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When the World Falls Apart:
Punk and 1970s Britain

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1. INTRODUCTION

For once in my life I've got something to say
I wanna say it now for now is today
A love has been given so why not enjoy
So let's all grab and let's all enjoy!

If the kids are united
Then we'll never be divided
             (Sham 69 , "If The Kids Are United")

It has been forty years since the Clash and the Sex pistols released their first albums and the status of punk has changed a lot. Nowadays it is more usual that people may wear colourful hair, piercings or tattoos than it was decades ago. It is also more common that pop songs feature the presence of songs with sexual themes or national and/or social criticism. Punk has been reduced to teenagers whose desire for breaking the rules and being different to their parents is bigger than their principles and their praises for punk idols. The Sex Pistols disappeared long time ago and the dream of the Clash also vanished decades ago. Punk has finally been commodified and accepted and, consequently, its power seems to have vanished in the crowd of teenagers with spiky colourful hair, leather jackets and safety pins. Musicians have become superstars and they are idealised by new generations of punks, although in its origins punk musicians were considered ordinary people, as the members of the audience were.

However, as a cultural expression punk is also a window onto the social and cultural forces of its time. What is more, it can be approached as an agent of history. As John Storey notes, in a different context, cultural manifestations like punk rock "do not simply reflect history, they make history and are part of its processes and practices" (3). The word "punk" is usually linked to rebellion, anarchy, chaos and uncontrollable youths resisting social and parental norms. The situation that young British people were forced to live during the 1970s was the perfect breeding ground for punk to emerge and

brought with it a medium for teenagers to express themselves. However, punk has been applied a lot of stereotypes: punks are considered violent, terrorists, drug addicts, bizarre and trouble makers. Nonetheless, llittle is said about the social dimension of their rebellious nature, for their asking for rights or their activism against racism; in brief, little is said about their role as history-makers as insinuated by Storey. Some people even tend to group all of them as racists, since some neo-Nazis have adopted punk as music style. Punk suffers from the same problem as other subcultures or groups which differ from the mainstream: society only defines it through a bunch of stereotypes which may or not be true, but which are the cause of misjudgements of the movement, derived from not understanding why it emerged and for which purpose. Punk was born because the political, social and economic situation required it: working class youths were disappointed, could not understand their inferiority and were tired of people who wanted to impose some morals on them that they were unwilling to accept. Moreover, since rock stars were more frequently considered to have sold-out as a consequence of their distancing from their origins, that usually were working-class, punks took charge and created working class music for the working class youth.

This dissertation considers the cultural dimension of the punk movement that emerged in Britain in the seventies, a chaotic decade when the country was mired in an economic depression that mainly affected the working classes, British society became more and more conservative, and discrimination by class and race grew every day. It focuses on the first albums of the two best known punk bands from that era: the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols* and the Clash's *The Clash*, both released in 1977. Focusing on a series of common topics and on how these topics relate with the broader musical panorama but also with the social changes Great Britain was going through at the time. Punk rock contributed to the innovation in music both by

introducing new subject matters and by giving its own twist to worn-out ideas about youth rebellion, a feature of rock music that had been present almost from the very beginnings of the genre – and most notably in the not-so-distant hippy movement of the late sixties – but that required a new impetus if music were to respond to and comment on the conservative turn of the seventies. Although punk rock has not received the critical attention that academics have given to other music genres, I will contend that, notwithstanding the unsettling appearance of performers and fans alike, punk was a rich cultural phenomenon that should be taken into account.

This is not to say that popular music in general and punk rock in particular have been completely overlooked by academia. In this dissertation I also want to consider the ways in which the cultural and social dimensions of rock music have been dealt with. From the study of the culture industry carried out by members of the Frankfurt School, in particular Theodor Adorno's multifaceted analysis of popular music, to, for example, Lawrence Grossberg's analysis of the conservative appropriation of rock music in *We Gotta Get Out of this Place*, researchers have shown how music, like literature or cinema, relates with and offers insights into the socio-historical context of certain periods of time. Moreover, although popular music is often regarded as a medium for the articulation of the experiences of a generation, it also contributes in the shaping of identity. In this respect, its positioning within the music market (and the market forces in general) is relevant. Punk rock occupies a contradictory space. Although it became part of the music industry, punk stood up against it from its beginnings. To this effect, the lyrics of the songs – and how much they differed from mainstream music – were crucial; what is more, if the songs made mainstream audiences feel offended, they were considered even better.

The thematic innovation is one of the main achievements of punk its focus was not on love or improving society. The musicians dealt with issues like sex, drugs and other controversial topics. Punks used music to establish their own identity, which is not strange at all, but the importance lies on the way in which they did it: they broke with previous traditions and vehemently presented themselves as the opposite of the generations that came before. They constructed their own independent identity by presenting themselves as figures of chaos fighting against the adult's order and this became a recurrent idea in punk songs. The ideas of challenge and revolution which had been central to other music genres before were basic in punk songs as well, but punks focused on the state of revolution itself and not on the objectives of it, that is, on chaos and disorder. They also challenged everything in mainstream society and culture and, accordingly, they choose obscenity and ugliness over mainstream values. In brief, when they were faced with a choice, they chose everything that was not supposed to be chosen. Thus, punk stood up against what it everything that was taken for granted, against everything that was acceptable and, in so doing, showed the strength of the working class youths and opened spaces for them in a society that saw them as the waste of the budding neoliberal turn in politics and economics. Punk rock showed the kids of the British working class other ways of being part of society, an idea that seemed to have been forgotten at the same rate as punk was commodified. This paper focuses on how punk emerged in the 1970s, when rock stars started making big money and became more detached from their working class audience. More specifically, it analyses the first albums by the Clash and the Sex Pistols and the topics and ideas that came to symbolize the genre and that influenced the way youths would relate with culture and society from that moment onwards. But first I will comment on how the relation of music and society has been approached by academics.

2. ACADEMIA AND POPULAR MUSIC

Before dealing with punk, it is worth considering how academia has approached popular music. To cut a long story short, the interest in mass media and the commercialization of culture that arose as early as the 1920s and that took the form both of textual and ideological analyses determined the way popular music has been dealt with in the last decades. However, it has been the field of Cultural Studies where popular culture in general and popular music in particular have been more consistently and more thoroughly examined, thus providing theoretical tools and critical perspectives from which to approach cultural manifestations like punk rock. In his essay "The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities", Stuart Hall provides a description of how this discipline emerged and developed. According to Hall, it was not until after World War II that Cultural Studies emerged in Great Britain, and he considered it the consequence of a change caused by a rupture in British traditional culture. Although at the beginning it was not considered something serious because it mixed several disciplines, the creation of the Centre for Cultural Studies by Richard Hoggart, later replaced by F.R. Leavis (13), increased its position in the academic world. One of the basic ideas of this project was that culture emerges from the changes that the social and historical context undergoes. As John Storey notes, "Cultural Studies has always been an unfolding discourse, responding to changing historical and political conditions and always marked by debate, disagreement and intervention" (2), which points out to the basic idea that dominates Cultural Studies: culture organises and constructs history. What is more, since Marxism highly influenced Cultural Studies (Storey 3), it not only defends the idea that the essence of cultural artefacts depends on society and their historical context, it also empathises that under capitalism, the culture produced by that sort of society is tainted in inequality of gender, ethics and class (4). Thus, culture

contributes to the structuration and sculpting of history. As an illustration, the inequality of class that still existed during the seventies was one of the mainsprings that contributed to the emergence of punk.

From the perspective of Cultural Studies, music can be said to have had an enormous influence in how we see ourselves in relation with society and how we communicate our emotions and thoughts. Researchers such as Simon Frith or John Storey have dealt with music and society in some of their work. Frith, for example, usually examines rock music from a social perspective, that is, how music influences society and the individual. For Storey, who has approached music from a more theoretical perspective and without focusing on any single specific genre, music is a way of self-expression, both, the writer of the song and the listener use music as a medium through which they can state their feelings and thoughts (100). Thus, music is more akin to a cultural resource to build a sense of identity, but, as Frith observes ("Music and identity" 114), it is also a way of making sense of the world, even it implies annoying people, as in the case of punk. This is reflected, for instance, in the Sham 69's song that serves as an introduction to this dissertation. In this song, the band refers to the fact that they are expressing what they think and encourages other youths to do the same. Therefore, these characteristics should be taken into account when analysing the reasons why teenagers spend so much time listening to music: it is through music that they forge their identity as they enter adult society and face new challenges and responsibilities in a world that they do not fully understand. In a sense, as Story notes (102), this is the reason why industry of popular music has been is focused into the world of teenagers.

However, the music industry cannot completely control what people listen to, nor can it control what people "do" with the music they listen to. Listeners tend to be

classified mainly into two groups, those who listen to commercial music, and those who reject this sort of music and rebel against it (Storey 102). Although things are more complex than a classification of this sort might suggest, the music that these two groups listen to also differ in the sense that commercial music fosters pseudo-individualization and passivity from the listener (94) while the other types of music usually do not. The notion of pseudo-individualization was mentioned by Storey and refers to the fact that commercial music is always more or less the same and the audiences do not remember it or simply do not realise that what they are listening to had been listened to previously. Pseudo-individualization and passivity are quite interrelated because passivity refers to not listening carefully to a song and, therefore, not spotting that those songs are more or less always the same, which would promote a specific identity (or pseudoidentity). On the other hand, among those who reject commercial music, various types of what Theodor Adorno coined "radical music" (in Laing 96) may be identified, and punk can be considered one of those types or genres. Finally, it could happen that one brand of the so-called "radical music" were made with the deliberate intention of shocking the audience, and these songs would produce what Laing terms a "Shock effect" (96). This effect is achieved by working with unusual elements with the intention of annoying those people who have some fixed ideas about what should and should not be present in a song or a concert. As Laing states, "the production of shock-effects involves confronting an audience with unexpected or unfamiliar material which invades and disturbs the discourse to which that audience is attuned" (98). This was very common in seventies punk, since it was born in a country almost engulfed in chaos, with an increasingly conservative society, where youths were seen as social threat only for being more open-minded.

3. BRITAIN IN THE SEVENTIES

1970s Britain has been conscientiously discussed by authors such as Andrew Marr, who provided a political and economic perspective, and Arthur Marwick, who adopted a more social stand. All things considered, the decade of the seventies in the United Kingdom is considered a chaotic era. In contrast to the sixties, the seventies are often regarded as a very dark period in the history of Britain and the western world at large. For Marr, for example, during the seventies "the world seemed bleaker and more confusing" (359). In fact, the mood Marr conjures up resembles that of a punk rock song: pessimistic and chaotic. The decade was marked by the increasing unemployment rates as well as by the high number of strikes, which reflected the rebellious mood of the working class. The UK miners' strike of 1972 is often considered the turning point (Marr 337) for its controversy and influence, but there were many others during the seventies, most notably the dustmen's strike in the winter of 1978 that covered the country in rubbish and dirt for weeks creating a harrowing environment. However, the labour conflict with the worst consequences was the strike organised by the oil workers in 1973, which caused constant power cuts in order to save fuel. Then, the national situation was even more pessimistic and unpleasant, especially for the poor. But unemployment and strikes were not the only features that marked the course of the country during the seventies. The reduction of taxes and the unlimited borrowing of money caused inflation to rise to unprecedented figures (325). On top of this, the economic situations further aggravated when the stock market felt, forcing the government to ask for a loan to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Black 124). The resultant crisis was so serious in Britain that it almost led the country to bankruptcy. The crisis affected every corner of the state, although the most victimized sector of society was the poor and the working classes (who were often the same).

Additionally, as in any other crisis, the welfare state and public services in general, were highly damaged.

In political terms, the situation in Britain was similarly turbulent, chaotic and tense. The decade began with the conservative Edward Heath in government; he was replaced in the elections of 1974 by Labourist Harold Wilson, who retired two years later and was succeeded by Jim Callaghan. By the time the decade came to an end the Tories were back in government, capitalizing on the so-called Winter of Discontent (1978-1979) and on the mood of disillusionment that reigned in the entire country. According to Robert Sounders (28), the disappointment of people was used by conservatives:

> As a strategy document warned in 1978, "people are fed up with 'chance', and with new systems that 'do not' work". Voters did not want "radical upheaval, based on promises of a Brave New World", and would "no longer believe politicians' promises of a better times ahead.

Although the victory of the Tories was slightly surprising, the conservative party had been preparing for it for the whole decade with Margaret Thatcher as the new leader (Hall, "The Neo-liberal Revolution" 718). They defended the privatization of public services, the return to Victorian values, the preservation of national traditions, individualism, and the demonization and stigmatization of the working classes and, most strongly, of the trade unions that Thatcher so much despised (712).

From a more social perspective, the seventies were characterised by the generational gap between the old and the new generations and by being unstable. One the one hand, the seventies was a conservative decade, in contrast to the sixties, which put added emphasis on rebellion and social progress. For this reason, it is not surprising that, as authors such as Matthew Grimley claim, that the triumph of Margaret Thatcher in the 1979 elections meant "a reaction against permissiveness in 1970s Britain" (79),

because, as mentioned above, Thatcher had been the whole decade taking profit from the socially and politically conflictive situation of Britain. Nonetheless, it is considered that tolerance increased during this decade (Marwick 244-245). However, this may be due to the presence of the youth who stood up against the adults in many aspects, such as the topic of sex. The issue of sex meant a lot of problems for parents since teens were leaving behind, more and more, old ideas of sexuality. In broad terms, there were two main tendencies among adults at the time, either being tolerant and accepting those changes or opposing the new sexual mores (251). Nevertheless, teens were perceived as being violent and involved in vandalism and the presence of violence and the use substances such as heroine or cannabis among young people grew. But these were not the only attitudes that changed, the idea of class also changed during the seventies. During the seventies there was a growing awareness of the class divide in Britain, and it was more common to have it talked about publicly than it had been decades before. The expansion of TV and new leisure activities influenced by cultures from countries such as the United States, where social class was not so important, made people have the false impression that the differences between classes were disappearing (209). However, as mentioned above, the working class was negatively affected by the crisis in social and economic terms, and punk emphasises this. In fact, the distinction between classes still moulded the everyday life of people: the pubs they visited, the places where they lived, the schools they went and even the people they spoke with, all were determined by their social class. In addition to class conflicts, racism also increased during this decade (116). In this context, punk can be said to have evolved out of the hypocrisy of society, which presented a façade of equality while, at the same time, was harming and discriminating the weakest groups of society. The working class youth grew up in a country where they were considered as inferior, stupid, and savages, where their

opinions were not heard or considered important, and where people was increasingly disappointed. Punk was the result of this; it was a reaction from working class youths who fought for a place in society.

4. THE EMERGENCE OF PUNK IN BRITAIN

In the context of the seventies described above the variety of popular music was enormous. Rock music, which was beginning to be considered a serious musical genre, branched into many different ramifications that co-existed, informed each other and developed under the same conditions. Seventies music was, in very general terms, characterized by the abandonment of politically conscious music in favor of spectacle and the so-called arena rock, commercial rock music intended for big audiences in huge venues like the Rainbow Theatre or the Earls Court Exhibition Centre, both in London. Not until the enormous success of the Beatles, who was one of the first bands to play in a stadium, it was unusual to organize a concert in such places. This new kind of rock was also interested in the newest technological innovations in the fields of sound and performance, thus putting the personal sensory experience over social concerns. The emergence of punk, with its rudimentary equipment and lo-fi approach to sound, must be viewed in this context. The changes both in the music and in the music industry revealed by these spectacles of sound and gimmicks and the appeal they had for adult audiences contributed to the development of punk and the form it took.

The audience was an important element in the success of arena rock genre. It was more and more addressed to adults (not in vain it would soon be known as adult-oriented rock) and, needless to say, attendance to the shows required a good economic situations. Genres like progressive rock, for example, was more widely consumed by middle-class young and not-so-young people with higher education and from stable

economic backgrounds. Likewise, hard rock was turning into spectacle and increasingly being addressed to people of all ages and all walks of life with money to spend. As a result, those bands made huge amounts of money and appeared increasingly distant from the working classes. In their shows, spectacle and hedonism were put above the social strains faced by the people. As David Simonelli notes (182), as the time went by and they started playing in the United States in order to make more money, they started being labelled as "sell outs" and created the need for a different kind of music that connected with and addressed the challenges of the new working classes (and out-of-work classes) that emerged from the economic turn of the seventies. However, the dire socio-economic situation of the time cannot be seen as inevitably giving birth to one specific type of music with concrete inescapable characteristics, nor were things as clear-cut as my brief account might suggest. The same context saw the birth of genres like glam rock, which situated somewhere between rock and pop, addressed the working classes, shamelessly embraced popular music as a commodity, put the emphasis on the good times and promoted personal pleasure and an unhealthy obsession with glitter. Faced with the same social situation, glam rock seemed criticise the hypocrisy of the supposed anti-materialistic buffs of progressive rock. What audiences found appealing in glam rock was the fact that, in general, it was quite a provincial movement and, strange as it may sound, it shares with punk its working-class values and the critique of previous genres' hypocrisy.

In this context of "sell-outs", chaos and disappointment, punk sprang as a reaction. It was born with an outstanding aversion against those rock stars who distanced themselves from audiences while their bank accounts got larger by the day. In general, punks were the antithesis of the professionalization and refinement that characterised rock stars, although, at the same time, they could not avoid becoming

professionals themselves. This, combined with the disappointment of belonging to an ill-treated working class, whose interests had been forgotten, was the catalysts for the birth of punk. Unlike US punk, which, according to Simonelli (242), emerged out of boredom, British punk was, mainly, the result of the socioeconomic situation.

The movement was characterised by several features. On the one hand, the recurrent tone in punk songs is quite apocalyptic, coinciding with the general mood of the seventies. "London calling", by the Clash, is clear example. Included in their 1979 album, it mentions nuclear conflicts, the arrival of zombies and the drowning of London. On the other hand, punk is also quite realistic. It was an autobiographical and transparent genre that depicted the lives of the musicians and that allowed the listener to identify with the songs, in contrast to its contemporaneous music. Punk's recurrent themes are diverse and they reflect punk's aspiration for uniqueness. Therefore, subject matters like "royalty, the USA, dead-end jobs, the police, watching television, record companies, sexual hypocrisy, war, anarchy and riots" (Laing 41) make this genre different from its contemporary mainstream popular music. Additionally, punk was commonly considered to be a movement characterised by violence, not only because of some the incidents that took place during punk concerts, but because of its most popular dance: pogo. This dance consisted in jumping without control and pushing and clashing against other members of the audience. As Simonelli states, punk was considered "the most frightening subculture to arise since rock and roll had shown up in Britain" (236). However, pogo was innovative in the sense that it blurred the boundary between the audience and the stage because people from the audience could jump into the stage and vice versa.

However, punk would have never existed if in the mid-seventies a lot of young people had not started founding bands as a method of creating the music they really

wanted to listen to. Those youths came from working-class backgrounds but many were also art-school students and conceived the movement both as a pastime and as a way of expressing themselves and creating art. The original line up of the Sex Pistols had Steve Jones as guitarist, Paul Cook on drums, Glen Matlock as bass player and Johnny Rotten (born John Lydon) as singer. Their manager was Malcom McLaren, an art school student who was quite interested in the Situationist movement. This movement was very controversial because, like punk, it wanted to shock the population by doing things that would offend people. According to Simonelli, "the Situationists engineered 'situations' designed to provoke an audience into confrontation with itself and society" (226). The Pistols' story was quite turbulent: they were interviewed by Bill Grundy on Thames TV but, due to an incident that involved an attempt by Grundy of reducing punks to a stereotype, alcohol and rude words from both sides, they appeared on tabloids' front pages and punk was marginalised from the rest of genres due to its supposed dangerous followers. Fired by EMI and A&M, they signed with Virgin Records the same year Matlock left the band and was replaced by the infamous Sid Vicious (born John Ritchie). It was on that label they published their album *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*. Their brief adventure came to an end in 1978, after their last show in the United States tour.

The Clash, in contrast, had a longer history and by the mid-eighties they were still active. However, at the beginning the line-up was very changing. Even when they recorded their first album, *The Clash* (1977), there was no permanent drummer. What it is commonly considered as the original line-up was made with Joe Strummer on vocals and second guitar, Mick Jones on lead guitar, Paul Simon on bass and Nick "Topper" Headon at drums. The Clash, in contrast to the Pistols, were more politically committed and this is illustrated by some of their lyrics and imagery, some of which were inspired

by the Notting Hill Carnival riots of 1976 in which the police charged against blacks. Likewise, the fact that they participated in the Rock Against Racism concert points to this idea. In 1977 they published their first album, *The Clash*, for CBS. Their fame grew as they published more albums but finally they broke up in the mid-eighties.

5. A BRAND NEW IDENTITY

Punk is a music genre and as critics like Frith have claimed, it has the power of constructing identities. Young working class punks found in music a means for communication that could express their sense of alienation (Davies 21) and how they felt as working class people during the seventies (Simonelli 231). The Clash's songs, "What's my name?" and "Hate and war" present some of these feelings. In lines 23 and 24 of "Hate and war" the band comments that survival as a working class is achieved only through violence. "What's my name?" presents a larger account of their feelings, not only as working class but just as youths living in the seventies. Therefore both are a good instance of the realism of punk; moreover, the difficulties of being a teenager and even the idea of lack an identity are frequently addressed in the latter, for instance "What the hell is wrong with me? / I'm not who I want to be" (ll.1-2).

Most important is that the punk identity was defined not only against the previous musical tradition, such as the arena rock, but also against its contemporary commercial music. They used the conventions of pop music in order to subvert and mock them. Pop songs were usually their target, not only when they made covers, but also when writing their own songs. The Pistol's "No feelings", for instance, does not depict the typical romantic relationships that appeared in hit songs like Elton John's "Your song". In fact, the Pistol's is completely different because, while John's is a declaration of love, the other deals with feelings like disdain and self-interest. Thus,

opposition to popular music is common in punk and in consequence they felt independent (Laing 153). Moreover, punk stood up against previous rock music, which was written by rock stars swimming in money, who played in huge arenas and who had grown distant from their working class audience every day. Therefore, punks were very critical with those they considered "sold-outs" and chose not to imitate them. In "Garageland", for instance, The Clash presents itself as a garage band who played in modest places in contrast to the enormous arenas where successful rock bands played at the time: "We're a garage band / We come from garage land" (5-6). Additionally, it was common that punk responded to the famous statement of the sixties of 'peace and love' in an attempt of define themselves against the previous generation. Songs such as "Anarchy in the UK" (by the Pistols) or "Hate and war" (by the Clash), are instances of this.

The fact that punk forged an identity based on opposing to dominant music conventions that had been unquestionably accepted by bands and audience also points out the fact that punk was identified as an independent movement from the mainstream and homogenous adult society and culture that was imposed from above and that seemed to have forgotten the working class. Therefore, punk can be considered as rebellious, an idea that is common in songs such as "Seventeen" by the Sex Pistols or the abovementioned "Garageland" by the Clash.

6. MUSIC FOR THE REVOLUTION

From its birth, one of the most outstanding characteristics of punk was its emphasis on revolution and its obsession with questioning the society of Britain: its order, values and culture. In general, punk was a reaction against the establishment (Simonelli 230), resistance from the alienated young working class punks not only against their social

position but also against becoming one of those passive members of the audience who did not payed attention to those popular tunes they loved. Thus, it is suitable to consider that, as David Simonelli (230) states, punk was "an effort to recreate the original rebellious nature of rock and roll". Then, as it happened with rock and roll, this was mainly the consequence of an unfair society in which the working class youths, the main figures and fans of punk rock, were discriminated and considered not worthy enough.

Therefore, punk was disappointed with society and decided to rebel against it. Additionally, since those who encouraged their discrimination were also promoting a particular way of behaving and of what was right and wrong, punks decided to question (and rebel against) what was considered socially acceptable. This punk critique addressed every corner of society, even the traditional distribution of social class that it was still quite influential in British society although the media attempted to give the impression of social homogeneity and no class differences. Their challenge towards what was normally considered socially acceptable led to their passion for everything that was obscene (Pottie 6) and to reject what mainstream society expected from them (Davies 14), they liked ugliness, being offensive and the use of controversial symbols such as the swastika, whose meaning was altered. For instance, it was commonly known that the Sex Pistols' bass player Sid Vicious liked to wear the swastika symbol just to shock people. Thus, songs such as "God Save the Queen" from the Pistols or "Career opportunities" from the Clash were really popular and they responded to these ideas.

As has been mentioned previously, TV and other media from the decade tended to present a reality of the country that was not real at all. Moreover, the fact that punks were not happy with the popular music and bands from their time, not only pop music but also rock, influenced the questioning and critique of this highly capitalist music

industry (Frith, "Post-Punk" 18). Their disagreement was so enormous that they created independent labels like Stiff Records (Simonelli 238). However, some of them paradoxically also signed with famous ones like Virgin Records or CBS. The Sex Pistol's song "EMI" is a great example of this. It was written after EMI and A&M fired the band and it indirectly accuses them of being hypocrites. According to them, the companies were only interested in money and popularity as it is stated in line 4, "They only did it cause of fame".

Finally, punk was also interested in emphasising, more than the end result of a revolution, the chaos that would emerge from it. The chaos of seventies' Britain and its feeling of ungovernability was the breeding ground where this idea appeared, which is presented by, for example Abrasive Wheels in "Burn 'em down" or the Adicts in "Viva la revolution". The revolutionary content also can be found in the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the UK", which makes clear references to revolutionary movements like the MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) or the IRA (Irish Republican Army), or the Clash's "White riot", which praises the blacks' bravery in fighting for their rights while they also ask for a similar revolution from the whites, "Blacks gotta lotta problems/But they don't mind throwing a brick (ll. 6-7) and "white riot, a riot of my own" (l.5).

Thus, punk's rebellion is closely linked with the fact that society and politicians were unfair with the lower classes while at the same time the media attempted to depict a completely different situation in which social class differences were not visible. Punks reacted against this and depicted their reality as accurate as possible in an attempt to tear down the set of increasingly conservative values and conventions that ruled British society in the seventies. Moreover, as a result, they were obsessed with being as offensive as possible for the rest of society.

7. SHOCK THE AUDIENCES

When punk is mentioned, people often picture young people with colourful Mohican hairstyles, black ripped clothes, spiky jewellery and faces covered with piercings. This image is quite shocking, as shocking as the lyrics of punk songs that offended lots of British people at that time. Basically, it can be considered that their purpose was just horrifying the general population and with no intention behind. As Jude Davies claims, "punk was pure shock and no meaning" (13). However, there was an intention behind which had strong consequences in society, not only because punk made society see the reality they did not want to see, but also because it showed its most disgusting part. What these punks wanted to do was criticise the dull and conservative society that had become so common in Britain in the seventies. The medium through which shock was conveyed was diverse, it goes from the controversial topics that each song dealt with (Laing 45), to the vocabulary used (95) to even the names of the bands (62): Sex Pistols, London SS, Vice Squad, the Adicts, the Vibrators, UK Subs, the Slits and Penetration, references to sex, drugs or violence are present even in the names of bands.

The shock effect derived from different sources. Vocabulary is an important element in achieving a shocking effect in the audience. It is usually obscene and a combination of rude words and terms related with violence and sexuality (Laing 95) is also common. For instance, "Protex Blue," by the Clash, contains many references to masturbation or pornography ─"Erotica my pocket, got a packet for you" in line 20 among many other. Therefore, punk responded to the return of Victorian values that the Tories were promoting during the seventies. Moreover, the fact that many adults did not accept the promiscuous attitudes of younger generations contributed to the presence of these ideas. An important question, thus, may be why they were so enthusiastic about annoying and shocking people. The answer, for Laing, is simple: pleasure (102). Punks

were pleased by knowing that mainstream society would consider unpleasant the lyrics they were writing, the way they were behaving, their ideas or even the way they dressed. Therefore mainstream listeners were shocked by songs such as the Pistols' "Submission", whose lyrics seem to describe a sexual encounter –"I feel your undercurrent flowing" (l.4) – or "Bodies", which presents a disgusting and vulgar approach to an abortion in lines such as line 26, "Gurgling bloody mess", that surely made the song quite repugnant for mainstream audiences. For that reason, many songs were written to shock people in a country where it was clearly set what was right or wrong. The Sex Pistols were very good at this and the fact that their manager, Malcom McLaren, was highly influenced by the Stuationists was crucial in the writing of songs such as "Anarchy in the UK", that seems to embrace anarchism in a very violent way – "I wanna destroy the passer-by" (l.8) – or "God Save the Queen", that is an alternative and improper version of the national anthem.

The importance of these ideas for punk and seventies society may be interrelated with the confrontation between tolerance and conservativism. While these punks wanted to progress socially, most part of the country was becoming more conservative every day and this was reflected in the victory of Thatcher in the 1979 elections. Therefore, punk and its shock effect can be considered a reaction against what was coming, that is, against the increasing nationalism, privatization, the destruction of the welfare state, the growing racism, class discrimination, the return of Victorian values, or even sexism that became even more real with the backlash that took place in the eighties. Punk was just an attempt to stop this. But this ability to shock people did not disappeared with the passing of time, even nowadays punk is still seen as something frightening, characteristic of social outcasts that only want to rebel in a world where such active rebellion is not generally well regarded by the general population.

8. CONCLUSION

Punk was born in a tense environment, in a country immersed in a strong economic crisis, where strikes were continuous and politicians seemed to have turned their backs on the working classes. It was born in a society which was quite conservative –although increasingly more tolerant thanks to some of the youngest sectors of society– and in which the generational gap was big enough to seriously confront adults and youths. Moreover, the fact that musicians had become more interested in money than in the plight of their working class audiences was essential in the appearance of punk, a genre that was typically revolutionary, not only because it asked for a revolution or for how shocking it was for mainstream audiences and previous generations, but also for the thematic innovation and the new approach to the process of creation of youths' identity.

This analysis of punk songs from *Never mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols* (1977) by the Sex Pistols and *The Clash* (1977) by the Clash, has resulted in a demonstration of their revolutionary spirit, of how they sought to present themselves in contrast to previous generations and, particularly in the case of the Sex Pistols' album, of their compelling desire to shock audiences by introducing controversial elements into their lyrics or dealing with controversial topics. Thus, punk should be considered a reaction against the context in which it was born. It was an attempt to stop the increasing lack of tolerance and the increasing discrimination of certain sectors of society. It was also the claim by young working class people for more equality and opportunities at a time when they felt that were not good enough, that they were inferior and that the whole nation did not care about them. They felt alone, frustrated and cheated and what they did was join together to denounce what they thought it was unfair and to present themselves as a revolutionary movement.

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APPENDIX

THE CLASH – *THE CLASH* (1977)

WHITE RIOT

White riot, I want to riot
White riot, a riot of my own
White riot, I want to riot
5 White riot, a riot of my own

Black man gotta lotta problems
But they don't mind throwing a brick
White people go to school
Where they teach you how to be thick

10 An' everybody's doing
Just what they're told to
And nobody wants
To go to jail

White riot, I want to riot
15 White riot, a riot of my own
White riot, I want to riot
White riot, a riot of my own

All the power's in the hands
Of people rich enough to buy it
20 While we walk the street
Too chicken to even try it

And everybody's doing
Just what they're told to
And nobody wants
25 To go to jail
White riot, I want to riot
White riot, a riot of my own
White riot, I want to riot
White riot, a riot of my own

30 Hey, you, standing in line
Are we gonna sign an agreement?

White riot, I want to riot
White riot, a riot of my own
White riot, I want to riot
35 White riot, a riot of my own

HATE AND WAR

Hate and war
The only things we got today
An' if I close my eyes
They will not go away
5 You have to deal with it
It is the currency
Hate, hate, hate, the hate of a nation
A million miles from home
And get war from the junkies
10 Who don't like my form
I'm gonna stay in the city
Even when the house fall down
I don't dream of a holiday
When hate an' war come around
15 Hate and war
The only things we got today
Hate and war
The only things

I have the will to survive
20 I cheat if I can't win
If someone locks me out
I kick my way back in
An' if I get aggression
I give 'em two times back
25 Every day it's just the same
With hate an' war on my back
Hate and war, I hate all the English, man
Hate and war, they're just as bad as wops
Hate and war, I hate all the politeness
30 Hate and war, I hate all the cops
Hate and war, I want to walk down any street
Hate and war, looking like a creep
Hate and war, I don't care if I get beat up
Hate and war, by any rotten Greek

WHAT'S MY NAME?

What the hell is wrong with me?
I'm not who I want to be
I tired spot cream an' I tried it all
I'm crawling up the wall

5   What's my name, name, name

I tried to join a ping-pong club
Sign on the door said "all full up"
I got nicked, fighting in the road
The judge didn't even know

10   What's my name, name, name

Dad go pissed so I got clocked
Couldn't hear the Tannoy so he lost the lot
Offers mum a bribe through the letter box
Drives you fucking mad

15   Now, I'm round the back of your house at night
Peeping in the window, are you sleeping tight?
I laugh at your locks with my celluloid strip
An' you won't know who came
What's my name, name, name

20   What's my name, name, name

PROTEX BLUE

Standing in the bog of a west end bar
Guy on the right leaning over too far
Money in my pocket gonna put it in the slot
Open up the pack see what type I got

5 I didn't want to hold you
I didn't want to use you
Protex, protex blue
All I want to do

It's a fab protective for that type of a girl
10 But everybody knows that she uses it well
It's a therapeutic structure I can use at will
But I don't think it fits my V.D. bill

I didn't want to hold you
I didn't want to use you
15 Protex, protex blue
All I want to do

Protex, protex blue
All I want to do

Sitting in the carriage of a bakerloo
20 Erotica my pocket, got a packet for you
Advert on the escalator on my way home
I don't need no skin flicks, I want to be alone

I didn't want to hold you
I didn't want to use you
25 Protex, protex blue
All I want to do, ooh, ooh, ooh

Johnny, Johnny!

GARAGELAND

Back in the garage with my bullshit detector
Carbon monoxide making sure it's effective
People ringing up making offers for my life
I just want to stay in the garage all night

5 We're a garage band (oh, oh, oh)
We come from garageland (oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh)

Meanwhile things are hotting up in the West End, alright
Contracts in the offices, groups in the night
My bumming slumming friends have all got new boots
10 And someone just asked me if the group would wear suits

We're a garage band (oh, oh, oh)
We come from garageland (oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh)

I don't want to hear about what the rich are doing
I don't want to go to where, where the rich are going
15 They think they're so clever, they think they're so right
But the truth is only known by guttersnipes
We're a garage band (oh, oh, oh)
We come from garageland (oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh)

Twenty-two singers, but one microphone
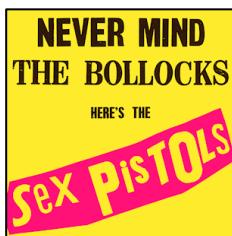20 Back in the garage
Five guitar players, but one guitar
Back in the garage
Complaints, complaints, what an old bag
Back in the garage, back in the garage
25 Back in the garage

BODIES

She was a girl from Birmingham	30 Fuck this
She just had an abortion	And fuck that
She was a case of insanity	Fuck it all
Her name was Pauline she lived in a tree	And fuck her fucking brat
5 She was a no one who killed her baby	She don't wanna baby that looks like that
She sent the letters from the country	35 I don't wanna baby that looks like that
She was an animal	Body
She was a bloody disgrace	I'm not no animal
Body	Body
10 I'm not an animal	An abortion
Body	40 Body
I'm not an animal	I'm not an animal
Dragged on a table in a factory	Body
Illegitimate place to be	I'm not an animal
15 In a packet in a lavatory	An animal
Die little baby screaming	45 I'm not an animal
Body	I'm not an animal
Screaming fucking bloody mess	An animal
Not an animal	I'm not an animal
20 It's an abortion	I ain't no animal
Body	50 Body
I'm not an animal	I'm not an animal
Mummy, Mummy, Mummy	I'm not an animal
I'm not an abortion	An animal
25 Throbbing squirm	I ain't no animal
Gurgling bloody mess	55 I'm not an animal
I'm not a discharge	I'm not an animal
I'm not a loss in protein	Mummy
I'm not a throbbing squirm…	

ANARCHY IN THE U.K.

Right
Now
Ha, ha, ha
I am an antichrist
5 I am an anarchist
Don't know what I want
But I know how to get it
I wanna destroy passer by
Cause I
10 Wanna be
Anarchy
No dogs body
Anarchy for the UK
It's coming sometime and maybe
15 I give a wrong time stop at traffic line
Your future dream is a shopping scheme
Cause I
I wanna be
Anarchy
20 In the city
How many ways to get what you want
I use the best
I use the rest

I use the enemy
25 I use anarchy
Cause I
Wanna be
Anarchy
It's the only way to be
30 Is this the MPLA
Or is this the UDA
Or is this the IRA
I thought it was the UK
Or just
35 Another
Country
Another council tenancy
I wanna be
Anarchy
40 And I wanna be
Anarchy
Know what I mean
And I wanna be
Anarchist
45 Get pissed
Destroy

SUBMISSION

I'm on a submarine mission for you baby
I feel the way you were going
I picked you up on my TV screen
I feel your undercurrent flowing
5 Sub mission
Going down down
Dragging her down
Sub mission
I can't tell you what I found
10 You've got me pretty deep baby
I can't figure out your watery love
I got to solve your mystery
You're sitting it out in heaven above
Sub mission
15 Going down down
Dragging her down
Sub mission
I can't tell you what I found
Well, it's a mystery
20 Under the sea
In the water
Sub mission

Going down down
Dragging her down
25 Submission
I can't tell you what I found
Cause it's a secret
Under the water
In the sea
30 It's an octopus rock
You've got me pretty deep baby
I can't figure out your watery love
I got to solve your mystery
You're sitting it out in heaven above
35 Sub mission
Going down down
Dragging her down
Sub mission
I can't tell you what I found
40 Sub mission
Sub mission
Going down, down, under the sea
I wanna drown, down, under the water
Going down, down, under the sea

33

E.M.I.

It's an unlimited supply
And there is no reason why
I tell you it was all a frame
They only did it cause of fame
5 Who
EMI
EMI
Too many people had the suss
Too many people support us
10 An unlimited amount
Too many outlets in and out
Who
EMI
EMI
15 And sir and friends were crucified
A day they wish that we had died
We are an addition
We are ruled by none
Ever, ever, ever
20 And you thought that we were faking
That we were all just money making
You do not believe we're for real
Or you would lose your cheap appeal
Don't you judge a book just by the cover

25 Unless you cover just another
And blind acceptance is a sign
Of stupid fools who stand in line
Like
EMI
30 EMI
Unlimited edition with an unlimited supply
That was the only reason we all had to say goodbye
Unlimited supply
EMI
35 There is no reason why
EMI
I tell you it was all a frame
EMI
They only did it cause of fame
40 EMI
I do not need the pressure
EMI
I can't stand those useless fools
EMI
45 Unlimited supply
EMI
Hello EMI
Goodbye A&M