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54 Savage, England’s Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock, 100.
other, at the second level it is shocking because it is pornographic and therefore deemed unsuitable for public display. At the deepest level of interpretation, the T-shirt acts as an instrument to offend British values of decency, and challenges heteronormative society with its depiction of gay sex.

Plant describes punk as ‘an attack on the values and institutions of music, culture, and society’ and here we can see clearly how conservative British values are being attacked through explicit homosexual imagery, in the same way that values of religion and the monarchy were attacked in the Destroy T-shirt with the aim of ‘antagonising the establishment’.57

As previously mentioned, the title of the Orton biography and an extract from the text also feature on the T-shirt. The title itself can be read in different ways. At the first level, the slang is an instruction to pay attention, but the meaning is changed by the fact that ‘prick’ is a slang term for penis, and the phrase itself could be misheard as ‘prick up your rears’, making it an allusion to sodomy. This is an example of the arbitrary nature of the sign, whereby the relationship between the signifier (the phrase) and its signified meaning can change. When placed next to the image of a homosexual orgy, the phrase ultimately adds to the shock value of the T-shirt.

The text underneath involves an exchange between Orton and Oscar Lewenstein, who compliments Orton on his fur coat. Orton responds by explaining that he looks better in cheap clothes, before the final line: ‘I’m from the gutter, […] And don’t you ever forget it because I won’t.’

Of this line Paul Gorman says: ‘The biting tone and aphoristic ring could have come from one of the Sex Pistols themselves.’58

This suggests that the excerpt is in keeping with punk’s anti-establishment ethos, which is why McLaren chose it. Further, Gorman explains that McLaren’s decision to dedicate the T-shirt to Orton was because he admired him due to his status as a gay outlaw (he was incarcerated for defacing public library books). Additionally, according to Gorman, he was one of the punk movement’s ‘guiding

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57 Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age*, 144.
spirits’ who rejected the values of society. Thus for McLaren, the Prick Up Your Ears T-shirt could be seen as a tribute to Orton, in keeping with his values as a homosexual man and an outlaw.

The T-shirt, produced at the end of the shop’s incarnation as Seditionaries, garnered wide exposure later when the design was sold at fellow King’s Road shop Boy. The reason it’s so difficult to tell whether the T-shirts are originally from the shop at 430 King’s Road is because in the 1980s, Westwood, needing money, leased all the printing screens for the designs to Boy for the relatively small sum of £200. Mulvagh states that Boy ignored Westwood’s prerequisites regarding their use and as the shirts entered the Japanese market, it became more difficult to authenticate the originals.

This commercialisation of the punk T-shirts designed by McLaren and Westwood demonstrates how they were adopted into the wider culture as desirable clothing items. In fact, Plant states that ‘punk was accommodated so swiftly that the possibility was raised that it was in some sense already recuperated before it had even begun’.

Effectively, the acceptance of the T-shirt designs into mainstream culture removes their power as disruptive, subcultural statements, which in turn meant that they became symbolic of the punk movement in itself, rather than the inherent statements that McLaren and Westwood were trying to make. Even where détournement was the final goal, the T-shirts as symbols no longer stood for punk’s challenge to meaning, or a political stance, but rather for punk as a recognisable, commodified subcultural style.

59 Gorman, “I’m from the gutter. Don’t forget it because I won’t.”
60 Mulvagh, Vivienne Westwood: An Unfashionable Life, 134.
61 Plant, The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age, 144.
Chapter 2. Understanding the lived experience of punk clothing using oral testimony

Whilst the T-shirts in the Brighton Museum collection offer a snapshot of punk clothing from the late 1970s and show us how political messages were diffused through the clothing produced by McLaren and Westwood, what isn't clear from using a purely object-based methodology is how widely these T-shirts were worn, and what other sartorial choices there were for punks in the late 1970s in and outside London.

Worley et al. suggest that the protest element of punk is 'shaped far more by its practice and content than by the semiotic or stylistic signifiers emphasised in previous studies'. With this in mind, it is necessary to undertake a multi-methodological approach, therefore this chapter will utilize three oral testimony interviews conducted by the author with people who self-identified as punks in the late 1970s. The interviewees were asked about their involvement with punk, the clothing they wore in this period and where they obtained it, in order to ultimately determine why they wore punk clothing and how the lived experiences of punks correspond with the evidence provided by the analysis of punk T-shirts.

As discussed previously, the specific nature of oral testimony makes it an extremely personal method of research that relies on the dialogue between researcher and interviewee. The three people interviewed here are recalling a time in their own lives from personal memory, and thus, unlike the first part of this study, the research is not official in the sense that it does not involve systematic visual analysis or written records of any kind.

The three interviewees are Fiona, Tim 'TV' Smith and Kim (the use of first names only is at the request of participants). Fiona was fifteen when she got involved with punk in 1977, and started going to see punk bands play at venues such as the Roxy nightclub in Covent Garden, a popular destination for punks in this period. TV Smith was a part of the punk scene in its formative year, 1976, when aged twenty, he relocated to London from the West Country to form a band and became the vocalist for punk band The Adverts. Smith describes how when he

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arrived in London, there wasn’t really a punk scene to get into, but rather, the scene ‘coalesced’ around a group of ten to fifteen bands (his included). Kim Warren, the youngest of the three interviewees, says in her interview that she got into punk at the age of thirteen, which would suggest that her interest in punk happened later, around 1979. This implies that she was participating in punk at a slightly later time than when the T-shirts were being sold at 430 King’s Road. She lived in Steyning, near Worthing, with her parents, and so offers an alternative viewpoint of punk outside London. This is an important factor in developing a thorough understanding of punk clothing, because without it, this research would only be applicable to punks living in London in the period we’re discussing.

Roger Sabin identifies a tendency to rewrite history in discussions of punk due to the ‘narrowness of the frame of reference’. This is an allusion to the overarching focus on the Sex Pistols and the contributions of Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood in academia, which leaves other aspects of punk unexplored. As it turned out, none of the interviewees purchased or wore any of the T-shirts analysed previously, nor did they buy any items of clothing from the shop owned by McLaren and Westwood, which means that they are able to offer alternative narratives on the reasons for wearing punk clothing than the ones implied by the semiotic analysis of the T-shirts above, and therefore this study will hopefully avoid succumbing to the narrow focus of which Sabin speaks.

Whilst the items designed by McLaren and Westwood represent punk, this research will fit alongside Sabin’s in its attempt to uncover how they only help to understand a small fraction of the punk subculture.

When considering the interviews as a whole, certain themes emerge, specifically discussions surrounding the ‘Do It Yourself’ (DIY) movement and authenticity in punk, the extent to which punk was political, and gender differences in punk style, all of which will be discussed in detail below with reference to direct quotes from the interviews.

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63 Tim Smith, personal interview, 7 Jan. 2016.
2.1 DIY and Authenticity

Significantly, none of the interviewees bought clothing from the shop at 430 King's Road, and they all state that the clothes sold there were actually too expensive for them to afford. Fiona explains:

bondage trousers were like thirty quid or something, and that was a lot of money. I was getting 50p a week pocket money. [...] So some punks did wear that but generally [for] most punks it was Kensington market, T-shirts off the back of music papers, jumble sales, vintage shops, do-it-yourself, shops in the King’s Road.65

Fiona’s quote clarifies that for the majority of punks, clothing like the T-shirts in the Brighton Museum collection would be out of reach. However, she does point out that there were some young working-class men who could afford the items thanks to well-paying jobs such as builders and decorators, and they would be the ones wearing clothing bought from 430 King’s Road. Fiona couldn’t recall the prices of the items sold by McLaren and Westwood, but they can be found in other sources. Whilst Savage states that the T-shirts were ‘not cheap at two pounds each’, Laura Mulvagh offers different prices when she explains that ‘at a time when £25 was a good weekly wage for a young person, a pair of bondage trousers cost £50, a parachute shirt £30, and a T-shirt £7-8’.66

A surviving handwritten Seditionaries order form (published online at the Worlds End website run by Vivienne’s son Ben Westwood) shows the prices falling between the figures suggested by Savage and Mulvagh. The form (Figure 3) shows prices of £30 for a pair of bondage trousers, £5 for a regular sleeveless T-shirt and £6.50 for the muslin long sleeve top, such as the Destroy top previously discussed. Additionally, there is a shorter-sleeved version of the muslin top at £5 and a long-sleeved version of the regular T-shirt for £6.50. It’s possible that the pricing of items changed over the period the shop was open, but the form clearly states ‘Seditionaries’ so we know that these are likely reflective of prices in 1977-78. Whilst the prices are slightly less than those

65 Fiona, personal interview, 10 Jan. 2016.
66 Savage, England’s Dreaming, 100.
stated by Mulvagh, at £5-6.50 for a T-shirt, they would still have been expensive for a young person.

However, although some people obviously could afford to buy the clothing sold by McLaren and Westwood, both Smith and Fiona illuminate another reason why punks would choose not to wear such clothing, which raises the question of authenticity in subcultures. This is especially highlighted in the interview with Fiona, who uses the colloquial punk term ’pseud’ to describe someone who was perceived as ‘a fake’.67 She goes on to state that wearing T-shirts like those by McLaren and Westwood with slogans and imagery on, or even band T-shirts, make you look ‘like you’d just joined punk’ which wasn’t a good thing because ‘people were very obsessed about being genuine’.68 Fiona suggests customising or making your own clothes – DIY – as an alternative to buying T-shirts, which is a theme that occurs in all three interviews.

Smith was particularly insistent on the fact that he ‘never went to SEX, [...] never bought any item of punk clothing’, instead favouring to adapt clothing himself that he bought from charity shops.69 Examples of DIY in their own clothing practices include Fiona buying boiler suits from an army surplus shop that she would ‘rip up and put chains all over’, and Smith customizing T-shirts with stencils, bleaching trousers, and using safety pins to close up rips.70 Additionally, Smith describes how using second-hand clothing offered him ‘freedom to adapt [because he wasn’t] afraid of destroying some expensive fashion thing’.71 Here, he marks himself apart from other punk musicians like The Clash and Sex Pistols who would buy off-the-peg clothing that had already been adapted to fit in with the punk aesthetic. Smith makes it clear in his interview that he doesn’t like off-the-peg clothing, which implies that he feels to DIY your own clothes is to be in keeping with the ethos of punk.

Publicity shots of The Adverts from the late seventies demonstrate Smith’s DIY practices. Figure 5 depicts Smith (left) with his other band members. None of

67 Fiona, personal interview.
68 Fiona, personal interview.
69 Smith, personal interview.
70 Fiona, personal interview.
71 Smith, personal interview.
them are wearing ready-made punk clothing such as T-shirts by McLaren and Westwood; instead they wear fairly plain clothes. Smith is wearing a dark pinstriped shirt, a creased light-coloured tie, a black suit jacket, braces and black jeans. The most obvious aspect of DIY is the multitude of badges on his jacket lapels and the one on his tie. Gaye Advert (second from left) and Howard Pickup (right) also wear badges on their T-shirts, and Gaye holds a leather jacket adorned with more badges and a safety pin that can be seen poking upwards from the lapel. Additionally, Smith has added metal studs down the side seam of his jeans and Gaye wears a makeshift bracelet of fabric wrapped around her right wrist and a studded bracelet on the other. The armholes of her T-shirt also appear ragged as if they have been ripped. Overall, it’s small, simple changes that add to the DIY aesthetic of the band, which makes the look accessible in terms of price, but also ability, as very little skill is required to make the changes.

Michelle Liptrot argues that DIY activities in punk are counter-hegemonic because they are seen as ‘providing the subcultural movement with relative autonomy from both large- and small-scale punk commerce, and more generally from the mainstream’.72

Figure 5 demonstrates this autonomy by showing that DIY was low-cost and easy to do, whereas McLaren and Westwood’s designs were unattainable for most punks and would fall under the category of small-scale punk commerce that Liptrot refers to. This means by not buying clothing sold at 430 King’s Road, Fiona and Smith are effectively rejecting the commercial aspect of punk. Furthermore, Liptrot argues that the DIY side of punk has an ‘anti-capitalist element’ which could be argued is seen here in the feelings expressed by Fiona and Smith, with their insistence on reworking second-hand clothing rather than buying mass-produced off-the-peg versions.73 Although the independent shop run by McLaren and Westwood is not part of mainstream culture, it could still be seen as a commercial enterprise and thus, as outlined by Liptrot, there exists a

73 Liptrot, “‘Punk belongs to the Punx, not business men!’: British DIY Punk as a form of cultural resistance,” 235.
dichotomy in the punk subculture between commercial forms of punk and DIY punk.\(^74\)

Whilst the topic of DIY was also discussed by Kim Warren, her situation in a different geographical location offers another explanation for DIY, or making your own clothing. When asked what drew her to punk, she said: ‘It was so different, and plus I was making my own clothes, as you can see I’m a dressmaker, [...] and you could just be a bit more expressive.’\(^75\)

Additionally, she mentions that there were no places in Worthing that sold punk clothing, so she had to buy clothing in Brighton, as well as visiting fabric and second-hand shops. It’s clear that Kim’s location outside London affected her ability to find ready-made punk clothing, whilst her personal skills in dressmaking allowed her to construct her punk look herself. Here, the DIY aspect of her clothing stems from not only wanting to be ‘expressive’, but also necessity, due to the fact that there was a lack of other options where she lived.

From this information it can be argued that not only were the clothes sold at 430 King’s Road out of budget for many punks, but for those outside the specific group that wore such clothes, the clothing wasn’t seen as an ‘authentic’ way of constructing a punk identity through dress. This other, DIY side of punk is often overlooked according to Liptrot, but its existence is made clear from oral testimony interviews with people who identified as punks in the 1970s. As Warren states in her interview,

> everybody just sort of assumes that punk rockers walk around with Mohicans on top and bondage trousers but, you know, back in the day it wasn’t the case, it was kind of good if you didn’t have loads of money, you could just make stuff and look alright.\(^76\)

\(^{2.2}\) Politics and Punk

Bearing in mind the fact that not all punks were wearing the clothes designed by McLaren and Westwood, the relationship between punk and politics must also

\(^{74}\) Liptrot, “‘Punk belongs to the Punx, not business men!’: British DIY Punk as a form of cultural resistance,” 247.

\(^{75}\) Kim Warren, personal interview, 3 Dec. 2015.

\(^{76}\) Kim, personal interview.
be reconsidered. The previous analysis of the T-shirts provided a framework for understanding the role of Situationism and the politics of the left in punk clothing, but this political leaning may not apply to those outside that particular circle of clientele.

The narrow lens of academia surrounding punk, discussed above, over-emphasises McLaren and Westwood’s contribution, but could also be said to place an undeserving importance on politics in punk. One person who disputes this is journalist and broadcaster Danny Baker, who wrote for the punk fanzine *Sniffin’ Glue*. In his memoirs he explains that he never once heard anyone in the punk scene discussing the current political situation, despite ‘every documentary made about punk since 1976’ placing punk in the context of a climate of political unrest.77

The only interviewee who specifically mentioned politics was Fiona, who placed great importance on the relationship between punk and politics when she stated ‘punk was very, very political, it couldn’t separate that, and so when you got into punk you immediately got into politics’.78 This quote contradicts Baker’s statement that punk was never overtly political, instead testifying to the influential power of the punk subculture, as it seems to suggest that people who weren’t previously ‘into’ politics became so when they joined punk. In addition, Fiona clarifies that punk was ‘open-minded’ about things like race and sexuality, as well as detailing the clashes between the right-wing ‘skinheads’ and left-wing punks, attributing this violence as the reason for her eventually leaving the punk subculture.79

In his interview, Smith doesn’t specifically mention the political aspect of punk, but does show an interest in working class representation when he says that the punk scene ‘was about bands who were actually talking about real life and things that ordinary people could identify with’ which is what he liked about it.80 This alignment with ‘ordinary’ people suggests a shared sense of working class values, another political aspect of punk, which signifies that although Smith might not have affiliated himself with McLaren and his Situationist politics like

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78 Fiona, personal interview.
79 Fiona, personal interview.
80 Smith, personal interview.
the Sex Pistols did, there was still a political element in punk for him, and he shared some ideologies with Situationist thought. Additionally, Smith is in a unique position in this study in that we have other information on his political leaning available in songs written and performed by The Adverts, which have distinctly left-wing undertones.

Conversely, there is no mention of political leaning by Kim, which is significant. Whilst the political stances of Fiona and Smith are important, Kim’s lack of political affiliation could be a result of her geographical location outside London. In her interview, she explains that the spread of punk was ‘a very slow thing because there wasn’t an awful lot in the media’ with the exception of music magazines like *NME* and *The Face*.81 This implies that whilst regional punks had the ability to learn about the music on the punk scene and see images of the way people in bands and fans were dressed, there was less dissemination of the politics. Her mention of *The Face*, first published in May 1980, also shows how slow punk was to reach the area she was living in. Being outside London meant that Kim was unlikely to know about the marches and demonstrations that Fiona discusses in her interview as being ‘like a day out’ for punks, but she was probably also too late to the scene to take part even if she did.82

Moreover, although Kim never mentions politics in her description of punk, she does mention clashes with other groups of young people whilst in Brighton for the mods and rockers bank holiday weekend, specifically that she and her boyfriend were chased through Brighton.83 The memory of being attacked for having a punk appearance is something that Fiona also shares when she talks of being beaten up a couple of times by skinhead girls for looking like a punk.84 She explains that dressing in punk clothes ‘wasn’t just like wearing a fashion, it was like wearing a statement’.85

In this sense, the process of dressing like a punk is seen as a political statement in itself, regardless of whether you share the left-wing/anarchist political position that punk is associated with. This emphasises the communicative and

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81 Kim, personal interview.
82 Fiona, personal interview.
83 Kim, personal interview.
84 Fiona, personal interview.
85 Fiona, personal interview.
political power of dress, and because of this it could be argued that Kim was still committing a political act by dressing in punk clothes, even though what drew her to punk were the stylistic elements that she found ‘liberating’ and ‘creative’. The idea of punk being liberating offers another reason for the wearing of punk clothing, and is one that Fiona also recognises:

> We all did it as an escape, we did it because it was actually quite hard to function in the normal world [...] And if you weren’t from a certain class or certain background there were jobs that weren’t even open to you; if you were a woman there were jobs that weren’t open to you.\(^\text{87}\)

This shows that by joining punk, young people were attempting to break away from mainstream society and its inequalities. This could provide an explanation for why punk was predominantly working class, but what is also interesting to note is that the mention of gender inequality is used as a reason for young women joining punk. Fiona actually states that she found the people involved with punk who were not working class were usually women, and the above quote gives an insight into why that might be. The subject of inequality between men and women in the 1970s is something that Fiona mentions frequently, and it’s important to address gender in punk and how the reasons why women joined punk may differ from those of their male counterparts.

### 2.3 Gender in Punk

In her discussion of alternative femininities in subculture, Samantha Holland argues that the academic discipline of subcultural theory has marginalised or completely overlooked the role of women in subculture, instead treating youth subcultures as male-dominated and from the male perspective.\(^\text{88}\)

Whilst she partly puts this down to a gender bias on behalf of the researchers, Holland does suggest other reasons for the apparent gender disparity in youth subcultures, namely that young girls were earning less than young men, and that they were encouraged to save their money for marriage and spend more time on

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\(^{86}\) Warren, personal interview.  
\(^{87}\) Fiona, personal interview.  
domestic work in the home, thus leaving them little time and expenditure for immersion in a subculture. For Fiona however, it was these traditional attitudes regarding the role of women that meant young girls were drawn to punk. She states: ‘A lot of these girls were being pressured just into marriage, to marry a wealthy man or whatever, and we just didn’t wanna do that.’

Fiona also emphasised throughout her interview that the ‘normal world’ outside punk was disrespectful to women. She discusses this with reference to women not having careers in the same way that men did, domestic violence being ‘big’ in the seventies, and the idea that women were considered to be the property of their husbands. This last point is also expressed by Holland with regards to studies of girls in subculture, who quotes Brake as saying girls are ‘seen as the possession of their boyfriends’ and therefore not as independent participants in subcultures.

To summarise her point, Fiona says that a woman’s identity was dependent on ‘whether you were a good cook and kept a good home and brought up your children’. For Fiona, who never married or had children, this idea of what a woman should be in mainstream society was at odds with her own personal identity as a woman, which she states was one of the reasons young, middle class girls such as herself were drawn to punk.

Also important in a discussion of gender in punk is the fact that punk as a music genre provided female role models for both Fiona and Kim in the form of musicians such as Patti Smith, the Slits, Poly Styrene and Debbie Harry. Kim expressed the idea that punk allowed you to be either ‘completely androgynous’ like Patti Smith or ‘out and out sexy’ like Debbie Harry, which shows that punk offered alternative femininities outside the mainstream ideal. Fiona also mentioned Debbie Harry but said that she and her friends identified more with Patti Smith, Poly Styrene and the Slits because they were ‘breaking the gender

90 Fiona, personal interview.
92 Fiona, personal interview.
93 Kim, personal interview.
norms’ by trying to make themselves look unattractive. In this way, female punk musicians were making it acceptable for young women to defy beauty ideals imposed on them by mainstream society.

When discussing female punks and the way they dressed, Smith does repeatedly use the word ‘sexy’ to describe the style of acts like Siouxsie Sioux and the Slits, although he does state that it was an ‘unconventional’ kind of sexy, which suggests that he recognised that female punks were going against the standards set for mainstream femininity.

The scope for self-expression and non-conformity inherent in punk provided young women with more options for their outward identities, which could be expressed through dress. Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton, quoted by Holland, explain: ‘with punk, women were able to negotiate a social and ideological space for themselves through the deployment of oppositional dress.’

Although punk clothing provided young women with an opportunity to express their identity in a way that placed them outside mainstream culture, Evans and Thornton go on to explain that they were still at a disadvantage compared to male punks because on top of having to assert themselves against the dominant culture, they also had to deal with ‘the patriarchal structures that are almost invariably replicated within the subculture itself’.

Central to this is the idea of a patriarchal hierarchy in subculture, which places women below men, as in society as a whole. As Sarah Thornton argues, mainstream culture is feminised because it is seen to represent values surrounding conformity, the family, and class, in direct opposition to the masculinised alternative, independent and classless subcultures, a theory which Holland offers as an explanation of why women in subcultures are marginalised.

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94 Kim, personal interview.
96 Fiona, personal interview.
95 Smith, personal interview.
The notion that women are seen as lesser or inferior punks is subtly reflected in Kim's reminiscence of her own time as a punk and how she sees herself. She refers to herself as a ‘softie punk’ because of her long hair and interest in Soul records. This psychological refusal to accept that she was a proper member of the punk subculture relates back to ideas surrounding authenticity, but could also be symptomatic of the patriarchal structures in subcultures mentioned by Evans and Thornton. By identifying herself as a ‘softie’ punk, Kim uses feminine-associated language to belittle her involvement in punk, and in doing so, reinforces Thornton’s theory that subculture is seen as inherently masculine by association. It could also be that her positioning outside London (or any big city) makes Kim feel like a lesser version of a punk. It is tell-tale nuances of language such as the use of the word ‘softie’ and the opinions offered in these interviews on the subject of punk which provide information that would otherwise be lost to the researcher, and give a clearer view of what punk looked like in the late 1970s, outside the narrow frame of reference of studies that focus solely on the work of McLaren and Westwood.

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99 Kim, personal interview.
Conclusion

To summarise, the research presented in the previous chapters has shown that the relationship between punk clothing and politics is variable. In chapter 1, a semiotic analysis of punk T-shirts, informed by Barthes’ idea of myth, uncovered signified meanings that align with a specific political ideology – that of the Situationist International – through the recycling of images and the tactic of détournement.

Whilst initial research did therefore expose a link between punk clothing and politics by highlighting how political ideas are communicated through punk T-shirts, chapter 2 went beyond looking at material objects with the use of personal testimony from interviews conducted by the author. It was established early on in the investigation that the use of oral testimony is by no means exhaustive, and further research would be required to establish solid conclusions. However, the interviews suggest that the relationship is a lot more complex than many documentaries or history books indicate.

None of the three interviewees purchased items like the T-shirts made by McLaren and Westwood, which clearly shows that the clothes sold at 430 King’s Road only accounted for a small proportion of punk clothing. This was largely due to the expensive prices of these clothes, but also significant are ideas surrounding authenticity in punk, and the importance of making or customising one’s own clothes in order to be seen as authentic. Further, for one interviewee who was not based in London, making her own clothes was the only option due to a lack of places to buy punk clothing locally.

Additionally, the interviewees offered alternative reasons than politics for wearing punk clothing. For Fiona, punk offered an escape from the normal world in which women were given fewer opportunities than men, encouraged by the prevalence of strong female role models in the form of punk musicians who were breaking down gender norms. For Kim, who found punk to be liberating, the subculture offered her the chance to be creative in her outward appearance, and thus in control of how other people saw her.

Finally, one key point that has resulted from this research is the idea that punk wasn’t all about the Situationist politics associated with McLaren and Westwood’s clothing, but rather, as explained by Worley et al., whilst some
applied political ideas through the medium of punk, others have been less involved, or even taken an anti-political stance.\textsuperscript{100} This would imply that even where punks were not consciously overtly political, they could remain so in a broader sociological sense.

Despite the varying degrees to which punk was involved with politics, findings in chapter 2 present the idea that regardless of levels of conscious personal involvement with politics, the act of wearing punk clothing was a political statement. As Vivienne Westwood says, ‘fashion is the strongest form of communication there is’.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{100} Worley et al., "Introduction: from protest to resistance," 4.
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**Interviews**


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Paul Gorman Archive
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Figure 2: Prick Up Your Ears T-shirt in white cotton c. 1978. Fashion and Textiles Collection, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, Brighton. Personal photograph by the author. 28 Oct. 2015.
Figure 3: Detail of gay orgy T-shirt from The Pleasure Chest, Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles. Paul Gorman Archive. Photography by Paul Gorman. March 2016.
Figure 4: Seditionaries mail order form. Ben Westwood, “Seditionaries Mail Order,” Worlds End, Word Press, 16 May 2014.
Figure 5: Black and white photograph of The Adverts outside Burlington Arcade, Piccadilly, London. c. 1977. Photographer unknown.
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Appendix 1. Transcript of interview with Kim, 3 Dec 2015

AH: Can I begin by asking you to tell me your date and place of birth?


AH: I'm interested in the relationship between punk and clothing. When did you become a punk and why?

K: I sort of got interested in it when I was about 13, yeah it must've been because I was in middle school.

AH: And what drew you to punk?

K: Just because it was so different, and plus I was making my own clothes, as you can see I'm a dressmaker, so I was making my own clothes and you could just be a bit more expressive. I was a bit of a softie punk, because I used to hide all my, I'm a big Soul head as well, so I used to hide all my Soul records before my friends came round and just get the punk ones out. But I loved the clothes, I loved the fact you could wear whatever you wanted, and it was really free, you know, and I know everybody just sort of assumes that punk rockers walk around with Mohicans on top and bondage trousers but, you know, back in the day it wasn't the case, it was kind of good if you didn't have loads of money, you could just make stuff and look alright, you know.

AH: How would you describe punk?

K: I just thought, I found it really liberating. But then I didn't really go for all the hardcore stuff, you know, the Sex Pistols never really grabbed me, I was more kind of a Clash, Stranglers, that kind of girl. Adam and the Ants I absolutely loved, but before they started doing all that ridiculous face painting and stuff, you know, more art school. But I just found it really creative you know, kind of, do what you want kind of thing. But equally I like the, you know there was a lot behind it, you know listen to some of the song lyrics for example The Clash, they're really educated people as well, you know everyone thinks that there were a load of stupid idiots going round and spitting on people but that was never my- no. Never happened with us.

AH: How did you go about transforming yourself into a punk in terms of appearance?

K: Well, I bleached my hair but I wasn't, you know, big spiky hair or anything, I used to cornrow, tons of make up and sort of mad clothes really. But it was a gradual, thing, I had a pair of, first of all I had a pair of Dr Martens, that my mum was so cross with me that she gave them to a dustman. But I had a boyfriend at the time as well, so it was kind of all kind of clothes swapping you know, and also, as I say because I had a sewing machine, just running up stuff for my friends, so that was how it was really. It was no
overnight transformation, it was just a gradual thing, seeing what you could get away with.

AH: Could you tell me about the sort of clothes that you wore?

K: Yeah, I think when I started off I did have a pair of tartan bondage but they were my boyfriend’s, and little mini-kilts, woolly tights, monkey boots, and then as I got older, it was more kind of PVC, mini-skirts – God, I must have looked like such a slut, really, and lots of studded belts, all that sort of stuff. I mean, I’ve got some photos if you’d like to see, I can bring them in. I’ve got some old newspaper articles as well about the Worthing scene.

AH: Could you buy these sorts of clothes in Worthing?

K: No, as I say, I used to come over to Brighton a lot and buy stuff, but that was you know, kind of birthdays and Christmas because I was still at school and sixth form college and everything. So yeah birthdays and Christmas, also I used to go to fabric shops, and second hand shops as well, they were fantastic then, I used to wear lots of men’s suits as well, but customize them.

AH: Did you ever travel anywhere else to buy clothes or fabrics?

K: I went to King’s Road once, I told my mum I was going to Horsham. One of my friends, who was quite wealthy actually, had the most amazing matte black American car and he put the Batman insignia on the front so you can imagine, at 15, driving up King’s Road, so… but I didn’t buy anything in London because I couldn’t afford it, but it was just amazing just to get some inspiration as well, going to all the shops and things.

AH: You said you bought men’s suits...

K: Mmm, old 1940s ones that I used to take the bottoms right in.

AH: Do you think that you tried to feminize them?

K: Slightly, but I mean the whole thing, you could be completely androgynous, I mean look, case in point Patti Smith, you know, or you could be out and out sexy Debbie Harry, you know, but you could be both as well, so that was the good thing about it.

AH: How did people react to your appearance?

K: My mum, she didn’t like it when I went too macho, then equally, when my skirts were too short, she went absolutely up the wall, but she was fine actually, she quite liked all that self expression, she was a 70s chick anyway, in her sports cars and trouser suits, you know, so she was cool with it.

AH: What about other people? Were there any remarks in the street?
K: I think because I had waist-length blonde hair I did get quite a few remarks but I think it was you know, it wasn’t disgust or anything, I think it was more lechy. But quite a few, a lot of my male friends in particular did get an awful lot of abuse, they were beaten up because we, what we used to do was, I mean, how liberal was my mum, we used to come in probably once a week and go to gigs, and I was doing that since I was about 15, and my friends lived in Lancing, and so they’d collect my sister and I, we’d get the train, but they got beaten up and chased quite a lot. And I went to, you know the mods and rockers thing that they do on bank holiday Monday? Well one year they, when the punk rock thing was really quite strong, the punks all did it as well and I went to one of those and I was absolutely terrified, being chased around Brighton. Yeah, me and my boyfriend were absolutely petrified. But I think that was the only time violence was directed at me, but I certainly know that it was towards quite a few of my friends. Particularly, I had a girlfriend of mine, Debbie, and she did have a really extreme hairdo and she got spat at quite a lot. It was in Worthing you know, not the most liberated of places. Well, it certainly wasn’t then. But punk was everywhere, it was even in little villages.

AH: How did you first hear about the punk movement?

K: First off, I remember very first, was being at my Grandma’s house, think I must have been about 12, 11 or 12 and reading the Sunday Times, no the News of the World and of course the News of the World [being] the News of the World, it overdramatized it and there were pictures of girls wearing bin liners and I remember my grandparents being absolutely horrified. Bin liners, bloody ridiculous but you know that kind of... but it was a very slow thing because there wasn’t an awful lot in the media unless you, you know, listened to John Peel or got the NME which of course we all did, and The Face magazine, things like that. So you had to, particularly at that time ‘cause I was living in Steyning, you had to do your homework really, there’s no internet or anything you had to really look into it.

AH: Did you wear any T-shirts with slogans on?

K: Yeah, I had loads of, wish I’d still got them now actually, quite a few Clash ones, no not slogans, I just had band T-shirts really. Adam and the Ants definitely, that was all the fetish thing as well that they did, Clash, that was about it but because, you know, I was still at school and only had a part-time job, all the stuff, you know, that sort of stuff, was really expensive. So it was down to the richer kids I’m afraid.

AH: Is there anything else you can think of or you’d like to talk about?

K: I dunno [pause] it was great fun, God. And what’s kind of good actually is it really widened my music knowledge as well so, because I’ve got three children now, so, they like all their screamo stuff that they’re interested in now but also, you know, my thirteen year old loves the Clash which is great, you know, if you think.
Appendix 2. Transcript of interview with Tim ‘TV’ Smith, 7 Jan 2016.

AH: Can I begin by asking you to tell me your date and place of birth?

TS: Date of birth 4/5/56 and I was born in Hornchurch.

AH: I’m interested in finding out about the relationship between punk and clothing as I mentioned to you in my email. When did you first get involved in the punk scene?

TS: Well, when did the punk scene first get involved with me, really? You know I moved up to London to form a band before there was a punk scene really, in sort of early ’76 and I knew something was happening, there’d been a few you know, kind of reports of Sex Pistols playing gigs, and I’d always been into bands like Iggy and that kind of thing you know, New York Dolls and that, so I like that kind of more aggressive, like real music you know, and that’s what I wanted to do as well, you know, and there was nothing happening really where I was in the West Country and so the plan was to move to London, form a band, and then the same time as I moved out you know, lots of other people were obviously having the same idea, because in the Summer of ’76 there was the 100 Club festival with The Damned and the Pistols and Buzzcocks played their first gig and [The] Clash were starting to play and so, you know, it’s just good timing really. And then the whole punk scene kind of coalesced you know, it wasn’t really a question of dropping into a scene that was already formed, the whole thing coalesced around us really, you know, about 10 or 15 bands at the time.

AH: In terms of the clothes you were wearing, do you think your personal look or style changed when you were involved in that scene or when that happened?

TS: Yeah, definitely. ’cause before I had my band, in the West Country I was more kind of glam, you know with eyeliner and black nail varnish and you know, that kind of look, long hair, but you know I soon got the idea and cut my hair and started changing the way I looked as well. I don’t know if that was because of the punk scene, ’cause it didn’t have a clearly defined style but certainly you know, I started getting clothes out of charity shops and you know, adapting them, the inevitable safety pins to close up the rips and it didn’t really matter how bad the clothes were because it gave you freedom to adapt, you know, you weren’t afraid of destroying some expensive you know, fashion thing and that was kind of like the difference I think between the way me and a lot of people did it, and the way, the whole kind of Pistols, Clash angle where they bought off the peg, ready kind of adapted stuff.

AH: So you didn’t go for that stuff or buy it yourself?

TS: I never went to SEX, I never went to Boy, I never bought anything, I never bought any punk item of clothing, I bought stuff from, say from charity shops and adapted them.
AH: Is that because of the price or because you didn’t want to get something that was already made up for you?

TS: Both, really. I mean, I couldn’t afford it anyway. I mean, maybe I could’ve gone in and blagged you know, a pair of SEX trousers or something, I mean Gaye [Black] certainly did, she went in and Malcom gave her a pair of PVC trousers but I wasn’t, I just didn’t really want, I never liked off the peg really, I still adapt my clothes now.

AH: I see you’ve got some customized trousers on...

TS: Yeah well they’re self-made. Well, I don’t make the trousers but you know I bleach them up and I customize the T-shirts and virtually everything I wear still on stage is bits I’ve you know, picked from here and there and put together in a kind of identifiable style now. I mean I have a look for onstage that I stick to with variations just because I think it does give people something to focus on.

AH: So the clothes you’re wearing now, for example, are they the clothes that you wear every day?

TS: They’re not the same I wear every day no, I don’t wear the bleached up T-shirts and rarely the bleached up jeans every day, I don’t really need them to go round the Co-op you know, I’d rather people weren’t looking at me. But you know if you’re standing on the stage you’re making a statement and people are supposed to be looking at you and paying attention, that’s the whole idea of doing a gig.

AH: When you first started out in punk would you be wearing those sorts of clothes every day?

TS: Parts of it, and parts as I do now, parts of what I wear on stage I wear the rest of the time too, parts I don’t.

AH: I’m quite interested in gender between dress and gender differences, would you say the clothes worn then by men and women were similar or different?

TS: You can’t really generalize because there was a lot of, kind of a lot of the women went for a kind of fetishistic look, you know, like Siouxsie Sioux you know and they were kind of exploiting their femininity and the sex angle in the way they dressed, I don’t think many men did that, around the early punk days anyway. The Roxy before was like, the blokes would their leather trousers and in a way the women took that over, they dressed up to look sexy and you know, although not in the conventional way. The Slits or someone looked kind of shabby, sexy, chic, you know, Siouxsie yeah looked more like fetishistic but it was very variable you know, it’s very hard to generalize. One of the nice things about the punk scene early on was everyone found their own style, and a lot of it was fairly shabby because of the materials we were using.
AH: What do you think drew you to punk and what are the fundamental principles behind punk?

TS: As I say there wasn’t a punk scene to be drawn to, there was just kind of a feeling in the air that there was gonna be some kind of bands and some kind of music thing going on that I felt I slotted into because it was about bands saying stuff about real life and not this kind of fantasy you know boy meets girl, boy loses girl you know, heartbreak and the rest of that sort of corny stuff that was going on in the pop scene and rock scene at the time, or alternatively the whole progressive kind of fantasy nonsense that didn’t have any basis in real life so the thing about the punk scene as it developed was that it was about bands who were actually talking about real life and things that ordinary people could identify with. That’s certainly what attracted me about it.

AH: Did you get any reactions to your appearance?

TS: Well people on the street tended to feel threatened by it. Often, you know, you would get a lot of looks, and you know, a lot of aggression towards to just because you looked different and you know that’s still the case today I think if you look extremely different you will also be disliked by the general public and it’s unfortunate they do feel threatened by anything where people have taken you know, the rules into their own hands and change that for the way they wanted to go. There’s no one to really say what the rules of dress are you know, you’re born into the rules of dress and if you wanna change them you know why shouldn’t you? Why should people feel threatened by it?

AH: You mentioned that you customized your own clothes, did you wear anything resembling a slogan T-shirt?

TS: Well I bought you know I’ve got a shirt from a charity shop and then wrote or you know like print or stencil various slogans down the sleeves. I remember I had one down the sleeve or down the jeans that said ‘the gospel according to me’ you know, stenciled stuff, or you know, paint splashes or whatever or just ripped, you know you could rip an arm off, it only cost 50p from the charity shop, you’d rip an arm off and go round with it like that, and it didn’t matter.
Appendix 3. Transcript of interview with Fiona, 10 Jan 2016.

AH: Can I begin by asking you to tell me your date and place of birth?


AH: When did you get involved in punk and what drew you to it?

F: Well I wasn’t in at the beginning because I was only fifteen. So I got into it I think from my diary, it’s quite funny my diary because I actually write my poor friend, I won’t say her name, my best friend at the time at school wouldn’t come with me to punk gigs and I put quite annoyed in my diary ‘My friend won’t come with me to punk gigs, it means I miss loads of good ones’! Which is hilarious because you know I’d never been out to a club at that stage, you know I was living at home, but I think for a lot of people my age the thing that really – I was getting music papers anyway so I was starting to see it appear in the music papers, listening to John Peel, because that was the thing, I have put that on my Instagram that in those days our bibles were music papers like NME, Sounds, Black Echoes, all of that, and a lot of these obviously bands were wearing before it sort of got popular. So you’d get your fashion tips from the music papers too, from looking at bands, and a lot of fashion in those days came from music you know, in that way.

Also we were listening to John Peel who was on very late on was it Radio One? Or, yeah I think it was Radio One or one of those stations, and he was very influential, and he was always picking up new people you know, he had like Siouxsie and the Banshees before anyone, Adam and the Ants before anyone, probably the Pistols before anyone, because he was very, had his ear close to the ground and he’d be sent cassette tapes because that’s how people communicated then with their music and he would literally, you know again he had no rules, and I think this is really the lesson of all of this really, is to allow creativity to really flourish you need none of this rule stuff because you don’t know what’s gonna’ be the next thing, and if you have a very open policy, it allows that to come in whereas if you narrow it all down, you know only certain things are gonna’ come through. So anyway, I badgered my friend, because I didn’t wanna go to a punk club by myself ‘cause the seventies again, people forget, Covent Garden was rough, believe it or not, that’s where the Roxy was, and also the seventies were quite violent, you know, people um, there were fights all the time outside clubs, the national front started to operate a bit later in sort of about ‘77, ‘78, you know it wasn’t like now just you can travel anywhere and nothing would happen to you, if you were wearing different clothes people would attack you, literally attack you in the street, a bit like what’s going on with the postcode war now, it’s quite similar. But this was anywhere in London, you could be on the tube and someone would attack you, I mean you know it wasn’t just like wearing a fashion, it was like wearing a statement. So, I got my friend, I think the diary starts in April, and at first I had long hair and was sort of trying to wear punky clothes and then I quickly realized that I was gonna’ be called a pseud so I cut all my hair off which is why, I don’t know whether you saw that picture of me [on Instagram], April 17th was my first punk gig. ‘Couldn’t get in sob’ I put, because you know I didn’t know how to get in to gigs. It’s funny because I was actually
writing down gigs before I went to them and then not being able to get anyone to go with me. So then I started going to the Roxy and that’s quite mad because over the last couple of years, I’ve met the Czezowski’s who actually ran the Roxy, they’re the people that owned the Roxy, and I’ve got to know them quite well in the last two years and that’s been amazing for me because you know the Roxy in a way changed my life and I told them that and they couldn’t believe that but I mean it did for loads of us I mean you know, they were an amazing couple, still together, with a huge archive that they’re very protective over at the moment but yeah you go into the Roxy and it wasn’t busy, I mean there’d be like 50 people in there you know it wasn’t, there was no MTV there was no magazine there was no style stuff there was just ‘zines that started when the punk scene started from people wanting to do their own thing ‘cause it wasn’t something reported in the press, and yeah so I mean it was wide open in a way but we didn’t know that ‘cause we didn’t even think like that. So we’d go into the Roxy and there’d be usually three or four bands on in a night. Don Letts would be DJ-ing who I’ve noticed has just modeled for Maharishi, I don’t know whether you’ve seen that. Yeah, just to day I saw it, yeah. So, in order to be accepted on the scene, you had to look the part, and that’s when I cut off my hair sort of literally myself, because again you know there weren’t punk hairdressers, I mean I think some of the kids who were coming from sort of who’d been in the soul scene, ‘cause a lot of the kids who went in the punk scene had come from the soul scene, they probably were going to hairdressers that knew, you know could make a punk hair cut but generally, again there wasn’t this marketing of style like there is now and so you just did it yourself, again, not to be radical, it’s because that’s the only way you could do it, and I used to colour my hair with food colouring, blue and red I think, yeah cochineal I used to use, loads of us did and we used to put sugar water in our hair to make it stiff you know especially the boys, and that’s how you’d do it, I must write that down actually ‘cause I forgot that. But that was quite normal again you know, sometimes people would use Teddy Boy grease in their hair. So then I started going to punk gigs and then, my friends sometimes they wanted to come you know sometimes they didn’t and so I started going out on my own, I was fifteen you know, and London was rough then, I can’t believe it, but I think that’s the thing about my life generally is that I’m really passionate about something I just find a way to do it, you know and my dad worked very long hours and my mum bless her was quite ill and um so I didn’t really have that sort of parental control that a lot of people had but a lot us didn’t because there was no smartphones, no internet, if you said you were doing homework round your friend’s there was absolutely no way of checking unless you phoned that friend’s mother and my parents didn’t really do that so in a funny way I had this sort of incredible freedom, and then I started going out and meeting people, and then when I met the people, I mean again some of the people I was knocking round with were like thirteen, fourteen, you know, fifteen, you know we were all out and you can’t even go to a club now unless you’re over eighteen or twenty one you know, but we were all going to these clubs and you know having this wild time and then what happened is you’d start following bands and one of the bands I followed which weren’t the best musically were 999 because they had a very tight sort of crew and I put quite a sad little entry actually, this is one that I’m not sure I’ve got the guts to post [on Instagram], look this is so funny, ‘Summary of the year, definitely the year of punk. I think I grew up a lot during
this year. At the beginning I knew nothing and no one, I liked no music in particular, I was interested in Reggae from Black Echoes but heard none, I clung to Soul and made a half-hearted attempt with Rock like Dr. Feelgood and the Hotrods, usual stuff because that was, the scene was quite pub-rocky then, before punk, because that’s where bands used to perform, in pubs. ‘I was the biggest pseu in the beginning’ a pseu was like a fake, you know it’s like you like it but you’re not really part of it, you know what I mean, because very much on the punk scene like all these subcultures I’ve been into, it’s all about being completely genuine and real, you know, ‘I think it was very hard because I knew no one who was a punk and no real idea how to get people, my friends, to go with me to things, but they weren’t able to, (I won’t say her name) so-and-so was very unwilling and so-and-so was unable, I missed some good gigs!’ This whole thing just goes on and on, a funny description. ‘I only went to big gigs and drowned myself in safety pins, I liked everything that everyone else did, I was very ooh-ah about blokes, not surprising because I’ve never had a proper relationship’ oh this is so embarrassing ‘I only liked what was hip and popular, I was very naïve about violence and still am, I was a part-time punk in the beginning, I didn’t cut my hair for ages because I didn’t want to’ erm this is quite interesting ‘there is a great snob thing about hair which is very bad and the hip thing is very much in. Now what’s really in is jar punk, I really hate that phrase, it’s a pity reggae is hip but at least you get to hear more’ that’s right because I didn’t like the way it was sort of suddenly it became trendy so you know, it was just because it was trendy. ‘John Peel does a fantastic show every night’ see yeah, it’s great for history this. So yeah so that was the thing it was all about being authentic and if you weren’t authentic you weren’t included. You know a lot of all these subculture things it is quite gang mentality and that’s what, I’ve been working with this youth charity recently that works with troubled kids on council estates and I really identify with them a lot because it’s really just the same, you know this whole gang thing they’re into they’re into to just be accepted you know, but unfortunately the sort of violence that’s happening on some of these estates now in the gangs, it is really extreme, but they feel in order to be accepted they have to do that, which is a real shame, and that’s the bit we’re trying to change with this charity but it’s really interesting all of this stuff because it is really ultimately about belonging, you know, and about hanging out with your mates and being accepted, you know so that’s really a lot of the early punk stuff was like that.

With the gigs, God there were so many places, a lot of them round Soho, there was the Vortex, the Marquee, there was the Red Cow in Hammersmith there was the Nashville in West London, and Hope and Anchor in Islington, a lot of these were pubs with stages, and you would basically read the music papers because that’s where the gigs would be listed every week and it’s hard to describe this now but to get Sounds and NME and all these things each week it was like wow it’s arrived, you know it was really exciting to get this and you’d just scour the papers to see what was on and plan out your gigs that you’d go to and hang out with your like-minded friends, remember there’s no phone, I mean we used to have to go to phone boxes to phone people, and they’d either be in or they weren’t in you know what I mean, you think about it and it’s quite amazing now with all of this technology that we have that we can still keep in touch with people. I still find that quite mad. I don’t know how we did, I mean we just used to say, I think people were more tolerant then about lateness and stuff like that,
and life was definitely much slower, something I'm finding a bit hard now actually, now I'm older, because a lot of friends my age are leaving London now because the pace is so fast now, but life was slower, there was no internet and generally you know people got married by twenty five then, had kids. I went to a rockin’ funeral literally just last week, no, yeah Friday, and they’re friends my age, and most of them are grandparents. I didn’t even have kids so it’s sort of quite freaky for me, you know what I mean because I just don’t even feel in a way that I’m old enough to have kids yet. But you know that’s what happened in, especially in working class which you know, punk was mainly, I was from a middle class background but most punks were working class. Interestingly enough the ones that weren’t tended to be girls, and I think the reason for that was that like me, a lot of these girls were being pressured into marriage, to marry a wealthy man or whatever, and we just didn’t wanna do that because we just had maybe a bit more adventure in us you know? And so that’s why only a few of the girls were from sort of posher families as it were, but most people on the punk scene were very working class and working class again was like a big thing then. You know I read a statistic recently that something like forty five percent of people at that time that I was a punk were living in council accommodation you know because before Thatcher had privatized it and now there’s only eight percent of people in the country living in council accommodation so it was a very, it’s very hard in this climate now to remember what the atmosphere was like then.

We’d be very influenced by people like the Slits, Poly Styrene, all those incredible, Patti Smith, all those, I mean there were so many really strong female role models at the end of the seventies and again that was amazing ’cause again women didn’t even have their own tax code then you know it’s hard to remember that sort of stuff now. Women were very much the property of their husband, you know you didn’t get loads of women living on their own like you do now, women over thirty were literally called to their face spinsters, there was something wrong with you, the fact you hadn’t snaggled a husband, I mean you know, feminism had started, it was the start of feminism really coming through, Spare Rib, I mean I remember I got a copy of Spare Rib, my dad went nuts when he saw it, went absolutely nuts, you know, but that was normal, it’s like men were really really in charge in those days you know Thatcher hadn’t even started and of course because of her political persuasion none of us liked her anyway, so we didn’t really care although obviously she was groundbreaking when you think about it now, she behaved like a man in lots of ways so we didn’t really identify with Thatcher, obviously punks being left wing anyway. And then also politically punk was very, very political, it couldn’t separate that, and so when you got into punk you immediately got into politics. You know we’d go on marches, you know again sexuality was quite, I mean not for me but for a lot of people, quite fluid in the scene, so there were gay punks and lesbian punks but no big deal it was like the punk scene was very open minded you know, about race, colour, sexuality, everything. It’s quite because then in the 80s it went backwards a bit actually with Thatcher, it went a bit backwards but the late 70s were very left wing, very open minded.

So I’d start to follow bands and I’d start to go out a lot I mean, if you look at my diary I start literally I’m going out three or four nights a week, following bands all round the country you know, coming back in the van, sleeping in bus shelters
I mean I don’t know what, I was fifteen sixteen I’d be put in care now and it’s like crazy but nothing happened to me, nothing bad happened to me. And yeah, it was a really amazing time and I’m really glad, I mean for a long time I felt a bit embarrassed about it, you know ‘cause I went quite straight for a while after Sign of the Times ended in the late 90s and I was a bit like mortified that I’d sort of done all of this you know ‘cause I now realize that you know, people don’t do this at fifteen normally you know, but now I look back and I just think you know, I’m really glad I saw it because punk was very much like acid house, both very intense scenes, and the Grime scene was probably the same at the beginning, but they burn themselves out quite quickly because basically the corporates grab onto it all very fast and commercialise it and of course when that happens it’s not the same. And then of course the Pistols broke up, the Clash went to America, so they were the big bands, so yeah it all exploded quite quickly and what happened was at the end of punk, well for me, it wasn’t the end of punk, punk went on, but in about ’79 I decided to leave and go on the Rocking scene which was like the Rock n Roll scene because punk was getting very violent. What happened was all the politics at the end of the seventies were really extreme and the right wing was really rising, the left wing was really strong, and there was a lot of demonstrations all the time, demonstrations were like a day out for us, a bit like there’s happening now, there’s a lot of demos now and so every weekend we’d go on a demo but the National Front started to rise and the rise of the skinheads. Now not all skinheads were extremely right wing, a lot of my friends got into the skinhead thing and they were just into the ska element, but the right wing started to rise and they started to attack punks at gigs they’d literally be standing, waiting outside while we came out, starting fights and people would you know, be smashing glasses over people’s heads I mean, I had friends that were really badly injured and it just wasn’t nice, I got beaten up myself a couple of times by skinhead girls and so I just decided this is too much for me and went on the Rock n Roll scene so that’s how I left punk. But then that was quite mad because the Rocking scene was equally tough, but not this violence all the time but the people in it were equally tough because again it attracted people who didn’t fit in to conventional society, there were Hell’s Angels there, Teddy Boys there and stuff so you had to pretend you hadn’t been a punk, and that’s a really mad thing because when I went on the Rocking scene, which we call it, that’s what it’s called, the Rocking scene rather than Rock n Roll, it’s funny, Rock n Roll was Teds, Rocking scene is the Rockabilly influence scene, I actually literally had to deny I was a punk, I never mentioned it, so I put all of my punk stuff away in boxes and never looked at it, I literally never looked at it until literally two years ago, because it was like you couldn’t mention it on that scene, and then after that I suppose I didn’t have any reason to look at it, so I’ve only just started to unearth it now, and again, my punk rock scrapbook, I only sort of looked at this a few years ago, and this is what I used to get into Goldsmiths, I only was there a year, ’cause I was too busy going out to clubs, but they actually took me on the Goldsmiths course, the communication course, because of this. Well actually I don’t think it was normal to accept people but they were, you know more open minded then and I think they could see that I was creative, and it was a communication course, it was a new course at the time, but I wasn’t conventionally artistic, I mean I did do some drawings as well to get in but it wasn’t like a proper portfolio as it is now, but you know I was talking to
somebody at Saint Martins, who’s very high up at Saint Martins, and we were saying we’re not sure McQueen would get into college now, because McQueen didn’t, if you read that book it’s really interesting, he only got in there because someone saw his clothing that he was making an thought he had a spark about him and actually persuaded the bursar you’ve got to let him on the course. He didn’t have exams to get on or anything like that. They could just see that he had the talent and someone said look you’ve gotta’ let this person on the course. So now, would he get in? I mean that was me and my friend, who’s very high up at Saint Martins, I won’t say who he is, but he said he wouldn’t get past the UCAS system.

AH: You mentioned a shop that you used to buy clothes at, were there any other places you used to shop for your clothes?

F: Oh God well okay so the scene in the late seventies was you had really switched on chains like Chelsea Girl, that I used to like a lot, that’s again had a little revival recently, I don’t think they did that revival very well myself, because Chelsea Girl was actually a very good shop and they were really on it with all the sort of platforms and sort of Soul styles and I had amazing clothes from there before punk, but most of us, I mean when punk got big, the high street did pick up on it, but again, there was very much this thing about being a pseud, about being authentic or about being sort of fashion-y as it were, and if you were a proper punk like we wanted to be, you would go to jumble sales, because that was the other thing, I actually only really remembered the other day because again it’s so long ago, you sort of forget all this stuff, but basically jumble sales were a really big thing, they’d happen every single Saturday all over London in the sort of suburbs and they were brilliant because of course it wasn’t that far away from the fifties and the sixties, the late seventies, so the quality of jumble was actually quite good and all the grannies used to go, all the grannies were obsessed with jumble sales and I think the reason is that you could get a bit of jumble and sell it on to people and that’s how a lot of us made our living for years, is we’d go to jumble sales and buy stuff there and resell it, so people at Ken market would buy off people from jumble sales, people at Portobello would buy off people from jumble sales, and that’s how, it was sort of like an underground cash economy going on you know, vintage shops would buy from jumble sales. So it’s amazing yeah, it was really good, good way to survive.

AH: Did you ever go to retailers of punk clothing like Sex/Seditionaries?

F: Yeah well Sex when I first went there, it was, Sex was first wasn’t it? Yeah Sex was before Seditionaries, it was scary. Again, very scary, very intimidating, Jordan was working in there and she was deliberately intimidating, I mean Jordan looked like no one else ever does. So, going into Sex just to go in the shop, you know you had to be quite brave to begin with, you’ve got to remember this is late ’seventies, this is like you know, normal culture is very conservative and there’s this shop with great big sex letters outside I mean, it wasn’t like now everyone would just be piling through the door it was like people were intimidated by that, especially with Jordan at the front. But I did go into, I don’t think I even dared go in Sex but I went in Seditionaries, that was amazing, again
quite intimidating, not a lot of clothes for sale just bits and pieces but again very expensive, and that’s the other thing that again people don’t understand with history is I don’t know how much bondage trousers were, like thirty quid or something and that was a lot of money. I was getting 50p a week pocket money, you know what I mean? I worked in a café after school in order to get money to go to gigs, gigs were, in fact I’ve got my flyer, gigs were like 75p and a pound so yeah, it was it was a lot of money, you’re talking like several week’s wages. So some punks did wear that but generally most punks it was Kensington market, T-shirts off the back of music papers, jumble sales, vintage shops, do-it-yourself, shops in the King’s Road, again another statistic I found out recently that there were three hundred, and I remember this, three hundred independent shops in the King’s Road, not one chain. This whole chain thing, this didn’t exist, I mean I’m sure there was, well no I say didn’t exist, that’s wrong. Chelsea Girl was a chain, I’m pretty sure Topshop was around and I know Miss Selfridge definitely was around but generally most punks it was Kensington market, not one chain. This whole chain thing, this didn’t exist, I mean I’m sure there was, well no I say didn’t exist, that’s wrong. Chelsea Girl was a chain, I’m pretty sure Topshop was around and I know Miss Selfridge definitely was around but it wasn’t common, you know what I mean, there was a huge amount of independent retailers, a lot of them in the King’s Road selling hippie stuff at that point but Boy was in the King’s Road, so yeah no it was good.

AH: Did you make or alter any of your own clothes?

F: Well like I say I went to Lawrence Corner, got that boiler suit, ripped all that up, stenciled it and put chains on and stuff, erm what else did I do? Cut my own hair off, used food colouring. Yeah, I mean you definitely DIY with your clothes especially like shredding and ripping and stuff like that. Towards late ’78 I was getting into Rockabilly so I was wearing fifties clothes still with sort of slightly punk hair. So yeah, DIY punk, I mean Poly Styrene had a stall, there was a place called Beaufort Market at the top of the King’s Road, and that was like a little indoor market full of vintage stalls, so she had a stall there and again there was a lot, markets were big. There was also Antiquarius and downstairs was Acme Attractions where Don Letts ran the place with Jeanette Beckman [subject probably referring to Jeanette Lee, Janette Beckman is a photographer], and that’s all very well documented in that book and she went on to, she’s running Rough Trade now, I didn’t even know that, again ‘cause I left the whole scene for a long time at the end of the nineties there’s a lot of stuff I’m only just finding out because when you’re like a teenage punk in those days again there was no information out there, you’ve got to remember, there was no internet, there was nothing, so unless you read it in the music paper or someone told you, you didn’t know so it’s quite funny with all this punk stuff that’s coming up now, because I’m actually learning stuff about punk that I didn’t know, you know, because I was never in the inner circle, you know, I never went out with anyone in a band, quite deliberately actually because it’s quite stressful going out with someone in a band, plus you know, I don’t know whether you saw the picture of me as a punk but I wasn’t the sexy punk that a lot of them were. Adam Ant only went out with models. And also I didn’t want to, I didn’t like- for me it was about the music and the fashion, I was never you know, obviously I fancied boys and stuff but I never wanted to be a band groupie, I mean a lot of the girls did, but I didn’t you know, because if you’re a band groupie you have to go and see that band all the time and you can’t see any other band and I’d want to see lots of bands.
AH: What did your family think when you cut all your hair off?

F: Well my family went absolutely bonkers. I was literally excluded from family photos for years, absolutely. It was hard, it was actually very, very stressful but as I said, my dad worked extremely hard, my mum unfortunately was very ill and so I didn’t really see them very much. I’ll be honest with you and I spent a lot of time round my friend’s who lived locally to me and so I almost sort of decamped to her house for several years while I was a punk and then as soon as I got to just before 18 I left home anyway, yeah so I’d left home by then.

AH: I’m interested in looking at punk in terms of gender and whether there was a big gender difference in the appearance of punks...

F: Oh yeah, lots. Well, funnily enough, punk actually in lots of ways was quite unisex compared to other scenes but at the same time you’ve got to remember women’s place in society was absolutely not what it is now, I mean women didn’t have careers, women didn’t even have CVs you know, you just go and have someone get a job, yeah okay, do you know what I mean, I mean I have to say I didn’t get many straight jobs, there must have been some sort of CV for a straight job but the whole thing about being a woman in the seventies is that you would go to school, very few people again went to university, university was very small, I can’t remember the statistics of how many women went to university in the late seventies but it was small, and only really middle class people went. I mean not only, but generally middle class people went and you were expected to get married you know, definitely by thirty if you were middle class and by twenty-five if you were working class. A lot of my working class friends were married in their early twenties, even late teens, it wasn’t unusual you know. I mean it was such a different world, but the punk scene was quite unisex and you’d get quite a lot of respect being a girl, and I think that’s another thing that appealed to me about it because the normal world was so disrespectful to women, you know, in so many ways. Domestic violence was big in the late seventies, not in my family but you know, in the world. It was a different way for women, absolutely and also you’re very much judged about your homemaking skills, I mean that was like, nonexistent you can see for me but you know, it was really very much about whether you were a good cook and kept a good home and brought up your children, that was your identity as a woman you know, generally, that was the mainstream identity. So yeah, punk was very liberating and certainly for me to see all those women that were so adventurous like Poly Styrene and Patti Smith and so many, who else? Debbie Harry was different, I like Debbie Harry, and she’s obviously hugely iconic now but she was doing the sexy thing, and a lot of us who were punks, it’s not as though we didn’t like her, I mean we really liked her but we didn’t identify with her, we identified much more with Patti, Poly Styrene, people who were breaking the gender norms, you know, ‘cause they were actually in a way making themselves look ugly, especially Poly you know, she wasn’t playing up to the pretty thing and Poly’s actually a really good person if you’re looking at gender stuff, look at her lyrics, look at the X-Ray Spex lyrics, they are absolutely fantastic, I mean, I think she was fifteen or something insane when she wrote them, and they’re just so predictive of the future, I mean she’s
writing about consumerism, she’s writing about when the world turned day-glo
which is sort of in a way about technology and futurism I mean, she is just
genius. She died a few years ago which is really really sad but she really was an
exceptional person, you know, she really was. And again there were these
exceptional women, who else was there? The Slits, oh they were off the hook.
Don Letts used to manage them and they were regularly beaten up in the street
literally for looking like they did I mean you know, people found them that
offensive you know, it’s hard, you can’t imagine what’s it’s like, you literally go
out in your punk clothes with your life in your hands, you never knew when
someone was gonna’ pull you down an alley and beat you up, I mean, I was
beaten up in the King’s Road by a Teddy Girl who literally saw me in my boiler
suit, just grabbed me and [mimes punching] on the ground, yeah. And it’s a quite
funny story actually because we were both taken to the police station in King’s
Road and she had quite a bad record you know, I was completely green as grass
and I was sitting in the police waiting room and there were all these Teddy Boys,
now Teddy Boys were really hard and I’ve got a book on Teddy Boys you’ll see,
they were real tough boys, working class, most of them in a lot of trouble, you
know prison, stuff like that, tattoos, again tattoos in those days were really
extreme you know that’s why I never got any tattoos because if you had a tattoo
in those days you were prison material, you know only people who really went
to prison or got into a lot of trouble had tattoos it’s not like a trendy thing like
now. That’s why I didn’t get any and thank God actually, thank God, I’m so
grateful that I never fell for that, and I was sitting next to all these Teddy Boys
and they were picking at my chains off my boiler suit and it was scary, these are
scary people you know, and this big Teddy Boy called Tiny stepped in and he
went leave her alone, she’s alright and so that’s why you know, I got off but yeah
the girl, when I got interviewed by the police they told me this girl had a really
serious record. So it was mad, and it was funny because Tiny started turning up
to punk gigs but I’ll show you this Teddy Boy thing because again the Teddy Boys
were a big thing in the late seventies, you can’t really talk about the late
seventies, even with the punk, without the Teds, because there were these huge
fights up the King’s Road every weekend and everyone would go up parading,
again, it’s quite an Italian thing in a way we used to go up the King’s Road
parading around.
I’ll be honest with you, I found it quite weird in the last couple of years that
people are seeing my life as like interesting, because for me it was just normal
what I did, you know what I mean? And that people are like flipping over these
photos that I’m posting up [on Instagram] you know because I’ve got a lot of
people on my Facebook because I still promote events, I’ve got like one and a half
thousand people on my Facebook and a lot of those were in the subcultures, not
all, but a lot of them were, but I also allowed people from the fashion business on
my Facebook, which I actually regret a bit now, because a lot of them are just
mining me for information, and they started flipping out when I started posting
literally my friends pictures up, pictures I’d took of my friends, I’m thinking why
are they flipping out? They’re just my mates, and I realized it’s because all this
subculture stuff is like really you know, important in the fashion business now
but I didn’t know that. I mean I literally swear to you even this time last year I
didn’t know why they were all flipping out, I literally didn’t know ‘cause I just
wasn’t in that world, and then I put all the pictures up with Jeremy Deller, well
Jeremy just took these pictures and everyone’s going mental I’m thinking why are they all going mental it’s just like, and it’s just Jeremy you know what I mean, Jeremy’s been on my Facebook for years you know, it’s not a big deal. It is quite funny all of this but yeah, amazing people and again because a lot of these, they live fast die young, are dying now, a lot of them are from Wales funnily enough.

AH: Did you wear any T-shirts with slogans on?

F: God, I’m trying to think. I mean they had, when punk started to get bigger, T-shirt companies would jump on the imagery to make T-shirts, but again, we all saw that as a arriviste, you know what I mean, a bit pseud-y, you know the real punks were more a bit low key than that you know what I mean, we would be into customizing or making our own clothes or you know, the wealthier punks, and they weren’t necessarily posh, a lot of these working class boys were earning really good money being builders and painters and decorators and stuff like that, they would be wearing the Westwood and stuff like that, but to wear a T-shirt with the Clash picture on, I think I did have a couple actually, I think I did have a Clash T-shirt, and I think I had a couple, but to wear a lot of them it was a bit like you’d just joined punk you know, there was very much a thing in punk about, people were very obsessed about being “genuine” you know, and not just in it because it was a fad, you know, that’s why you had to cut off your hair, because otherwise who were just seen as someone who was like, hopping on a bandwagon, and even now it’s hilarious actually that on Facebook there’s quite a lot of punk groups, and they have these massive battles and arguments with each other all the time, you know about who was there first, and that was I think again shocked a lot of people, because I never talked about being a punk up until very recently, two years ago, a lot of people didn’t realize how early I’d been a punk you know, compared to you know, I wasn’t that early because the real, the Sex Pistols and all that, they were all punks in ’76, but for a fan I was relatively early and so a lot of people were really shocked because you know, they thought I was making it up and it wasn’t until I started posting pictures or you know I’ve got stuff from Adam, from Adams and the Ants, people are like blimey, Fiona’s not making it up she really was on the punk scene, because I think a lot of people just thought I was you know, blagging basically. These are really rare, the badges, they were just used in an exhibition recently, and badges were really important then, I mean you’ve gotta remember again we didn’t have all this materialism that’s around now and to have a badge, to get these would have been very rare at the time even, so to have one of these it was like an insider thing, you know this was, and again something I’m only just remembering, looking at my punk diary, about how really important that was, that you were part of the in crowd, that you were the, sort of the most hardcore fan, you weren’t just someone who’d latched onto something ten minutes ago, this was all very important, so to have like a collection of badges like this would have given you a lot of status within your group of people, yeah, well that was all very important actually. Again, something when you go to exhibitions you don’t understand that because it’s hard to convey that in a photograph.

The other thing like I say was the violence, which was so prevalent, again very good descriptions in here about the violence, and about how the Sex Pistols were constantly being attacked, which is one of the reasons why they got fed up, you
know, it was quite stressful being in a punk band to say the least, I mean the other thing people started this gobbing thing, I don’t know where it came from it was horrible, that’s how I got Glandular Fever and got ill, people would literally spit at the band, and the band would be covered in gob! That didn’t happen at the beginning but when it got popular, I mean can you imagine that now? I don’t know who started it, that’s very interesting actually, but people would bring up phlegm and spit it at the band and the bands literally, towards the end of '77, and '78, maybe '78, would be covered in gob, and you know a lot of people got out of it because it’s like you’re getting beaten up, you’re getting covered in gob, you know, it’s like, that’s why I left for the Rocking scene which was all about vintage, and again it’s quite interesting, I went to a Rocking funeral the other day of a friend of mine, and there were five hundred people there, all from the Rocking scene. I’m going to a Rocking wedding this weekend, and a lot of them are still making their living from selling vintage clothing, you know they’re still doing all that, they never changed, they never got out of it.

That’s a really weird thing that’s happening because again, when I did the Sign of the Times stuff which I know is not what you’re researching but I had all of these photographs in a box and I had a lot of pressure from people to do a book and I didn’t wanna’ do a book and the reason I didn’t wanna’ do a book is a lot of people died in the acid house scene you know through excess or whatever, and I knew it was going to be very painful to look in that box and again, they didn’t understand that and when I looked through the photos, and Jeremy Deller doesn’t even know this actually I haven’t even told him this, I actually cried for two weeks, I had nightmares and cried because these were my friends you know, and you know, these scenes are quite extreme and quite extreme behavior comes out of these scenes, I mean like I say what saved me was I was very wary of drugs, again you know being fifteen on the punk scene, quite a few of the punks got into Heroin and I saw that, and I could see where it was gonna lead and in a way it was a good thing, it put me off, although I don’t think I was ever that personality anyway. But a lot of people were and a lot of people died along the way. I mean, that’s another thing about posting up pictures I sometimes feel a bit weird about it is that a lot of the men in the pictures are dead. They take more risks generally you know, they drink, well in those days and now apparently I’m reading young people don’t drink as much but in those days it was a sign of maleness to drink and take drugs and you know, all of that, so they take more risks generally. I think if I could say why have they’ve all died, I’d say they had much more risky behavior generally than women.

And these [Rocking scene] people aren’t doing it as a fashion, they just never changed. It’s mad and I suppose all that is ending now in a way isn’t it. Do you have that in a generation where people are so obsessed with- oh the vintage scene’s quite big isn’t it? I mean I’ve got a lot of friends from the Rocking scene who are making a lot of money out of with repro vintage thing, they’re doing really well with all of that, yeah. I suppose it’s a different world now, it’s like I say to you we all did it as an escape, we did it because it was actually quite hard to function in the normal world, the normal world was so straight. You’ve got to remember people in the city were wearing bowler hats, like properly wearing bowler hats in the late seventies, do you know what I mean? And if you weren’t from a certain class or certain background there were jobs that weren’t even open to you, if you were a woman there were jobs that weren’t open to you. In
the late seventies one of my first jobs after I left uni, I was only there a year, was I went to work at Lloyds of London, but Lloyds of London wasn’t in the flashy building it is now, it was in an old fashioned building in the city, and I went to be an insurance broker just to please my dad, bless him you know, he was so fed up with me, and so I went to be an insurance broker and I think there was I don’t know how many thousand people worked in this building, there was something like forty women at the time that I was there? This was how mad it was, we’d have to go up to, this is where I sound like a granny now, there would be these wooden desks with these old farts sitting there, they’d just sit there all day doing the claims, and you’d have to go up with a folder, and they’d go ‘so what d’you want Miss Cartledge?’ and then they’d deliberately make you wait and just say literally to your face ‘oh women and foreigners shouldn’t be allowed in this building.’ Because remember there’s no PC then, all this PC stuff has happened later you know. It was a different world, a different world and maybe because of that it pushed us into all of these subcultures, you know, and then you could make a whole living just out of being in a subculture you didn’t actually have to pay any notice of the normal world at all, you know.
Appendix 4. Email interview with Paul Gorman

15 Feb 2016

Hi Paul,

I hope you don't mind me emailing, I got your email address from your website.

I'm currently researching the role of politics in punk clothing for my undergraduate dissertation at the University of Brighton, which involves analysing some Sex and Seditionaries T-shirts within the Brighton Museum collection. These include the Cambridge Rapist T-shirt, the Destroy swastika T-shirt (which I've dated as 1975 and 1977 respectively - does that sound right?) and the reason for my emailing you, the Prick Up Your Ears T-shirt.

Basically, I'm trying to find out who actually drew the gay orgy illustration that appears on the latter, or find out when it came from. I know you've spoken about the T-shirt on your blog so I was wondering if you have any ideas, or could point me in the direction of where I might find out? I can only find mentions of it in passing (other than your 'I'm from the gutter. Don't forget it because I won't' article) and I'm stumped!

Any thoughts would be greatly appreciated as your blog has been a huge help thus far.

Kind Regards

Alice Hudson


Dear Alice

Thank you for writing. More than happy to help.

The Prick Up The Ears design was modified by McLaren from a t-shirt he acquired in The Pleasure Chest, a sex shop on Santa Monica Blvd in the area of Los Angeles known as Boystown in January 1978 immediately after the Sex Pistols had split up at the end of their US tour.

McLaren was constantly on the search for unusual and outsider ephemera to be used as source material for incorporation into fashion designs and graphics (the two half naked Cowboys [1975] came from a book of illustrations by Jim French bought by McLaren in New York for example, the images for Vive le Rock! and The Killer Rocks On [both 1972] came from rock'n'roll show cards and the repeat print used in the Nostalgia Of Mud [1982] and Witches [1983] collections came from a 1958 folk music LP cover).

I do not have the name of the illustrator of the Prick Up Your Ears design to hand, though know it is in my notes somewhere. Let me have a dig.
I do, however, have the original t-shirt which McLaren bought in LA; it is interesting to note the ways in which he adapted to reflect the Mohican hair-styles etc then just coming in when the shirt was first published in late 1978.

All best
Paul

16 Feb 2016

Hi Paul,

Thanks for your speedy reply.

I’m thrilled that you know where McLaren found the original Prick Up Your Ears illustration, that’s a huge help. I’d read about the origin of the Cowboys design on your blog so I thought it might be a similar situation where it was a copy/adaptation of previously existing work. If you could dig out the name of the illustrator that would be fantastic! Could you possibly send me a photo of the original T-shirt that McLaren bought in LA? It would be great to use as reference in my paper (it’s unlikely that it will be published anywhere but in the event that it does I will check back with you about permission to use it).

I’ve attached some photos for you from the Brighton museum collection, as you can see they have a few different items. A couple of them (definitely the Destroy one) were used as part of Brighton Museum’s Subversive Design exhibition that ran from Oct 2013-March 2014, which is how I discovered they were there. They also have two pairs of bondage trousers and a bondage jacket, although I’m focusing on the symbolism in the T-shirt designs for my research project (and specifically discussing the three I mentioned, although others may enter the discussion).

Kind regards
Alice

16 Feb 2016

Hi Alice

The t-shirts of the period quite often - though not always - had the black tape labels and the muslin’s the white square ones.

Will dig out the shirt soon and see if I can track down the illustrator’s name.

BTW do you have all you need re the other shirts - the genesis of Destroy and the involvement of Alex McDowell and the rationale behind the elements of CR?

Best
P
Hi Alice

Feel free to use as much or as little of this as you like but please credit me as the source.

Best
Paul

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CAMBRIDGE RAPIST

This is one of Malcolm McLaren’s most misunderstood artworks.

Vivienne Westwood even wrote in her biography that she believed it celebrated the activities of the violent sexual criminal of the title, but, in fact, McLaren produced the design as not only as a critique of contemporary British society but also a response to the media obsession in 1975 with Peter Cook, a serial rapist who preyed over a number of months on female students in Cambridge, disguising his identity by wearing a leather hood.

Such hoods were popular among fetishists, and usually only available through mail-order ads and underground distributors, but were openly stocked in Sex, the fashion boutique operated by McLaren with Westwood at 430 King’s Road, along with a range of sexual paraphernalia to be worn publicly as accessories to the clothing collections they designed together, including the series of sexually explicit and statement t-shirts.

The arrival of police at the shop in the spring of 1975 to investigate a rumour that Cook had acquired his hood there (as it turned out, Cook had fashioned it himself) prompted McLaren to speculate on the power of the garments he was selling.

Immediately he printed on the front of a white t-shirt a stark monochrome photograph of the front of the hood; this was not to celebrate the rapist’s activities, but to comment on the way Cook had captured the public imagination and was front page news in the manner usually reserved for celebrities, pop stars and politicians.

It was also a quote of the masked image on the cover of King Mob Echo 1, the 1968 magazine produced by the UK Situationist cell with which McLaren was associated. See attached.

That criminals were aligned with other societal outsiders as worthy of celebration by the Situationist International was another element which attracted McLaren.

But only a handful were made with the single image of the mask. In typical
McLaren style, the design was soon embellished with stylistic and satirical elements.

Along the top he added in decorative script to musical notation the first line from The Beatles song A Hard Day’s Night: “It’s been a hard day’s night...” Given the ordeals suffered at the hands of the Cambridge Rapist’s victims concurrent with the production of the design, this made for a brutal and arresting visual statement.

Across the mask, in ‘marquee’ lettering with graphic stars picked out in hot pink and fluoro green, McLaren blazoned the name ‘Cambridge Rapist’ as though it were a pop star’s pseudonym.

At bottom left he placed a professional portrait of The Beatles’ manager Brian Epstein, who had died from an overdose in 1967. Next to that he positioned a parody of a newswire report of the death, suggesting that Epstein’s death had in fact been the result of sado-masochistic practices (this was based on gossip McLaren had been told by the art dealer Robert Fraser, who had known Epstein well).

In a final flourish, the entire artwork was given dimension by being double printed, with one screen slightly off register, providing a newspaper-style shadow outline.

Cook was caught in the summer of 1975 and subsequently imprisoned for life, and his exploits remained fresh in the public mind while the Cambridge Rapist was stocked at 430 King’s Road and worn on-stage by members of the Sex Pistols between 1975 and 1978, thus adding to their shock value.

In this period, McLaren was challenged by journalist David May on the sale of the design*

McLaren, as a follower of the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich - who argued that modern neurosis stemmed from sexual and socio-economic conditions - explained that it was in line with the project at Sex: to use fashion, media and popular culture to blow the lid off British sexual repression on the basis that Cook in particular and violence against women in general were products of sublimation:

"Look, why treat [Cook] as an individual? Why not treat him as a symbol of what is happening to everybody...I’m saying that if everyone did wear these clothes then this particular island, and all the violence that has been pushed down, would fucking explode!"


DESTROY

Destroy is a Nihilist design collage made in the early spring of 1977 after the Sex
Pistols had achieved worldwide notoriety, sparked by their use of foul language on teatime TV and their subsequent antics which resulted in the termination of their contract with record company EMI.

At the time of its conception and realisation, their manager Malcolm McLaren was engaged in power plays with UK and international record labels interested in signing the group, including Richard Branson’s Virgin and A&M, whose head office in Los Angeles he visited.

During a television interview in this period, McLaren said: "You have to destroy in order to create," and was much preoccupied with taking on the music industry and bringing down the major conglomerates which controlled it.

One evening at the West End offices of his management company Glitterbest he poured his energies into a new disruptive design for sale in Seditionaries, the recently recast manifestation of the boutique he operated with Vivienne Westwood at 430 King’s Road.

With the group having made a bold social announcement with the title of their debut single Anarchy In The UK, he was keen that the momentum of chaos and upheaval be maintained and later told me*: “I wanted to make an ultimate, bigger statement, one that would set out to bring down all established principles to do with order, power and right and wrong.”

Each of the symbols was detourned in one way or another. Inside a large circle - the most simple and powerful of all symbols - the swastika was placed by McLaren as the embodiment of evil as well as for its properties as a symbol of provocation three decades after the end of WW2, but printed in colours such as industrial grey (with the circle in blood-red), lime green and acid yellow (both against navy blue).

A postage stamp bearing the decapitated head of the Queen represented the over-turning of order and a drawing of Christ on the cross (taken from one of McLaren’s favourite artworks, Matthias Grunewald’s macabre altar pieces) represented good, but was inverted.

At bottom right of the design, McLaren hand-lettered the lyrics from the first verse of Anarchy In The UK.

At this time, the Central School of Art student Alex McDowell - who had booked one of the Sex Pistols first gigs and is now a leading Hollywood set designer - was overseeing the screen-printing and production of Seditionaries t-shirt designs and on viewing the artwork suggested that it needed a title. McLaren proposed the word ‘destroy’, drawing it in suitably distressed lettering on a piece of paper to be incorporated into the artwork.

A couple of prototypes were produced with the title in block capitals to which was appended the Pistols’ first record company, so that it read: DESTROY EMI’. Guitarist Steve Jones wore one to the press call outside Buckingham Palace
where the group signed to A&M in March 1977.

In this period Westwood had worked up the design for a new style of top to feature in Seditionaries. Destroy - complete with shattered lettering and deliberately printed off-register - was introduced as the first artwork on the front of this long-sleeved muslin garment and worn by lead singer Johnny Rotten in performance, photographs and videos when promoting the release of the second single God Save The Queen.