

Eddie and The Hot Rods  
*Teenage Depression*  
Island, WIP6354, 1976  
Designer: Island in-house design group



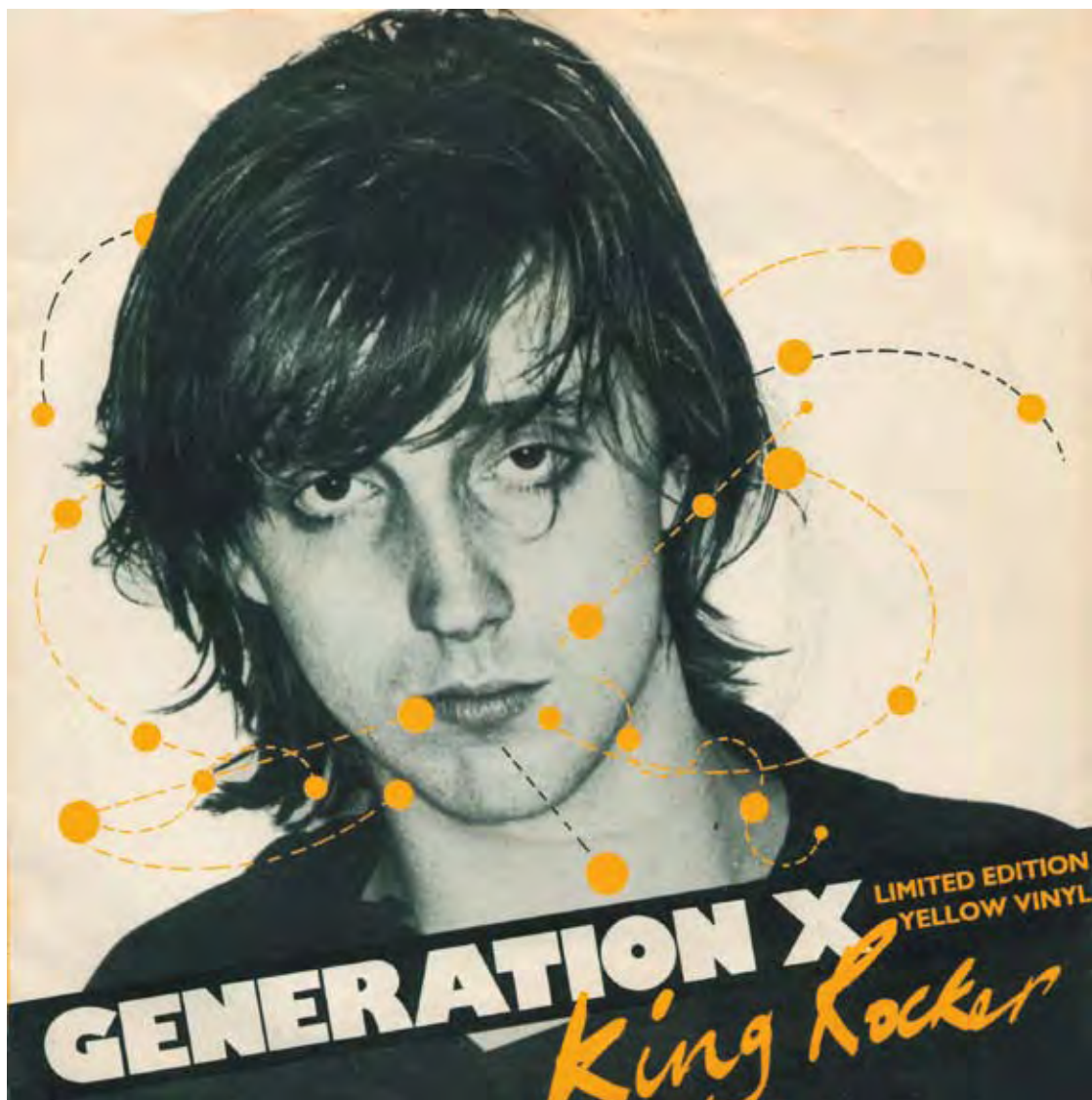
The Rezillos  
*I Can't Stand My Baby*  
Sensible Records, FAB1, 1977  
Designer: unknown

Application For Single Release.  
(BLOCK CAPITALS) to be completed in ink.

SONG TITLE		FILE NUMBER	
NAME OF GROUP		NAME OF RECORDING COMPANY	
CAT. NO.	SPEED		
	MODE		
PRODUCTION	STUDIO USED		
SIZE OF SINGLE	SONG PUBLISHERS		FOR OFFICIAL USE
	DATE OF RECORDING		

THE  
DESPERATE  
BICYCLES.  
OCCUPIED  
TERRITORY.  
SKILL.

REFILL RECORDS LTD. RR4. STEREO.



Generation X

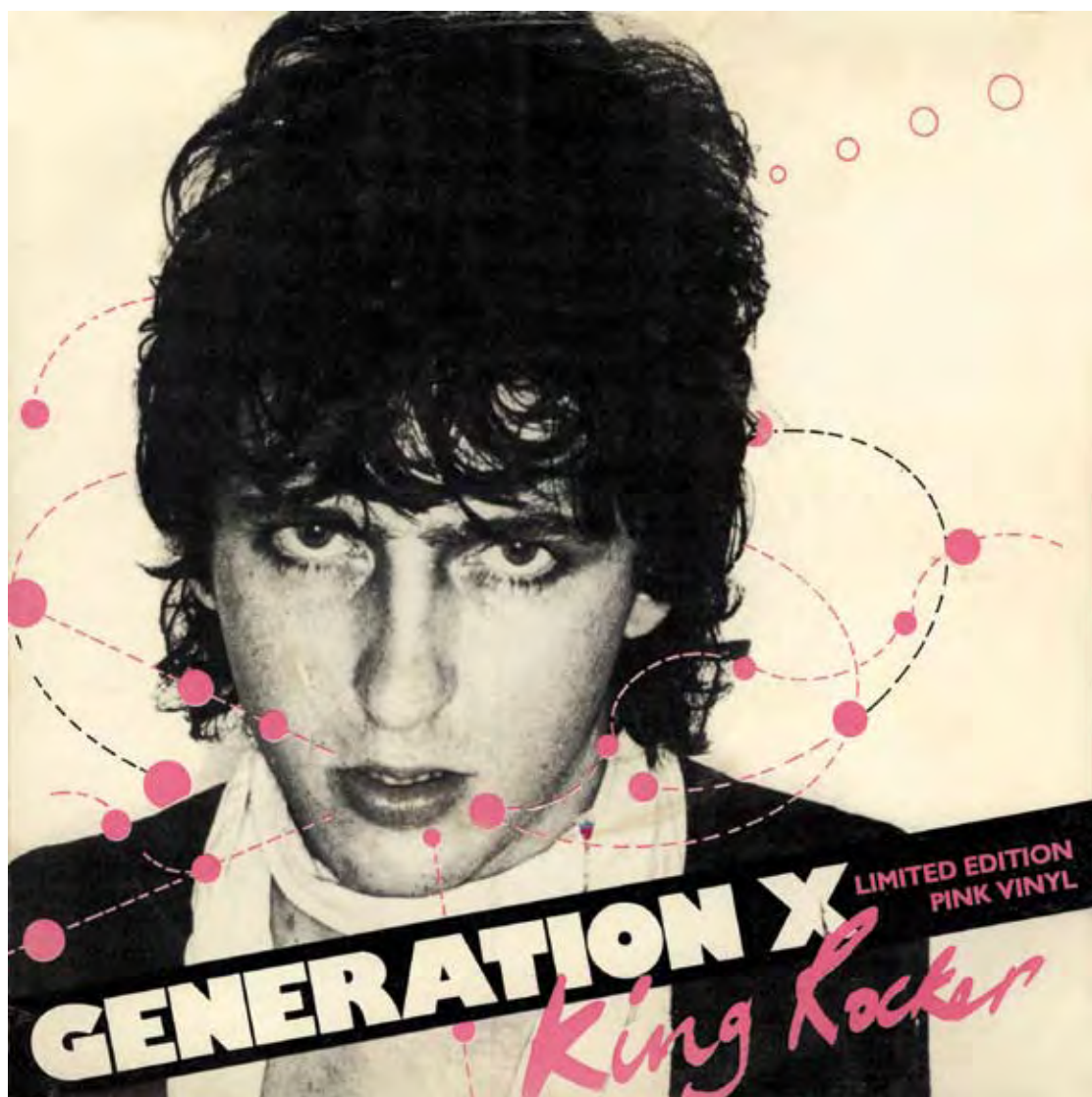
*King Rocker*

One of four variations [see page 38]

Chrysalis, CHS2261, 1979

Designer: unknown





Generation X  
*King Rocker*  
One of four variations [see page 38]  
Chrysalis, CHS2261, 1979  
Designer: unknown



Das Schnitz

4am EP

One of multiple versions [see page 42]

Ellie Jay Records, EJSP9246, 1979

Designer: group member



The Professionals  
*(Join The) Professionals*  
Virgin, VS426, 1981  
Designer: unknown



The Anti-Nowhere League  
*Woman*  
WXYZ, ABCD4, 1982  
Designer: unknown





The Anti-Nowhere League  
*Woman* (picture disc version)  
WXYZ, ABCDP4, 1982  
Designer: unknown



Crass  
*Who Dunnit?*  
Crass, 121984/4, 1983  
Designer: Gee Vaucher

## We're So Bored With London

### Part 1

Wayne Daly in conversation with Russell Bestley

*If you're going to reminisce, then you need to do it properly.*

The Mekons, '1st Guitarist' (CNT Records), 1982

I first became aware of Russell Bestley's PhD project *Hitsville UK: Punk In The Faraway Towns* while still a student of his at the London College of Printing. Bestley had recently begun the project—an exhaustive mapping and typological survey of seven-inch UK punk sleeves—and one afternoon offered to make a presentation of his work-in-progress to the part-time MA cohort, ostensibly as a demonstration of research methodologies but also, rather blatantly, as an excuse to show off his impressive record collection, exhibiting the kind of zealous pride that any good collector would. The small audience was receptive (apart perhaps from a couple of people who looked a bit puzzled by what was going on), engrossed by this largely ignored story of punk musicians from the provinces, writ large in rigorously assembled timelines and groupings of punk sub-genres.

Bestley's research is rooted in a number of specific agendas and inter-related themes: a micro-history of UK punk with emphasis on the regions; a study of the relationship between graphic design styles and methods and evolving UK punk sub-genres, regions and audience groups; a detailed investigation of the crossover between untrained DIY design approaches and 'professional' or art school 'knowing' design agendas (ie. DIY punk and Situationism); and establishing links between punk sub-genres, dress codes, music styles, audiences and graphic/visual form. Bestley sets himself in opposition to the centralised image of punk, and in doing so, re-frames our understanding of the subculture, allowing for a wider-spread and more inclusive history of punk. An exhibition of the work in early 2007, first in Southampton and then (perhaps ironically enough) at the BFI in central London was well-received; the sleeves, reproduced at actual size, seemed to surpass their modest, ephemeral origins and were rightfully celebrated as meaningful design artefacts.

A couple of weeks before writing this text, a reformed Sex Pistols performed seven sold-out stadium gigs in select major cities around the UK, 30 years after the release of *Never Mind the Bollocks*. There's nothing inherently wrong with this of course—who could blame them for wanting to take full advantage of this anniversary? But *Hitsville UK* is a timely rejoinder to the shopworn media image of punk and a crucial account of the significance of smallness and of locality.

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WD: In preparation for this piece, I was talking to someone the other day about your project. I explained it to them, quite well I think, and their response (to the notion of UK punk fandom existing beyond what was happening in London) was "But isn't that all obvious?". So... is it? It seems that punk and its many sub-genres have enjoyed obsessively detailed coverage in the media; Jon Savage's *England's Dreaming*, written in 1991, is often cited as the last word on the subject. People might be forgiven for wondering if there's anything left to say?



RB: Well, I think we need to start with a definition of some terms and by looking at the central questions raised by my research.

As you rightly suggest “UK punk fandom” existed well beyond central London, and many, if not all, historians and critics writing about punk—in whatever sense of the word—note what Jon Savage called the ‘diaspora’ of the subculture moving out into the provinces. Therein, really, lies my first issue with many of those ‘histories’. When Dick Hebdige wrote about punk as a youth subculture in his heavily-cited 1979 book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, it was seen as a contemporary, and radical, development in cultural studies which then went on to the reading lists of many college and university courses in the humanities and social sciences, as well as influencing the development of art and design histories and cultural theory. That’s pretty much where I encountered it first, though even at the time some of the assumptions and conclusions reached by Hebdige didn’t ring true to my own experience (a fact I was later to find out that was shared by others working in academia, such as David Muggleton, Gary Clarke and Roger Sabin).

The central presupposition to Hebdige’s theory was that innovation in youth subculture and identity starts with some kind of elite vanguard of style-makers, and that the take-up of this style by others later on, and in different regions, is somehow inferior. As Gary Clarke suggests in his criticism of this position: “Hebdige’s analysis begins with a heat wave in Oxford Street and ends in a Kings Road boutique”, and the importance or relevance of the ‘provinces’ is directly affected and underplayed as a result. This model of analysis, which actually plays a strong part in Savage’s writing, fails to take into account the way that styles—fashion, music, graphic design—can be adapted to create new versions of themselves, and that ‘innovation’ is not confined to a simple starting point. In simple terms, this means that later versions of ‘punk’—the morphing and changing visual and musical identities of things such as Hardcore, Oi, Anarcho Punk, the DIY Avant Garde, Post Punk, New Wave etc.—were innovative in themselves, and in many cases miles away from the styles of the ‘original’ innovators on Kings Road.

Another issue I’m engaged with is the way that regional ‘hubs’ of activity helped to develop some of these new punk sub-genres, and the way that the creators of the new styles—ie. the bands, labels, designers etc., as well as the fans—originated from further afield. I have limited my study to a particular period and to the UK—there is a much bigger story to be told internationally, but my own interest is in what might be termed a micro- rather than a macro-approach to history. As you say, there has been a huge amount of coverage of punk; in books, magazines, films, television and on the web over the past twenty years, with seemingly constant new marketing campaigns based on significant anniversaries of record releases, gigs, births and deaths. However, some stories are still untold. Some authors, like Jon Savage, Simon Reynolds, Clinton Heylin and John Robb, have attempted an overview of a significant part of the punk movement, but their stories are inconsistent and lack any real reference to geography or locality beyond the major centres (London, Manchester, and perhaps



Radio Stars  
Nervous Wreck  
Chiswick, NS23, 1977  
Designer: unknown

Jet Bronx & The Forbidden  
Ain't Doin' Nothin'  
Lightning, LIG501, 1977  
Designer: unknown

Epileptics  
Last Bus To Debdon EP  
Spiderleg, SPIDLE2, 1981  
Designer: group member



Sheffield, Leeds, Edinburgh and Bristol). Others, like Alex Ogg and Ian Glasper, have written some incredibly detailed and fact-heavy accounts of band histories and discographies, with extensive interviews and detailed notes, though they do not attempt to contextualise these within a broader history of the punk movement. I think there is some excellent work in both 'camps', but I am also interested to find out how a sense of local identity—even if it's negative and based on apathy, boredom and an attack on the group's immediate surroundings—feeds into musical and visual direction. One argument might be that a central aspect of punk was in some ways a natural extension of folk music—in the sense of protest songs about local issues and identities. Some punk groups celebrated local identity, albeit often in an ironic manner: the track 'We're From Bradford' by The Negatives included the chorus chant "We're from Bradford, not from London. B-R-A-D-F-O-R-D!", which captures the provincial sentiment pretty well I think. Others wrote about the lack of local facilities, or the fact that the local landlord had banned them from the village pub, and these rhetorical statements were often reflected in the sleeves—such as agit-prop graphic styles and photographs of the offending establishments.

By mapping the shift in location of punk 'producers' of seven inch singles over time, it's clear that there is a broad sweep away from London and into the wider regions. This is not just an example of provincial hicks taking up the punk fashion late, while the cutting edge innovators move on, as you can also observe a change in musical and graphic identity in the process. This is particularly true within two fields—the political area of second generation punk (particularly Anarcho Punk and Hardcore), which adopted strong visual and musical aesthetics to reflect a strong ideological position, and the DIY Avant Garde, by which I mean those groups and individuals who took up the 'anyone can do it' rhetoric of punk and ran with it.

So I would argue that yes, there is something left to say. One of punk's central ideologies (if it had any) was the position that the underdog might be empowered to do something for himself, and that personal gestures need not be insignificant. I'd like to think that this makes it worthy of further investigation in itself, in the way that jazz and folk were reappraised in the 1960s and 1970s, though I'm wary of how pretentious that might sound!

WD: Growing up in a smallish coastal town in Ireland, I always felt a sense of disconnectedness when it came to any kind of important cultural movements (none of which were happening in Ireland!); any interest in music or art was passive, observing from a distance through magazines or the occasional decent late-night radio show. The only truly exciting performance I ever saw at the time was at an evening organised by local bands, most of whom were playing really terrible covers of eight-minute Smashing Pumpkins songs. Horrible, indulgent guitar histrionics. About mid-way through the bill these three grizzled men walked on stage and played fast, loud songs for ten minutes. I'm not sure if I liked it (judging by the reaction, the rest of the audience didn't—I think they were booed



Anorexia  
*Rapist In The Park*  
Slim Records, SJP812, 1980  
Designer: group member

Alternative TV  
*Action Time Vision*  
Deptford Fun City, DFC07, 1978  
Designer: unknown

Captain Sensible  
*This Is Your Captain Speaking* EP  
Crass, 321984/5, 1981  
Designer: Gee Vaucher



off stage), but it was somehow arresting and felt more vital than the other sound-alikes on the bill. It was a fleeting sensation though. From your own experiences, what did it mean to be a punk fan (and indeed a musician—you were in a band, right?) in provincial Britain? How important was your 'sense of local identity' or lack thereof?

RB: As I've already mentioned, provincial punk attitudes and aspirations were largely ignored during the early period of UK punk (what I termed the First Wave), but were to come more to the fore during the Second and Third Waves, between 1978 and 1984, as regional scenes developed.

I grew up in the south east of England, only about 30 miles from London, but when you're 15 years old that distance can appear magnified—I would travel to London for gigs every now and then, when I could raise the train fare and ticket price, but to all intents and purposes I was stuck in a small town away from what the music press were describing as the action.

However, the local scene where I lived did start to produce its own punk groups and gigs. I can remember a similar experience to your own—a gig at a local church hall, with around seven or eight bands on the bill. A couple of young, spikey haired blokes in long raincoats came on stage with guitars—no drummer or bassist—and proceeded to make a racket for about 10 minutes. They were called Brainstorm and were part of the developing local punk legend. At the bottom of the bill, a bunch of local bikers calling themselves The Anti-Nowhere League played around half a dozen songs, murdering cover versions of Ralph McTell's 'Streets of London', Del Shannon's 'Runaway', Blondie's 'Denis' and Bill Haley & The Comets' 'Rock Around the Clock' (retitled 'Fuck Around the Clock'). In many ways they were dreadful, but they were also a shot in the arm of the local music scene.

Bands like these encouraged people like myself and my school mates to get hold of cheap mail order guitars and make our own 'music'. The punk maxim of 'anyone can do it' as portrayed in the music press really was followed through in small towns and villages well away from the big cities and their punk venues, shops and hang-outs. London clubs like the Roxy had a policy of booking new and unsigned bands, some of whom were apparently pretty dreadful, but even this minimal approach to 'quality control' wasn't exercised in the smaller towns across the UK: bands could hire the local church hall or community centre, invite their mates and make their own 'punk' scene. Some looked like what the *Daily Mirror* suggested punks should look like, others made an effort with charity shop clothes or army surplus, and some were just straight-looking young kids who happened to have a guitar/bass/drum kit/dad with a car!

I'm sure that the two attitudes to punk—the local hall parties entertained by incompetent and often drunk teenagers, and the 'real' punk gigs which you had to travel to and pay for tickets and drinks—would have remained distinct if it wasn't for the eventual success of some of those local 'chancers' on a national level. Sure enough, Brainstorm went back to obscurity (or school...), but The Anti-Nowhere League managed to hit the charts with their debut single, 'Streets of London', backed with the



The Pigs  
Youthanasia  
New Bristol, NBR01, 1977  
Designers: Tim Clifford & Roy Savage

Peter & The Test Tube Babies  
Banned from The Pubs  
No Future, O14, 1982  
Designer: unknown

Vice Squad  
State of The Nation EP  
Zonophone, Z34, 1982  
Designer: unknown

notorious 'So What' (which begins "I've been to Hastings, I've been to Brighton, I've been to Eastbourne too"—the nearest seaside towns from the band's hometown Tunbridge Wells), and went on to commercial success alongside the likes of Peter & The Test Tube Babies (from Brighton), Vice Squad (Bristol), The Exploited (East Kilbride), Discharge (Stoke) and many others during the early 1980s Third Wave.

Local punk scenes also tended to be quite territorial, and outsiders could be treated with some suspicion. Certainly, in common with football supporters, punks from adjacent towns tended to display the greatest rivalry, while those visiting from further afield were often welcomed into the local scene. Punks, by their very nature, tended to stand out in a crowd, and visitors could at least form a bond through common allegiances and interests (or through a common sense of antagonism from the mainstream).

It's interesting that I found within my research something of a 'double edged sword' in relation to local identity: groups often reflected local scenes, sang about local issues, credited the local 'punch' on their sleeves, and were photographed against local landmarks. However, their attitudes more often than not displayed an antipathy to the local council, authorities, landowners, pub landlords, and decried the fact that life is boring in their particular small town... an interesting conflict between local pride and identity and the punk spirit of antagonism and opposition.

WD: The gradual shifts in graphic styles are one of the immediate revelations from looking through the project, particularly when seen in the context of your timelines, and there's a clear sense that you want to dispel many of the received ideas about the visual codes employed by the bands and labels. Punk graphics tend to be stereotyped by a fairly narrow set of elements—bold colours, cut-and-paste typography, provocative imagery. There's a truth behind every cliché, but your research presents a far broader picture, and clear evidence of a constantly evolving visual language. There's something of a crossover between the amateur and the professional too; as you point out, the DIY maxim pretty much defines the punk spirit, and yet there's a much higher proportion of professionally-produced sleeves than I would have imagined (in terms of typesetting, full colour printing etc.), in some instances bands even releasing picture discs (which you've previously described as 'very un-punk!'). Were there specific differences in the design and promotional strategies employed by bands and labels in the key centres, and those in the regions?

RB: I discovered during my research a number of methods by which punk sleeves, and what might be called the commercial framework of punk graphics—punk record sleeves, posters and flyers, rather than homemade fanzines etc.—could be analysed. Some of these methods produced, for me at least, some interesting but rather unsurprising results, while others offered some new conclusions which were at the very least unexpected.

By employing the sleeve graphics themselves within the timelines, it was possible to show what you describe as "a constantly evolving visual



The Lurkers  
*Free Admission Single*  
Beggars Banquest, BEG1, 1977  
Designer: unknown

The Exploited  
*Attack Alternative*  
Secret, SHH130, 1982  
Designer: unknown

Discharge  
*Realities of War*  
Clay, CLAY1, 1980  
Designer: Martin H



language”, whereby there is a constant state of flux between commercialism and ideology as groups achieved critical and commercial acclaim, or were seen as ‘selling out’ to the mainstream music industry. Early punk releases were often housed in plain or record company branded sleeves, as the picture sleeve was itself something of a novelty—seven-inch EP releases in the 1960s had briefly utilised picture sleeves, but by the early 1970s they were quite unusual, at least within the more serious ‘rock’ rather than ‘pop’ canons. When successful independent labels such as Chiswick and Stiff Records began using picture sleeves as sales and marketing incentives, other labels followed suit, but even the major labels (EMI, CBS, Polydor, United Artists, Epic etc.) held off from investing too heavily in sleeve production: sleeves tended to be black and white or simple two colour prints, partly to encompass the lo-tech and raw punk aesthetic, but also I’m sure because such production was comparatively cheap. When you consider the cost of investment in album sleeve design and production during the same period, these single sleeves appear particularly rough and ready.

As punk grew to achieve critical acclaim and, eventually, chart success during the Second Wave (with the inclusion of New Wave and Powerpop styles), new marketing tools such as coloured vinyl, limited edition sleeves and additional gimmicks became increasingly prevalent. The natural conclusion of this style of marketing came with releases such as the fourth single by Generation X, ‘King Rucker’, which was issued in four different sleeves, each depicting an individual member of the group, and four corresponding colours of vinyl. It’s interesting to see that other groups who were perhaps more wedded to the underground, antagonistic and anti-commercial ideology of punk, adopted an oppositional stance and went back to basics with their graphic strategies. Of course, some of this was due to commercial constraints—the DIY sleeve designers had small budgets in a very similar fashion to the early punk producers—but even very successful ‘real punk’ groups in the late 1970s and early 1980s adopted strongly abrasive, lo-tech graphic styles and eschewed such trivialities as coloured vinyl and limited edition sleeves. In part, the geography of this contest is revealed across the timelines themselves—as punk becomes ‘glossier’ around the capital, it becomes even more lo-tech further away in the provinces.

However, the other interesting aspect of the timelines is the way that the information can be viewed quantitatively, as well as qualitatively. Certainly the results of my survey of punk typographic and printing styles brought out some interesting findings. For instance, those punk clichés you mention—bold colours, cut-and-paste typography, provocative imagery—are much rarer than is often assumed. Ransom note typography accounted for around 3% of my sample, and the détournement of media images figured on less than 8% of the sleeves. Conversely, over 31% of the sleeves featured a photograph of the group and more than 29% were professionally typeset, around a third were black and white and over 95% professionally printed. The picture discs you mention were quite unusual—picture discs were a fairly new format in the early 1980s largely



Generation X  
King Rucker  
Two of four variations [see pages 26–27]  
Chrysalis, CHS2261, 1979  
Designer: unknown

Disrupters  
Shelters For The Rich  
Radical Change, RC2, 1982  
Designer: unknown





The Mekons  
*Never Been In A Riot*  
Fast Product, FAST1, 1978  
Designer: Bob Last



employed as 'collectors' issues particularly aimed at the teenage pop market. Even so, pop magazines such as *FlexiPop* and *Smash Hits* featured Hardcore Punk groups who made it into the charts, such as The Anti-Nowhere League, Anti Pasti and Discharge, as well as successful New Wave and chart-friendly former punk groups such as The Clash, Siouxsie & The Banshees, The Stranglers and The Skids. Picture disc releases were issued for many of these groups in order to appeal to much the same audience.

Another quantitative aspect that can be seen in the timelines are the ways in which record releases followed the more traditional patterns of the music industry, with peaks and troughs across the calendar year. Single releases, particularly on the major labels, were often viewed as promotional items to support the more important, and more expensive, album release. Many punk groups were forced into similar working practices to their forebears in rock and pop—one, or perhaps two, albums in the first year to 18 months, with a third after around two years. Albums aimed at chart placing were usually accompanied by a tour, and in many cases followed peak record buying periods around autumn and the early spring. The christmas market is very important to record sales, and it is interesting to note just how many punk albums—including the Sex Pistols' defining moment, *Never Mind The Bollocks*—were released around October or November in time for this peak. Singles, as marketing devices, then flowed around album releases, and peak months tended to be October to March each year.

WD: But I guess many of the acts on the periphery would not have had the ability, or even the inclination, to compete with the distributive power of the bigger labels. Presumably there was a value in remaining small-scale. What modes of dissemination were employed by the smaller labels or those who self-released, and did these methods offer any advantages?

RB: This is one of the issues which sits at the heart of the punk and ideology debate. While one of the central punk maxims—'anyone can do it'—was married to a distrust of the music industry and a desire to go it alone, DIY production did lead to some difficult choices. Many early pre-punk and punk 'independent' labels such as Chiswick, Stiff, Step Forward and Raw Records struck deals with the major labels in order to get large scale manufacturing and, more importantly, distribution, including the sale of rights within international territories once certain artists on their roster (such as The Damned and Elvis Costello) became commercially successful.

Other prominent punk groups had signed to a major label right away—including the Sex Pistols (EMI, then A&M, then Virgin), The Stranglers (United Artists) and The Clash (CBS), and the debate between new, independent agendas and the business establishment did lead to something of an ideological split within the movement. The Buzzcocks had been a catalyst for this argument, as they released their debut EP *Spiral Scratch*, on their own New Hormones record label in January 1977, leading to



Plummet Airlines  
*Silver Shirt*  
Stiff, BUY8, 1976  
Designer: Stiff in-house design group

Anti-Pasti  
*East To The West*  
Rondelet, ROUND18, 1982  
Designer: unknown

The Damned  
*Neat Neat Neat*  
Stiff, BUY10, 1977  
Designer: Barney Bubbles

critical acclaim and a suggested new direction for punk groups toward independence from the music establishment. However, the group then signed immediately to a major label (United Artists) for their subsequent recording career, and the range of potential directions for punk groups setting out on the recording trail seemed to narrow. They could seek out a major label deal right away—the early punk period saw a great deal of interest in the new ‘movement’ which many labels sought to exploit; they could release a single on their own label or a small independent, which if successful could lead to a better major label deal; or they could stay rigidly independent and try to build success on their own terms. The latter was often seen as the ‘purest’ approach to punk as a recorded form, reflected in Mark Perry’s comment in *Sniffin’ Glue* fanzine, that “...punk died the day The Clash signed to CBS.”

The early punk DIY labels were often forced to use innovative marketing campaigns in order to draw attention to their product, and were highly reliant on personal contacts and good reviews within the music press. Luckily for them, some journalists at *NME*, *Sounds* and *Melody Maker*, had bought into the same ideas as Mark Perry, and were happy to promote small, obscure and independent labels. The Rough Trade and Small Wonder record shops in London began selling independent records through personal contacts, and became hubs for small label distribution, leading to the establishment of their own labels. Other small shops across the country formed links with these distribution centres, going on to formalise their network through the establishment of what became known as The Cartel.

Between 1977 and 1980, many small punk labels sprang up, often centred around one particular group or local scene, and some became very successful, selling equal numbers of records to the major labels. This led to the establishment of the Independent Chart in late 1979. Following a suggestion by an associate of Cherry Red label owner Iain McNay, the music trade paper *Record Business* began compiling a chart of those independent records which were not manufactured and distributed by the major label system. Barry Lazell, a researcher given the task of compiling the weekly chart, defined the term: “...most importantly... indie is not a musical or artistic definition... To have indie status, a record—or the label on which it was released—had to be one which was independently distributed: produced, manufactured, marketed and put into the shops without recourse to the major record companies which have traditionally controlled virtually all aspects of the record industry.”

The ideological split, and the supposedly more ‘honest’ DIY approach taken by the independent labels, led to the establishment of an alternative punk marketplace, and what could be termed an underground punk economy, which has lasted right up to today in many parts of the world. So, yes, there were advantages to the DIY approach—and whatever disadvantages existed against signing to a major label (poorer recording, manufacturing and distribution budgets, for instance) could be said to have been outweighed by the credibility associated with the ‘independent’ brand image.



The Straps  
*Brixton*  
Donut, DONUT3, 1982  
Designer: unknown

The Nightingales  
*Use Your Loaf*  
Cherry Red, CHERRY34, 1982  
Designer: unknown

Lack of Knowledge  
*Grey* EP  
Crass, 121984/6, 1984  
Designer: Gee Vaucher



WD: How common was it for regional groups to make the transition to the major labels (which would invariably have had their headquarters in London)? You mentioned earlier about “a constant state of flux between commercialism and ideology” which implies a certain tempering of creativity. When you’re producing a handful of records to distribute to a limited audience, you have autonomy over the means of production; the covers for Das Schnitz’s *4am* EP (a fantastic act of détournement, where the band, unable to afford the expense of printing sleeves, instead bought a job lot of existing sleeves—Chaka Khan Dr. Hook, Blondie etc.—and scrawled their name and the record details directly on top in marker) could never conceivably be massproduced, for all sorts of reasons. To what extent was sleeve design affected by success?



RB: I think there are two issues to consider here. One of the starting points for my project was my personal conviction that the story of UK punk outside of London was not fully recognised within recent punk histories. While London became the acknowledged centre of early UK punk, it was also used as a stereotype to react against, and this led to something of a backlash among elements of the punk underground. When The Panik, from Manchester, included the credit “We’re so bored with London” on the sleeve of their self-released EP they weren’t alone in their outlook. You only have to look at the number of independent regional compilation albums from the period to see the growth of small, loose-knit scenes based around small towns, clubs and labels.

Groups from some historically and culturally distinct regions faced a more explicit dilemma. The Rezillos, from Edinburgh, decided not to relocate to the capital—a move which endeared them to their hardcore Scottish following but was seen as a negative career move within the industry. Meanwhile, Stiff Little Fingers, from Northern Ireland, relocated to London, and were accused of ‘selling out’ and deserting their roots by their local fan base as a result. London was certainly the business hub of the record industry, and as such many labels were forced to operate via the capital, if only for marketing and distribution purposes. Though the DIY independent scene was strongly identified with a wide number of regional scenes, the big name at the centre of the independent market, Rough Trade, was still based in London, and it had the eyes and ears of the (London-based) music press and radio.

Quite a number of regional groups did make the transition to the major labels, in part following the success of self-released records on smaller independent labels, or through the efforts of the majors to secure some financial investment in the subculture before it vanished. Did this lead to a tempering of creativity? In many ways, yes it did, and this can be seen in the glossier production values of records, and in the loss of individuality in the design of the packaging itself. Mass production inevitably leads to some dilution of those design quirks we could associate with a hand-made, DIY aesthetic. Sleeves such as the Das Schnitz EP that you mention, or the debut single by The Atoms (which featured two hand-cut sleeve boards, each silkscreen printed in four colours, xeroxed inserts and hand-cut



Das Schnitz  
4am EP  
Three of multiple versions [see also  
page 28]  
Ellie Jay Records, EJSP9246, 1979  
Designer: group member



silkscreened labels, all packaged in a plastic sleeve), would have been impossible to reproduce economically on a large scale. The great benefit of a stable punk underground market was that a small independent producer could, for a short while at least, be fairly confident that they could sell a few hundred, or even a few thousand, copies of their record releases. This economic model could then exist as a kind of self-reliant cottage industry; demand was not high enough to warrant a shift to mass production, but the security offered by a stable marketplace could support individual, hand-made, labour intensive design.

The punk and New Wave labels who made the successful shift into the major league, such as Stiff Records, did attempt to bring some ideas in terms of product and design innovation from the DIY arena into the commercial mainstream. Certainly Stiff's in-house designer, Barney Bubbles, managed to adopt playful, innovative and inventive design strategies which sat somewhere between the creative concepts of Hipgnosis in the mid 1970s and the DIY approach of the early punk sleeve designers. Covers such as Ian Dury and the Blockheads' *Do It Yourself* album, which featured twelve different designs based on Crown Wallpaper patterns, showed how successful innovation could still work within a commercial arena, and the ability of major labels to offer additional material such as free gifts, stickers, flexi-discs and badges, showed that at least some were inspired by—or threatened by—developments in the DIY scene.



Atoms

*Max Bygraves Killed My Mother*

RINKA, 1979

Designer: Keith Allen

Television Personalities

*Where's Bill Grundy Now?* (1st release)

King's Road, LYN5976/7 1978

Designer: group member

Television Personalities

*Where's Bill Grundy Now?* (2nd release)

Rough Trade, RT033, 1979

Designer: group member