The Sex Pistols and the London Mob

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From my point of view it’s got nothing to do with music. And you could build up a whole thesis just on that thing.

Marcus Lipton MP

Johnny Rotten? Sid Vicious? Aren’t they characters from a Dickens novel?

Kenny Rogers, country music singer

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The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Michael Ewen Kitson
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Abstract

The London Mob and the Sex Pistols

This thesis concerns the invention, improvisation, and right to ownership of the punk patent and questions the contention, put by the band’s manager, Malcolm McLaren, and other commentators, that the Sex Pistols and English punk were a Situationist prank. This challenge to what, in the majority of punk literature, has become an ‘accepted truth’ was first raised by McLaren’s nemesis, the band’s lead singer, John Lydon.

McLaren and Lydon did agree that the London punk movement took its inspiration from the anarchic and chaotic energies of the eighteenth-century London mob. This common crowd could switch instantly and unpredictably from a passive state to an anarchic, violent and destructive mob, or ‘King Mob’: one that turned all authority on its head in concerted, but undirected, acts of misrule. Through his own improvisation with punk tropes, Lydon came to embody English punk and functioned, on the one hand, as a natural mob leader; and on the other, as a focus for the mob’s anger.

I argue that, in following McLaren’s reduction of the Sex Pistols to a Situationist-inspired prank, one of the earliest and most influential analyses of the punk phenomenon, Greil Marcus’s Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century, misunderstood how fundamental the culture and semiotics of the London mob was to McLaren, Lydon, the Sex Pistols and the performance of London punk.

I take seriously, then, the idea that the cultural signifiers the Sex Pistols drew upon to make their punk performances, and which accounted in no small way for their ability to ‘outrage’, were exclusively British and unique to London’s cultural topography and the culture of the London crowd.

After the implosion of the Sex Pistols on their 1978 American tour, with Lydon quitting in disgust, McLaren attempted to take ownership of the punk legacy: both actually, through attempting to assert his copyright over the Sex Pistols’ brand; and
symbolically through re-writing the Sex Pistols’ story in his 1980 movie *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*. Curiously, and most notably, the mob is foregrounded in the film through its opening sequence, which draws heavily from the events of the Gordon Riots in 1780.

This thesis contests the paradigm put in place by McLaren’s version of events as portrayed in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* and reconsiders punk as a cultural *object trouvè*. In particular, I consider literary influences on its protagonists: Graham Greene on John Lydon and Charles Dickens and J. M. Barrie on Malcolm McLaren.
Chapter 1: Introduction

All that phoney Beatlemania has bitten the dust. ¹

On the morning of 15 January 1978, one-week-shy of his twenty-second birthday, John Lydon, a boy with a home in Gunter Grove in the Borough of Chelsea, woke up a long way from that home, destitute and abandoned by his management, on the west coast of America. Twenty-four hours earlier he had represented the spearhead of the latest British music fad since the Beatles, The Who and The Rolling Stones to take America by media storm – punk rock. Less than twelve hours earlier John Lydon, in his stage persona Johnny Rotten, had fronted the Sex Pistols as their lead singer, entertaining over 5000 new American fans in the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco.

Audiences who came to see the Sex Pistols throughout their American tour entered each venue with a ‘grabbag’ of expectations, largely fuelled by international media coverage picked up from the British tabloid press. These American audiences anticipated ‘gobbing’, ² that is, spitting and being spat upon, and they knew the band was infamous for its attitude. They expected vocal antagonism from the band, as well as the possibility of physical violence because at London punk gigs, according to the media rumour mills, there were regular knifings, and fights with fists, chains and eye-gouging. ³

¹ ‘London Calling’ (Strummer/Jones) from the other London punk band, The Clash.
³ Ibid. The eye-gouging was the exaggeration of an incident at the 100 Club in September 1976, when a thrown pint glass shattered against a pillar and a splinter entered a (to this day unnamed) girl’s eye. The police subsequently arrested Sid Vicious and charged him with possession of a knife. Phil Strongman, Pretty Vacant: A History of Punk, Orion, London 2007: p. 23. A minor incident at the Nashville (23 April 1976) made a for a photo opportunity for music journalist Kate Simon et al. and their images were subsequently used to illustrate violence at punk gigs. Jon Savage, England’s Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock, Faber, London 1993: pp. 166-7. The most dramatic image of the same affray was taken by Barry Plummer and graced the cover of Melody Maker (7 August 1976). See Clinton Heylin, Babylon’s Burning, Penguin, London 2007: p. 111. While a reproduction of the both the image and the cover of Melody Maker appears in Caroline Coon, 1988: The New Wave Punk Rock Explosion, Omnibus, London
Still these San Franciscans came, and as the music critic and cultural commentator Greil Marcus was shocked to see, some of them even brought their small children.\(^4\)

When the band took the stage, what greeted this audience were four young men barely out of their teens. One of them wore leather pants and a leather jerkin over a white hero shirt; this was their singer, Johnny Rotten. Another boy, tall and skinny, his hair a bird’s nest, topless, a bass guitar slung low at his leather-clad hips, swagger-staggering as though drunk or drugged, was the bad boy, Sid Vicious. There was a less weird, even sort of handsome one with a perm, while the blond, drummer looked kind of plain, even normal.

This was the Sex Pistols’ last gig of what had been a gruelling twelve-day American tour.\(^5\) By now the band was on the point of imploding: two of them weren’t talking to the other two: one of these other two was out of it on heroin, while the other, the lead singer, wasn’t talking to anybody. They opened with their Queen’s Jubilee anthem, ‘God Save the Queen’ and, workmanlike, played their way through their set of thirteen songs and closed with their signature-first-single ‘Anarchy in the UK’, now retitled and rephrased for American audiences as ‘Anarchy in the USA’. With his vocals complete, Lydon left the stage, but the band kicked into a cover of The Stooge’s ‘No Fun’. Lydon took his time to reappear; when he did, he went up to the bass player Sid Vicious (who couldn’t play) and told him that he was “a living circus”.\(^6\) He then turned his scorn upon his audience, telling them that for an encore: “You’ll get one number and one number only, ‘cause I’m a lazy bastard”.\(^7\)

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1982: p. 12. In two separate incidents – presumably involving the same chain – Sid Vicious attacked first, the music journalist, Nick Kent and second, Bob Harris, the presenter of The Old Grey Whistle Test and his audio engineer.


\(^7\) The audio can be heard on *The Sex Pistols: Live at Winterland* album and the footage seen in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*. 
Hunchbacked and kneeling onto a stage floor littered with small gifts, a broken umbrella, some flowers and tossed rubbish, Lydon chanted the lyric “No fun”. There and then, John Lydon’s psychic armour – his stage persona as Johnny Rotten – threatened to break down: snot filled his nose and the back of his throat, his eyes began to water and to weep and then, dropping all pretence of melody, Lydon choked: “No fun. This is no fun.” Stopping altogether, Lydon turned his infamous ‘Lydon-stare’ upon his audience. He unleashed his trademark choking snarl of laughter, learned from Laurence Olivier’s cinematic portrayal of Richard III – and which he used to open ‘Anarchy in the UK’ – “Ahahahaha” then taunted them: “Ever get the feeling you’ve been cheated? Good night!”

For Greil Marcus, who was there to review the concert for *Rolling Stone*, the effect of this performance and its conclusion were so profound that he would come to compare his experience with the final frames of the British sci-fi horror movie *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967), as seen in the early hours of the morning on American television. It was a feeling so uncanny that it would take him a decade and 450 printed pages to exorcise. My thesis will show that what Marcus felt at that concert was something quintessentially London, which he got at a ‘gut level’, but was unable to interpret rationally. Although Marcus recognised that the Sex Pistols’ performance, like the subject of *Quatermass and the Pit*, concerned the ancient anarchic energies and misrule of the mob, Marcus misunderstood that both film and concert spoke in signs and signifiers specific to a London mob. Instead, this west coast American latched onto the contemporary legend that conflated the Sex Pistols with International Situationism, and this became the vehicle by which Marcus sought to rationalise and interpret his irrational experience at Winterland.

8 Ibid.
1.1 IT’S NOT ABOUT THE MUSIC

I had nothing to do with the Sex Pistols’ music at all. I couldn’t play. I didn’t understand what they were doing – John Lydon/Johnny Rotten. 9

At the close of 1976, a band provocatively named the Sex Pistols, brought the underground London punk scene to instant popular notoriety. Punk was music as noise; disruption as entertainment; ugliness as beauty; and violence as fashion statement. To Britain’s youth, the Sex Pistols were the instant embodiment of punk. When the band was brought to the attention of Marcus Lipton, the Labour MP for Lambeth Central, in 1977, he had this to say:

Now you see the managers of these groups obviously come to the conclusion that the music by itself is not going to stimulate and get the crowds, so they get hold of these fellows who are willing to perform these antics, and their behaviour, because they think it arouses the cheers of the multitude, just gets outrageous. From my point of view it’s got nothing to do with music. And you could build up a whole thesis just on that thing. 10

Lipton earmarks four punk tropes: first, that the manager is the instigator behind the band’s shenanigans. As we shall see, Malcolm McLaren was variously called – and came to believe, he was – the Sex Pistols’ Svengali, their Diaghelev and puppet master. Second, Lipton refers to the Sex Pistols’ audience as the multitude. The ‘multitude’ is a term used to describe the many, and it also implies that unlike the employer of the term, the subject is common, poor, barely educated or altogether uneducated, prone to irrational behaviour, easily led and whose natural habitat is the street. Multitude is loosely interchangeable with such terms as, the masses, the crowd, the hoi polloi, and its active incarnation as the mob. Third, Lipton believes that whatever the Sex Pistols are doing, their performance isn’t about the music. Fourth, the noise the Sex Pistols create is secondary to the noisy visual display they make through their antics and outrageous

behaviour. And these antics and outrageous behaviour are intended to arouse and incite the multitude – that is, to raise the mob.

The songwriter Will Birch, author of *No Sleep Till Canvey Island* (2000), agrees with Lipton’s condemnation of the music: “I don’t think the Sex Pistols were musically of any interest at all”,\(^{11}\) while punk commentator, Stewart Home argues that the Sex Pistols could more accurately be classified “as a form of theatre”.\(^{12}\) Even the Sex Pistols’ manager, Malcolm McLaren, concurs with Lipton, Birch and Home, when he counsels would-be punk musicians to divide and alienate: “forget about music and concentrate on creating generation gaps”.\(^{13}\) So if punk rock wasn’t about music, what was it about? Birch gushes:

I think the lyrics were tremendous and I think Johnny Rotten’s vocal style was great, hugely entertaining. I think the whole Sex Pistols’ image and the way they launched themselves in London was outrageous, so fantastic. But as far as the music goes … [t]here was nothing new about it at all.\(^ {14}\)

Birch highlights the lyrical content and its delivery, the band’s image and the meta-spectacle; their performance beyond and in addition to their stage show, and by which they became known in London. But Birch suggests that their music itself is old, dull, flat, lacking innovation – that simply there was nothing new about it. To him the music was passé, its antecedents clearly visible; others found it all too new, deeply offensive and deserving of immediate repression.

The Sex Pistols and punk music had its critics right from the Sex Pistols’ first gig at St Martin’s’ College of Art and Design in December 1975, when someone pulled the plug on their first set; however, entering into a debate about the relative merits of the Sex Pistols’ music is a subject I am going to leave to critics and musicologists. I am in

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\(^{13}\) *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*.

agreement with this diverse range of commentators encountered thus far – a politician, a music critic, a songwriter, the Sex Pistol’s manager and an anonymous art student at St Martin’s: that the Sex Pistols music is not what made the band infamous. This thesis considers the Sex Pistols’ cultural performance, while also addressing how and why their outrageous antics could and did arouse the ‘multitude’.

Even though my research enters a new field, I believe it necessary for the thesis to overlap with existing areas of punk research, especially those that remain active, inconclusive and in current discourse. Such areas of overlay include punk as a working class phenomenon; punk and various issues regarding ‘authenticity’; the assertion that punk owes a debt to the French philosopher, Guy Debord, and his International Situationists; and the difficulty of identifying punk’s alpha and omega.

My examination of John Lydon’s childhood, shows that his upbringing was both impoverished and working class. Much punk commentary has concerned itself with punk as working class in its origins, and therefore as representative of working class revolt, considered in terms of Marxist theory and anti-capitalism. Certainly, punk music performers embraced an alternative, non-mainstream, and do-it-yourself approach to their bands, as they made their music, found venues, promoted their performances, recorded their music and distributed it. But whether this resulted from punk’s exclusion from the mainstream and derived from ‘necessity’ rather than politics, depends on which band you approach.

The Sex Pistols, for example, were picked up exclusively by mainstream record labels and sold through chainstores. On the other hand, after 1979, after the Sex Pistols, punk’s DIY became notably anti-capitalist and anti-Thatcher in its rhetoric.

The ‘politics of boredom’ has been discussed extensively by Guy Debord and the International Situationists in relation to rioting. If punk is to be considered in working-class terms then the punks, in a post-industrial Britain were disenfranchised. As the numbers of jobless soared the feckless punks seemed to personify “the breakup of

15 During the Queen’s Jubilee some chains, like W.H. Smith, refused to stock ‘God Save the Queen’, but demand for the banned single saw other avenues of distribution opened.
Britain”. In these circumstances the boredom resulting from a life lived on the dole can be interpreted as a political issue and one in which riot and refusal would be an inevitable response. Some even hoped to see punk renamed as dole queue rock, but again the Sex Pistols did not fit this model. And again, after Thatcher came to power in 1979, punk appeared increasingly politicised, anti-Thatcher, markedly anti-capitalist and engaged in socialist discourse.

Issues of authenticity and how it relates to punk appear in a number of ways: how ‘punk’ the punk individual was, or when and how long that person had been a punk, whether they lived the punk lifestyle twenty-four/seven, unemployed and squatting, or were ‘weekend punks’ (people who lived under their parents’ roof and who held jobs and ‘punked up’ for punk gigs or events). Authenticity is also discussed in terms of where individual punks were located, and whether a regional centre like Manchester was as valuable as the metropolis of London.

Such questions as those, regarding how to decide the alpha and omega of punk, also raise questions as to when, where and how did punk die, but also whether punk did die – if indeed, it can be said that it lived at all?

Then there is the question of punk origins, in particular, its place of origination. Thirty years after punk’s appearance, there remains some disagreement as to whether punk was invented in New York or London. This in turn raises the question of how to explain its simultaneous appearance in Brisbane (The Saints) and Sydney (Radio Birdman), Australia.

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18 Take for example Crass and the anarcho-punk movement. This is contradicted by the example of Skrewdriver, a white supremacist punk rock group who associated with skinheads, promoted racism and aligned themselves with national socialism, the National Front and British National Party.

19 Clinton Heylin has made a convincing argument for the dissemination of proto-punk ideas through the fevered writings of Lester Bangs and Nick Kent. Both wrote music criticism for music journals that were distributed around the world (including Brisbane and Sydney). Some of these writings border on manifesto. Separated by the Atlantic ocean, Kent and Bangs maintained a friendship by telephone. Kent not only introduced proto-punk influences to the Sex Pistols through tapes he acquired from Bangs but briefly
I accept the argument put forward by Clinton Heylin in *From the Velvets to the Voidoids* (1993), by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain in *Please Kill Me* (1996), that a punk rock scene occurred simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic, that there was cross-pollination, but that the New York scene did predate the London punk scene. Like New York punk, the Sex Pistols’ sound shared similar musical origins, such as sixties garage rock, as well as deriving stylistic traits from the New York punk scene that gathered around the music venue founded in 1973, CBGBs.\(^{20}\) And this may account for Will Birch’s dismissal of the Sex Pistols sound as nothing new. However, I argue that the Sex Pistols’ cultural heritage was radically different from the New York punk scene. The cultural signifiers the Sex Pistols drew upon to make their punk performances, and which accounted in no small way for their ability to ‘outrage’, were exclusively British and unique to London’s cultural topography and the culture of the London crowd.

In a puzzling ellipsis, this connection has been largely overlooked by commentators on London punk and the Sex Pistols. Punk insiders Fred and Judy Vermorel in *Sex Pistols: The Inside Story* (1978), the band’s manager, Malcolm McLaren, Nils Stevenson in *Vacant* (1999) and the punk theorist, Greil Marcus, in *Lipstick Traces* (Harvard University Press edition, 1988) have all claimed that the Sex Pistols and punk was a prank, devised by McLaren, based on the political and philosophic work *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) written by the French Situationist Guy Debord. Marcus even establishes a tenuous six-degrees-of-association between the lyrics of ‘Anarchy in the UK’, as penned by John Lydon, and the directing hand of Guy Debord. The position taken by these involved parties and commentators highlights McLaren’s centrality while marginalising the creative input of the band.

However, McLaren’s influence has been typically overstated, most notably in his self-propagandising, punk rock ‘mockumentary’ about the Sex Pistols, *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* (1980). Although McLaren has claimed the real-life accuracy of the film’s portrayal of him as the arch-manipulator of his young protégés (and of punk

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\(^{20}\) ‘CBGBs’ stands for Country Blue Grass Blues. It had the additional title of ‘&OMFUG’, which stood for & Other Music For Uplifting Gormandizers.
audiences, the media, the general public and the record establishment/industry), in contrast, John Lydon’s improvised performance and self-created image as Johnny Rotten can be shown to have been derived from a repertoire wholly of his own making. Indeed a number of items sold through McLaren and Westwood’s clothing boutique SEX at 430 The King’s Road were derived entirely from Lydon’s innate style. When John Lydon wore his trousers backwards others followed and SEX tailored them and sold them.

The claims of exclusive ownership made by Lydon and McLaren are examined and, although a court eventually found in favour of Lydon in the long-running dispute over the Sex Pistols’ legacy, what the two men had in common and how they complemented each other’s narrative is of greater import.

1.1.1 Punk and the mob

The Sex Pistols explicitly drew upon, borrowed from and referred to London’s street culture of the multitude. This culture, especially in its active and extreme incarnation as the mob of mobs, or ‘King Mob’, was the antecedent for the kinds of audience behaviour later provoked by the Sex Pistols. Moreover, McLaren’s opening sequence to The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle (1980) explicitly references the 1780 Gordon Riots, out of which King Mob arrived.

As we have heard Marcus Lipton, Labour MP for Lambeth Central in London, point out, it was not the music the Sex Pistols made that stimulated the crowds but their “antics” and “[outrageous] behaviour”. Each Sex Pistols’ concert was in and of itself a

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21 This is best demonstrated by the 1979 court case initiated by John Lydon against Malcolm McLaren and his company Glitterbest over rights to assets including any activities to exploit the names, trademarks, or goodwill of the Sex Pistols. This legal wrangle alone would last ten years. The punk rock movie The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle opens with McLaren (bizarrely wearing an S&M mask) stating that he invented the punk rock.

22 This term means a mob that has the strength and numbers to challenge the King’s authority, and was the eponymous title of Christopher Hibbert’s 1958 historical study of the Gordon Riots. King Mob was subsequently appropriated as the name of a London-based politically subversive group in the mid-sixties and early seventies that admired the ideas of the French intellectual Guy Debord and his group the International Situationists.
mini-riot or what John Lydon has described as “organised chaos”.23 And Lipton is correct: the band and the management of the Sex Pistols were well-aware that their on-stage and off-stage behaviour – whether at a gig, on television, or reported in print – was something more than the music. Their outrageous behaviour and antics did arouse the multitude (not just to ‘cheer’ but also to jeer): they enraged television audiences and the readership of the press when they appeared on television, while their Jubilee anthem, ‘God Save the Queen’, turned monarchists into a mob that attacked John Lydon with machete, knife and broken bottle.

1.1.2 Theory and methodology
Over thirty years, punk has received a wide range of commentary made by diverse commentators, some of them academics, some of whose commentary is theoretical. The Sex Pistols themselves have not been extensively theorised either by the academy or in the popular domain. Unlike the Beatles, the Sex Pistols are not the subject of a Masters in Popular Music and Society.24 However, academics have approached the topic of British punk sociologically,25 and as a subject of Cultural Studies,26 identifying punk as a subculture, which shares recognizable traits with other post war youth subcultures.

Amongst the idiosyncratic records, which comprise this study, many are tendentious and most were found to pursue a particular interest by their author in some aspect of the story. It is for this reason that I undertook to identify recurring tropes and analyse the discourses in the commentaries.

I identified five tropes of punk commentary. The first of these commentaries clusters around the Sex Pistols’ rise to infamy and ends after their break-up at Winterland. The second cluster, identified as ‘insider’ accounts, were made by people close to the band, or who were sympathetic to punk as it took place between 1976, 1977 and 1978. The third cluster I identify as being theoretical approaches or academic insights

24 Liverpool Hope University.
25 For example: Dick Hebdige, Angela McRobbie, Sarah Thornton and David Muggleton.
26 Dave Laing’s academic thesis One Chord Wonders uses a chronological historical approach to investigate punk’s economic model in a cultural framework.
into the punk phenomenon begun in the wake of Sid Vicious’ death by heroin overdose. The fourth is marked by a return to punk as the subject of cultural history, conducted by journalists asking questions about the formation of the Sex Pistols and punks. Many of these journalists covered punk for their respective music journals during 1976 and 1977. Ten years on, their new studies reflect an attempt to establish the public record by documenting the formation and rise of the Sex Pistols and punk’s other players. Notably, as in the case of Jon Savage, they also come to terms with their own youthful experiences and youthful selves. A fifth trope comprises disparate verbatim interviews gathered from both sides of the Atlantic after punk was fully established, and the interviewees responses are coloured by their awareness of this fact.

In the initial foment heralding punk’s arrival, the commentary is diverse, chaotic and varied. While not exhaustive, this list of commentators includes: punks themselves, their friends and family, their managers, the ‘man on the street’, as well as non-punk musicians threatened by punk’s year zero approach to music and musicianship; punk fans producing photocopied ‘zines; sympathetic music press reporters; the unsympathetic music press, whose vitriol was nothing in comparison to the fury of the tabloid press in the wake of ‘the Grundy incident’; and as we have seen, politicians like Marcus Lipton. The Sex Pistols were even debated in parliament. It is notable that such establishment organisations as BBC Radio made ‘no comment’ statements declaring they would not play punk rock, although the likes of John Peel flouted it, while Bob Harris of The Old Grey Whistle Test didn’t.

With the punk and Queen’s Jubilee debacle still fresh in the minds of the British public, journalist Caroline Coon’s feature articles on punk were collated and published in book form. Coon’s sympathetic voice and her friendship with Lydon made her output the

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27 For example, Caroline Coon of Melody Maker, Nick Kent of New Musical Express, Jon Savage of Sounds and Barry Cain of Record Mirror. Cain has revisited, collected and reproduced his music journalism of January to December 1977, framing it, annotating it and concluding this and his book in January 2007 with verbatim interviews with four of his former subjects, Hugh Cornwell, Rat Scabies, Alan Edwards and John Lydon. See Barry Cain, ’77 Sulphate Strip, Ovolo, Cornwall 2007.

28 They also would not play reggae or dub.
first of several works that I have chosen to classify as ‘insider’ works. I use this term to emphasise the privileged access of these authors to the punk players and the punk scene in which they moved freely.

After John Lydon quit the band at Winterland in 1978 – both concluding his involvement and fragmenting the Sex Pistols, if not ending punk – Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons published ‘The Boy Looked At Johnny’, their book-length obituary of rock ‘n’ roll. That same year the band’s photographer, Ray Stevenson, published his hagiographic pictorial work, Sex Pistols File, and Fred and Judy Vermorel (intimate friends of McLaren and Westwood) published Sex Pistols: The Inside Story.

Punk, which had all seemed a bit of a lark, was now hammered with grave consequences. Sid Vicious, charged with the murder of Nancy Spungen in November 1978, overdosed and died from heroin in February 1979. For many people, 1979 is seen as the year in which the London punk scene, as defined by the first wave of punk, was rudely concluded. This ending was further emphasised by the coming to power of Margaret Thatcher and the Tories. This sense of conclusion, without resolution, generated academic interest and the theorising of punk, by punk ‘outsiders’. If punk insiders were those who had a privileged entrée to the punk scene, then punk ‘outsiders’ are to be defined by their impartial detachment. Dick Hebdige’s work Subcultures: The Meaning of Style would locate punk among the youth subcultures as they had been identified through sociological study of previous post war youth subcultures (mods, rockers, skinheads and bikers et al.). Six years later, in 1985, the first academic title to research punk on its own merits appeared with Dave Laing’s One Chord Wonders, while in 1988, the Berkeley-educated music critic, Greil Marcus promulgated his own theory of punk in Lipstick Traces (Harvard University Press). A fourth academic text, Punk Rock: So

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29 The murder occurred in October 1978.
30 Nevertheless, 1979 and 1980 saw a new wave; or third wave, of punk groups form. Amongst punk commentators this is considered as a distinct flowering that lasted until 1984. See Ian Glasper, Burning Britain: The History of UK Punk 1980 to 1984, Cherry Red Books, Norfolk 2004.

What I describe as ‘second wave journalism’ consists of Craig Bromberg, a New York entertainment journalist who set out to write a biography of Malcolm McLaren and produced an overview of punk, Jon Savage (a twenty-something, punk ‘insider’ and London music journalist for Sounds) and Clinton Heylin, a New York music journalist, who was concerned by the skewing of the historical record towards London to the neglect of New York.

These works are marked by a return to the origins of punk and the punk scene as it was played out from 1975 to 1980. By the late-eighties, punk had become a muddy, much-contested cultural memory, of warring stakeholders and without definitive overviews. These journalists, Bromberg, Savage and Heylin, whether originating in investigative, entertainment, or music reporting, sought to document and evaluate punk for the public record by returning to extant documents and especially by using first-hand accounts gathered from the people who were actually there. In Jon Savage’s case, the approach was a personal analysis, in-depth research and consideration of his own immersion in punk, undertaken after a decade’s cogitation.

Almost twenty-years later and following in this trend toward reconsideration of the public record, John Lydon would break from his brief ill-tempered ranting castigations that still regularly appeared in the music press, to deliver a full-length work of autobiography and opinion, No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs. Coopting the successful format of this work, two further collections of verbatim interviews with punk luminaries were published by New York co-authors Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, and the British, John Robb.

Surprisingly, the thirtieth anniversary of punk did not launch a slew of major punk re-evaluations, as evidenced in new works of history, autobiography, visual works, new academic titles and theoretical studies. Of interest were two titles: Phil Strongman’s Pretty Vacant, which engagingly retails the Sex Pistols’ story, while Clinton Heylin’s Babylon’s Burning, is an exhaustive work of historical and journalistic research that attempts (at least according to its marketing) in its last chapter to trace punk’s influence on nineties’ grunge.
The Sex Pistols’ ‘Anarchy in the UK’, McLaren’s reference to the Gordon Riots of 1780 in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, his obsession with the ‘Dickensian’ aspects of London street and gang life, all suggested a close study of the London mob was necessary, and, moreover, would form a new understanding of the Sex Pistols’ interpretation of historical as well as literary themes. Building upon this existing punk commentary, I searched the commentators’ analyses of specific punk productions and products, relating to all associations between the Sex Pistols and the London mob.

This thesis enters the discourse of crowd theory, with a specific focus upon theories of the crowd’s active incarnation as the mob. Although crowd theory spans two millennia, it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the crowd found a sympathetic thinker in Elias Canetti and his book *Crowds and Power* (translated into English in 1960). After acknowledging the history of crowd theory, I have taken Canetti’s theories as recorded in *Crowds and Power* as my major source. Canetti proved to be useful in identifying aspects of the London mob, as distinct from other crowd categories, and this thesis then applies them to the Sex Pistols and their outrageous antics used to incite the multitude. I combine this examination with a close textual analysis of historical records, literary productions, including speculative fictions concerning the London mob, and all manner of titles addressing punk.

Unlike previous academic enquiry, I have specifically and intentionally limited this thesis to addressing the subject of the Sex Pistols, and to a specific period in the Sex Pistols incarnation prior to the induction of Sid Vicious. I do this to distinguish between the Sex Pistols as a phenomenon linked to a specific time and place, and punk in any of its incarnations either in London, Manchester, Cleveland, New York, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and other cities, or as it transformed itself after 1978.\(^{32}\)

My methodology comprised three parts. The first included historical research, a return to primary sources, to examine what was said by the people who were actually

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\(^{32}\) Or punk known by any of its other subsequent names – New Wave, ‘hardcore’, or ‘dole queue rock’.
there. In this regard the use of interview material on the one hand and primary sources, such as Old Bailey records for the Gordon Riots on the other, proved especially valuable.


The second part of my methodology tackled the phenomena that combine to generate the mob. As no commentators had identified themselves with the crowd or the mob prior to Canetti, and as it proved impossible to recreate, in a verifiable way, all the factors that incite a mob, I therefore turned to the imaginative and speculative literary record – specifically those works that engaged with the London mob, including the Gordon Riots (1780) and to a lesser degree, the Notting Hill Race Riots (1958).

For instance, although ostensibly a book intended for infants, Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of the Two Bad Mice* is the story of a home invasion by two anthropomorphised characters. This lower-class husband and wife gang break into the home of Lucinda, a doll enjoying the comforts of the middle class. It supplies a case study of the smallest unit of a mob and a clear definition of home invasion – the middle class anxiety about the uncontrollable element of the ‘street’. It also serves to illustrate the mob trope in what appears to be an unexpected and unrelated form.

In turn, Graham Greene’s short story ‘The Destructors’ supplies a point of departure for an explanation of the dynamics of the mob in action. Perhaps fittingly, given that John Lydon accredits his stage persona as Johnny Rotten, to among others, the character of Pinkie in Greene’s *Brighton Rock*.

Next I consider the most likely sources for McLaren’s vision of the Gordon Riots as filmed for *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*: Charles Dickens’ populist historical novel *Barnaby Rudge*, and Christopher Hibbert’s *King Mob*. The latter historical study uses the literary device of providing an imaginative – if not speculative – recreation of the historical record.

Thirdly, unlike other punk commentators I look to the texts, many of them literary, some of them cinematic, that have been key to the formation and generation of the major punk players: John Lydon and Malcolm McLaren. It is of interest to see how these two players sought out mob exemplars in literary texts and applied them directly to
their own lives, their public personas and drew them into the performance of the Sex Pistols. I examine punk phenomena in relation to those who formed and took part in it. I consider Lydon in terms of his assertion that his stage persona, Johnny Rotten is self-created. I examine McLaren’s formative relationship with his grandmother and absent mother and how this – for better or worse – shaped his subsequent relationships with women. And unlike previous commentators, I undertake a close examination of pseudo or marginalised punk texts such as Derek Jarman’s *Jubilee*, McLaren’s *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* and Greil Marcus’ flawed work *Lipstick Traces*.

This approach was necessary to square the two oppositional voices of McLaren and Lydon, whose perspectives on the Sex Pistols and punk rock have provided the lens through which this work came into existence.

1.2 THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis challenges the extent of the Sex Pistols’ debt to the ideas and theories of the International Situationists as promulgated by Marcus, McLaren, the Vermorels, Stevenson and others. Rather, I will argue that sufficient evidence is available to make the case that more relevant influences can be found in certain literary texts and, not the least, in the paradigm of the eighteenth century London mob. The Sex Pistols were a short-lived affair although the punk movement they inspired survived to the band’s thirtieth anniversary in 2006 and 2007. However, despite a brief burst of hagiographic pictorial magazines cashing in on their end (Stevenson; 1978, Hennessey; 1978) and the work of punk insiders (Coon; 1977, Burchill & Parsons; 1978, Vermorel; 1978), it would take a decade before major punk evaluations began to appear. For these reasons, in order to consider the varying interpretations of punk over the past thirty years, the next chapter gives a chronological overview and examination of punk literature. I establish my own area of research, differentiating this thesis from studies of punk as music, or punk as a specimen of sociological, anthropological, cultural or subcultural enquiry, by focussing on the performance of punk, its invention and improvisation, and the manufacture of punk as an activity to taunt and incite the multitude. I argue that London punk, as exemplified by the Sex Pistols was a direct result of the *milieu*, the site and culture of
London. This is followed by a history of the punk period with which readers may orientate themselves in place and time, as well as a *dramatis personae* of the punks themselves.

Resulting from the lead suggested by the opening film footage of the punk rock movie *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, I take up the assertion that the Sex Pistols and their manager interpreted London punk as a riotous refusal in the tradition of the eighteenth century mob and more particularly the Gordon Rioters of June 1780. These ‘historical reenactments’ reference the mass disorder that set much of London ablaze, when the London crowd metamorphosed into ‘King Mob’ and made their devastating protest a carnival of riot and refusal to bow to authority. Like the Bastille mob that would appear nine years later in Paris, this ‘King Mob’ – with misplaced patriotism – tore down all five of London’s prisons, attacked the homes of ruling authorities as well as the perceived enemies of the people and their king.

The literature, records and illustrations of the London mob since the eighteenth century are considered in detail in Chapter 3. I have taken it as given that although factors such as numbers involved, mass, or definitions of ‘active’ or ‘passive’, do not define a mob, there are nonetheless recurring patterns. While it is impossible to know a mob by its numbers, by its members or even by its dress, it can be judged by its recurrent actions. I consider the smallest unit of the mob – the pair – employing the children’s book *The Tale of the Two Bad Mice* (1902) by Beatrix Potter as an example of the smallest unit of a mob action. This is followed by a consideration of the gang and its transformation into a destructive mob through Graham Greene’s short story ‘The Destructors’ (1955). Using Greene’s story I show how the rigid hierarchy of a gang is inverted when a mob action is undertaken. In Greene’s story we see the static hierarchy of the gang unit contrasted with the rapid, communal, high energy, violent advent of the mob.

Whereas Dickens’ *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) was written within living memory of the Gordon Riots, Potter’s and Greene’s works reveal how the idea of mob has entered

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Canetti uses the term Prohibition Crowd to describe action such as this: A Prohibition Crowd is defined by their negativity and refusal. They do not have revolutionary intentions. Such intent Canetti reserves for the Refusal Crowd. See Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, Phoenix, London 2000: pp. 55–8.
into the literary imagination. The mob and crowds have also been extensively theorised and in Chapter 4, I examine some of these works. I consider the first-recorded London mob action during the Peasant’s Revolt in 1381. Simultaneous with the rising of the men of Kent and Essex, and their march on the English capital and the residence of the boy-king, Richard II, a London mob rose and undertook its own violent activities that were neither for nor against the aims of the peasants. Turning to the comparatively far richer resources of the eighteenth century, I examine the apotheosis of the London mob in the Gordon Riots of June 1780.\textsuperscript{34} By using the combined theory and taxonomy of crowds undertaken by Elias Canetti in his landmark \textit{Crowds and Power} (1960), I then apply his categories to the London mob and to the Sex Pistols and punk.

The cultural heritage of the teenage Sex Pistol, John Lydon, is given detailed examination in Chapter 5. Lydon’s childhood bout with meningitis that wiped his memory in his eighth year may be the origin of his Year Zero and ‘scorched earth’ approach to pop music; certainly it left him with a twisted spine, staring eyes, epilepsy and saw him seek safety in gangs. All of these elements would be fed into his hunchbacked, snarling, antagonistic stage performance as Johnny Rotten. I consider the influence of Lydon’s resentment of his Catholic education while his fondness for the Graham Greene novel \textit{Brighton Rock} and especially the character of the tortured, seventeen-year-old lapsed Catholic gangster, Pinkie, and his gang is examined.

Punk and mob tropes are combined for the first time in the first punk movie \textit{Jubilee} (1977), made by British art filmmaker, Derek Jarman, explored in Chapter 6. Inspired by Jordan, a shop assistant at Vivienne Westwood’s and Malcolm McLaren’s fashion boutique, 430 The King’s Road, Jarman would try to follow the critical success of his directorial debut, \textit{Sebastiane} (1976) with what he initially described as a more or less documentary study of Jordan’s \textit{milieu}, originally to be shot on Super 8. When his backers at Megalovision raised additional finance to exploit the punk rock phenomenon,

\textsuperscript{34} No civil insurrection in London, either before or after, ever reached the proportions of the Gordon Riots. Historian, Robert Shoemaker, describes the eighteenth century as “quintessentially the century of the mob” and that by 1799 “the age of the mob was over”. See Robert Shoemaker, \textit{The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England}, Hambledon and London, London 2004: pp. 111, 151.
Jordan’s home movie became the costume drama *Jubilee*. Jarman’s research led him into Jordan’s world, where the child murderer, Myra Hindley, and would-be assassin of Andy Warhol, Valerie Solanas, were heroines. Envisioning a world ruled by girl-packs and all-girl motorcycle gangs, *Jubilee* now became a warning that the crowd energies punk was tapping would inevitably raise and unleash a murderous mob intent upon regicide, resulting in anarchy and societal breakdown. Vivienne Westwood saw *Jubilee* in its premier screening at the National Film Institute in January 1978 and was so incensed that she saw it again. She published her critique – of Jarman, of Jarman as writer and director, and of *Jubilee* – as a screen-printed t-shirt.

Malcolm McLaren remains a pivotal and controversial figure in the narrative of punk. While not giving much credence to his claim that the Sex Pistols were little more than a Situationist prank, nonetheless, I survey a range of influences on him and how these filtered through him to shape the Sex Pistols. In Chapter 7, I look to McLaren’s childhood spent with his Victorian-era grandmother and his favourite children’s books from the period, all of which carry a theme of motherless children, but especially motherless boys: McLaren, from the age of six, casts himself as the one who leads these boys astray. I pay particular attention to McLaren’s obsession with J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan and Wendy* (1904), and the curious template it laid down in his relationship with the Wendy-like Vivienne Westwood, and in McLaren’s own role as Peter Pan to Vivienne and his Lost Boys, the Sex Pistols.

Finally, I conclude this thesis with a consideration of punk’s legacy as a cultural movement. In light of the evidence about the influence of the culture and energies of the eighteenth-century London mob and the crowd, as theorised by Elias Canetti, I re-examine and reconsider music critic, cultural commentator and writer on punk, Greil Marcus’s experience at the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco on 14 January 1978. I consider seriously Marcus’s equating of that experience to *Quatermass and the Pit* by exploring how tropes of the mob and the psychogeography of London are utilised by Nigel Kneale in the *Quatermass* films. It is for these reasons, rather than for some spurious ‘secret history’, that Marcus connects *Quatermass* with the Sex Pistols. It was not the Paris Situationists he heard at the Winterland Ballroom, but London calling.
Chapter 2: Punk’s Milieu

Punk was symptomatic of and a product of its times. Mid-seventies Britain was in a downward spiral of economic decline and facing its humbled place in the world after Empire. The welfare state that had promised to care for British subjects from ‘the cradle to the grave’ was in crisis, while the changes in economic management would see the punk generation bear the brunt of an ideological shift away from post-war social democracy to a harder, meaner way of life for the poor where, for the first time since the Great Depression and after enjoying thirty years of full employment, unemployment – by both Labour and Tories – would be taken as a given. For the working class, this seemed the ultimate betrayal.

During 1976, and especially over that year’s long hot summer, the Sex Pistols, as a band and punk as a movement, consolidated their energies. But it would be the ‘Grundy incident’ that first exposed this volatile subterranean cult to the general public, and raised the Sex Pistols and punk to infamy the very next day, upon the howls of editorialised outrage splashed across the tabloids. Insidiously, the ‘Grundy incident’ lead to extraordinary paper sales and, thereafter, the tabloids would seek, by ‘whatever means necessary’, to replicate those sales. In light of the tabloids’ biased and even fabricated reporting, it would take years before punk would receive a legitimate reappraisal.

In this chapter, I will introduce the life and times of London punk, the societal stage upon which punk was performed, its key players and the events that span the beginning of the Sex Pistols in 1975 and their implosion in 1978, as well as an overview of the literature and research that has been undertaken into punk over the last thirty years.

2.1 HOW PUNK BROKE

The Sex Pistols and the accompanying punk culture came to the attention of the wider English public on Saturday morning, 2 December 1976. At 6.15pm on the previous night, the Sex Pistols had appeared on the Thames Television show, Today as a last minute replacement after the sudden cancellation of the glitter rock group, Queen. Because the Sex Pistols’ appearance on Today was unexpected, it was decided that rather than
perform their music live, a rock video would be shown and the Sex Pistols would converse with Today’s host, Bill Grundy.

This was not the Sex Pistols’ first television appearance – on Wednesday, 1 September 1976 they had appeared on Tony Wilson’s So It Goes (a regional show out of Manchester) performing three of their songs\(^{35}\) – but this was their first opportunity live-to-air. While the Today program, only reached a regional London audience, the subsequent tabloid newspaper coverage made the so-called ‘Grundy incident’ – the Sex Pistols themselves, and their punk entourage – notorious.

The call to appear on the Today show came from a publicist at their record label, EMI, during the Sex Pistols’ rehearsals at the Roxy Cinema in Harlesden on the afternoon of 1 December.\(^{36}\) The Sex Pistols were bundled into a limousine (lent to them for the evening by EMI) and chauffeured to the Thames Television studios. To meet them in the Green Room were several of their fan-base (known as the Bromley contingent): Simon Barker, Steve Severin, Siouxsie Sioux and Simone (surname possibly Thomas\(^{37}\)). Having spent the afternoon at a boozy lunch laid-on by Punch magazine,\(^{38}\) the Today show host, Bill Grundy, like the Sex Pistols – who took their fill of the Green Room fridge – was drunk.\(^{39}\) The footage of their on-air appearance shows the Sex Pistols slumped in their seats alternately scowling or looking bored, as Grundy, equally unexcited by this moment in cultural history, drawls from his autocue:

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\(^{37}\) Simone is a margin and largely unrecorded figure: “Simone, a black girl with platinum blonde hair, wearing a plastic mac and smoking multicoloured Russian cigarettes” also makes mention of her boyfriend, “Simon” (presumably, Simon Barker), in Bertie Marshall’s Berlin Bromley, SAF, London 2006: pp. 23-4.


Safety pins? Chains round the neck? And that’s just the fellas, yeah-yeah … [momentarily bewildered]

Eh … ? I mean, it is just the fellas – yeah? 40

Glen Matlock, deadpan but with accentuated cockney accent, reads aloud from Grundy’s autocue: “They are punk rockers, the new craze, they tell me.” Startled but without recourse, Grundy continues reading from his autocue:

They are punk rockers, the new craze, they tell me. Their heroes, not the nice clean Rolling Stones – you see, they are as drunk as I am … they are clean as I am – they are clean by comparison. They are a group called the Sex Pistols – and I’m surrounded now by all of them! So just let us see the Sex Pistols in action! Come on chucks … 41

Thirty seconds of the ‘Anarchy in the UK’ film clip plays. Vision is returned to the studio and Bill Grundy states:

I’m told that that group received £40,000 from a record company.

Still reading from his autocue, though summoning a new enthusiasm, Grundy asks:

Doesn’t that seem slightly opposed to their anti-materialistic way of life?

Glen Matlock takes the bait and swats it down: declaring that they’ve already spent it, “Yup, spent it all down the boozer”. Barely thirty seconds later, damage begins. Steve says, ‘fucking’, under his breath and Lydon says, ‘shit’, but the worst is yet to come. Unable to charm the lads, Grundy turns his attention to the Bromley contingent and Siouxsie Sioux, suggesting that the two of them meet after the show. Detecting Grundy’s tone and annoyed by Siouxsie’s cooing and blushing, Steve Jones calls Grundy “a dirty sod” and a “dirty old man”. Grundy goads Jones on:

Well keep going chief, keep going. Go on, you’ve got another five seconds, say something outrageous –

40 Dialogue transcribed from Television footage in The Filth and the Fury.
41 Transcribed from The Filth & the Fury, Film Four videocassette release, London 2000.
STEVE JONES: You dirty bastard!
BILL GRUNDY: Go on, again.
SJ: You dirty fucker!
BG: What a clever boy!
SJ: What a fucking rotter! 42

What greeted the readers of the Daily Mirror on Saturday morning was the headline ‘TV FURY OVER ROCK CULT FILTH!’43 with a full front page devoted to the incident. With the later, second edition, the headline was pushed to a larger font and now read ‘THE FILTH AND THE FURY!’44 The Sun’s front page asked ‘WERE THE PISTOLS LOADED?’45 while the Daily Express read ‘PUNK? CALL IT FILTHY LUCRE!’46 With these headlines, the Daily Mirror, the Sun and the Daily Express sold a total of eight million newspapers – hence the oft repeated “more than armistice day”. Others joined the fray, the Evening Standard with ‘FOUL MOUTHED YOBS’47 and the Evening News with ‘GRUNDY GOADED PUNK BOYS SAYS RECORD CHIEF’.48 However, it was the Daily Mirror’s story of James Holmes, the forty-two-year-old lorry driver who kicked in the screen of his brand-new colour television because he was so disgusted by the language overheard by his eight-year-old son, that trumped the lot.49 This act of outraged stupidity made immediate entry into the Sex Pistols’ mythology. The

46 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
Sex Pistols and this thing called punk were suddenly infamous, as their drummer, Paul Cook, put it so succinctly, “That’s all. A four-letter word done everyfing”.

For most people, the appearance of this punk cult and its progenitors, the Sex Pistols, was an upwelling from the gutter. They were foul-mouthed, ugly, stupid, violent, filthy, uneducated, unemployed and work-shy, making an undignified and noisy scene and grabbing whatever attention they could. What was worse was that this behaviour would and could inspire others like them – or others, as yet not like them – to start behaving in the same way or worse.

The Grundy incident firmly established the Sex Pistols and punk beyond the confines of a subterranean cult. Fittingly, with the Grundy incident punk had gone over the top. In this briefest of moments, every member of the band had taken the opportunity to establish his stage persona. By baiting its fifty-three-year-old presenter, the Grundy incident also represented a generational conflict between the wartime generation and those children born during the 1950s. This generational conflict was exactly what Malcolm McLaren had wished for and had schooled his young protégés in. What had become acceptable within the hermetic culture of McLaren and Westwood’s shop at 430 The King’s Road, however, proved anathema to television audiences. Even McLaren was taken aback by how outrageous and shocking his teenage boys had been, swearing live-to-air on television. McLaren envisaged the imminent arrival of the Flying Squad and the immediate arrest of the group and its management. It is said that he berated the boys and in tears complained that they had wrecked everything he had set out to do. As it turned out he was right to fear the backlash that their antics would provoke both in editorials and from the tabloids’ readership.

The tabloids pitched their voice at a level of contempt for this latest disgusting youth fad and the punks became a subject viewed exclusively from without. It would be left to the music press to attempt any reporting from within one of the first of whom,

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albeit writing for *Melody Maker*, was Caroline Coon.\(^5\) Aside from the music press, punk was reported unsympathetically. It would be several years before punk had a more considered appraisal. Beginning in 1978, with the little yellow book, *Sex Pistols: The Inside Story*, produced by the punk insiders, Fred and Judy Vermorel, a small but consistent production of punk evaluations then followed. There would be Greil Marcus’s *Lipstick Traces* in 1988, with its in-depth examination of the Situationist themes raised by the Vermorels and believed by them to underpin punk. In 1991 Jon Savage would attempt to unravel his own experiences as a music press writer who was converted by the punk scene in *England’s Dreaming*. While some texts would attempt to tease out punk’s origins in sixties American garage rock and its simultaneous resurgence in both New York and London, others would seek to argue a claim to exclusive ownership. Now, thirty years later, this thesis takes stock of the punk cultural record. Punk was a product of its extraordinarily conservative times; to understand punk we must turn to the landscape of cultural, social and economic decay that punk inhabited.

### 2.2 GENERAL LANDSCAPE, HABITAT AND TIMES OF PUNK

#### 2.2.1 ‘Anarchy in the UK’

After the Second World War, Britain embraced Socialism within a democratic framework. Clement Attlee’s postwar Labour government established in 1948 the welfare state and this, together with a commitment to full employment, was accepted in principle by successive Conservative and Labour governments. The economic theory underpinning government policy was that of John Maynard Keynes, outlined in his *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), in which he argued that unemployment could be alleviated by increased spending on public works. By the early 1970s, however, galloping inflation was causing widespread unemployment. This was the Britain of the teenaged John Lydon:

Early seventies Britain was a very depressing place. It was completely run-down, there was trash on the streets, total unemployment – just about everybody was on strike. Everybody was brought up with an education system that told you point blank that if you came from the wrong side of the tracks (which of course was not much use because the trains were on strike) then you had no hope in hell and no career prospects at all. Out of that came pretentious moi and the Sex Pistols and then a whole lot of copycat wankers after us.  

John Lydon’s recollection of the early seventies is subjective; unemployment was not total, even if it was the experience of members of his family and peers. Certainly, regular strike action interrupted services – such as electricity, heating, transport, television reception – that had previously been taken for granted. Lydon and his peers discovered that the education they had received gave them no advantage, even disadvantaged them, in recessionary times. According to Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, education “standards were too low and schooling was too little geared for the needs of a modern economy”. The economy faced a frightening combination of “rising unemployment, and escalating inflation, low productivity, declining industrial investment and profitability, and heightened industrial conflict”. Add to this, the spectre of Irish Republican Army (IRA) terrorism that broke out in London in the wake of ‘Bloody Sunday’ in Derry, Northern Ireland, in 1972, when British soldiers opened fire on civil rights marchers, killing thirteen civilians. The Arab oil embargo of 1973 had combined with two coal miners’ strikes resulting in an energy crisis, rising costs and further strike action in other industries. In March 1974, the Labour party under Harold Wilson was returned to office, winning on a ticket that argued that they were the best party to oversee inflation and unemployment. Within a year, due to the drastic economic measures taken by the Wilson government, Britain was in deep recession; as David Gladstone states:

The terms of the loan negotiated with the International Monetary Fund necessitated a further cut of £1 billion from public spending in 1977–78, with a similar amount being raised by a National Insurance surcharge on employers.  

Labour became divided between those who chose a middle ground and the hard left that advocated vigorous and militant strike action. During the strikes of 1974 garbage piled a storey high in central London and a rat plague accompanied it. For a nation that had enjoyed full employment since the 1940s, in mid-seventies Britain there were as many unemployed as during the Great Depression.

By the second year of Harold Wilson’s second term, the people as a whole were increasingly disaffected with the Labour government. Then, in March 1976, the value of sterling began to fall. Wilson immediately resigned, leaving his successor James Callaghan to deal with the collapse of confidence in the pound. This crisis more than any other meant that Callaghan now faced an ideological shift in the Labour party’s long commitment to full employment, along with its abandonment of Keynesian economic theory. In a speech at the Labour party conference in 1976, he accepted unemployment, increased taxes and cuts to government spending as the antidote to inflation. Also under attack from both right and left factions, the ‘cradle to the grave’ welfare system was described as being in crisis: a crisis that was economic, political and social. Despite its role since 1948, when the National Health Service, the National Insurance and the National Assistance income maintenance programs were inaugurated, both Conservatives

56 Ibid.
57 Images of this can be seen in the opening sequence of Julien Temple’s *The Filth & the Fury*.
58 1.4 million were unemployed in 1979. “… unemployment rose to 3 million and during the 1980s as a whole it never returned to its pre-1979 level. Its unprecedentedly high postwar level conjured up images of the 1930s.” David Gladstone, *The Twentieth-Century Welfare State*, Macmillan Press, Houndsmill 1999: p. 76.
59 Ironically, this speech presaged and later legitimised Thatcher’s same anti-Keynesian policies that were to become synonymous with the Conservative leader as ‘Thatcherism’, after her election in 1979.
60 This inauguration of these ministries was synonymous in the mind of George Orwell with undue interference by the State in the lives of its citizens, and such control he feared would lead directly to totalitarianism and became the subject of his novel *1984* (1948).
and Labour alike had agreed upon the welfare system as a social right. To paraphrase David Gladstone in his history of the twentieth century British welfare state, the common experience of the Second World War by rich and poor alike had democratised hardship and it was popularly felt that the “people’s war” in turn required “the people’s peace”.61 Prior to this, welfare had exclusively centred on the very poor. The ‘welfare state’ for all, was an idealistic reward for wartime suffering. However, reports conducted in the late sixties and early seventies, led to these government ministries coming under attack: poverty still existed, and university studies showed that the middle classes had done far better than the poor from the availability of universal services. Meanwhile unemployment was on an upward rise. Some even blamed the funds used by the welfare state as contributing to the current recession and economic decline of Britain; arguing that they could have been better utilised shoring up industry.

With regard to housing, the London slum clearances of the sixties had resulted in 384 tower blocks by 1974.62 This naive experiment in social welfare was an abject failure, as Roy Porter describes:

Planners’ Utopias proved tenants’ nightmares, as streets in the sky became slums in the sky. High-rise architecture killed traditional street-life, atomized communities, and produced disaffection, delinquency and crime. … Lifts and central heating failed, children vandalized the laundrettes, rubbish chutes became rats’ nests, old people were terrorized … 63

Another issue was the flow of immigrants from the former British colonies. London had, since its founding under Roman occupation, been a place of immigrants and immigration. Immigrants to London had included Angles, Saxons, Danes, Jutes, Vikings, Normans, Flemings, Huguenots and Jews, and although some of these experienced tension with the local population, it was not like that experienced by the new arrivals. While there have been black or coloured Londoners since the eighteenth century, the postwar influx of

63 Ibid.
British subjects from newly independent colonies of the West Indies, Africa, India and Pakistan led to a racist backlash. The National Front, established in 1967, found a popular hero in 1968 in the Tory MP, Enoch Powell, who warned in a speech, should immigration continue unchecked, of a river “foaming with blood”. While punks would wear swastikas for fashion, the skinhead members of the National Front wore them for darker purposes.

2.3 DRAMATIS PERSONAE

2.3.1 430 The King’s Road, World’s End

If punk had a headquarters it was number 430 on The King’s Road in the Borough of Chelsea, London. This seventeenth century road was built for the private use of Charles II, *en route* from the palace of Whitehall and the King’s residence at Hampton Court. Today, The King’s Road begins at Sloane Square and ends fittingly at World’s End and has been an iconic fashion, fame and rock ‘n’ roll nexus from the early sixties, through Swinging London, the glitter era to the mid seventies’ punks and on to this day.

It was here on The King’s Road, at the kink in the road that denotes the end of the fashionable strip, that Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren set up shop in the early seventies. The business was fashion but it centred upon subcultures. In its first incarnation the shop catered to the Teddy Boy resurgence as ‘Let It Rock’, then to biker and leather aficionados with ‘Too Fast To Live Too Young To Die’, and then as ‘SEX’, selling McLaren and Westwood’s art-politics fashions, alongside whips, chains and bondage gear before becoming ‘Seditionaries’. As well as the famous – popstars like Bryan Ferry, David Bowie, Marc Bolan and Mick Jagger – The King’s Road attracted the fashionable and the disaffected like Steve Jones, Paul Cook, John Lydon and the variously named John Simon ‘Sime’ Ritchie Beverley (aka Sid Vicious). These teenagers

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65 The King’s Road never ran all the way between Whitehall and Hampton Court – this was just a section of private road – and Charles II took a boat the rest of the way to Richmond from World’s End.

would lark about and shoplift the same fashions they had seen their heroes wearing on television on *Top of the Pops* the night before.

The shop at 430 The King’s Road was like a stage peopled by an extraordinarily colourful cast of characters. What follows is a survey of the *Dramatis Personae* of punk who strutted their stuff first on the stage of 430 The King’s Road and then the world.

### 2.3.2 Principal players

“The Embezzler”

Malcolm McLaren claims he was born on the 22 January 1946, to a Jewish mother and a Scottish father. He came to fame and infamy as the manager of the Sex Pistols. Malcolm’s version of events (as filmed in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*) would suggest that the invention of punk, the formation of the group, the Sex Pistols, the invention of the stage identities of Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious, and the antics of the group were all initiated and stage managed by Malcolm McLaren. Though largely refuted in the documentary *The Filth & the Fury*, made with the band members in 2000, McLaren nonetheless traded on this invented identity as the master swindler for twenty years. Less known to the general public is that McLaren’s Svengali image was taking a hammering in the courts as early as 1979, as John Lydon chased down the band’s money which Malcolm and his lawyer, Jeremy Fisher, had embezzled/mismanaged.

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67 The name chosen to describe his character in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*.

68 The Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data dates McLaren’s year of birth as 1945.

69 Svengali [A character in George Du Maurier’s novel *Trilby* (1894)] A person who exercises a controlling or mesmeric influence on another, especially for a sinister purpose. *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. “The charming Trilby, an artist’s model, slowly falls under the mesmeric charm spell of Svengali, a German-Polish musician, who trains her voice and establishes her as a famous singer. His power over her is such that when he dies her voice collapses, she loses her eminence and languishes, and finally dies.” *The Oxford Companion to English Literature, 5th edition*, Margaret Drabble (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford 1985: p. 997.
“The Queen of The King’s Road”
Vivienne Westwood was Malcolm’s foremost ‘partner in crime’. Westwood was able to take McLaren’s abstract ideas and make them manifest. Westwood, nee Swire, was born on 16 April 1941. Westwood left her husband Derek in 1965. Malcolm McLaren and Westwood became a couple and their son, Joseph Corre, was born in 1968. In 1971, they moved into the rear of the shopfront at 430 The King’s Road and soon took over the shop’s lease. Westwood is credited with actively entering Malcolm’s fantasy world, while her obsession with the Queen is said to have inspired the lyrics to the Sex Pistols’ ‘God Save the Queen’. After her separation from McLaren, Westwood built her own identity and reputation as a fashion designer. In what many people viewed as an extraordinary turnabout, Westwood accepted an OBE from the Queen in 1993.

“The Other Jew on The King’s Road”
Bernie Rhodes, the manager of the ‘other’ London punk band, The Clash, was initially a close friend of Malcolm McLaren. They met at art school and their friendship could be best described as co-conspiratorial. Rhodes believed that a youth movement could force its way into the mainstream through sheer mass and so he actively encouraged as many young people as possible to start bands. But Rhodes was more Jewish, more cockney, more politically subversive, and more business savvy than Malcolm and sometime in 1977, their friendship foundered. Unlike McLaren, Rhodes discouraged the association between punk and the symbol of the swastika. Under Rhodes’ guidance, The Clash (formerly called the 101ers), actively dissociated itself from the followers of the National Front and, through their songs, associated themselves with liberal and leftwing political causes, most notably anti-racism.

“The Shopgirl at ‘430’”
Jordan was born Pamela Rooke in 1955. Jordan saw herself as a painting, wearing outrageous and sexually provocative clothes, painting her face with cat-burglar masks

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71 Ibid: p. 93
and wearing her hair in a beehive. Her obsession with Myra Hindley led to Hindley’s inauguration as a punk icon. Jordan and her ‘entourage’ inspired Derek Jarman to make his film Jubilee. As the girlfriend and manager of Stuart Leslie Goddard, Jordan helped create his image as Adam Ant. John Lydon credits her with the very first London punk look from which all others sprang.

“The Situationist”

Jamie Reid the Situationist graphic designer and partner of Sophie Richmond. Reid and Richmond met at art school along with McLaren, Fred and Judy Vermorel and Helen Wellington-Lloyd. Before Reid joined the Sex Pistols, he designed the publications of the English Situationist chapter, King Mob. However, it should be noted that while King Mob was inspired by Debord’s ideas, Debord had personally ex-communicated them. The promotion of the conduit of ideas from Debord and especially his work The Society of the Spectacle, and its intertwining with the Sex Pistols narrative and mythology is mostly credited to the rock journalist, Greil Marcus and his book Lipstick Traces. In fact, Reid’s grasp of Situationism was tenuous and it was largely through plagiarism of Situationist imagery and May ’68 posters that he created such iconic punk motifs as the image of the Queen with a safety pin through her mouth, the ripped up and safety-pinned back-together Union Jack, the seven-inch record sleeves and the yellow and black cover for the album Never Mind the Bollocks.

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72 John Lydon had another view: “All the talk about the French Situationists being associated with punk is bollocks. It’s nonsense. Now that really is coffee-table book stuff. The Paris riots and the Situationist movement of the sixties – it was all nonsense forarty French students.” Rotten, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1994: p. 3.

73 This form of plagiaristic practice or detournement is described by Debord as an act of liberation of a word, statement, image or event from its intended usage and to subvert its meaning. So plagiarising from the Situationists was a Situationist act. See Merlin Coverley, Psychogeography, Pocket Essentials, Harpenden 2006: p. 95.
“Punk’s Secretary”
Sophie Richmond’s diary account of the Sex Pistols from 1976 to the band’s breakup in San Francisco in 1978 was reproduced in Fred and Judy Vermorel’s biography. McLaren credits her with finessing subversive letters to the press that fanned the flames of notoriety around the Sex Pistols.

“The Dwarf”
Helen Wellington-Lloyd was born either Helen Miniver,74 or Helen Mininberg.75 Married, Helen’s name is variously published as Wallington-Lloyd76, Wellington Lloyd77 and Wellington-Lloyd.78 Further to this list of nom de plumes, Helen is credited in The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle as Helen of Troy. I have subsequently adopted Wellington-Lloyd throughout. Helen and Malcolm McLaren met at the interviews for Goldsmiths’ art school. They became close friends, briefly lovers and LSD partners. Helen was born to a wealthy South African family. She played the role of a lady-in-waiting in Derek Jarman’s Jubilee and a wannabe musician learning the ten lessons of punk in The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle. Malcolm McLaren credits Helen with the invention of the punk graphic ‘ransom note look’ of cut-out newspaper letters. She disappeared from public attention in 1980.

74 Spelling used throughout Craig Bromberg, The Wicked Ways of Malcolm McLaren.
75 Spelling used throughout Jon Savage, England’s Dreaming.
76 Ibid.
77 Spelling used throughout Stephen Colegrave and Chris Sullivan, Punk.
2.3.3 *The Sex Pistols*

“The Cat Burglar”\(^{79}\)

The Sex Pistols’ guitarist Steve Jones stole all of the Sex Pistols’ musical gear. The microphones came from a David Bowie concert, the guitars purportedly from Rod Stewart’s mansion, as well as other items from the residences of Ronnie Wood and Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones.\(^{80}\) Although the band turned Steve Jones away from a life of crime and imprisonment, Jones’ attitude to the Sex Pistols was always buccaneer; as he put it, he “was only in it for the piss up and the birds after the show”.\(^{81}\) As well as being a competent guitar player, Jones’s contribution to the Sex Pistols’ look was a knotted Union Jack handkerchief on his head.

“The Tea-maker”\(^{82}\)

Paul Cook (or ‘Cookie’) was the best friend of Steve Jones and the Sex Pistols’ drummer. He worked at Watneys Brewery as an electrician until he joined the band fulltime. He claims to have read two books, Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* and “a book about the Kray brothers”.\(^{83}\) Whether Cook finished them is dubious, as he says he “gets bored after a couple of pages”.\(^{84}\) During and after his brush with fame, Paul Cook was, and remains, the least affected of the Sex Pistols.

“Alas Poor Wally”\(^{85}\)

Warwick ‘Wally’ Nightingale formed a band with Paul Cook and Steve Jones called The Strand; this became the Swankers but they never performed live. Jones begged McLaren to manage the band and upon accepting, McLaren’s first edict was that Wally Nightingale

\(^{79}\) The credit assigned to Jones by McLaren in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*.
\(^{82}\) The credit assigned to Paul Cook by McLaren in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*.
\(^{84}\) Ibid.
\(^{85}\) *The Filth and the Fury*. 
had to go. The band kicked Wally out and he became a footnote to the Sex Pistols and punk.

“The Only One in the Band Who Could Play His Instrument”
Glen Matlock was just the Saturday store-help at 430 The King’s Road until he told McLaren that he was a bass player. McLaren immediately set about introducing Matlock to Jones and Cook. A talented musician, Matlock is credited with teaching the rest of the band how to play their instruments as well as writing all the tunes. If this thesis were one that tackled the musical influences upon the creation of the London punk sound, Glen Matlock would deserve much greater attention. However, by focussing my examination upon the cultural signifiers of London punk, Matlock’s musical influence is marginalised.

Matlock was “kicked” out of the Sex Pistols for, according to Jones, washing his feet too much, and according to Lydon, for waffling on about the Beatles. Unlike his fellow band members who were all from solid working-class backgrounds, Matlock came from the lower middle class and this led to continuous sniping from Lydon. To this day, Matlock still claims he left of his own accord. Matlock was replaced by Sid Vicious on bass, who, it was agreed by the band and their management, had the punk look and attitude but definitely couldn’t play bass. Matlock was hired back as a session musician to play the bass parts on their subsequent recordings. Matlock’s resignation or ejection from the group marked the end of the Sex Pistols’ creativity and their rapid decline into a series of stunts.

“The Dickensian Element”
John Lydon aka Johnny Rotten. Born on 31 January 1956, into a working-class, Irish Catholic family recently emigrated from Ireland. His father John Christopher Lydon was a crane driver by profession but the recessionary seventies saw him employed in whatever work he could get, laying concrete or as rat catcher at a sewage farm. At eight

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86 Ibid.
years of age, Lydon contracted meningitis and was bedridden for a year. He recovered and was sent to a Catholic school where he rebelled. In 1975 Lydon got his long hair cut short and dyed green. He was kicked out of home by his father, who told him to take the cabbage on his head with him, and went squatting with John Simon Beverley (Sid Vicious). His sockless attire and safety-pinned clothes, or what McLaren called ‘the Dickensian’, led McLaren to ask him whether he could sing. Lydon was auditioned and would front the band. Lydon wrote the lyrics for the Sex Pistols’ most incendiary singles, ‘Anarchy in the UK’ and ‘God Save the Queen’. He was dubbed Johnny Rotten because of his rotten teeth.

2.3.4 Punk converts

“The Gimmick”

John Simon (“Sime”) Beverley, aka Ritchie, aka Sid Vicious. Sid Vicious was the Sex Pistols’ greatest fan. Born on 10 May 1957, John was raised exclusively by his mother, Anne Beverley. His father, whose surname was Ritchie, sent Anne and two-year-old John or Sime, as his mother called him, to the Spanish Island of Ibiza, but never followed. Without any income and facing starvation, Anne began to deal hash to tourists. She and John eventually returned to London in the mid-sixties. The author of Pretty Vacant, Phil Strongman, notes that it was faster and easier to get public housing in the late 1960s by being a heroin addict or, in Anne’s case, by pretending to be one. Unfortunately, this meant that Anne and Sime were housed among heroin addicts and Anne quickly established a genuine habit. John/Sime hated school and left when he was fifteen. He was subsequently kicked out of home by Anne and began to squat. This is when,

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91 The credit assigned to Sid Vicious by McLaren for The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle.
according to John Lydon, Sime sold speed and according to Savage, flirted with male prostitution. John Lydon initially came into John/Sime’s orbit at Hackney Technical College and John/Sime became a member of the ‘gang of Johns’ that, included John Lydon, John Wardle and John Gray. The nickname ‘Sid’ comes from this time, when John Lydon named John/Sime after Lydon’s pet hamster: this hamster had in turn been named after the former member of the acid-rock group Pink Floyd, Syd Barrett. Barrett suffered a drug induced mental breakdown and was a recluse. The addition of ‘Vicious’ as a surname comes from the Lou Reed song, ‘(You’re So) Vicious’. Sid met Nancy Spungen and fell in love with her and heroin. Knowing how deeply Sid’s hero-worship and friendship with Lydon was, Spungen pushed Sid to get a role in the band. As John Lydon’s and the Sex Pistols’ greatest fan, Sid’s inclusion heralded the end of the group as a creative entity. Unable to play bass, Sid’s heroin addiction and Malcolm McLaren’s on-tour manipulations led inevitably to the band’s break up. Sid soldiered on in his role in The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle but increasingly disliked McLaren. Sid boasted that he would be dead at twenty-one: he was, from a heroin overdose.

“The Bromley Contingent”
Siouxsie Sioux (Susan Janet Dallion), Billy Idol (William Broad), Steve ‘Severin’ (Bailey), Debbie Juvenile (Wilson), Tracie O’Keefe, Soo ‘Catwoman’ Lucas, Nils Stevenson, Philip Salon, Marco Pirroni, Linda Ashby.

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The ‘Bromley contingent’ was largely drawn from the suburb of Bromley, outside London. The name is misleading, as it would come to refer to the group of friends attending both the Sex Pistols’ early gigs as well as ‘Louise’s’, an inner London lesbian bar frequented by such artists as Francis Bacon. The Bromley contingent subsequently came to include Linda Ashby, a lesbian dominatrix who shopped at ‘SEX’, Stuart Leslie Goddard aka Adam Ant, and even the Irishman, Shane MacGowan, who later formed the punk folk outfit, The Pogues. This led to a fluidity between Ashby’s premises, the Bromley contingent’s digs and the Sex Pistols’ gigs, with a couple of the girls selling clothes at ‘SEX’ as well as working at Ashby’s. The individual looks of the Bromley contingent were all entirely different and very striking. They literally made a scene wherever they went. Soo ‘Catwoman’ Lucas made herself up to look like a cat and Phil Salon foreshadowed the campy-Goth look of the band, The Damned. Nils Stevenson claims that Siouxsie Sioux’s look was based on the combination of Charlotte Rampling’s maîtresse in Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter* (1974) and the wicked queen from Walt Disney’s *Snow White* (1937). Liza Minnelli’s costume in *Cabaret* (1972) has also been suggested; and the influence of film upon the punks, and Siouxsie in particular, cannot be overstated. The name of her band Siouxsie and the Banshees was derived from the movie *The Cry of the Banshee* (1970).

2.3.5 *Nancy Spungen: a necessary footnote*

Nancy, like Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious, is a punk icon; however, while her story is an essential aspect of the Sex Pistols’ narrative (as well as the budding New York and London punk scenes), Nancy is not an actor in my thesis. But to exclude her from mention would be to falsify the punk narrative. I therefore supply a brief biography of Nancy and her part in events relevant to the London punk scene, her relationship with Sid Vicious and her murder.

Nancy Spungen, the daughter of American Midwestern Jews, was Sid Vicious’s opportunistic lover and heroin dealer. Her mother Deborah’s biography of Nancy, *And I Don’t Want To Live This Life* (1983), is the definitive text of her family and her

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daughter’s deeply troubled life with schizophrenia. Moving to New York in the mid-seventies, Nancy fell in with the neophyte-punk glitter group, made up of former members of The New York Dolls, Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers, among whom she began her heroin addiction. To support her addiction, she worked as a prostitute. She followed the members of The New York Dolls and Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers to London with the express intention of getting one of the Sex Pistols as a boyfriend. She had no success with Johnny Rotten, Steve Jones had sex with her and left her, whereupon she settled for the Sex Pistols’ biggest groupie, Sid Vicious. Their mutually abusive and co-dependent relationship was consolidated by their addiction to heroin and Nancy’s role as Sid’s dealer. It became increasingly obvious that they would either die of heroin or violence. However, all attempts to separate Sid and Nancy failed. Sid’s purchase of a Bowie knife worried friends of the couple, not only because Sid used it to cut himself, but for how it might be used between Sid and Nancy. After the breakup of the Sex Pistols, Sid moved with Nancy to New York to be closer to the heroin scene. They checked into room 100 at the Chelsea Hotel. Sometime on the night of 12 October 1978, Nancy suffered a one-centimetre-deep puncture wound to her abdomen. Sid and Nancy were both heavily sedated with heroin. Nancy awoke in the early hours of the morning and dragged herself to the bathroom where she fell unconscious and died while Sid slept. Although the hotel room showed evidence of having been burgled, Sid was subsequently charged with Nancy’s murder and sent to Riker’s Island. He was bailed out by McLaren, who went on to exploit Sid’s notoriety for the conclusion of *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*. It has since come to light that Sid and Nancy’s heroin dealer, Rockets Redglare, admitted to stabbing Nancy when she awoke as he was robbing Sid and Nancy’s hotel room.99

In 1984 filmmaker Alex Cox filmed a version of Sid and Nancy’s relationship as a tragic love story, known both as *Love Kills* and *Sid & Nancy*. The film was denigrated by John Lydon as a complete fabrication.100 The film suggests that Sid’s fatal heroin

overdose on 1 February 1979 was Sid carrying out his part in a suicide pact agreed with Nancy. With his career in the ascendant and a new girlfriend, Michelle Robinson, this seems unlikely. There is speculation that as the heroin was 98 per cent pure during a heroin drought that it may have been a ‘hotshot’ from Rockets Redglare, sold to Sid’s mother Anne, with the intention of silencing Sid.

2.4 THE SHORT LIFE AND CRIMES OF THE SEX PISTOLS

By 1974, the roll-on effect of the London Dock closures meant that employment in clothing and footwear had declined. The once anti-establishment fashion for beads, long hair (and facial hair on men) had become regulation. The most common clothing among youths was bell-bottom flares, clogs and a skivvy or t-shirt with the name of a rock band. Malcolm McLaren and partner, Vivienne Westwood, were running ‘Too Fast To Live Too Young To Die’ which would shortly be transformed into a bondage and sex fetishist store called ‘SEX’. McLaren had chased one teenager, a handsome, cocky lad, from the store for shoplifting. Cheekily, this lad would return the following week. McLaren got to know this youth, Steve Jones, and his mate Paul Cook, who told him about their band.

In mid 1975, McLaren visited the United States and inveigled himself into the role of ‘manager’ of cross-dressing, hard-glitter-rock outfit, The New York Dolls. From all accounts it was a disaster and after a fortnight as their manager, McLaren returned to London deeply depressed.

At first, McLaren thought of Jones’ band as a backing group for one or other of the people he had met at the New York venue CBGBs. This included Richard Hell of the group Television, and Sylvain, ‘formerly’ of The New York Dolls. When The New York Dolls reformed as Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers, and Hell disclosed his recently acquired heroin addiction, McLaren focussed his attention on Steve Jones’ band

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101 This account is derived from the versions given by Fred and Judy Vermorel, Craig Bromberg, Jon Savage and Phil Strongman.
as an entity in itself. It occurred to McLaren and Westwood that they might be able to use the band to promote their fashions.

Upon assuming the role of manager, McLaren had Wally Nightingale ejected. The band’s line-up would now see Glen Matlock play bass, Jones play guitar and Cook play drums while the search for a front man began. McLaren’s friend, Bernie Rhodes, had seen a boy with shocking short green hair and loads of attitude on The King’s Road and Rhodes suggested McLaren get this kid to front the group, now called the Sex Pistols. Another potential candidate was this guy called John, who Westwood had met in their store while McLaren was in America. (Westwood’s John was John Simon Beverley not John Lydon; if he had been chosen, punk’s history might have been quite different). Subsequently, the boy with green hair was approached. Suspicious of McLaren and his boys, Lydon suspected a set up. When asked if he could sing, he replied that he could play the violin badly. He was taken for a drink at the Roebuck pub. Here, Lydon alienated Steve Jones with his smart-arsed commentary but won McLaren over, who insisted on an audition immediately. Lydon was taken back to ‘430’ where on the shopfloor there was a fifties jukebox loaded with ‘forty-fives’ from the golden age of rock. It also included the Alice Cooper track ‘Eighteen’, which Lydon chose as his audition number. However, Lydon refused to sing along to the jukebox unless he was supplied with a mike. An unattached showerhead was found and Lydon’s hunchbacked, high-octane performance won him, if not the band’s admiration, then better still, their manager’s favour.

The Sex Pistols rehearsals were to begin at a studio called The Crunchy Frog. Jones, who had decided he couldn’t stand Lydon, saw that none of the other band members turned up for their first rehearsal. Feeling duped, Lydon rang each of them and told them that he would kill them. As he was paying for the band’s studio hire, McLaren saw that the next rehearsal took place.

Later, McLaren set Steve Jones up in a flat above a rehearsal space at 6 Denmark Street, which McLaren hoped would be a “cross between a gay bath house and a college

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dorm’. Living on a diet of lager and shoplifted baked beans, the band rehearsed a variety of songs from The Who, The Faces, The Stooges, The Modern Lovers and Chuck Berry on the musical equipment Jones stole for them.

After what seemed like many months rehearsing in close quarters, the band began to pester McLaren to find them a gig. He either wasn’t convinced that they were ready, or wasn’t convinced that the world was ready for the Sex Pistols. As it was, Glen Matlock used his art school connections to secure the Sex Pistols their first gig at St Martins School of Art, just before Christmas 1975. This first gig was a short-lived affair. It was either, or both, their sneering attitude and the racket they made, that saw the electricity plug pulled before they’d finished their opening song. However, far from dampening their spirits, Jones described the experience as euphoric.

Just over a month later, McLaren secured the Sex Pistols a performance that dovetailed with his concept of the band as a promotion for ‘SEX’ to “London’s leading artistic/Bohemian circle”.

On St Valentine’s Day, the Sex Pistols played at artist Andrew Logan’s Miss Alternative World party. As its name suggests, this party was largely made up of gay, lesbian, transvestite and transsexual artists and centred around a dragshow burlesque of the mainstream Miss World competition.

Again, with McLaren’s view to promoting ‘SEX’, in April the Sex Pistols started a residency at the El Paradiso strip club in Soho. Rotten’s stage antics, which involved smashing stage-lights with his mike stand – observed by the uncomprehending owner – concluded this engagement.

In May, the search for a permanent venue paid off and the 100 Club in Oxford Street, Westminster became their regular venue. It was here that the Sex Pistols began to build-up a core audience: including the young people drawn from the suburb of Bromley, whom along with the entourage they in turn drew, would come to be known collectively as the ‘Bromley contingent’.

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106 The Filth and the Fury.
McLaren was keen to spread the word of the Sex Pistols (and his business ‘SEX’) beyond the confines of London’s least salubrious locale of Soho. This led to McLaren booking the Sex Pistols at various ‘venues’ outside London. McLaren made these bookings by phone, sight unseen, and subsequently many of these performances were either unattended or poorly attended. McLaren did not see it as his duty to accompany his band on the road and so seemed unaware of the poor choice of venue he was making. More often than not, these early tour gigs were rudely concluded in stand offs between the band and the publican or the band and locals, who didn’t like Londoners in general, let alone the likes of the Sex Pistols who had blustered onto their patch with all their attitude and this racket they called ‘music’. And who can blame them, as even the cosmopolitan London audiences were deeply confused by the Sex Pistols.

For the outsider, all of the Sex Pistols’ cultural referents, both as music and as a package, were an indecipherable white noise. Their look was like nothing seen before, and although there were some clearly identifiable symbolic referents, these were largely of a taboo nature, and they caused the viewer to blink or look away. The ‘music’, on the other hand was a hailstorm on a tin roof; its melody was buried in thumping teutonic rhythms, screeching guitar and Lydon’s banshee scream. This wasn’t music, it wasn’t rock ‘n’ roll and most confusing of all, the band wasn’t driven by a need to please. In fact, directly the opposite because it seemed that the band wanted to be, if not hated and attacked, then at the very least, ignored. But there was also something inspiring about the band’s fearlessness, attitude, their arrogance and overall style.

That summer, England sweltered through a heatwave. Hotter than the London summer seen as a key factor in the racial tensions that led to the Nottinghill Race Riots in 1958 and only topped by the summer of 1940, England contended with a drought and London faced unheard of water shortages. In the midst of this sweltering heat, on 4 June, the Sex Pistols played a gig at the Manchester Lesser Free Trade Hall selling just

109 “… the total rainfall at Kew in London from the beginning of October 1975 to the end of August 1976 was just 235mm or 43% of the long term average.” http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/features/understanding/1976_drought.shtml as retrieved on 12 July 2008 15:11:28 GMT.
forty-two tickets but starting a wave of new bands in Manchester. (From this event would come future popstars, Mark E. Smith of The Fall, Morrissey of The Smiths, Bernard Sumner of New Order, Mick Hucknall of Simply Red, Ian Curtis and Peter Hook of Joy Division\textsuperscript{110}).

The real summer heat set in on 23 June when for fourteen days the temperature topped 32 °C.\textsuperscript{111} London’s parks and gardens with their English lawns turned brown and then to dust, while the Thames became, first, a sludge of stinking estuarial mud, and then, as the extraordinary summer conditions continued, its surface dried like clay and cracked. In addition to the ‘natural’ conditions, many punks cited the wide-availability of the drug, amphetamine sulphate (street name ‘speed’).\textsuperscript{112} The punks were literally up and out all night.\textsuperscript{113} Alongside or as a result of these factors, the Sex Pistols and London punk began to take on a momentum and in July, inspired by the Sex Pistols’ performances, a succession of ‘punk groups’ seemingly hot-housed, now emerged and were quickly engaged as support acts for the Sex Pistols. These included The Clash, The Damned and Manchester’s Buzzcocks.

In August 1976, the so-called ‘summer of hate’\textsuperscript{114} at the Screen on the Green, Islington took place. The Sex Pistols topped a midnight-to-dawn bill that included the Kenneth Anger films \textit{Scorpio Rising} and \textit{Kustom Car Commandos}. The noise and colour of the Sex Pistols and this movement called ‘punk rock’ that they had single-handedly inspired began to attract the attention of record companies. Artists and Repertoire (A&R)

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/features/understanding/1976_drought.shtml as retrieved on 12 Jul 2008 15:11:28 GMT.
\item Amphetamine sulphate abuse is credited by Jon Savage with speeding up punk music and defining punk’s mental state and its attitude. This attitude is described as a combination of “irritability, suspicion, restlessness, overexcitement … grandiosity, hostility and aggression.” Jon Savage, \textit{England’s Dreaming}, Faber, London 1992: p. 192.
\item Ibid. John (sic) Ingham quoted in Savage. “Caroline and I used to stay up until four in the morning, the windows would be open all night, and then the sun’s coming up: that was in the spring and the weather just kept going”.
\item The punk’s summer of hate was a play upon the hippies’ summer of love.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
men began to attend Sex Pistols gigs, frequently returning to see if the band really was as ugly and as bad as they had first thought.\textsuperscript{115}

In September, the Sex Pistols made their first television appearance on Tony Wilson’s \textit{So It Goes} program in Manchester. Cued to perform ‘Anarchy in the UK’ they went on playing and rather than pull the plug, host Tony Wilson overruled the producer and the Sex Pistols played three songs. It was edited for broadcast but it set a precedent in the minds of the band that, given any sort of opportunity, they should go all the way.

Back in London, an ‘international’\textsuperscript{116} Punk Festival played over two nights, 20–21 September at the 100 Club. Among the debuting punk groups were Bromley contingent members, Siouxsie Sioux on vocals, Marco Pirroni on guitar and Sid Vicious on drums, performing as Siouxsie and the Banshees. During The Damned’s performance on 21 September, Sid Vicious hurled a beer glass that shattered against a column and a sliver of glass entered a patron’s eye.\textsuperscript{117} Sid was arrested and charged with carrying a knife and the violence was reported in the music press and then picked up by the tabloids.

In October, the Sex Pistols signed with EMI for £40,000. They recorded ‘Anarchy in the UK’, released on 26 November to warm critical response in the music press climbing to number 38 in the United Kingdom singles charts. Alan Lewis declared his age, when he signed off his review in \textit{Sounds} with, “And as an old fart who loved the early Who, I welcome the Pistols”.\textsuperscript{118} While Caroline Coon reviewed the single with:

It’s great. It’s startlingly harsh, loaded with cynical irony and too concerned with urban reality to appeal to those too settled into the thrill of romance. But for restless young renegades bored with sugar and spice images. Which are about as removed from the life they know as Venus and Mars, it will be an instant hit.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{115} A & R man, Nick Mobbs for EMI records, as quoted in \textit{The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle}.

\textsuperscript{116} There was a French act called The Stinky Toys.


\textsuperscript{118} The full article is reproduced in Ray Stevenson, \textit{Sex Pistols File}, Omnibus, London 1978: p. 28.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
Up to this point, the Sex Pistols and punk had been an underground phenomenon but this changed with the Sex Pistols’ ‘swear-in’ with Bill Grundy on the Today show on 1 December 1976. In response to the resulting tabloid furore, the Greater London Council asserted its right to ban the Sex Pistols from playing within the city limits. On the basis of this ban, the Sex Pistols departed for a tour of Holland. Annoyed at the prospect of losing their quarry, the tabloids delivered a parting shot, inventing a story of the Sex Pistols’ swearing, spitting and vomiting in the departure lounge (although both Heathrow Airport and KLM airlines denied the allegations), EMI decided the ever-escalating bad press was hurting their reputation and with the Sex Pistols out of the country, EMI dropped them.

Increasingly the butt of criticism from both John Lydon and Steve Jones, bassist Glen Matlock left the band in February 1977. Matlock’s exit made way for Lydon’s mate, the Sex Pistols’ greatest fan, Sid Vicious to be inducted.

In March, the Sex Pistols signed with A&M records, managed by Herb Alpert and Jerry Moss. The band’s first single from A&M would be their broadside against the Queen’s twenty-fifth coronation anniversary, the Silver Jubilee. Meanwhile, convinced that the BBC television channels had blacklisted the Sex Pistols, Sid Vicious attacked Bob Harris the presenter of BBC2’s The Old Grey Whistle Test, and a colleague, with a steel chain. When Bob Harris’s solicitors sent an official letter of complaint to Jerry Moss, the Sex Pistols were sacked from A&M.

In May, the Sex Pistols signed with Richard Branson’s ‘hippy’ Virgin label that was all-cashed-up from its ‘prog rock’ album, Tubular Bells. Already showing signs of intravenous drug use, now Sid became ill with hepatitis. As would occur whenever Sid got drug-sick, he was dropped by the other band members. During his period of abandonment by his mates, Sid’s mutually abusive and co-dependent relationship with the American stripper, prostitute and heroin addict, Nancy Spungen was consolidated.

Given the role that the Queen’s Jubilee was playing as a smokescreen for the recessionary times, ‘God Save the Queen’ was, at least, considered to be in very poor

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taste and at worst, an act of treason. Richard Branson had to head-off proposed strike-action by his staff at Virgin’s record pressing factory, who wanted no part in the single’s production. Against the odds ‘God Save the Queen’ was released on 27 May, whereupon the BBC promptly banned it from airplay. Many radio and television stations refused to air the commercial for the single and some shops and chains refused to carry it.

On 7 June, the Sex Pistols played live under the bridges of London on board the Thames cruiser Queen Elizabeth. The cruiser was boarded by river police and, among others, McLaren was arrested. Johnny Rotten, the Sex Pistols and punk were debated in parliament at Westminster. Despite the public’s inability to hear the single, either on radio or played live, and despite the difficulty involved in obtaining it, ‘God Save the Queen’ nonetheless charted at ‘number two’ in Jubilee week. Rod Stewart was number one and there was suspicion that the sales figures had been ‘massaged’.

Following the reporting of the Jubilee incident, the Sunday Mirror called for somebody – anybody – to ‘PUNISH THE PUNKS’. Somebody complied: unhappy with their Queen being referred to as a moron, monarchists attacked Johnny Rotten with a broken bottle, blade and machete. In two more separate incidents the Sex Pistols’ graphic designer Jamie Reid had his leg broken and the band’s drummer Paul Cook was coshed.

On 1 July, with the Jubilee and the fears of a punk riot receding, Virgin released ‘Pretty Vacant’ while the bans by shopping chains gradually began to lift. Even Top of the Pops came to the party and played the ‘Pretty Vacant’ promotional video.

However the Sex Pistols, according to McLaren, were still banned from playing live in London. To subvert this ban, they played under pseudonyms like SPOTS (Sex Pistols On Tour) and Acne Rabble. These small tight gigs – played to a surprised and appreciative crowd – are remembered by Steve Jones and John Lydon as among the best gigs the band ever played. With his leg in plaster and the release of the Sex Pistols first long-playing record looming, Jamie Reid designed the day-glo yellow, gloss black

122 John Lydon describes the attack in detail in Julien Temple’s documentary The Filth and the Fury.
123 This may have been a fib, propagated by McLaren but to what end result, isn’t known.
124 The Filth and the Fury.
and lurid pink album sleeve for *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols*. This ghastly but arresting combination of colours, like the ransom note lettering and the image of her-majesty-with-a-safety-pin-through-her-lips, would become synonymous with the Sex Pistols and punk, and become a lasting evocation of that era.

In October, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols* was released and it would not be without incident. Meanwhile, the Sex Pistols’ movie *Who Killed Bambi?*, to be directed by Russ Meyer from a script by Roger Ebert, began production. Two days later, when Malcolm failed to pay them, Meyer and Ebert walked out. McLaren turned to the Sex Pistols’ ‘film archivist’ – whom McLaren had on a small retainer in order to collect and catalogue Sex Pistols’ film and television footage – the National Film and Television School student, Julien Temple.

On 5 November, Chris Seale, manager of Nottingham’s Virgin record store was arrested for displaying the indecent term ‘bollocks’. The playwright and screenwriter, John Mortimer, who had been defence counsel in the Oz conspiracy trial in 1971, defended Seale and won, after the etymology of the word ‘bollocks’ was traced back to an Old English term for a priest.

As if enough wasn’t happening in the courts, Sid and Nancy were arrested for possession of narcotics. Sid was not only using heroin but he was messing up and the band decided that either Nancy had to go or Sid. An attempt to kidnap Nancy by the Sex Pistols’ management and put her on a plane bound for the United States failed when Nancy escaped from her abductors’ car at traffic lights. With the American tour fast approaching, it made more sense to management to wait it out: this way, Sid would be getting on a plane for America and leaving Nancy behind in London.

On Christmas day 1977, the Sex Pistols played their final gig in England as a benefit for striking firefighters and their children in Huddersfield. As John Lydon

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125 In 1971, the editor, Richard Neville, Martin Sharp and others, of Oz magazine were charged with obscenity for Edition 28 ‘The Schoolkids Issue’ in which Rupert the Bear was sexualised. The trial ran for an extraordinary fifteen months, made the conservative establishment look foolish and was seen as a win for the more permissive counter culture.

remembers it fondly, “there was a lot a’ love in the house”. Plans for the American tour briefly faltered when US visas were refused because all the band members, as well as the band’s manager, had criminal records. After negotiation, the visas were issued the following day.

The American tour was a nightmare. The band began in Atlanta, then played Memphis, San Antonio, Baton Rouge, Dallas, Tulsa and concluded on 14 January 1978 in San Francisco. Sid was hopelessly addicted to heroin and a Vietnam veteran was employed to act as Sid’s bodyguard in order to stop Sid getting drugs and to curb his will to self-harm. The Sex Pistols’ American audiences were abusive and violent. A woman in Dallas punched Sid in the nose. Then, after being hit in the face with a full can of beer, Sid attacked another audience member in San Antonio by striking him over the head with his bass guitar.

By this time McLaren had become bored by his role as the band’s manager. He may also have become jealous of the band’s success and his diminished power. Throughout the tour McLaren played games of divide and conquer among the band members. This created a Paul Cook and Steve Jones camp versus John Lydon and the out-of-control Sid Vicious. Whereas Jones and Cook flew from gig to gig and stayed in hotels with McLaren, John and Sid travelled on the tour bus and were accommodated in roadside motels. It all became too much; twelve days after playing the final gig of their American tour at the Winterland Ballroom, Lydon quit the band.

Punk was Johnny Rotten: its look, its attitude, its voice, its style. With Lydon’s withdrawal it must have looked like the end of the road. But McLaren battled on with one clear goal, to make the Sex Pistols movie.

McLaren abandoned Lydon and Sid Vicious in America while he flew with Steve Jones, Paul Cook and all-round filmmaker Julien Temple to Rio De Janeiro. Sid was hospitalised for a heroin overdose but, undermining McLaren, Richard Branson came to Lydon’s aid sending him to Jamaica to scout Reggae and Dub talent for the Virgin label.

Although Sid recuperated, he didn’t kick his habit. Charged with Nancy’s murder, Sid was briefly jailed and then bailed. Celebrating his freedom he died of an overdose.

127 The Filth and the Fury.
On the day of Sid’s burial in New York, the judge in the court proceedings “J. Lydon and others v. Glitterbest/Matrixbest” found in favour of the band members over Malcolm McLaren and ordered all assets to be seized, including McLaren’s unfinished movie *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*.

McLaren subsequently fled to Paris where he stole music from Third World musicians and set it to softcore pornography, while writing a paedophile porno musical called *The Mile High Club*. Lydon found greater success than he had had with the Sex Pistols, when he formed his new band, Public Image Limited (P.i.L.) with ex-Clash member, Keith Levene, and his old friend from ‘the gang of Johns’, John Wardle, now ‘Jah Wobble’.

In 1980 *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* was finally released. Curiously, McLaren had set the opening scenes in eighteenth-century London, with carnivalesque crowds cavorting in the street as they joyously strung up effigies or ‘guys’, each resembling one of the Sex Pistols, above a great bonfire. This opening sequence mixed eighteenth-century dress, burning torches, people jigging wildly in the streets with the anachronistic appearance of an electric guitar, and referenced the ancient ceremonies and traditions of London town such as the public execution and the annual Guy Fawkes’ bonfires. In so doing, it captured the energies of punk and the admiration of John Lydon:

> The opening sequence was a quality act – the burning of the effigy of Johnny Rotten was excellent. It was also the best thing. It was filmed so brilliantly, I thought, Out, I want to die. It’s the end of my life. Malcolm’s come up with a stroke of real class. But luckily it didn’t last. From there on the movie was just rubbish.  

### 2.5 EXISTING PUNK RESEARCH AND COMMENTARY

#### 2.5.1 Chronology of major works on punk: introduction


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student’s personal collage, the book is a compilation of Coon’s interviews and feature articles on punk that had appeared in *Melody Maker* between July 1976 and July 1977. There were to be other books on punk published late in that year\textsuperscript{130} but Coon’s is the ur-text on British punk, the starting point for many subsequent texts about punk, the Sex Pistols, Johnny Rotten, The Clash and The Damned. Coon’s influence stems from a combination of factors. She had her *entrée* to the punk camp both because of, and in spite of, the fact that she was a respected journalist and also a hip political activist.\textsuperscript{131} Coon was accepted by her journalist peers and liked by the punks. Her writing was influential because her reporting was investigative and eschewed the hyperbole of the tabloid press. Coon is also representative of the zeitgeist in that she managed to balance her politics as a Marxist and a feminist while also being admired as an extremely attractive and very smart woman. Much of Coon’s reportage – her commentary as well as the material gathered in her interviews (reported verbatim) – is quoted, as though copyright free, in the scores of books written on punk after 1977.

If Coon was the queen of punk reportage then arguably the first piece of punk ‘literature’ was *The Boy Looked At Johnny*: *The Obituary of Rock and Roll* by *New Musical Express* reporters Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons, which Pluto Press (then ‘the publishing arm of International Socialism’\textsuperscript{132}) published in 1978.

Where Coon’s work is sympathetic in its rendering of the nascent punk scene, *The Boy Looked At Johnny* snarls with punk attitude. The title refers to a line from the Patti Smith song ‘Horses’ on her album of the same name, “the boy looked at Johnny and Johnny wanted to run but the movie kept moving as planned”.\textsuperscript{133} As the authors of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Stephanie Pietri and Alexis Quinlin, *Punk 17 Rock*, Regine Deforges, Paris 1977.Text, French only.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Julie Davis (ed.), *Punk*, Millington, London 1977. Anthologised excerpts from punk ‘zines.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Caroline Coon and Rufus Harris, *The Release Report on Drug Offenders*, Sphere, London, 1969. In 1967, Coon was a founding member (with Rufus Harris) of *Release*, a London-based agency that continues to this day to provide legal advice and representation for people charged with the possession of drugs. Among their clients – two figures despised by the punks – John Lennon and George Harrison.
  \item \textsuperscript{133} http://www.plutobooks.com/shtml/aboutpluto.shtml
  \item ‘Land/Horses’ by Patti Smith, on *Horses*, Arista, New York 1975.
\end{itemize}
obituary of rock’n’roll, Burchill and Parsons pull no punches where such rock luminaries as Pete Townsend and David Bowie are concerned. Even The New York Dolls, Iggy Pop and Debbie Harry, receive scathing critiques.

Beyond these two works of entertainment industry journalism, the growing number of works on the Sex Pistols and punk shows a steady transformation: from the ephemeral fan’s pictorial scrapbook and the stapled punk ’zines, like Sniffin’ Glue and Bondage, into mainstream publisher trade titles with predominantly text-based content. Academic titles appear as early as 1979, with Dick Hebdige’s Subcultures, and sporadically appear thereafter.

Fred and Judy Vermorel’s Sex Pistols: The Inside Story (Star Books, 1978) raised questions about the personalities behind the band that were to intrigue punk commentators for the next three decades. The Vermorels suggested that John Lydon was some sort of autodidact and scholar, and portrayed McLaren as the band’s Svengali informed by art school theory. The Vermorels’ backgrounding of the Sex Pistols’ story shaped the punk narrative as it passed through the hands of investigative and music journalists and academics based in England and America over the next three decades. John Lydon was to address those same questions in his autobiographical oral history of punk, Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs (Picador USA, 1995).

Another line of ongoing research concerns punk’s origins (beyond an insular and parochial London) and is established by American authors, arguing a very credible case for New York’s precedence as punk’s site of origin. My own overview concludes in 2007, with Phil Strongman’s breezy and very readable account of the punk narrative in its thirtieth year: Pretty Vacant. These works are now examined in their order of publication.

2.5.2 Chronology of major works on punk: body
Ray Stevenson’s Sex Pistols File (Omnibus Books, London, 1978) was the first book to cash-in on the Sex Pistols’ cult status; it resembles a fan’s scrapbook of magazine and newspaper cuttings and annotated photographs he took himself. As the brother of Sex Pistols ‘insider’ Nils Stevenson, Ray and his camera had open access to the Sex Pistols’ gigs at the 100 Club, on tour in France and Germany, as well as offstage when the lads
were larking about. The photos are all black and white and, in keeping with the Sex Pistols’ own low-rent graphic style, the layout is cut-and-paste and captioned with typed humorous asides. It is also without page numbering. As a document, the quarto format of *Sex Pistols File* makes a connection with the plethora of photocopied punk fanzines that abounded on the punk scene, for example, Shane MacGowan’s *Bondage* and Mark Perry’s *Sniffin’ Glue (and Other Rock ‘n’ Roll Habits)*, both of which came on the scene in the summer of 1976, when punk was at its underground peak. These fanzines reveal a level of exclusive and proprietorial ownership. In issue 5 of *Sniffin’ Glue*, Perry tried to warn the music press off, telling *Sounds*, *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Rockstar*, to “leave our music to us”. This has been a factor in the presentation of Stevenson’s photos as a fan’s clippings and catalogued photos. Keeping the look, but breaking with the DIY ethic, *Sex Pistols File* is published in a bound book format and holds an International Standard Book Number (ISBN) rather than an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) that catalogues periodicals.

The format of *Sex Pistols File* doesn’t exactly look like a book, in fact it most closely resembles the ephemeral one-off or ‘collector’s issue’ magazine, such that showcases a popular rock act and is sold not through bookstores but through newsagencies or (in England, in what are called) off-licences. Apart from its heavy paper cover and glue binding (rather than staples), to all intents and purposes *Sex Pistols File* conforms to the hagiographic style of a collector’s magazine. The *Sex Pistols File* is neither a book nor a magazine and, with its schizophrenic association of a one-off magazine with a book’s pedigree, establishes a confusion that will recur throughout punk’s literary life. This ambiguity begs the question as to whether punk and the Sex Pistols were just ephemera or the catalyst for an important cultural shift and therefore worthy of literary consideration. Despite such confusion, it is noteworthy that *Sex Pistols*

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134 The original issues have been republished. See: Mark Perry, *Sniffin’ Glue: The Essential Punk Accessory*, Sanctuary House, London 2000.

File has been an extraordinary popular success with as many as fourteen reprints between 1978 and 1994.136

Like Stevenson’s Sex Pistols File, Fred and Judy Vermorel’s Sex Pistols: The Inside Story (1978) is a book with a sense of magazine-like ephemera. Its format is pocket-sized and its cover a garish combination of bright yellow, gloss black and hot pink (referencing Jamie Reid’s cover art for Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols137), while its interior text and images are all black and white. Unlike Sex Pistols File, which is printed on cheap paper, the pages of Sex Pistols: The Inside Story are heavy and glossy. The cover includes a reproduction of Reid’s iconic punk image of Queen Elizabeth with a safety pin through her lips. This image, that has become synonymous with punk, Reid plagiarised from a poster produced by the Atelier populaire and was associated with the riots in Paris in May 1968.138 This is one of the many ways

136 The Brothers’ Stevenson, Ray and Nils would seek to replicate this earlier success with ‘Vacant’: A Diary of the Punk Years 1976-1979. Immediate notice should be given to the book’s cover that again references magazines rather than book design. Vacant successfully parodies such mid to late eighties glossy magazine fare as The Face or Vogue. Ironically, the face in vogue in this case, is not the likes of David Bowie or Grace Jones but instead, a member of the Bromley contingent, Soo ‘Catwoman’ Lucas. Like The Pistols File before it, Vacant is predominantly made up of Ray’s black and white and verite-styled images; Vacant breaks with this in three ways, first, in the inclusion of some very glossy colour pictures entitled ‘The Punk Aristocracy’, second in an introductory essay from Nils and third, and despite the book’s title stating its range as 1976-1979, with a personal diary covering the period February 1976 through to 27 August 1980. Nils’ introductory essay is noteworthy for its lack of originality. Second hand and without analysis, Nils cites Walter Benjamin, Andy Warhol, swallows Greil Marcus’s Lipstick Traces whole but unread and allows Malcolm McLaren to argue that the ‘whole Sex Pistols scam was the putting into practice of a lot of Situationist theories’ (p. 8). This could be construed as alarming, given that in his introduction, Nils dismisses his own empirical experience as gathered in his personal diary and defers to the dominant interpretations and theories of punk that were in vogue in the nineties. For punk researchers ‘Vacant’ will prove useful as an historical litmus by which to test, in the changing historicity of punk’s interpreters, interpretation and theorising.

137 Itself a visual reference and play upon soap powder packaging and this in turn a reference to the Beatles’ manager, Brian Epstein being distressed at the Beatles being marketed like soap powder.

138 Greil Marcus, Lipstick Traces, Secker and Warburg, London 1990: p. 31, and the image is reproduced on p. 34, alongside Reid’s version on p. 35.
that *Sex Pistols: The Inside Story* connects the International Situationists and the events of May ‘68 with the Sex Pistols.

Friends of Malcolm and Vivienne, Fred and Judy Vermorel met at art school and, as their tabloid subtitle indicates, theirs was indeed an insider’s account of the punk movement from the inauguration of the Sex Pistols to their implosion. The first edition of Fred and Judy Vermorel’s biography concluded its coverage of the band towards the end of 1977 before the band broke up in January 1978. Later editions published in 1981 (Star Books) and 1987 (Omnibus Books) extended their coverage to include: Paul Cook and Steve Jones’ trip to Rio to meet the Great Train Robber, Ronald ‘Ronnie’ Biggs; and Sid Vicious’s murder charge and subsequent heroin overdose. In addition to follow-up interviews with all the band members, as well as Malcolm McLaren, filmmaker Julien Temple and Virgin producer, Al Clarke, there are thirteen pages of background notes. These include in banner headlines, ‘THE (EARLY) LIFE AND CRIMES OF MALCOLM MCLAREN’, and a brief essay entitled ‘FROM SITUATIONISM TO PUNK’.

As previously stated this was the first published work to critically assess Malcolm McLaren’s cultural baggage – he had spent seven obstreperous years at art schools – and also that of John Lydon, who had studied such texts as Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Graham Greene’s *Brighton Rock* and the poetry of John Keats, for his A-levels in English Literature. For a rock band that was popularly believed to be unable to play their instruments, it had been taken for granted, even by punk’s fans, that the Sex Pistols were uneducated and illiterate. This, in turn, led to closer readings of punk signifiers as well as intellectual reappraisals of the Sex Pistols and punk by Dick Hebdige and the west coast American musicologist and cultural commentator, Greil Marcus.

The reputable academic publisher, Routledge, broke with tradition in the use of garish hot pink, gloss black and day-glo yellow for the cover of Dick Hebdige’s pocket-size book, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). This decision consciously mimics either or both, the Star Books design for the Vermorels’ biography of the Sex Pistols as

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139 There was another edition in 2006 but without any additional material.
well as *Never Mind the Bollocks* album cover. In place of the safety-pin-in-her-majesty’s-lips graphic, a hermaphroditic punk face resembling Sid Vicious fills the cover. This is, in itself, an important piece of design because the book seeks to attract its readership from outside the traditional academy with its cover telling its potential readership that it was sympathetic to punk and subculture in general.

Born in 1951, Hebdige is a second-wave baby boomer and is culturally synchronous with the principal players of punk. Hebdige studied at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham and *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* was based on his MA. Hebdige’s work was very influential and went on to establish postwar subculture studies in schools of cultural studies in academia around the globe. Hebdige’s *Subculture* was sympathetic to the successive incarnations of postwar youth culture and, given the meltdown the so-called ‘punk movement’ and especially the Sex Pistols had come to in 1978, it was noticeably sympathetic to punk culture. Hebdige’s Marxist idea of punk as a ‘refusal crowd’, bears comparison with the non-Marxist analysis of crowd behaviours in Elias Canetti’s *Crowds & Power (Masse und Macht, 1960)*, as well sociological and historiographical crowd studies. I agree with Hebdige’s idea of punk as a noisy bricolage of all of London’s postwar youth subcultures, but I prefer to see the punk costume as a ‘cut up’ of the cast-off uniforms of past crowds. In this case, the past crowds are the postwar youth subcultures such as Ted, Mod, Rocker, Biker and Skinhead and even demobbed soldiers as represented in and by punk’s use of army disposal goods. Hebdige’s work set a significant precedent for the academic study of punk.

141 Sections from his work have been much anthologised. See for example *The Subcultures Reader, Second Edition* edited by Ken Gelder also from Routledge Press (1997). Hebdige’s work has been a site of considerable academic enquiry. Angela McRobbie’s feminist critique ‘Settling Accounts With Subcultures’ appeared in 1980. While in Professor Roger Sabin’s opinion, you cannot discuss Hebdige’s work without referring to Sarah Thornton’s theory (drawing on the sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu’s work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, [published in France in 1979]) of ‘subcultural capital’. (Subcultural capital (another name for ‘cool’) being either cultural knowledge, or commodities acquired by members of a subculture and by which, their status within the subculture is measured.) Hebdige and Thornton’s ideas have been incorporated and extended in David Muggleton’s *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style (Dress, Body, Culture)*, Berg, Oxford 2000.
Hebdige’s work co-opted punk as a specimen to be examined in the light of existing sociological research within the emerging field of subcultural studies, an offshoot of Cultural Studies, which sought to theorise youth post-war subcultures. In contrast the very first academic text to tackle punk from within and upon on its own terms was that of Dave Laing.

Published in 1985, Laing’s *One Chord Wonders* is firmly centred upon British punk, London punk and the Sex Pistols’ story, but it is also about rock ‘n’ roll in general and pop music as a cultural phenomena. Laing claims *One Chord Wonders* is a comparative work, and one in which he sought to uncover “… how far punk’s meaning differed from the sorts of meaning to be found in other popular music and popular culture”. Laing positions his own work between those of contemporary reporters and punk insiders, many of them journalists (like Caroline Coon, Julie Burchill, Tony Parsons but also, Fred and Judy Vermorel), and the later theoretical works of punk outsiders, including rock critics and academics: Dick Hebdige, Greil Marcus, Robert Christgau and Simon Frith.

Laing’s work is interesting and fresh in its approach to the creation of a taxonomy of punk. Laing sets out to deduce punk’s manifold meanings, by distinguishing between the contemporary reporters and punk insiders, many of them journalists (like Caroline Coon, Julie Burchill, Tony Parsons but also, Fred and Judy Vermorel), and the later theoretical works of punk outsiders, including rock critics and academics: Dick Hebdige, Greil Marcus, Robert Christgau and Simon Frith.


143 Professional rock critic, Robert Christgau was the editor of *The Village Voice* from the early sixties until 2006 and is now contributing editor of *Rolling Stone*. He is best know for his ascerbic reviews and commentaries that have often angered their subjects, most famously, Lou Reed who delivered a spoken word riposte to Christgau on his 1978-concert album, *Take No Prisoners*.

144 Simon Frith is a rock critic and academic. His approach to pop music is largely sociological as his 1978-debut work *The Sociology of Rock* attests, however his writing for the mainstream press is populist rather than academic. Frith is also the editor (with Andrew Goodwin), of *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word* (1990) a collation of selection of academic essays on rock and pop since 1950 after its reprinting in 1994 it became a staple alongside Ken Gelder’s (and formerly Sarah Thornton’s) *The Subcultures Reader* (1997) in undergraduate cultural studies courses.

145 Stacy Thompson extends Laing’s taxonomy of punk by separating punk into two distinct categories. The first category being the “several major genres of punk textuality” and the second being “the scene” of which, by the time of her publishing in 2004, Thompson was able to describe seven major punk sub-scenes or individuated movements. Thompson’s “punk project” identifies five genres of punk texts: music (recorded or performed), style (especially clothing), the printed word (including fanzines, or ‘zines),
between the meanings generated from its ‘artefacts’, ‘events’, and the ‘institutions’. Amongst the artefacts, Laing categorises the ‘hundreds of recordings’, ‘dozens of fanzines’ and miscellaneous published writings, as well as the diversity of items making for punk’s ‘visual style’. The ‘events’ that Laing evokes here are the Grundy incident, and its aftermath of concert cancellations and the ensuing acts of censorship both real and popularly imagined. In the institutional category, Laing posits two oppositional forces, one he describes as ‘news organizations’ and the other as ‘establishment’. Laing’s ‘news organizations’ are not the likes of the BBC or the tabloid press but in fact punk promoters, such as DIY record labels, clubs and shops. A place is reserved for the BBC and the tabloid press in his latter category, the ‘establishment’, which encompasses record companies, broadcasters and the music press. Laing’s assertion that these establishment organizations either embraced, or excluded punk leads to the interesting observation that each through its aims and actions, and largely inadvertently, helped to promote, even generate punk, the punk story and punk ‘noise’ in all its heterogeneous sound and visual fury.

Though very much tied to London punk, the Sex Pistols and the chronology associated with their history, Laing states that One Chord Wonders is not ‘primarily’ an historical approach to punk. Instead, Laing has favoured a semiological approach to the disparate material gathered under the rubric of punk. This rubric then is a combination of the Sex Pistols’ chronology and Laing’s taxonomy: of artefacts, events and institutions. Laing explains his choice of semiology for his investigation because he believes that it

cinema, and events (punk happenings aside from shows). The ‘punk scene’, on the other hand, is both temporal and location based and includes New York, English, California or Hardcore, Washington D.C., First Wave straight edge, New York Second Wave straight edge, Riot Grrrl and Berkley/Lookout Pop Scene. Thompson states: “the entire field of punk can be understood as a set of problems that unfold from a single contradiction between aesthetics and economics … (p. 2)”. Thompson’s unrepentantly Marxist argument revolves around punk’s angry refusal to be commodified and she argues that punk was a direct challenge to capitalism and the capitalist model. Thompson states that in her thesis she “advances a materialist investigation of punk economics and punk aesthetics … in order to formulate some ways in which punk both resists and is resisted by capitalism … (p. 2)”. Thompson’s argument is compelling but breaks down in her chapters dedicated to a punk cinema. See Stacy Thompson, Punk Productions, SUNY, New York 2004.
goes beyond either the approaches of musicology or the linguistic. He demonstrates the shortcomings of taking either a musicological or linguistic approach, by way of the example of interrogating a popular song. Musicology tends to privilege the song’s musicality over, say, an examination of its lyrical content. While, on the other hand, a linguistic study excludes the role of the singing voice, let alone the accompanying instrumentation.

Therefore, the centre of Laing’s thesis is to ask how did punk create meanings, what were those meanings and which meanings were received and accepted and in turn, how did their consumers use these meanings? But as I have already highlighted, while One Chord Wonders is primarily semiological, it is secondarily historical, and for this reason the chapters alternate between theories of meaning and straight-forward historicism. In its use of the Sex Pistols and the Sex Pistols story, One Chord Wonders delivers absolutely nothing new to the historical record; instead it is Laing’s semiological approach to punk that is important.

Semiology is the study of communication and culture as it is generated by systems of signs. However, in semiology all signs are not created equal. Further, Laing goes beyond an examination of a signifier’s primary meaning or usage, to examine the secondary, culturally-specific web of meanings that have accreted around that word. It is at this level that ideology, or the battle of ownership over which connotations will dominate and which will be marginalised. At issue is the question of who has the right to use the word ‘punk’, who might be described as a punk, but also how that word is used and who controls its meaning. This was to be seen in the derisive attitude of the tabloid press when using the term punk in opposition to the meaning with which self-proclaimed punk adherents might regard themselves and their peers. At issue is power, the generation and ownership of power and the politics of that power arrangement.

In situating his own work in the discourse on punk, Laing both acknowledges and distances his work from, first, Marxism and, second, the work of Dick Hebdige and the Birmingham School. Laing believes that Marxism privileges the social over language systems; for example, he suggests that the political lyrics of a song must also be considered with regard to the place in which those sentiments are disseminated. A political rally is quite a different place of consumption to a pub, and both venues – what
is described as, its popular cultural structure – colour the song’s meaning in its point of reception.

Laing differentiates his work from Hebdige and the Birmingham school by explaining that he uses the term punk as in ‘punk rock’, not punk as in punk look. Punk as in punk rock denotes a specific musical genre and Laing argues that unlike every other youth subculture (the teds, mods, skinheads), that all adopted an already existing type of music, punk began as music. Laing’s terms of reference are at odds with Hebdige and the Birmingham School who use punk to describe the parameters of a ‘subculture’. Whereas Laing argues that punk and its subcultural sense of belonging is rooted in the performance of punk rock, for Hebdige and the Birmingham School, the music is merely an aspect of this subculture’s sense of belonging and subordinate to their view of punk as overwhelmingly visual and described by Laing as the ‘punk look’.

Drawing on Michel Foucault’s idea of discourse, One Chord Wonders explores the production of the discourse-of-punk-rock through processes of control, selection, organisation and redistribution. According to Laing, punk rock laid bare the operations of power in mainstream popular music, exposing the machinations and collusions of the broadcasting stations, record companies, retailers, the local state and the music press. All of which used and misused their power to exclude.

But the case of punk rock, its emergence, its complex, contradictory and unstable challenge to the musical establishment and its subsequent disintegration, offers an unrivalled chance to show how power makes meaning in cultural history.

Laing concludes that:

146 Punk did adopt an already existing ‘type of music’; dub and reggae, but it did this later and doesn’t dismantle Laing’s argument that punk germinated out of punk rock and that a shared fascination for punk rock defines punks first and foremost, with fashion and visuals coming in secondary importance.

147 Discourse as it is used here refers to ‘discursive formation’, or what Foucault saw as a form of institutionalised thinking and communication that required its participants to have specialised knowledge both for its transmission and reception. See Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge Second edition, translated by Alan Sheridan, Routledge, London 2002.

Punk rock was a genre shot through with paradox at every level. It contained elements of a subculture and of an avant-garde, the one building identity, the other subverting it.

… punk rock’s moment of triumph was brief, though its effects were, far reaching. 149

Laing hopes that there might yet be written a punk history to “deal in depth with the considerable range of local punk rock activity which grew up through Britain”150 and which Laing believes is comparable to the beat group era of 1963-6. At the time of my writing, twenty-three years after Laing’s request and over thirty years after punk’s appearance this narrative is yet to be published.

However, a decade after Fred and Judy Vermorel drew attention to a Situationist influence in the matrix of punk, the American musicologist and critic Greil Marcus would take their micro-essay of approximately 1200 words ‘FROM SITUATIONISM TO PUNK’, in *Sex Pistols: The Inside Story* and expand this, through his own theoretical interrogation, to a whopping 450 pages.

In *Sex Pistols: The Inside Story*, in a micro-essay of approximately 1200 words entitled ‘FROM SITUATIONISM TO PUNK’, Fred and Judy Vermorel had drawn attention to a Situationist influence in the matrix of punk. Over a decade later, in *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, the American musicologist and critic Greil Marcus would vastly expand the Vermorels’ hypothesis, employing his own (highly idiosyncratic) theoretical interrogation. First published in hardback by Harvard University Press in 1989, it was published in paperback format the following year by London’s Secker and Warburg.

_Lipstick Traces_ was Marcus’s attempt to identify the Sex Pistols as the apotheosis of an underground cult or secret history that could be traced back, via the French philosopher Guy Debord and the International Situationists, through the Lettrist International, Surrealism to Dada and so on, through heretics, sects, anarchist cults back to the fourteenth century and a Dutch heretic, John of Leyden, and then to the twelfth century and the founder of the Levantine Assassins, Hassan i-Sabbah II.

149 Ibid: p. 131
150 Ibid: p. viv
Marcus’s work is the definitive exploration of the Sex Pistols and Situationism as first postulated by the Vermorels and, although requiring a healthy dose of scepticism on the part of the reader, cannot be simply dismissed. Marcus lays out the evidence for the ‘influence’ of Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* upon the lyrics of John Lydon and upon the relationship between Jamie Reid and Malcolm McLaren. He claims the guiding hand of Debord in the lyrical content of ‘Anarchy in the UK’ and also makes a case for McLaren and Reid’s ‘utilisation’ of Debordian ideas in their making, promotion and exploitation of the Sex Pistols and their market.

For nearly two decades, and in the face of regular dismissal by academics and punk writers, Marcus’s text has provided one of the dominant theories about London punk: establishing the nexus of Situationism, the Sex Pistols and London punk and arguing McLaren’s assertion (via Fred and Judy Vermorel) that the Sex Pistols were, to-the-very-letter, an enactment of Guy Debord’s theories as espoused in *The Society of the Spectacle*. (In Chapter 8: Punk’s Legacy, I will comprehensively question the degree to which Marcus overstates the Situationist influence.) Like *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* before it, Marcus’s work privileges McLaren and, I argue, enters into and even extends McLaren’s myth making, and consolidates his persona as a Svengali. Although this image as a master puppeteer has held sway since McLaren asserted it with *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, punk’s other key-players (especially the American camp) and one of punk’s key progenitors, John Lydon, have tirelessly fought it.151

It is true that Marcus never actually describes Lydon as McLaren’s puppet. However, by suggesting that Lydon was, if not a “mouthpiece”152, then a “medium”153 for Situationist ideas and slogans, Marcus fails to acknowledge either Lydon’s demonstrably self-assembled persona or his free agency and improvisation. While Marcus gives John Lydon due coverage, his is an outsider’s account that favours McLaren. In his ‘autobiography’ *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs*, Lydon feels compelled to respond to Marcus’s assertions upon three separate occasions:

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151 For example: the court case, ‘Lydon vs. Glitterbest/Matrixbest’ and the books by punk New Yorkers, Clinton Heylin and Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain will be considered.


153 Ibid.
We didn’t sit around and wax Situationist philosophy. Never. … I don’t know what the big palabra was about the Situationists, anyway. It was bollocks for that Lipstick Traces arsehole to flog his book. Mind games for the muddled classes. 154

Why, according to Greil Marcus’s book Lipstick Traces, Michael Jackson is a Situationist. Forget it. There’s no master conspiracy in anything, not even in governments. Everything is just some kind of vaguely organized chaos. 155

You can’t manipulate crowds and fill it up with a bunch of haberdashery specials. It has to happen naturally. No Situationist scheme will do. You can’t buy a public until after you’ve made a record. 156

Lydon, the front man of the Sex Pistols, popularly regarded as the very embodiment of London punk, here ridicules Marcus’s assertion of a connection between Situationism and the Sex Pistols.

Certainly, the underground lineage or “secret history” of punk attitudes and antecedents that Marcus proposes owes little to standard historical practice. Marcus’s methodology is to seek out arguably obtuse similarities with which to further his argument in a process he describes as seeking “simultaneity.” For example, Marcus finds simultaneity in the names John Lydon and John of Leyden, which allows him to segue from the self-declared anti-Christ, the twentieth century ‘Lydon’, to the fifteenth century heretic, ‘Leyden’. Marcus initially states that “to root motives in mere coincidence of names is specious”157 but he nonetheless concludes that “serendipity is where you find it”. 158 Lipstick Traces could be described as a pseudo-genealogy created through the serendipitous benefit of hindsight.

Also in 1989, Perennial Books New York (soon to be a division of Harper Collins), published New York journalist Craig Bromberg’s expose, The Wicked Ways of

155 Ibid: p. 3.
156 Ibid: p. 112.
158 Ibid.
Malcolm McLaren. Bromberg’s book is based on hundreds of hours of taped interviews with almost every single player in the punk narrative still alive. Once again McLaren’s role as the Svengali of punk is privileged to the detriment of the creative contribution of others (Jamie Reid and Sophie Richmond go unmentioned). McLaren is nevertheless savaged, not by Bromberg, but by his interviewees, who expose McLaren’s character and damn him with his own actions.

In spite of a number of minor inaccuracies, this book is among the most valuable texts for critical analysis and examination, and a starting point for further research. Within the field of entertainment journalism, Bromberg’s book is a widely and deeply researched labour of investigative journalism.\(^{159}\) The inaccuracies include misspellings of individuals’ names and easily verifiable historical mistakes (such as dating the Gordon Riots as 1778 and spelling Granada Broadcasting as Grenada). Nevertheless, as punk recedes in time and the major punk players disappear, Bromberg’s work will become – alongside Lydon’s autobiography cum biography of English punk, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs* – a goldmine for subsequent punk researchers.

Jon Savage’s *England’s Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (1991) is by far the best overview written about British punk and its milieu. As a music journalist, Jon Savage was able to call on his own youthful experience of years of English punk rock. Savage’s personal diary entries from the mid-seventies exchange the tabloids’ inflation of punk rock as public enemy number one for the street-level gaze of an insightful twenty-year-old. Savage is the first to tell the Sex Pistols’ narrative critically and analytically. This is possible because Savage is able to mine Fred and Judy Vermorel’s work *Sex Pistols: The Inside Story* with a cool detachment. From the Vermorels, Savage picks and chooses. He ignores the fact that Lydon studied Keats’s poetry and Shakespeare’s

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\(^{159}\) I say investigative, because for example, despite being warned off seeking out McLaren’s mother, even being lied to by McLaren who claimed she was dead, Bromberg nonetheless checked death records and eventually tracked Eve Edwards down. Unfortunately for history, for all Bromberg’s gumshoe technique and a gigantic bunch of flowers, Eve Edwards had nothing to say about the son she disowned thirty-odd years earlier.
Macbeth, choosing instead to concentrate on John Lydon’s identification with the teenage gangster, Pinkie, of Graham Greene’s Brighton Rock.\textsuperscript{160}\n
Savage also explores the childhoods of both Lydon and McLaren. Again, Savage’s consideration of Lydon’s childhood bout with meningitis and McLaren’s dependent relationship on his grandmother, were both starting points for further investigation. My thesis is as indebted to Savage’s research as to the investigative journalism undertaken by Craig Bromberg.\textsuperscript{161} England’s Dreaming also includes an extensive discography that tells the history of the punk sound from its beginnings in the fifties rock ‘n’ roll of Elvis, Gene Vincent, Chuck Berry and Eddie Cochran through the late sixties and into the early seventies when bands and independent labels unearthed and reissued fifties and sixties garage band recordings.\textsuperscript{162} These antecedents, together with the granddaddies of punk – The Velvet Underground, New York Dolls, Lou Reed, MC5, Modern Lovers and Iggy Pop and The Stooges – are analysed for the effect they had on the burgeoning punk scene on both sides of the Atlantic: at London’s 430 The King’s Road and New York’s CBGBs. I am also indebted to Savage for his footnote that Malcolm McLaren owned only one long-playing record, the soundtrack to the filmed musical Oliver! directed by Carol Reed in 1968. This led to my mining of all the Dickensian associations and planted the seed for this thesis.

Although one is immediately suspicious of Lydon’s hyperbolic statement that “this book is as close to the truth as one can get”,\textsuperscript{163} Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs (1993) is essential primary source material that delivers some extraordinary insights. For example, John Lydon first revealed here that one of the many influences of his stage-persona Johnny Rotten was Sir Laurence Olivier’s film portrayal of Richard III. And until Julien

\textsuperscript{160} This, in turn, led me to undertake a deeper and more critical analysis of Lydon’s identification with Pinkie, as can be seen in Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{161} I am further indebted to Savage for his bibliography that listed Bromberg’s work.


Temple’s documentary in 2000 (apart from Glen Matlock’s lacklustre *I Was A Teenage Sex Pistol* [1990]), this was the only extended account of the Sex Pistols by a member of the band and in opposition to McLaren’s imaginative version in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*.

*Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs*, is not a traditional autobiography. Lydon’s voice is dominant but the voices of other punk figures, especially from the Bromley contingent, are featured, as is Lydon’s father. While their accounts certainly don’t contradict that of Lydon, they nonetheless serve as counterpoint views. It should be noted that sharing the credit with Lydon are Keith and Kent Zimmerman whose contribution is not made clear. They aren’t ghostwriters but they would appear to have arranged interviews, recorded and transcribed them, and then arranged and organised the material presented. Obviously, the voices of the McLaren camp – McLaren, Vivienne Westwood and Helen Wellington-Lloyd – are all absent. Unfortunately, it could be argued that in their absence *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs* is an unchallenged work of image-management and mythmaking, equally insidious as anything Lydon might accuse McLaren of. Nonetheless, as an extended insight into John Lydon, this work is primary source material.

In *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World* (1993), author Clinton Heylin tackles the question of whether punk’s originators were American or British. Heylin’s is far from the last word on this subject and this topic and his contribution continues to be both rudely castigated, championed and hotly debated.\(^{164}\) There is absolutely no doubt in my mind, that the New York punk scene that centred on CBGBs and opened in 1973 predated the London punk scene. But Heylin’s aim is not one-upmanship. He shows that both the New York and London scenes shared common cultural signifiers, common musical tastes and a Do It Yourself ethic, but both had quite different approaches:

\(^{164}\) In counter argument; claiming London as the site of punk’s evolution, much is made of the significance of the underground Ladbroke Grove-based psychedelic pub rock group, the Pink Fairies formed in 1970 and retrospectively claimed as a proto-punk band.
The British bands took a deliberately anti-intellectual stance, refuting any British awareness of, or influence from, previous exponents of the form. The New York and Cleveland bands saw themselves as self-consciously drawing on and extending an existing tradition in American rock and roll. 165

On the one hand, American punk was centred upon the New York club, CBGBs, where such bands and individuals as diverse and unique as The Ramones, Patti Smith, Richard Hell, Television, Blondie, Wayne County and Talking Heads were regular performers. While on the other hand, the UK scene, with the Sex Pistols, The Damned, Buzzcocks and The Clash – their combined influence launched a thousand punk bands across the UK – was actually centred on Malcolm McLaren at 430 The King’s Road. With its sudden surge of media attention after the Grundy incident, it was as if this upstart British punk scene sprang out of nowhere and stole the mantle from New York. Heylin picks up on a continuing unassuaged vexation felt by exponents of the American punk scene that centred on CBGBs. As Heylin shows us by contrast, “the CBGBs scene went largely ignored by the American music industry until 1976 – two years after the debuts of Television, the Ramones and Blondie”, 166 while:

The British weekly music press was reviewing Sex Pistols’ shows less than three months after their cacophonous debut. Within a year of the Pistols’ first performance they had a record deal, with the ‘major’ label EMI. Within six months of their first gigs The Damned and The Clash also secured contracts, the latter with CBS. 167

For the hardworking bands and the fan base centred upon CBGBs, it was obvious that the London punk scene hadn’t earned their chops and didn’t deserve to eclipse the pre-eminence of the New York scene. Heylin does reveal the cross-pollination that was occurring across the Atlantic, with Malcolm McLaren’s own travels to New York in 1972 and 1974. And in 1975, McLaren was briefly the manager of the glam band, The New York Dolls, who also performed at CBGBs. Things could have been quite different

166 Ibid: p. xiv
167 Ibid.
because the fledgling group that McLaren initially agreed to manage, and which would
form the core of the Sex Pistols (before the appointment of their singer John Lydon),
McLaren originally intended to be a backing group for Sylvain Sylvain, the former
guitarist for The New York Dolls, or for Richard Hell of Television. If this had happened
the intertwining of the London and New York scenes might have led to closer ties on
both sides of the Atlantic. However, the re-formation of The New York Dolls as Johnny
Thunders and the Heartbreakers, and Hell’s heroin addiction, quashed this. The New
York punk scene did itself no favours when, in the wake of the London punk scene’s
success, New York bands began emulating London punk music:

With the emergence of the Pistols, Clash and Damned, American bands began copying their sound,
often without consciously realizing that they were drawing aspects of this music second hand from
American bands like the Stooges, the Modern Lovers and the [New York] Dolls. 168

Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain’s Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History
of Punk (1996) is made up of ‘uncensored’ (that is, verbatim) interviews, but there is an
organising hand that has juxtaposed each of the roughly two hundred word entries and
maintained a chronology. McNeil and McCain have interviewed widely, but as this work
champions the American origins of punk,169 the single chapter that considers the British
punk scene does so, not with new interviews with the London protagonists (apart from
brief comment from Malcolm McLaren), but through the eyes of David Johansen, Leee

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168 Ibid.
169 At odds with his own perspective (that punk began in lower Manhattan in the early seventies) but
nonetheless willing to accept Please Kill Me on its own merits, rock critic Robert Christgau opens his now
much-quoted encapsulation of punk, in his review of Please Kill Me for the New York Times (3 February,
1996): “Punk was a musical movement that reacted against the pastoral sentimentality, expressionistic
excess and superstar bloat of 1960’s rock with short, fast, hard, acerbic songs. It was also a subculture that
scornfully rejected the political idealism and Californian flower-power silliness of hippie myth.” Accessed
on-line:
6.06 pm on 10/12/08.
Black Childers and Jerry Nolan of The New York Dolls. This makes for interesting reading but not for additional material for my thesis.

Legs McNeil, a rock journalist and founder of the American fanzine Punk, claims to have been the first to employ the word punk to describe the punk sound. Co-author McCain (poet), like McNeil, was in the CBGBs’ scene.170

Whereas Heylin presented the facts for the American punk scene’s pre-eminence, but acknowledged that British punk was of its own making, McNeil and McCain’s agenda is to restore punk’s origins to the East Coast of the United States and especially to the CBGBs’ scene. Given that up to this point, apart from Heylin’s work, all punk literature tended to fixate upon the British scene and continued to do so even after Heylin’s work, McNeil and McCain’s hardline deserves, if not acceptance, then sympathy.

My thesis is not about the ownership of international punk, nor about who came first, the New York punk scene or the Sex Pistols, and I certainly agree with Heylin, McNeil and McCain, that the sound of punk belongs originally to US white performers by way of their African-American brothers. My argument is that London punk is formatively a London thing and its trappings are culturally drawn from London topography, literature, culture and subculture.

Upon release, Please Kill Me received a scalding New York Times review from the acerbic and controversial rock critic, Robert Christgau. After denigrating and contesting many of the assertions made by McNeil (Christgau either ignores McCain or gives her the benefit of the doubt), Christgau concludes: “I agree that punk crystallized in New York, but it’s myopic boosterism to imply that the Sex Pistols, the Clash and their progeny weren’t as momentous and valid as our bands”.171 Christgau thus reopened the very door that McNeil and McCain and Clinton Heylin believed they had closed, for further one-upmanship to be conducted back and forth across the Atlantic.

In 1999, twenty years after the first convergence of academia and punk in Hebdige’s influential work on subcultures and the meanings of their styles, his publisher

170 Author biographies. Ibid.
171 Ibid.
Routledge ventured again into the same territory with *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Rock*, a collection of papers by academics, writers and journalists old enough to have been involved in punk, all of them active as commentators on and analysts of popular culture. *Punk Rock: So What?* was initiated and edited by Roger Sabin, who also wrote the introduction and one of the papers (‘“I won’t let that dago by”: Rethinking Punk and Racism’).

As well as checking punk’s pulse twenty years after Sid’s death, and on the eve of the millennium, these papers (fourteen in all) cover all manner of topics exploring punk’s ongoing influence in, for example, the Brit-pop art movement, as the ‘punk’ in cyberpunk, in comics and graphic novels, in “everyday behaviour”, in literature, in cinema and music. The essayists also enter the arena of the punk culture wars, on such subjects as ‘punk authenticity’ (who is more punk than whom?), punk’s ownership (who should or shouldn’t be quoted?), punk’s origins (New York or London?), British punk’s London-centricity (there were also, albeit isolated, punks living punk lifestyles in regional centres) and when or where punk died (stillborn with the Grundy incident, Sid’s overdose in 1979, or the year 1984?); if punk died at all.

Commenting on the contributors to *Punk Rock: So What?*, Sabin notes that punk means ‘something’ to people born “of the right age” (that is, born after 1950), who have been involved in punk as musicians, fanzine writers, designers, journalists or simply as fans. Sabin informs us that he actively excluded two types of potential contributor: first, any of the “… big names associated with ‘punk studies’…” whom he cites as Jon Savage, Dave Laing, Dick Hebdige, Simon Frith and Greil Marcus; secondly, Sabin...

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173 A comprehensive overview of punk cinema has been attempted by Chris Barber and Jack Sargeant in *No Focus: Punk On Film*, Headpress, London 2006. There are startling omissions, including Dennis Hopper’s *Into the Blue* (1980) and the punk-inspired DIY cinema of Jim Jarmusch, while in terms of Australian punk cinema, although *Mad Max II* receives appropriate attention, Geoffrey Wright’s *Romper Stomper* (1992), whose subject is skinheads not punks, receives inappropriate attention. Neglected, is Richard Lowenstein’s *Dogs in Space* (1987), generally described as a punk sharehousehold (although there are arguments that the film’s characters conform more closely to new romantics than punk).
175 Ibid: p. 9
excluded “the typical profile of an academic writer” (presumably somebody born prior to 1950) and described by Sabin as an “‘outsider’ who takes the stance of an anthropologist exploring exotic terrain”. ¹⁷⁶ Sabin says his choice of writers stems from his perception that punk’s history, or history itself, is being rewritten and that “there’d be no need to worry if the discussions were making the correct historical connections; if the parameters of the debate were sound; if, ultimately, the commentators were getting it right”.¹⁷⁷ I’m not sure that all the contributors do get it right but enough of them do; and because of – or in despite of – Sabin’s policy of exclusion, this collection is a polyphonic success.¹⁷⁸

_Punk Rock: An Oral History_ (2006) is yet another collection of verbatim interviews, promoted as “oral history”, this time conducted by John Robb, a former member of the punk rock outfit The Membranes and self-publisher of the punk fanzine _Rox_. Seemingly out of ignorance of Heylin and McNeil’s and McCain’s arguments, Robb marginalises the New York scene and concentrates only on the English scene. Still, Robb’s interviews are wide-ranging and offer a refreshing approach to the punk story. Robb’s own experience of punk comes after the Sex Pistols, the result being that much of the material in this work is from the mouths of the Sex Pistols’ followers, such as the Bromley contingent, and the people who formed bands as a result of the first Manchester Lesser Free Trade Hall concert. Robb is certainly a greater fan of The Clash than the Sex Pistols and this allows him to extend the life of punk beyond the death of Sid Vicious and the release of _The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle_ up to 1984. Like The Clash’s politics, Robb is a little too earnest about punk and there is something of the punk evangelist here. And this begs the question to Robb, wasn’t it all just supposed to be a bit of stupid fun?

The thirtieth anniversary of punk’s Jubilee celebrations saw the publication of two new histories of punk.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid: p. 12
¹⁷⁷ Ibid: p. 2
¹⁷⁸ Most useful to my thesis was David Huxley’s paper on _The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle_ that supplies a breakdown of it into 40 scenes with a brief description of each scene. ‘Ever get the feeling you’ve been cheated?: Anarchy and Control in _The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle_’ in Roger Sabin (ed.), _Punk Rock: So What?_, Routledge, Oxon 1999: pp. 89-91.
Now a music journalist, Phil Strongman was a punk who saw the Sex Pistols play at the 100 Club in 1976. With *Pretty Vacant* (2007) the punk narrative meets the end of its fluidity, the myth has lost its lacunae, double-backs and curiosities, and has been ironed into a smooth, chronologically ordered narrative. After Strongman there will be new biographies of the Sex Pistols, but Strongman’s work marks a hiatus in the telling of the Sex Pistols’ story.

On the other hand, Clinton Heylin’s *Babylon’s Burning* (2007) delivers new research, new insights and new interview material. Immersed in the punk discourse, Heylin addresses many of the existing punk paradigms, producing new insights into these while also raising new ideas.

2.5.3 Other punk texts that require citation

Finally, there are four other texts that deserve mention. Tom Vague’s chronology of riot, rebellion and rock ‘n’ roll in London from the late seventeenth century to the end of the second millennium in *King Mob Echo* (2000), as well as three punk documents on film. Two of these films, Derek Jarman’s semi-apocalyptic punk melodrama set in an anarchistic London, *Jubilee*, and Malcolm McLaren’s *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, are considered in detail in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, respectively: while the third, Julien Temple’s documentary *The Filth and the Fury*, is extensively quoted throughout the thesis. These three films run the gamut in the presentation of punk, in outline only, from futurist drama in *Jubilee* to broad mockumentary in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* and talking head documentary in *The Filth & the Fury*.

Since the band’s split in 1978, Julien Temple’s *The Filth & the Fury* (2000), was the first opportunity for the Sex Pistols’ band members to speak openly and in detail to the general public about their time in the band, about their differences, and consternation at the repeated manipulation by McLaren, leading to their break up. The film also supplied a soapbox from which the band could thoroughly challenge the overriding myth put in place by McLaren as it appears in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*. *The Filth and the Fury* could also be interpreted as Temple’s own atonement for his role in the making and promotion of McLaren’s egomania, as well as establishing the trope that the Sex Pistols had been manufactured and manipulated by McLaren.
Unlike Greil Marcus, in his research into connections between the Sex Pistols and International Situationism, Tom Vague in *King Mob Echo: From Gordon Riots to Situationists and Sex Pistols* has (like my thesis) taken a lead from *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*’s staging of historical recreations of the Gordon Riots, as an essential factor in the Sex Pistols’ heritage. Where *Lipstick Traces* dips somewhat arbitrarily into the historical record across the globe to find serendipitous genealogies, Tom Vague’s *King Mob Echo* draws his evidence from unchallenged historical chronicles of geographically site-specific London. In *King Mob Echo*, Vague draws on accounts of three centuries’ of riots, rebellions and uprisings in the city of London, from the ‘No Popery’ riots of London apprentices in 1688 to Malcolm McLaren’s surprisingly effective, but unsuccessful, stand for Lord Mayor of London in December 1999. The work includes hour-by-hour accounts of the Gordon Riots (1780), day-by-day accounts of The Notting Hill Race Riots (1958), the Sex Pistols and their Jubilee ‘insurrection’, as well as accounts of the Brixton Riots (1981), Broadwater Farm Estate Riot (1985) and the Poll Tax Riots (31 March 1990). The book affirms McLaren’s argument that the energies of the Sex Pistols and London rioting and rebellion, especially that of the ‘refusal crowd’, were similar energies and historically documented.

While it is an entertaining trawl through the metropolis of London in riot, carnival, violence and play, Tom Vague’s voice is breathless, and the information is delivered as banner headlines, but without analysis. There are also dubious associations, inaccuracies and a tendency to inscribe the legend over refuted, or inconvenient evidence.

What follows in Chapter 3, is a consideration of Malcolm McLaren’s proposition (which received John Lydon’s approval) that the rebellious punk subculture that erupted in London in the summer of 1976, and became public enemy number one during the 1977 Jubilee year, had its cultural antecedents in the riots that shook London two hundred years earlier, in the summer of 1780. Through the available sources, I examine the eighteenth century London mob: first in Chapter 3, in literature, and second in Chapter 4, using historical record – primary, secondary, historiographical readings.
Chapter 3: The London Mob

It was a neighbourhood gang thing in Finsbury Park, North London, in the late 1950s. Organised only in the sense that if kids from other neighbourhoods tried to come in, there would be brick fights. You’d pile up as many bricks as you could and throw them. They’d be doing the same across the street until one lot ran off. That was it. What good fun … Benwell Road and Holloway Road in Finsbury Park had a scruffy mob of kids of all ages. We were all led by a chap called [Smoothie], a particularly bad piece of work. He was a real problem to his family, but I used to think he was great. He was such total chaos, he wouldn’t follow any rules and went in and out of Borstals. … You’d see dilapidated wastelands of bombed out buildings and a distinct lack of streetlights. You saw it even in the sixties – a backdrop of desolated houses. 179

Teenage gangs and mob violence fill the opening scenes of the 1980 film about the Sex Pistols and punk rock: The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle. These scenes of anarchy recreate the riots that convulsed London for six days and nights in the midsummer of 1780 and conflated them with punk. A man on horseback in a tri-cornered hat gallops through streets lit by burning torches crying ‘fire, fire.’ A wherry carrying the punkette, Debbie Juvenile, along with two effigies of band members of the Sex Pistols (Cook and Jones), beaches on the riverbank. The effigies are whisked up, raised aloft and paraded towards a gallows above a Guy Fawkes bonfire. Now an effigy of the band’s lead singer, John Lydon, is carried out of a Catholic church and also raised and carried through the street by jigging, cheering, celebratory crowds. The effigies are strung up by their necks over the bonfire while hysterical crowds run hither and thither. Silhouetted against the flames stands another man in a tri-cornered hat who holds up an electric guitar.

The Sex Pistols’ line-up with John Lydon had lasted just two years; they had “potty” mouthed live-on-telly, and made two hit singles, one of which was banned from airplay. Nevertheless, the Sex Pistols had achieved number two status in the pop charts in Jubilee week. Given that all parties separated and then declined into an acrimonious dispute, just why should we take the Sex Pistols seriously? Also, given that the Sex

Pistols had declared themselves ‘ahistorical’;\(^{180}\) just what was Malcolm McLaren trying to say by making an explicit link between a riot that occurred two hundred years earlier and the punk phenomenon he had had so much influence shaping? In the aftermath of the Sex Pistols, the estranged McLaren and John Lydon agreed on one thing: the significance of the London mob. So who was this London mob and how did McLaren know about them? What did the concept of the mob symbolise for Malcolm McLaren, John Lydon and punk?

In this chapter I consider the sources and content of London punk in the context of McLaren and Lydon’s knowledge and understanding of the London mob.

### 3.1 LITERARY EXAMPLES OF THE LONDON MOB

#### 3.1.1 The Gordon Riots as described by Dickens and Hibbert

Charles Dickens’s historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* appeared in weekly parts in the periodical *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, before it was published in book form in 1841. The ‘riots of ‘eighty’, which took place early in June 1780, were soon known as the Gordon Riots after Lord George Gordon, the unwitting instigator of the anarchy, violence, destruction and chaos that raged across London for six days. The riots were the result of Gordon’s call for the repeal of the Tolerance Act, a law passed by the House of Lords two years earlier in 1778. As the leader of the Protestant Association, Gordon gathered the support of some 40,000 signatures for a petition demanding the repeal of this law. Since the Reformation, Catholics had been continually persecuted and demonised; and after the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688, were debarred from holding office. This Act allowed them the right to once again own property and to teach and practise their faith openly. This was all it allowed them: it did not allow Catholics to hold office, let alone bear arms as was rumoured.

Gordon gathered his signatories in St George’s Fields and led the march to Westminster, where the House of Lords were sitting and where Gordon, as a Lord himself, proposed to present the petition. Shortly after the crowds arrived at Parliament, about 2pm on Friday 2 June 1780, the rioting began; while it lasted, the House of Lords was threatened; Catholic chapels, schools and homes were pulled down and the occupants’ possessions burned in the street. Five of London’s jails were broken open, the prisoners released and the buildings torched: a silk weavery was ransacked; a gin distillery was looted and destroyed; a tollhouse on the newly opened Westminster Bridge was ‘pulled down’ and its pennies thrown into the Thames. The London mob also attacked Irish workers and their lodgings and it was only as they converged upon the Bank of England that the anarchy was quelled in the early hours of 9 June by the army firing upon and killing an estimated 400 people.

Based upon my own readings of the records of the Proceedings of the Old Bailey, Charles Dickens’s *Barnaby Rudge* is a diligently researched account of the then, still-within-living-memory, anti-Catholic riots of that summer. When the historian, Christopher Hibbert, published an equally dramatic, though ‘historical’ rather than literary, account of the tumult over a hundred years later, in *King Mob* (1958), *Barnaby Rudge* was its progenitor. Dickens’s novel remains the definitive literary work detailing the phenomenon of the London mob at its apogee.

*Barnaby Rudge* is named after a gentle, but excitable, idiot boy, who lives with his protective mother Mary but is led astray and becomes embroiled in the six days of rioting where, briefly and perversely, Barnaby finds his place as a natural mob leader. An innocent, Barnaby Rudge represents those immense and powerful energies of the London commune, which are too often appropriated and taken advantage of by unscrupulous and selfish manipulators for nefarious political ends. (Dickens’s fictional ‘backstory’ is adopted by Malcolm McLaren in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*.)

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181 McLaren positions himself in the role of punk’s arch manipulator and re-enacts the character of Gashford: Dickens’s fictional invention for Gordon’s secretary and second-in-command of the Protestant Association. Both Gashford and McLaren draw upon the real-life Watson in their scenes, destroying the papers incriminating them in raising the mob.
While Dickens’s novel employs stock characters such as the villain and the plot device of a murder mystery, I have a personal preference for Dickens’s flawed work over that of Christopher Hibbert’s *King Mob*. Dickens had to create characters strong enough to hold the stage with historical figures like Gordon; they are individuals, and it is in their uniqueness that the diversity of the mob is represented.

Hibbert, the popular historian, is also attracted to the dramatic and is prone to novelistic flourishes in his writing, but unlike Dickens, Hibbert chooses not to individualise any member of the mob and he takes pains to describe the actions of the mob as an entity in itself. Lord George Gordon comes in for considerable attention from Hibbert, but he is not a member of the crowd. This could be seen as Hibbert’s way of distancing and differentiating his own work from that of Dickens. Hibbert depicts the activities of the mob over time and topographically but never identifies or empathises with them. The novelist, Dickens, on the other hand, seeks to win his readership through the creation of sympathetic characters, and to awaken empathy for those individuals who are caught up in the riots that he and his readership would nonetheless condemn and find abhorrent.

Both Hibbert and Dickens relied on precisely the same records held by the Old Bailey that I was able to access online. In these extraordinary documents, the testimonies of some two hundred people who were tried for crimes during the riots and those of their accusers were recorded. Even though their voices can be clearly heard, Hibbert does not recognise individuality in the mob. Given the materials available to him this suggests a prior assumption, as well as a deliberate distancing of his work from that of Dickens’s novel.

For Christopher Hibbert, writing in an era that had seen the masses mobilised by leaders such as Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini (even Churchill), and at a time when historians on both sides of the English Channel were utilising Marxist theory to interpret history, the crowd as mass was a timely subject. However, Hibbert turned not to Marxism in his account of the behaviour of the mass or ‘King Mob’, but to biological metaphor and myth. The mysterious, synchronous, symbiotic energies of this collective mass are

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182 The Old Bailey *Proceedings* online at http://hri.shef.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey.
metonymically likened to a hive of bees, a farm of ants or to the mythical Hydra. These similes – bees, ants, Hydra – allow Hibbert to describe a diverse range of destructive activities, occurring simultaneously but undirected, across the length and breadth of the city. In such an interpretation there is the mystery of the organism and no room for the powers of individuals to rise and fall as leaders. Given the same events and circumstances, Dickens, on the other hand, permits his characters to make choices for and against the collective will of the crowd. Faced with the task of individualising the mob, and giving faces to the anonymous multitude, Dickens creates the following characters: Barnaby, the strong simpleton; the madman-ostler-gypsy, Hugh; and pours character into the mould of the real-life public hangman, Ned Dennis, who was mesmerised by the riots and became a major figure in directing the mob’s mischief. Unlike Hibbert’s King Mob, even the idiot boy, Barnaby and his accomplices, Hugh and Ned, make individual choices that decide their future.

_Barnaby Rudge_ was Dickens’s attempt at a popular historical novel, but his account of the events disappointed many of his readers. _King Mob_, on the other hand, was an immediate bestseller. Its success might derive from an uncanny resonance with the zeitgeist of its times. _King Mob_ was published in 1958, the same year as one of London’s hottest summers on record. That summer saw increasing unrest in the West Indian district of Notting Hill and culminated in what London’s biographer, Peter Ackroyd, has dryly ascribed as the twentieth century’s contribution to the mob’s repertoire, “the race riot”.¹⁸⁴

In the century and a half since its publication, _Barnaby Rudge_ has never achieved the same success as _King Mob_ and for Dickens, after his triumph with the death of Little Nell in _The Old Curiosity Shop_, which drew record readers, _Barnaby Rudge_ was in Dickens’s

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¹⁸³ ‘EDWARD DENNIS, breaking the peace: riot, 28 Jun’ from _The Proceedings_ of the Old Bailey records, as accessed on-line: http://hri.shef.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey/results.jsp?words=mob&format=and&type=&range=&year=bhiaat 3.40 pm on 31/01/05.

terms an abject failure; by its last instalment its sales had dropped from 70,000 to 30,000 per week.\(^{185}\)

_Barnaby Rudge_ may have been too ‘post modern’ for nineteenth-century readers. In what was ostensibly a historical novel\(^{186}\) Dickens promiscuously mixed the genres for which he had an affection: the gothic, the mystery, the romance, the historical novel and the subgenre of the Newgate novel (of which more will be said below). This pastiche of genres, according to the Dickensian scholar, Paul Schlicke, was found by many of the work’s critics to be discordant.\(^{187}\) It is described by its modern bibliographer, Thomas Rice, as the “least loved and the least read” of Dickens’s books.\(^{188}\) It was also Dickens hardest book to write, while its structure – which was used to great effect in his only other historical novel _A Tale of Two Cities_ (1859) – was in _Barnaby Rudge_, a mistake. However, for its dramatic, blow-by-blow account of “the riots of ‘eighty” it is unequalled.

### 3.1.2 Barnaby Rudge: exegesis

Begun in 1836, the novel that would become _Barnaby Rudge_ was originally intended to be titled _Gabriel Vardon: The Locksmith of London_ and there is indeed a separate story-strand in _Barnaby Rudge_ that concerns the life and times of the cockney, fiercely Protestant, Gabriel Vardon, a locksmith – no surprise there – his wife, daughter and his wayward apprentice, Sim Tappertit. Apprentices, such as Tappertit and his fellows were,

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\(^{186}\) The historical novel was a genre established by Sir Walter Scott in _Waverley_ (1814) and _The Heart of Midlothian_ (1818).


\(^{188}\) Thomas Rice, ‘The End of Dickens’s Apprenticeship: Variable Focus in _Barnaby Rudge_’, in _Nineteenth-Century Fiction_ Sep 1975, Vol. 30, No. 2: pp. 172-184. Among critics who would follow him, the writer, Edgar Allan Poe thought the murder mystery that bookends the riots were incongruous. This mystery element, with its hint of ghosts and doppelgangers, concerns the murder of one Reuben Haredale in 1775 and the subsequent exposure of his murderer after the Gordon Riots as Barnaby’s father.
since medieval times, associated with riot and disorder, especially on ‘holy days’ or holidays when they would play violent games or single out a minority for harassment. Dickens’s tale is a story about the antagonisms between Protestants and Catholics, and it possibly reflects more of his own day than the previous century, because the Gordon Riots were not a two-sided conflict: they were wholly one-sided attacks by the Protestant London mob upon Catholics and their properties.

Dickens shows considerable empathy for Catholics who suffered at the hands of the Protestant mob and his most sympathetic portrait is of the Haredales with the murdered Reuben’s brother, Geoffrey Haredale, a wronged Roman Catholic. This subplot allows Dickens, at the height of the Gordon Riots, to intertwine his sympathetic fictional characters and their stories with the dramatic attacks on Catholic homes and property. For the purposes of literary narrative, Dickens creates a villain in the form of Haredale’s next-door neighbour, his sworn enemy, the bigoted Protestant, Sir John Chester. This departs from historical fact, suggesting that Gordon was a dupe and the riots were a masterminded conspiracy.

There are two romantic subplots; one, of the Romeo and Juliet variety, in the form of a love affair between Chester’s son, Edward, and Haredale’s niece, Emma; while the other concerns Joe Willet and Dolly Varden. Both Lord Chester and Geoffrey Haredale conspire to thwart these romances. After a lapse of five years, Dickens resumes his tale as if, through the intervening period, the characters have been stored in aspic. The race to marry off the two girls, which drives the first part of Barnaby Rudge, is forgotten. And so, in 1780, in need of a new plot-driver, Dickens makes Lord Chester a sinister presence responsible for covertly fomenting the Gordon Riots for his own veiled purposes. After the London mob descends upon the Haredale’s home, invading it, abducting Emma and burning the house to the ground, Edward Chester pursues her abductors and saves both Emma’s life and that of her father, Geoffrey Haredale, thus winning Geoffrey’s consent to his and Emma’s marriage. Barnaby’s father, the murderer of Reuben Haredale and ruthless blackmailer of Mrs Rudge, is hanged. Barnaby Rudge jailed for his part in the rioting, is sentenced to hang, but is set free at the last moment when it is conceded that he was an unwitting, or witless, participant and allowed to return to his devoted mother, Mary.
The plotting may be tired but the writing and Dickens’s imaginative rendering of the chaos and anarchy of a King Mob is very much alive, as this description of the London mob’s entirely fictional attack upon and ‘pulling down’ of a public house, the Maypole Inn in the fields outside London, amply demonstrates.

Crammed with men, clubs, sticks, torches, pistols; filled with a deafening noise, oaths, shouts, screams, hootings; changed all at once into a bear-garden, a mad-house, an infernal temple: men darting in and out, by door and window, smashing the glass, turning the taps, drinking liquor out of China punchbowls, sitting astride of casks smoking private and personal pipes, cutting down the sacred grove of lemons, hacking and hewing at the celebrated cheese, breaking open the inviolable drawers, putting things in their pockets which did not belong to them, dividing [the publican, John Willet’s] own money before his own eyes, wantonly wasting, breaking, pulling down and tearing up: nothing quiet, nothing private: men everywhere – above, below, overhead, in the bedrooms, in the kitchen, in the yard, in the stables – clambering in at windows when there were doors wide open; dropping out of windows when the stairs were handy; leaping out of banisters into chasms of passages: new faces and figures presenting themselves every instant – some yelling, some singing, some fighting, some breaking glass and crockery, some laying the dust with the liquor they couldn’t drink, some ringing bells till they pulled them down, others beating them with pokers till they beat them into fragments: more men still – more, more, more – swarming on like insects: noise, smoke, light, darkness, frolic, anger, laughter, groans, plunder, fear, ruin!

Despite such fabulous set pieces as the mob’s destruction of the Maypole Inn, the besieging and torching of Newgate Gaol, the plundering of Marlow’s gin distillery and the attack upon the home of the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Mansfield, *Barnaby Rudge* was Dickens’s singular failure, both with his public and as a novel. The Gordon Riots, unlike the storming of the Bastille in *A Tale of Two Cities*, amount to little. For all Dickens’s skill rendering the frenetic energy of individual scenes or mayhem and riot, in terms of narrative arc, the promise of the Gordon Riots proves instead, a disappointingly damp squib.

The climactic riot scenes of *Barnaby Rudge* are not equivalently resolved in the characters’ experiences but instead are left unresolved as loose ends that must be concluded with Barnaby’s appearance in the Old Bailey, the revelation of the identity of

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Barnaby’s father, Barnaby’s escape from the gallows, and the murder mystery’s denouement. While the historical events of the Gordon Riots are unerringly accurate, this book too liberally mixes fact and fiction, with historical figures holding place beside fictional ones. The fictional characters have a semblance of free will, while the historical figures are constrained by historical fact. The fictional characters’ plot motivations are employed too conveniently to explain mysterious aspects of the historical record.

One such example is the sinister secretary to Lord George Gordon fictionalised as Dickens’s character Gashford. This figure is based upon Gordon’s own secretary, Watson. In order to use the character of Gashford as a Svengali-figure raising the mob to his and Lord Chester’s nefarious but largely unexplained ends, Dickens dispensed with the constraints of Watson, the historical figure.

Ironically, ten years after the Gordon riots, Watson wrote and published a biography of Gordon. Watson, who had by this time become a champion of the French Revolution, saw this as an opportunity to adjust the public record by claiming that in 1780 Gordon had had revolutionary ends in mind for the June riots. The historian Ian Gilmour argues that this ‘biography’ espoused many of Watson’s own political views, some of which were quite contradictory to Gordon’s, yet attributed by Watson to Gordon, who was by then dead. Indeed, Watson’s biography of Gordon was a fiction employed to his own practical political ends.

3.1.3 Cruikshank: illustrating the London mob

Dickens’s need to produce an illustrated novel led him to represent individuals and London ‘types’. The London type was simultaneously a reality and a fiction, a subject arbitrated by the actuality of the inhabitants of London and their lineage of fictional representations. Originally, the illustrations for Barnaby Rudge were to have been undertaken by Dickens’s long-time friend and the illustrator of all his previous work, George Cruikshank. They had discussed the subject many times and had worked up

individual set pieces together, such as the entirely fictional but utterly true to the traditions of the London mob destruction of the Maypole Inn. Unfortunately, a contractual obligation prevented Cruikshank from illustrating the periodical in which Dickens’s novels were initially serialised before their publication in book form. Two illustrators, Hablot K. Browne and George Cattermole were employed to produce seventy-six illustrations. As well as the main characters, Browne and Cattermole portray a multitude of London types: drunken looters, madmen, bigoted Protestants with their cockades, apprentices, troublemakers, the violent and destructive; and, of course, those looking out for themselves: the pickpockets, prostitutes and thieves. Although these images lack Cruikshank’s artifice and self-confidence, Browne and Cattermole nonetheless extend Dickens’s description to amply suggest the manifold noise, smell, chaos and spectacle that is the London mob.

As well as on the streets of London, Dickens and his illustrators found much of the source material for his fictional characters in the works of William Hogarth who was almost contemporaneous with the times Dickens set out to portray. As Dickens writes in the preface to *Oliver Twist*, “I had read of thieves by the scores … But I had never met (except in HOGARTH [sic]) with the miserable reality”. William Hogarth’s etchings *The Harlot’s Progress* (1732), *The Rake’s Progress* (1735) and his oil painting of John Gay’s play *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) were forefront in the minds of Charles Dickens and George Cruikshank when in 1838, Dickens wrote and Cruikshank illustrated, that most ‘Dickensian’ of Dickens’s novels, *Oliver Twist* or, as the 1846 revised edition subtitled it, *The Parish Boy’s Progress*.

Like Hogarth’s *Progress* series, Dickens set out to chronicle the life of an orphan – known as a parish boy because he was a ward of the parish – who escapes to London and is apprenticed to an undertaker. Oliver’s experiences are not so very different to those of Hogarth’s Rake and Harlot. In style, each of Hogarth’s individual plates – like each of Dickens’s chapters – is a self-contained scene.

In *The Harlot’s Progress*, in six scenes, Hogarth depicts the arrival in town of a country lass and chronicles her downfall from mistress to prostitute to pox, gaol and

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death. Similarly, in eight plates in *The Rake’s Progress*, Hogarth depicts a young heir, newly come to town who dissipates a small fortune on fashion, drink, gambling and whores, marries an old crone to pay off his debts, but cannot forsake gambling and ends up in the London mad house of Bedlam.

Hogarth’s engravings and paintings on ‘modern moral subjects’ – *The Harlot’s Progress, The Rake’s Progress, The Four Times of the Day, Marriage A La Mode, Before/After, Beer Street/Gin Alley and The Idle Prentice/The Industrious Prentice* – are complex narratives that topographically represent eighteenth century London and provide an almost ethnographic depiction of its population. These cautionary tales that make comedy from tragic subjects are both rich in allegorical meaning and in-jokes. It is no wonder that Dickens describes Hogarth as: “the moralist and censor of his age – in whose great works the times in which he lived, and the characters of every time, will never cease to be reflected ... ”. These characters of every time would in turn come to populate Dickens’s works.

Many of Hogarth’s famous depictions of London scenes began their life as oil paintings. Hogarth then reproduced the painted images in the form of engravings, which made his images affordable to the ‘middling sort’. In this way Hogarth was able to disseminate his ideas and his sensibility. Hogarth’s art and his business model would lead to the explosion of satiric prints in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when George Cruikshank – prior to his second life as an illustrator of books – was a drunk and scurrilous caricaturist of the prince regent’s marital affairs.

When we refer to an incident or situation as ‘Dickensian’ we not only evoke the ironic literary style of Charles Dickens but also Cruikshank’s penmanship as a caricaturist and illustrator. Dickens and Cruikshank should be considered inseparable because Dickens learned his own ironic tone and satiric skills from the plates of Cruikshank (who in turn


was inspired by Hogarth). When they were separated, as they were for *Barnaby Rudge*, the illustrations supplied by the substitute artists were of an inferior quality.

George Cruikshank’s long association with Dickens began with the publication in weekly parts of Dickens’s first novel in 1836, *The Pickwick Papers*. By that time Cruikshank had been evolving his style for twenty-five years. So while it is Dickens who has eclipsed the name of George Cruikshank today, it is noteworthy that, in his own day, Dickens was described as the Cruikshank of literature.\(^\text{194}\) Cruikshank’s illustrations are characterised, like the work of Hogarth before him, with an unflinching portrayal of the lower strata of London society, its streets and the London poor.

Cruikshank was essentially a caricaturist, as was his father Isaac before him. In its late eighteenth and early nineteenth century incarnation, English caricature was yoked to scatological and brutally humiliating satire and the two Cruikshanks, Isaac and George, were just such savage satirists. When Isaac Cruikshank died of alcoholism in April 1811, George aged nineteen came into his own. In the same year, George was introduced to William Jones, the printer and publisher of *The Scourge*. Over the next two decades, Cruikshank made a name for himself satirising modish London society and, most infamously, for cruelly caricaturing the Prince of Wales (becoming George IV in 1820), and his many marital infidelities.\(^\text{195}\)

… *The Scourge* opened the season for harassing the regent. For twenty years between 1778 and 1797, 294 prints on the prince are catalogued (putting him fifth in frequency of reference then). In the eight years from January 1812 to December 1819, by contrast, he was targeted in 230 prints. This equalled

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\(^{195}\) A parallel can be seen in the irreverence shown toward the British monarchy by 1960s satirical journals and comedians. These journals included *Oz*, *Private Eye* and the humour of university wits and satirists like Peter Cook, Alan Bennett, Jonathan Miller, David Frost, Eleanor Bron and Dudley Moore and the television program *That Was The Week That Was*. 
one-seventh of all catalogued prints in those years, and ensured that the prince topped the list of satirical targets ahead of Napoleon. Furthermore, of these 230 prints, 94 were Cruikshank’s. 196

Why The Scourge could get away with these nearly seditious attacks in print was because the public’s sympathies lay with Caroline of Brunswick, whom George had proposed to without meeting. Jane Robbins describes Princess Caroline in Rebel Queen: The Trial of Caroline as: “a vivacious young woman of twenty-six; … plump and gossipy as a kitchen maid, and almost as poorly educated”.197 While not a bad match in years – George being six years her senior – he was both grossly corpulent and an alcoholic. Robbins writes that George “was not looking for a soul mate or lover, as he had mistresses for that purpose; he only required a wife”.198 The main reason for George’s pursuit of Caroline was to acquire her dowry to pay off his very substantial gambling debts. The public opinion of his marriage was summed up tartly by the novelist Jane Austen: “Poor woman, I shall support her as long as I can, because she is a woman and because I hate her husband”.199

Cruikshank’s satires would, from the third volume of The Scourge on, be seen as not only libellous but seditious and even treasonous. In April 1812, his ‘Princely Predilections of Ancient Music and Modern Discord’ appeared and the secretary of state brought this volume of The Scourge to the attention of the solicitor-general. Although they described Cruikshank’s work as ‘indecent and imprudent’, the pair chose not to prosecute.

Jones and Cruikshank got away with this … so between March and November, 1812, Jones commissioned another six elaborate Cruikshank prints on the regent, all, like [‘Princely Predilections’], indecent in detailing and allusion, and all saturated with venomous reference[s] to the evolving political vendetta as they hammered home the royal brothers’ depravities and infidelities, Lady Hertford’s influence and the new ministers’ hypocrisies. 200

198 Ibid: p. 5.
199 Personal correspondence between Jane Austen and Martha Lloyd, 16 February 1813, appears in Robbins, Ibid: p. 42.
The cartooning of the Georgian era is scatalogical, obsessed with exposing male and female genitalia, skewering hypocrisy and defaming the upper classes all in pursuit of a middle-class audience prepared to pay for the prints that damned their ‘betters’. These satiric papers were also hand-me-downs to the lower classes. With Cruikshank’s productive career spanning half a century, it was in the wake of the death of the prince regent in 1830, that something happened to tame Cruikshank and his fellow satirists’ barbaric style. In *City of Laughter* (2006), Vic Gatrell makes a convincing argument for Victorian moralists killing off the brutal art of the caricaturist and reducing it to a warmer, kinder style of cartooning and one that would become – as demonstrated by the vogue for Dickens’s illustrated serials – acceptable fare in the drawing rooms and studies of Victorian London.\(^{201}\)

So after all his venomous anti-monarchical etchings, Cruikshank is probably best known for his genteel illustrations for Dickens’s *Oliver Twist Or, The Parish Boy’s Progress*. Dickens was, nonetheless, tapping Cruikshank’s former association with savage satirical moralising, his railings against the hypocrisies of the ruling classes, and now redirecting it toward equally unflinching illustrations of the London poor and their social conditions, but now simpatico with the tone of Dickens’s novels. One of Cruikshank’s images is so evocative of what we call the ‘Dickensian’ that it stands in synecdochically for the whole of *Oliver Twist*. (Others are equally iconic; such as the rendering of a gibbering Fagin in the condemned cell of Newgate gaol or Sykes and his faithful hound pursued across the rookery rooftops of St Giles.)

The synecdoche to which I refer is the first meeting, at the behest of the Artful Dodger, between Oliver Twist and Fagin entitled ‘Oliver introduced to the Respectable Old Gentleman’ – an image that Malcolm McLaren would use to encapsulate his Fagin-esque relationship with his boys, the Sex Pistols. It is through this image that the genealogy of faces from the London mob, first captured by Hogarth in the eighteenth century, is recreated by Cruikshank and Dickens in the nineteenth century and through their image ultimately associated with the Sex Pistols in the late twentieth century.

\(^{201}\) Ibid: p. 580
3.1.4 ‘Oliver introduced to the Respectable Old Gentleman’

Cruikshank’s scratch-nib and dense line work shows a room lit only by a single candle and the fire, where Fagin roasts a pan of sausages for his boys, who are gathered around a primitive square block table. The boys are dressed in the attire of miniature men, smoking long-handled clay pipes and striking various attitudes: repose, disinterest, cheerfulness and annoyance. The density of the line work suggests the dry splintered wood of the floorboards, the grime of the drapes, nailed and hung to keep the room cosy, and the low ceiling, no doubt stained by charcoal and tobacco smoke. A diagonal plane from left to lower right directs the reader’s eye from the angular, cheerful expression of Fagin, through the Artful Dodger’s hand, that presents the humbly-stooped little gentleman, Oliver: hat doffed and walking cane in hand, his trousers too small for him – and his ankles exposed, without socks – above shoes that barely cover his feet. On the wall above the fire is pasted a satiric print of three hanged men on the gallows at Tyburn. It refers to Cruikshank’s satiric past, accompanied by an illegible text that might have been doggerel verse.

‘Oliver introduced to the Respectable Old Gentleman’ plays an iconic role in the mythologising of the Sex Pistols. The narrative shown in Cruikshank’s illustration parallels the first meeting between the pre-existing band members (Glen Matlock, Steve Jones and Paul Cook), their cockney-Jewish manager, Malcolm McLaren, and the boy who would become their lead singer, John Lydon. It was John Lydon’s own sockless state of attire that first led McLaren to associate these punk rockers with something he described as ‘Dickensian’. In turn, McLaren equated his role as a Fagin-type figure to the teenage boys in the band he managed, describing the Sex Pistols as his little Artful Dodgers.202 ‘Oliver introduced to the Respectable Old Gentleman’ was further intertwined with the Sex Pistols’ image when it was reproduced on a banner-length silk screen-print, accompanied by an ink-and-brush manifesto written by Malcolm McLaren.

202 Guardian Unlimited: [http://books.guardian.co.uk/top10s/top10/0,,99329,00.html](http://books.guardian.co.uk/top10s/top10/0,,99329,00.html) as retrieved on 3 Oct 2007: 18:50.
Next, this screen-print was reduced and photocopied and inserted in their only album *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols* (1978).

The Sex Pistols had set out to make anti-music, the noise of shattering glass in opposition to the popular music of their day; Malcolm McLaren had set out to make a biting musical satire of the music industry with *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*. Both ideas had their precedents in eighteenth-century London and particularly in *The Beggar’s Opera*. In their choice of subjects, John Gay and William Hogarth created comedy out of tragedy and both shared an appreciation of gallows humour as demonstrated in their works. Gallows humour, as well as venomous satire and music hall, was also the humour of the Sex Pistols, as John Lydon says:

> What England didn’t understand about the Sex Pistols is that we were music hall. There was always a sense of piss take and fun to it. There’s a sense of comedy in the English that even in your grimmest moment … you laugh. 204

Just as *The Beggar’s Opera* was an anti-opera; *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* was not only an anti-rock musical but also an anti-musical. Both were black comedies as much as satire. And with its infamous figures, highwaymen, train robbers, swindlers, dandies, roaring boys, molls, and lowlife as well as set pieces like that of the Cambridge Rapist Hotel, *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* echoes Gay’s opera as well as the genre Gay spawned: the Newgate novel.

> *The Beggar’s Opera* was first performed in 1728: a biting musical satire based on the famed thief-taker and receiver, Jonathan Wild, here played as Peachum, with the exceedingly talented burglar, Jack Sheppard, played as MacHeath. The play is largely set in Newgate Gaol and established the genre of the Newgate novel, which derived its plots

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203 There were to be other Sex Pistols’ albums but they were unofficial or retrospective and made up of unreleased recordings and demos.

204 *The Filth and the Fury.*
from the *Newgate Calendars*.\(^{205}\) As well as *The Beggar’s Opera*, the calendars supplied the plots for William Harrison Ainsworth’s *Jack Sheppard* (1839), a novelisation of the life of Sheppard, and *Rookwood* (1824), which romanticises the life of the highwayman, Dick Turpin; also Henry Fielding’s *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743); William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Catherine*, loosely based on the murderess, Catherine Hayes, which was serialised throughout 1839–1840; Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* in 1839 and a product of both the *Newgate Calendars* and the Old Bailey *Proceedings*, *Barnaby Rudge* appeared in 1841.

In a new century and a world away in England’s Lake District, Beatrix Potter looked to real places and animals for the subjects of her children’s stories. For *The Tale of the Two Bad Mice* (1904), Potter looked to her own pet mice, Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca for inspiration, while the doll’s house invaded by the two bad mice, belonged to her publisher, Norman Warne’s niece.\(^{206}\) While the story is a product of Potter’s imagination it is nonetheless an excellent introduction to the smallest unit of the London mob, the gang.

3.2 THE TALE OF THE TWO BAD MICE

3.2.1 Differentiating mobs and gangs

Within the London crowd there were gangs of thieves, prostitutes, pickpockets and highwaymen. *The Beggar’s Opera* concerns a gang of highwaymen, with Macheath the undisputed leader. A gang suggests a leader and a plan; an organised group. Gang can also mean the action of “a band of people going about together, especially for disreputable or criminal purposes”.\(^{207}\) If we allow that the smallest gang unit can be as few as two, then Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of the Two Bad Mice* is a tale about the

\(^{205}\) Begun in 1700, these calendars recorded notorious crimes and were compiled and published in five volumes in 1773.

\(^{206}\) The doll’s house is on display in Beatrix Potter’s home, Hill Top, as preserved by the British National Trust.

anthropomorphised figures of such a gang whose disreputable actions as a gang mirror and can be incorporated into those of the London mob. But unlike the individuated figures of Peachum, Locket, Polly and Macheath, the actions of these two mice are the stereotypical actions of the London mob.

This tale is intended for infants and so, even as adults, we must accept the conventions of children’s literature. In suspending our adult reason, we become unconscious to the allegorical nature of this tale, so it will be through close scrutiny that I intend to expose the allegory. This story, like *The Beggar’s Opera*, is an ironic morality tale that revels in its inversion of good.

We encounter a common pair, a husband and wife, Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca, who are a representation of the lower classes. The two mice live in a hole in the wall beside the fireplace.

When an unnamed (human) child takes her two dolls – the residents of the doll’s house – along with her for her walk in the park, the two mice invade the dolls’ home. The mice discover the table set with tiny cutlery beside food on little plates. However, the dolls’ food is inedible and when the disappointed mice smash the devilled ham to pieces, they discover that it is made of painted plaster. The two mice then set about smashing all the representations of food: pudding, fish, lobsters, oranges and pears. Curiously, the smashing of objects that falsely represent luxury goods echoes the mob actions of the Gordon rioters and this is a specific action theorised by Elias Canetti (both of which will be discussed in the next chapter).

Tom Thumb, like a chimney sweep, ventures up the chimney and discovers to his surprise that there is no soot. Meanwhile, in the kitchen, Hunca Munca finds canisters labelled Rice, Coffee and Sago. She opens them only to discover that the tins contain inedible beads.

Then those mice set to work to do all the mischief they could. In the upstairs bedroom they set to work tossing the dolls’ clothes out the window and tearing the feather bolster to pieces.

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208 Hunca Munca evokes the sixteenth century term ‘hugger mugger’ which meant both activities undertaken clandestinely and “disorder, confusion; a muddle”. *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*: p. 1275.
The mice’s activity of identifying luxury items and either destroying them there and then, or tossing them out the window, parallels the traditional actions of the London mob, whose members pile the tossed items in the street and set them alight. These actions are part of another ancient London tradition, the ‘pulling down’ or razing of a dwelling to the ground, with which Londoners sought to punish, shame and expose their fellow citizens for crimes against the community, such as conspicuous consumption, immoral behaviour or to reinforce an outsider’s status.

Up to this point, Hunca Munca and Tom Thumb have performed the role of the mob, but now they revert to their roles as husband and wife, and are no longer held to the laws of the mob. Under mob law, no individual member of a mob may benefit himself or herself by stealing. In their new role as individuals, Hunca Munca and Tom Thumb are free to set about looting the home. If this were still a representation of a London mob, one mouse would severely punish the other for stealing to benefit themselves. So now, conducting themselves as burglars or a gang, Hunca Munca and Tom Thumb steal a chair, a bookcase, a birdcage and other things described as ‘odds and ends’: shown in Potter’s illustration of the event as an iron, a bedpan, a fire grate and a cradle.

In the great mob actions of June 1780, a birdcage filled with canaries was looted from a Catholic house and tossed onto a bonfire of the home’s goods in the street. An anonymous man tried to save the birds but another anonymous member of the mob upheld the law of the mob and stopped the rescue of the birds, declaring that the canaries were owned by a Catholic, and therefore were “Popish goods” which deserved immolation. This seemingly illogical incident, where birds are punished on the basis of who owns them, is illustrative of the law of the mob. Even the pennies seized from the Westminster Bridge tollhouse are tossed into the Thames. All possessions of the enemy of the London mob are guilty by association and must be destroyed beyond any possibility of future use.


It is the Edwardian sentiment of its author, Beatrix Potter, which causes the narrative to be returned to the era’s ‘natural order of things’ by showing that when Hunca Munca and Tom Thumb have children of their own, they become good citizens, serving the upper classes. Though Tom Thumb does not go to jail, he is suitably ashamed of his actions in the dolls’ house. In the logic of a children’s story, Tom Thumb finds a penny, which he duly deposits in one of the dolls’ stockings, hung from the end of the dolls’ brass bed while they sleep.211

So that is the story of the two Bad Mice, – but they were not so very naughty after all, because Tom Thumb paid for everything he broke. 212

Not only are property rights reasserted by Tom Thumb’s restitution but also, after the topsy-turvy world of the home invasion, the ‘natural’ order of London’s class division is restored to the nursery:

And very early every morning – before anybody is awake – Hunca Munca comes with her dust-pan and her broom to sweep the Dollies’ house! 213

The unnamed child gets a policeman doll to stand watch over the doll’s property, while her nurse installs a mousetrap. The upper middle-class child turns to the law, while the nurse, a member of the serving poor, takes the law into her own hands and threatens the mice with death. The repentant acceptance of thanatocracy214 is the story’s moral.

211 Like Noddy and Big Ears, the two dolls Lucinda, the homeowner, and her cook, Jane share a bed. Even more shocking than an implied lesbianism, would be the suggestion of sexual liaisons between the upper and lower classes, a taboo explored in D. H. Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover ([1928], 1960), L.P. Hartley’s The Go Between (1953) and E.M. Forster’s Maurice (1971) and Howard’s End (1910).
214 Thanatocracy is the state whose power is maintained through the threat of, and punishment by, death. It is most applicable to the eighteen century when the most minor offence was punished with public hanging.
Home invasion is also the subject of Graham Greene’s 1954 short story ‘The Destructors’. It too alludes to the old London practices of apprentices – eager and common representatives of the London mob – who from medieval times made it their duty to pull down brothels, the homes of hypocrites and authority figures, foreigners and Catholics on May Day and Shrove Tuesday.

Greene’s ‘The Destructors’ is the story of Blackie, leader of the Wormsley Common gang, and the arrival of a new boy, Trevor, and his suggestion that they pull down Mr Thomas’s house during the August Bank Holiday. As such, it bears an uncanny resemblance to John Lydon’s own childhood memories from the late 1950s, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, of belonging to a mob of kids, led by a teenage gangster and fiercely territorial, who played in streets still littered with the bricks of blitzed homes.

It is the early 1950s, in inner-city London. Blackie and his gang are errant schoolboys, not apprentices, but they are still the same age as the London apprentices that went before them. They are ‘blitz babies’; the very first ‘teenagers’ and, once outside their homes, are entirely free of adult supervision. Their only contact with their own homes is as a place to sleep and to get an evening meal. Like the London mob, they live their lives on the street and not within doors.

Blackie’s gang meet daily on a bombsite – “the site of the last bomb of the first blitz” – which is now used as an impromptu car park and backs onto Mr Thomas’s outhouse (the boys call him Old Misery).

We are told that the new boy, Trev, is the son of an architect who has come down in the world, which explains why Trev is capable of spotting Mr Thomas’s house as one designed and built by the seventeenth-century architect, Sir Christopher Wren. Trev inveigles his way into Old Misery’s home where, because of the boy’s architectural knowledge, Mr Thomas shows him around. Later, Trev tells the gang that the house is

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216 Wren is best known for his rebuilding of the iconic London landmark, St Paul’s Cathedral, but he was also responsible for The Monument and some further fifty-two churches in the wake of the Great Fire of 1666.
‘beautiful’, that it has a two-hundred-year-old staircase like a corkscrew as well as wall panelling. This word ‘beautiful’ is troubling to the gang who associate it with things and feelings kept firmly outside their daily existence: beauty is for toffs and for mocking.

When Trev suggests that the gang pull the house down over the coming Bank Holiday weekend there is a shift in the ‘natural order’ of authority in the Wormsley Common gang. Blackie, who has been the leader, suddenly finds himself relegated to the role of a lieutenant.

Beyond paying no more attention to [Blackie] than to a stranger, the gang had gathered around T[revor]; Blackie was dimly aware of the fickleness of favour. 217

Greene tells us “It was the end of [Blackie’s] leadership”.218 In this shift of authority, Greene is signalling their transition from gang to mob. Where a gang is a hierarchical group that can exist indefinitely, a mob has a massive energy that must be channelled and utilised for a short-term purpose. Such a purpose is more important than the long-term benefits of the gang.

As the Wormsley Common gang, they look to Blackie as the natural leader, but when they are transformed into a mob by a short-term purpose, the gang becomes a collective with an ideal that it seeks to achieve in a minimum amount of time. Mob logic dictates that this task, rather than being mutually beneficial, must be mutually ‘nonbeneficial’ and no one person can profit from the enterprise.

[Blackie] thought about going home, of never returning, of letting them discover the hollowness of T[revor].s leadership, but suppose after all what T. proposed was possible – nothing like it had ever been done before.219

218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
For a mob, an outsider can achieve a kind of selfless power; they are not there to direct individual members to their own gain. Instead, they are there to facilitate and coordinate the actions of the mob for the benefits of the mob.

The fame of the Wormsley Common car-park gang would surely reach around London. There would be headlines in the papers. Even the grown-up gangs who ran the betting at the all-in wrestling and the barrow-boys would hear with respect how Old Misery’s house had been destroyed. 220

The attraction of pulling down the residence of Old Misery is that the glory of such an achievement will shine upon the Wormsley Common gang, and not upon any individual member. The achievement of such an extraordinary undertaking will establish the gang’s name and daring in perpetuity. This is therefore a collective with a purpose in common and each will naturally find his place within the endeavour. It is a selfless act.

Driven by pure, simple and altruistic ambition of fame for the gang, Blackie came back to where T. stood in the shadow of Old Misery’s wall. 221

This mob action of pulling down or demolishing a dwelling from its roof to its floor is as old and as primal as the London mob itself. It has been enacted by London apprentices on holidays since the medieval commune. It has been enacted by angry fishwives, and upon ‘bawdy houses’ by the wives of philandering husbands. It has been directed against the homes of corrupt lord mayors, the jails, the doss houses of Irish workers, the chapels and schools of Catholics and foreigners. It is an activity as old as the medieval London commune which preserved its identity, enforced its morality, punished hypocrisy and regulated the moral lives of its members through shaming punishments, or by destroying their possessions and pulling down their dwellings.

Just as in other historical instances of a ‘pulling down’, the boys in the Wormsley Common gang arrive ‘tooled up’ and set to work. This tooling up involves begging, borrowing, appropriating and stealing builder’s tools from fathers, family sheds and local

220  Ibid.
221  Ibid.
work sites. In this, Greene evokes a common metaphor for the medieval London commune at work: the sound of ‘bees’ in a ‘hive’. The pleasant hum of bees working away is associated with a common and communal purpose to the mutual benefit of the hive and the selfless furthering of the queen bee’s needs. However, the selfless labours of the mob here, far from serving a ruling breeder queen or protecting that monarch from attack, are directed toward perpetuating the reputation of, and creating a legacy for, the Wormsley Common gang.

But, of course, bees can be upset and nothing describes the London mob better than ‘swarm’.

They opened the back door to [Blackie] and he came in. He had at once the impression of organization, very different from the old happy-go-lucky ways under his leadership. … he had a sense of great urgency, and already he could see the plan. The interior of the house was being carefully demolished without touching the walls. Summers, with hammer and chisel, was ripping out the skirting boards in the ground floor dining-room: he had already smashed the panels out of the door. In the same room Joe was heaving up the parquet blocks, exposing softwood floorboards over the cellar. Coils of wire came out of the damaged skirting and Mike sat happily on the floor clipping wires.

Trev instructs Mike to smash all the china and glass and bottles in the kitchen,

then go into all the rooms and turn out the drawers. If they are locked get one of the others to break them open. Tear out all the papers you find and smash the ornaments. Better take a carving knife with you from the kitchen. The bedroom’s opposite here. Open the pillows and tear up the sheets.

Like Hunca Munca and Tom Thumb who wilfully toss the dolls’ clothes out of the upper-storey window, they also set about destroying the feather stuffed bolster or eiderdown. When the gang discovers Old Misery’s life savings stuffed in his mattress, again they follow the dictates of the mob, not the gang, and silently consent not to steal. In the long

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224 Ibid.
tradition of the mob that seeks to destroy objects of vanity and wealth, they burn the money, banknote by banknote. Greene’s narrator notes the beauty in their destruction. Greene’s narrator marvels at Trevor’s perverted genius: “a kind of imagination had seen this house as it had now become”. This imagination is that of the mob, but in Trevor there is a natural mob leader because his mob impulses have a consciously envisioned or imagined end point and outcome. He has become, as in Peter Ackroyd’s term for William Blake, ‘a cockney visionary’. Trevor is a natural mob leader but no long-term gang leader. With the mission complete, he will fall back into his subordinate role to Blackie, who is the gang’s natural leader.

Trevor tells Blackie that he’d love to see Old Misery’s face when he sees all that they’ve done. Blackie suggests that Trevor must really hate Old Misery. “Of course I don’t hate him,” T. said. “There’d be no fun if I hated him”.

However, the boys are driven by a shared distrust and even hatred of beauty and of things beautiful. Greene asserts that for these working class boys, beauty is something to be derided and destroyed and that even the word ‘beautiful’ “belonged to a class world that you could still see mocked and parodied at the Wormsley Common Empire [a Music Hall] by a man wearing a top hat and a monocle and using a haw-haw accent”.

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225 This is a theme of William Blake’s: If the New Jerusalem is to be built on London’s soil, then a revolution will be needed to destroy the existing order of things. It also takes a special kind of imagination to see beauty in destruction. For Blake destruction precedes the coming of the New Jerusalem and is therefore a part of the building of it and holy.


227 Ibid.


230 Ibid. William Joyce was a working class London Blackshirt who defected to Nazi Germany where he broadcast propaganda with an exaggerated upper-class English accent, earning him the nickname Lord Haw Haw. See Martin Pugh, ‘Hurrah for the Blackshirts!’: Fascists and Fascism in Britain Between the Wars, Pimlico, London 2006: p. 314.
Beauty, it seems, belongs to the middle and upper classes. Previously, it had lain within the reach of the architect, Trevor’s father, before he came down in the world. It can still be recognised by Trev but his appreciation is an inversion. To recognise things that are beautiful reminds Trev that he cannot have them; beautiful things belong to another life, one that is behind him now. As Trev says, his face illuminated by the last burning banknote: “All this hate and love, it’s soft, it’s hooey. There’s only things, Blackie”.

And with that, Greene, the author, pans around the room and the things are now all “unfamiliar shadows of half things, broken things, former things”.

When Old Misery returns home early from his holiday, the project falls suddenly into jeopardy. A boy called Summers calls it quits, telling Trevor: “We’ve done enough, anyway”. And Trevor replies: “Oh no we haven’t. Anybody could do this … ”. Greene’s narrator tells us: “… this was the shattered hollowed house with nothing left but walls. Yet walls could be preserved. Facades were valuable. They could build inside again more beautifully than before. This could again be a home”. Beauty is their enemy, because it belongs to the other and the walls and doors and upper storeys all act to wall these street kids off from beauty, luxury, privacy and privilege. And then Trevor betrays himself by betraying his own emotional investment in their activity. “T[revor] began to plead. ‘Just give me a minute and I’ll fix it. I swear I’ll fix it.’ But his authority had gone with his ambiguity”.

With this thing that Greene describes as ‘ambiguity’, Trev falls from his role as mob leader and immediately, the gang’s hierarchy reinstates itself. As Greene tells us, the consequence is that “he was only one of the gang”. In his fallen place, Trev begs:

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232 Ibid. Greene almost certainly had the Plato’s cave allegory from The Republic in mind.
233 Ibid.
234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
237 Ibid: p. 18
“‘Please’ he said. ‘Please’ Summers mimicked him, and then suddenly struck home with the fatal name. ‘Run along home, Trevor’.”\textsuperscript{238}

This exchange is relatively benign because in many other situations, when the natural order is reinstated and the mob leader falls from grace, he can be turned upon by the former mob, now turned into a vicious pack. In these circumstances, formerly displaced, but now reinstated gang leaders will not lift a finger to help them, knowing that they can not assert their gang leadership of this pack; further, such a mob leader is forever a threat to the gang leader’s power. However, by Blackie artificially maintaining his subordinate role to Trevor, the belittling and savage violence of the pack is stayed.

T. stood with his back to the rubble like a boxer knocked groggy against the ropes. He had no words as his dreams shook and slid. Then Blackie acted before the gang had time to laugh, pushing Summers backward. ‘I’ll watch the front, T.,’ he said, and cautiously he opened the shutters of the hall.\textsuperscript{239}

Under Blackie’s direction, the boys trap Mr Thomas in his outhouse and complete their work. The final act is to tie a rope attached from one wall of Mr Thomas’s house to a lorry in the adjoining car park. The following morning when the lorry driver takes off, the house crumbles in upon itself, dissolving into a state of nothingness.

One moment the house had stood there with such dignity between the bombsites like a man in a top hat, and then, bang, crash, there wasn’t anything left – not anything.\textsuperscript{240}

Out of that psyche that is London, the thing that rose up, the monster from the id, was the London mob. London is a city of gangs, gangs that can become packs, packs that can become a mob. As we have seen in this chapter, the London mob is comprehensively addressed in literary terms, allowing us to consider the mob \textit{in reductio} as its smallest unit, the couple, and then, as a traditional street gang transformed by the introduction of an activity associated with the mob, the systematic destruction of a home. Where Beatrix

\textsuperscript{238} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid: p. 22
Potter’s *The Tale of the Two Bad Mice* demonstrated the smallest unit of the crowd – a couple – involved in mob activities, Graham Greene’s ‘The Destructors’ precisely maps the fortunes of a gang leader. Blackie’s leadership of the Wormsley Common gang is appropriated by a visionary outsider, Trevor, who persuades Blackie’s gang into an undertaking that will benefit none of them individually but will make their collective, the Wormsley Common gang, a legacy of notoriety. As Greene’s natural *mob leader*, Trevor is someone who only discovers such authority through the misrule of mob activity. On the other hand, as a natural *gang* leader, Blackie experiences the fickleness of favour when his role is usurped by Trevor. It is taken for granted that the gang will automatically fall back under Blackie’s authority with the conclusion of misrule when the mob’s activity is completed. Then Trevor will return to his prior role as outsider. However, his challenge to the natural gang authority will remain and may yet assert itself at a time when the conditions are ripe for the mob to be activated again.

In the following chapter I begin by examining two of the most documented uprisings of the London mob: the first, in 1381, which coincided with the Peasants’ Revolt of that summer; the second, in 1780, known as the Gordon Riots, when London mobs challenged all authority as a King Mob. Contemporary chroniclers provided posterity with accounts deeply unsympathetic to the London mob of 1381. The *Proceedings* of the Old Bailey trials of a number of the participants in the riots of 1780, provided the most insightful firsthand accounts of witnesses and rioters. These records of the London mob have provided theorists of the mob and the crowd with invaluable insights. But it was the storming of the Bastille by the Paris mob or *canaille*, in 1789 that was to generate, in the following century, the most influential theories of the mob and the crowd, until Elias Canetti wrote his *Crowds and Power* (1960) as a result of his own experience in the crowd. Canetti’s taxonomy of crowds in *Crowds and Power* sheds light on the punk phenomena and is glossed by J. S. McClelland as follows:

Canetti’s classification of crowds works like this: all crowds have four essential attributes: growth, equality, density and direction; there are four opposed pairs of types of crowd: *open* and *closed* crowds, *rhythmic* and *stagnating* crowds, *slow* and *quick* crowds, and *visible* and *invisible* crowds; and there are
five types of emotional content available to crowds, producing five different types of crowd depending on which type of emotion predominates: *baiting*, *prohibition*, *reversal*, *feast* and *double* crowds. 241

In Chapter 4, I will apply Canetti’s taxonomy of crowds to the Gordon rioters, and to the Sex Pistols and punk.

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Chapter 4: King Mob

The fourteenth-century Peasants’ Revolt was not a Revolt by Londoners. Rather, the Revolt was sparked by discontent in the countryside, especially in Essex and Kent, resulting from the levy of a poll tax, one that was indiscriminate. Arriving outside the walls of London, the peasants of Essex and Kent were given entrance to the city by unknown accomplices. Simultaneously, within the walls of London, especially in the district associated with the manufacture and dyeing of cloth, Londoners acted upon accumulated grievances, while another group attacked the Savoy Palace. Demonstrated in this earliest record of mob actions are two coincidental factors that will recur, if not synchronously, then regularly with later risings of the London mob: first, the airing of grievances related to the manufacture of clothing and modish fashion, and second, the coincidence of mob risings with summer heat.242

The London mob’s rising that summer in 1381 was not in support of the men of Essex and Kent, but it certainly wasn’t against them. Both however had a common grievance against John of Gaunt, the owner of the Savoy palace: hence the home invasion and its torching. What is significant is that in this riot or revolt, we see, if not a template, then the first recording of elements that set a discernible pattern. The elements that will recur are: first, a threat from outside the walls of London; second, the discontent we would describe as a recession (scarcity of food, high prices, low wages, long hours);

242 In June 1595, London witnessed twelve instances of popular disturbances; apprentices instigated riots against the Lord Mayor, against food prices and imprisonment of their comrades. The mob rose in the Calico Riots of 1769, also known as the Spitalfields Riots, which largely took place in summer. These riots were focussed on resentment of Huguenot immigrants, with the worst violence occurring in September. The Gordon Riots took place at the beginning of June with blue cockades worn prominently as a statement of common cause. White Teddy Boys rose against West Indian migrants in the extraordinary summer heat of the 1958 Notting Hill Race Riots that were only doused with the coming of rain in September. Punk’s so-called ‘summer of hate’ was a fashionable riot and took place during the extraordinary heat of summer 1976. However, the May Day riots of 1517 involved neither clothing manufacture nor fashion and took place in spring and not summer. What they did have in common with other London mob actions was its violence against outsiders perceived to be working for lower wages.
third, summer heat; and fourth, a cockney xenophobia that focusses on recent immigrants. Just such factors are repeated in The Gordon Riots and in London in 1976/77.

This chapter looks to the historical record to further investigate and analyse the London mob. History gives us moments of clarity when a combination of factors come together to create the conditions under which general discontent might gather the momentum to build mob action. While it is not possible to apprehend all of the factors that lead to the eruption of the London mob, the historical record nonetheless provides us with ‘factual’ evidence. However, it should be noted that the contemporary chroniclers of the Peasant’s Revolt were polemical and non-participants – Thomas Walsingham, monk of St Albans (Historia Anglia, Chronicom Angliae, circa 1377?–1392?); Henry Knighton, Augustinian canon of St Mary-of-the-Meadows, Leicester (Chronicon, 1652); the Benedictine author of Anonimaille Chronicle (from St. Mary’s, York); a chronicle of Westminster (Chronicon Westmonasteriense, circa 1381–1394); and Sir Jean Froissart in his Chronicles (circa 1370–1400) – and though their records are our ‘primary sources’, they need to be treated with some scepticism because these authors wrote their histories with one eye upon perpetuity, and the other on the version of history required by their contemporary rulers and masters.

These chroniclers are notoriously unreliable as reporters of fact, especially as regards the alleged “peasants” of the rising; and they often present contradictory, partisan testimony concerning the events. Still, the major outlines of the revolt are clear.

We know and can infer more about the 1381 rising than about similar incidents in France, in Italy, or in England later on. Some of the more important incidents in the revolt – such as Richard’s confrontation with the rebels at Mile End and the death of Wat Tyler – were recorded in well-executed fifteenth-century illustrations.

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James M. Dean’s Introduction to ‘Literature of Richard II’s Reign and the Peasant’s Revolt’ in Medieval English Political Writings, Medieval Institute Publications, Kalamazoo 1996 as at http://www.lib.rochester.edu/Camelot/teams/richint.htm accessed 22.07.08 4.05pm GMT.

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Ibid: p. 1
In the case of the Gordon Riots, while I have consulted primary source material like contemporary letters and journal entries written during the Riots, it must be said that these records, like those contemporary records of the Peasants’ Revolt, are informed by their authors’ wealth and upper-class ideology, which it can be said, is defined by how they maintain their distance from the crowd and the street.\textsuperscript{245} Like the chroniclers of the Peasants’ Revolt, these letters and journal entries of the Gordon Riots are again written by observers (not participants), whom, while not explicitly polemical in their judgements, are certainly driven by fears regarding themselves, their property and wealth. Their observations are marked by their ‘othering’ of the people in the street, and not only their failure to differentiate between ‘active’ and ‘inactive’ members of the crowds that universally represent King Mob but whether that activity or inactivity is mob or bystander behaviour. Recent histories of the London Mob and the Gordon Riots have been written in the wake of Marxism. Although not declaring themselves Marxists, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Bloom and Peter Linebaugh could be described either as Neo-Marxist or post-Marxist, in that they have been influenced in their interpretation of primary sources to be sympathetic to the gaps in history, where the voices of the working poor and the destitute have been excluded.\textsuperscript{246} Turning back to primary sources, the records of the Old Bailey \textit{Proceedings} concerning the Gordon Riots have not been censored or excised,\textsuperscript{247} and unlike other records – entirely destroyed or partially lost by accident, war or simply time – they have survived in their entirety.\textsuperscript{248} The Old Bailey records are extraordinarily rich in voice and detail and have served to underpin both historico-fictional and documentary reconstructions of the Gordon Riots and surveys of

\textsuperscript{245} For example, Susan Burney, Ignatius Sancho and Sir Horace Walpole.
\textsuperscript{246} While I don’t consider myself a Marxist or even a neo-Marxist, I am nonetheless indebted to Marxism for its approach to history ‘from below’ in my own studies into the people of London, the crowd, and the London Mob.
\textsuperscript{247} Though, it should be noted that all swearing, curses and oaths are reduced to one phrase, Damn his eyes, or some variation on this and leading me to suspect that some form of censorship or substitution has occurred.
\textsuperscript{248} I accept that these \textit{Proceedings} and the statements of its participants have taken place in an intimidating arena, that of a court of law, and that the individuals would have taken efforts to present themselves in ways that may not be considered ‘natural’.

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The working poor. If they have a failing, it is in the difficulties faced by the researcher in phrasing the right questions with which to make full and complimentary use of such extensive evidence.

4.1.1 The Great Revolt, 1381

The Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 was a result of the Poll Tax levied on every English person. The tax, set at 4s, was the same irrespective of age, gender, or station in life. Like any flat tax it was disproportionately discriminatory against the poor and aged men and women, children and babies; many were hidden, or forced into hiding, so as not to incur the tax. Bullied by the tax collectors in both Essex and Kent, the peasants rose up. After some considerable riot and violence in the countryside, led by Wat Tyler and the priest, John Ball the men of Essex and Kent converged on London.

The drawbridge on London Bridge was lowered to the rebels by an anonymous guard or guards, sympathetic to the men’s cause; the rebels then marched to the prisons and freed their inmates. As Clive Bloom observes, this was the first instance of an act that would be repeated “on behalf of natural justice in every serious London insurrection thereafter”. But as Bloom also points out, even before the rebels had been given entry to London, a London crowd had already formed a mob. “It seems likely”, Bloom writes, “that the Savoy was destroyed by Londoners before the Kentish and Essex rebels arrived”.

Buoyed by their destruction of John of Gaunt’s Savoy Palace, the mob rampaged through the city crying for “justice” and “fair play!” These rallying cries, like the action of pulling down the gaols and releasing the prisoners, would recur in London mob actions

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249 For example: the fiction of Charles Dickens, and the histories of Christopher Hibbert, George Rude and Peter Linebaugh. The French Marxist historian, George Rude uses these records to construct a portrait of London’s working poor in The Crowd in History (1964).

250 Distinguishing ‘gaolbreaking’ as defining “a serious insurrection”, is useful to my thesis. Punk was not about opening the gaols and destroying their fabric: punk was a rebellion but it was not a serious insurrection. It was about creating mischief and not about committing crimes that the State might lock them up for. Clive Bloom, Violent London, Sidgwick and Jackson, London 2003: p. 27.

up to the Gordon Riots. The first watchword, “justice” would transform over time into the catchcry ‘Liberty’ – a natural right held to be self-evident by the crowd. Quite what it meant nobody knew, except that it was the inalienable right of Englishmen. The second phrase, ‘fair play’ would come to be associated with economic grievances and legality. Both were used to excite the mob’s sense of shared grievances and could be employed against anyone not born in London, or indeed anyone not born to the immediate locality in which they lived and worked.

Justice and fair play therefore were far from the minds of some of the mob that day in 1381, when they turned their attentions to their fellow Londoners, the Brabants and Flemings, who had recently settled in the city as weavers:

The London crowds began by attacking some Flemish prostitutes in Southwark. The pogrom was detailed [sic] in blood: thirty-five Flemings were dragged from the shelter of a church. Their fate is unknown, unlike seven unfortunate craftsmen lynched in Clerkenwell when the hospital of St John was attacked. In all it is possible that many hundreds were killed, one chronicler putting it as high as four hundred. 252

Among those murdered were servants of the Duke of Lancaster, some lawyers in the Temple, the king’s treasurer and the Archbishop of Canterbury who, in an aping of legitimate power, was beheaded by the mob on Tower Hill. Thankfully, murder would not become a fixture of the spontaneous mob rising.253 Roy Porter reports: “thereafter London was long extraordinarily free of serious public disorder – probably a token of its broad-based prosperity and the socio-economic cohesion created by its guilds”.254 In all mob actions after the Peasants’ Revolt up to and including the apotheosis of the London mob in the Gordon Riots, only the destruction of property, not the taking of lives, was the target.

252 Ibid: p. 28.
253 The famous Shakespearean phrase, “The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers” is uttered by one of Jack Cade’s rebels, Dick the Butcher, in Act 4 scene 2 of Henry VI (Part 2), but it is Butcher’s wishful thinking and not enacted and is probably Shakespeare’s (mis)remembering of the incident in 1381.
After the Reformation, the mob’s violence would be directed against a new public enemy number one that was both a threat within and without the city – the Catholics in the sixteenth century. When Catholics were seen by the mob as an ever present, hidden danger, ‘No Popery!’ was the catchcry. The mob’s fears were fuelled by, successively: the Spanish Armada, the Jesuit plot against Elizabeth, the French massacre of Huguenot Protestants on St Bartholomew’s Day 1572, the Irish rebels and then, in the new century, by the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, and the (albeit, invented by Titus Oates\(^{255}\)) Popish Plot.

Even the Great Fire of London in 1666 was blamed by the mob on Papists and Frenchmen, who, it was claimed, “had been seen throwing fireballs into houses, and one Huguenot who ‘confessed’ – read ‘tortured’ – to starting the blaze [and] was hanged at Tyburn …”.\(^{256}\) Against all rationality, this conspiracy theory held so much sway that an inscription on Wren’s Monument – built in memory of the victims of the Great Fire – read: “But Popish frenzy which wrought such horrors, is not yet quenched”.\(^{257}\) The removal of this inscription did not take place until 1831, the year of the passing of the Tolerance Act. One could argue that the conspiracy theory of a Papist menace remained a common fear until the beginning of the nineteenth century. No public outcry followed the removal of the plaque, and this event marks the end of the London mob until it re-emerges in mid-twentieth century London. By 1831, largely due to Irish immigration, London housed “more Roman Catholics than Rome”,\(^{258}\) and other immigrants, such as the Italians, Jews and Germans, were now the focus for the London mob’s xenophobia.

### 4.1.2 Differentiating the crowd from the mob

The mob is an entity that defies definite answers or even definite questions. Some of the most basic questions, such as what constitutes a mob, are unanswered and even go unconsidered: for instance, we don’t know how many people it takes to make a mob. The Riot Act 1715, regards twelve or more riotous people as a mob but as we have seen in the previous chapter, as few as two can undertake activities usually associated with those of


\(^{257}\) Ibid: p. 36.

the mob. We also have no scientific or sociological understanding of what causes a crowd to turn mob. That momentary cause that flicks the switch between a crowd and a mob has defied scrutiny; crowd studiers are nonetheless in agreement that there is clear definition between the two states. The following examples provide illustrations of these two states but equally show a problem in defining either the transition or the boundaries within which such a clear transition is demonstrable.

Reflecting on his own experience after a car accident – when he interceded on behalf of the injured driver and passengers, in a crowd that was wavering on the edge of becoming a violent, retributive mob – David Gregory Roberts in *Shantaram* (2003),\(^{259}\) writes:

> And perhaps there really *was* some softening of their fury, some reluctance to kill us, despite their urgent desire to cause us pain. I know that reluctance. I’ve seen it many times, in many violent worlds. I can’t fully explain it, it’s as if there’s a collective conscience within the group of a mob, and the right appeal, at exactly the right moment, can turn murderous hate aside from its intended victim. It’s as if the mob in just that critical moment, *want* to be stopped, *want* to be prevented from the worst of their own violence. And in that one doubting moment, a single voice or fist raised against the gathering evil can be enough to avert it.\(^{260}\)

Such considered reflection on what drives a mob is rare. Although Roberts claims to have witnessed such instances “many times, in many violent worlds”,\(^{261}\) still stands outside the mob mind. Almost none of the first hand accounts that I have read on incidences of the London mob – in riot, carnival, punishment or in play – have included accounts of just who constituted it, what they intended, what seemed to motivate them and to what end. None of the observers identifies himself with the mob. However, one twentieth-century novelist and intellectual, Elias Canetti, has reflected upon his singular experience of identifying with an active crowd. This experience we will consider in greater detail along with his attempt to categorise and explain the make-up of the crowd.

\(^{259}\) *Shantaram* is a novelisation of Roberts’ experience as an escaped Australian prisoner on the run, surviving as a gangster in Mumbai and living under the pseudonym, Linbaba.


\(^{261}\) Ibid.
UPRISING IN VIENNA

At least forty are dead and 200 have been wounded in fighting which followed a sudden revolutionary uprising of Viennese workers which began last night [July 15 1927] and continued all day today. The revolutionists are now in control of the centre of the city where street barricades are being erected. The demonstration, which rapidly developed revolutionary tendencies, began after a Vienna jury, despite their plea of guilty, had acquitted three Fascists who last January shot and killed a Socialist and his child.  

As this reportage illustrates, the journalist’s disinterest and delivery of a chronology of events, tells us nothing about the people who made up this crowd, except that they are described as Viennese workers. In contrast, Elias Canetti, then a student in Vienna, describes his own experience of this same revolutionary crowd in *The Conscience of Words*:

From all parts of the city the workers marched in closed processions to the Palace of Justice, which with its sheer name embodied injustice for them. It was a completely spontaneous reaction, I personally felt just how spontaneous. Taking my bicycle, I zoomed into the city and joined the procession.

That was forty-six years ago, and the excitement of that day still lingers in my bones. It was the closest thing to a revolution that I had physically experienced. A hundred pages would not suffice to describe what I saw. Since then, I have known precisely that I need not read a single word about what happened during the storming of the Bastille. I became part of the crowd, I dissolved into it fully. I did not feel the least resistance to what it did. I am surprised that I was nevertheless able to grasp all the concrete details occurring before my eyes.

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262 *International Herald Tribune*, ‘what happened on this day’ news item for July 15, 1927, Vienna.

263 Sigmund Freud was also present in Vienna that day although his response was somewhat different, as J.S. McClelland writes: “In Freud’s case, that sense of unease went particularly deep, because the bourgeois intellectual Jew who had never felt at home in anti-semitic Catholic Vienna before 1914 was even less likely to feel culturally secure, or even physically safe, in Hapsburgless Austrian republic after 1919 threatened by Marxism, and by some very nasty anti-semitic politics of its own before the Anschluss imported Nazism as a prelude to the final horror whose victim Freud very nearly was.” See J. S. McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob*, Unwin Hyman, London 1989: p. 241.

In his landmark study, *Masse und Macht* (published in 1960 and translated in English as *Crowds and Power* in 1962), Elias Canetti undertook an exhaustive theoretical overview of the ‘idea of the crowd’ over the past two millennia. In particular, Canetti set about critiquing and disproving a line of thought about the masses or ‘the crowd’ that went back to the decidedly undemocratic ideas of Plato, as mapped out in *The Republic*, and which, crossing time and the Aegean, had coloured Livy’s very unflattering portrait of the crowds of Rome.

The idea of the crowd as illustrated by Plato and Livy, as an irrational, many-headed beast, ruled by passion and seduced by demagoguery and requiring a strong ruler to keep it in line, would find a new champion in the Renaissance with Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* (written 1513, published 1532). When one considers that these profoundly undemocratic works are the cornerstones of western political thought, perhaps it is little wonder that the crowd has had such a bad reputation. As John S. McClelland writes:

Plato’s account in *The Republic* of democracy as mob rule degenerating into tyranny prepares the way for a host of crowd images: the crowd hounding Christ to his death; the crowd bawling for blood in the circus; crowds of mutinous legionaries looking around for someone to raise to the purple; crowds led by wild men from the desert in Late Antiquity; the Nikka Riots which nearly cost Justinian the Empire; later Roman mobs making trouble for popes; medieval crowds volatile at great festivals and fairs; people’s crusades … the barbarism of crowds during Wars of Religion; crowds at public executions; peasant revolts; Wilkesite and Church and King mobs in London; liberty mobs in Boston; the crowd in the French Revolution; lynch mobs; the mobs of industrial discontent; the list is endless.  

Writing in the wake of the Second World War, Canetti was able to survey the historical record and to reach new conclusions about the crowd in his seminal *Crowds and Power* (1960). Canetti’s is not an empirical work. Though based upon his personal experience and observations of the Vienna uprising, Canetti’s work remains theoretical because, although it offers templates with which crowds can be assessed, his theories cannot

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266 Empirical science is a practice based upon experiment and observation and demands that an experiment must return the same data ninety-nine times in a hundred.
possibly be tested scientifically. Far from being a failing upon the part of Canetti, this is because it is simply not possible to either scientifically define all the factors that are in play, let alone recreate the genuine discontent of a mob’s participants. Thus Canetti’s work is open-ended, and one that outlines the mood and substance of many diverse crowds but defies rigorous categorisation.

Nonetheless, Canetti does attempt a taxonomy of crowds, which he classified variously as open and closed, rhythmic and stagnating, slow and quick, visible and invisible. Canetti then argued that there were five types of emotional content available to each of these crowds: baiting, prohibition, reversal, feast and double crowds.

Canetti classifies crowds according to their “prevailing emotion”. The first and oldest of these prevailing emotions, Canetti subcategorises as baiting crowds and flight crowds. Flight crowds are those that in panic, flee on mass, while the baiting crowds could be better described as a lynching mob because, according to Canetti, it is a multitude seeking to enforce blood punishment. (Canetti also suggests that because of new communication technologies, these crowds can also form as virtual or what he describes as invisible crowds.)

The second prevailing emotion, he subcategorises into three groups, the prohibition crowd, the reversal crowd and the feasting crowd. The prohibition crowd are the nay-sayers; people who gather to make a refusal known; the reversal crowd, which could also be called revolutionaries, seek to turn current order on its head; and the feasting crowd is intent upon conspicuous consumption and instant gratification.

Punk, like the mob in the Gordon Riots, has more in common with what Canetti describes as the feasting crowd:

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268 An example of an invisible flight crowd would be the people who listened to and were taken in by, Orson Welles’ 1938 radio-broadcast of *War of the Worlds*. While the flight crowd is clearly discernible in the mass hysteria that followed the broadcast, the crowd’s invisibility relates to their geographical dispersion. Canetti identifies an invisible baiting crowd in the readership of newspapers, while the live-to-air broadcast of the ‘Grundy incident’ created a virtual home invasion when the mob/Sex Pistols were transmitted into the livingrooms of London, and should also be considered.
For the individual [within the feasting crowd] the atmosphere is one of loosening, not discharge. The feast is the goal and they are there. The density is very great, but the equality is in large part an equality simply of indulgence and pleasure. People move to and fro, not in one direction only. The things which are piled up, and which everyone partakes, are a very important part of the density; they are its core. They were gathered together first and only when they were all there, did people gather round them. 269

The feast is about conspicuous consumption of “the things which have been piled up, and which everyone partakes of”, 270 here those things are the luxury furnishings of the wealthy, the authoritarian and the stranger. According to Canetti:

The crowd particularly likes destroying houses and objects: breakable objects like window panes, mirrors, pictures and crockery; and people tend to think that it is the fragility of these objects which stimulates the destructiveness of the crowd. 271

Canetti suggests that fragility is not enough to excite and encourage the destructiveness of the mob. Rather there is a chain of associations. Within societies, fragility carries the association of luxury and luxury is owned by the wealthy, the wealthy are the mob’s betters, their punishers and hypocrites. Like the pejorative associations that ‘beauty’ holds for the boys in Graham Greene’s ‘The Destructors’, it is the symbolic chain of associations of fragility and luxury with power, rather than the actual object itself, that provokes the crowd.

Apart from Canetti’s empathetic study of the crowd, the mob has left no firsthand accounts of itself, so we must depend upon biased observers who, all too often, neither shared their lives nor their concerns and to whom the London crowd was the Other. As such they are described as: the nobodies, the mobile (pronounced as ‘mobilly’), 272 the shifting, the vulgar, the rabble, 273 the throng, 274 the common, the wretched, the

270 Ibid.
unwashed,\textsuperscript{275} the poor, the refuse,\textsuperscript{276} the denizens of the street, those who live without doors,\textsuperscript{277} a ragamuffin crew.\textsuperscript{278} In the case of the Gordon Riots of 1780, these pejoratives were founded on an erroneous class assumption. George Rude, by using the Old Bailey records, found that almost all of those arrested for mob activity, were in fact, the eighteenth century’s equivalent of the lower middle class. These observers and passive attendees at mob actions frequently felt themselves threatened, if not wronged by the crowd, and describe themselves dialectically as: the quality,\textsuperscript{279} somebodies, the nobility, the gentry, the clean, the washed, the educated and so forth. The clear class-based differences between the observers and the observed means that we must take into account these biases in most historical accounts of mob actions.

4.1.3 Theorising the mob and its activity

In the Old Bailey records that concern the Gordon Riots of June 1780, only one witness attempts any form of analytical comprehension of the mob, its activities and its constituents. Rose Jennings Esquire (sic) gave sworn evidence in the trial of Francis Mockford, a St Albans waiter, who was arrested for his role in the attack upon Newgate Gaol.\textsuperscript{280} Jennings testified:

… I formed a sort of distinction between the mob and the spectators. I observed the prisoner among the people within the circle, appearing to me to incite and instigate that part of the mob … \textsuperscript{281}

\textsuperscript{274} D’Urfey, \textit{The Royalist}, Act IV, (1682) Accessed 2.28pm on 22.06.08: www.letrs.indiana.edu/eprosed/index.html.


\textsuperscript{276} Richard Cumberland, \textit{The Fashionable Lover}, Act III (1772): op. cit.

\textsuperscript{277} Miller, \textit{Vanelia}, Act III, (1732): op. cit.

\textsuperscript{278} Richard Cumberland, \textit{The Fashionable Lover}, Act III (1772): op. cit.

\textsuperscript{279} Charles Burnaby, \textit{The Reform’d Wife}, Act III scene 1 (1700): op. cit.

\textsuperscript{280} Mr Akerman (also spelled Ackerman) who lived in the house adjoining the prison held Newgate’s lucrative lease. Throughout the proceedings, both home and prison are referred to as Mr Ackerman’s house.

\textsuperscript{281} ‘FRANCIS MOCKFORD, breaking the peace: riot, 28 Jun 1780’ from the \textit{Proceedings} of the Old Bailey records. Accessed at 3.40pm on 31/01/05: http://hri.shef.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey/results.jsp?words=mob&format=and&type=&range=&year=bhiaat.
The accused, Mockford, had apparently got hold of the keys to Newgate Gaol, which he later threw off Westminster Bridge into the middle of the Thames. When asked by the prosecution whether Jennings could draw the line between guilty and innocent spectators, he responded: “I can in this way, the persons who were innocent stood inactive the others were in action”.282

Rose Jennings was called again, this time in the case of Benjamin Bowsey, an African-American and former slave, who had arrived in London from America in 1776. He was accused of being ‘active’ in the attack on Newgate Gaol and the home of the gaoler, Mr Akerman. Bowsey was charged with the theft of three pairs of Akerman’s stockings, a pocket book, a blue and white silk handkerchief and a key to a private park. Jennings reiterates his distinction between the guilty and the innocent:

I endeavoured to form a distinction between the active and inactive people. I thought I did so; the inactive people seemed to form a circle. I observed a person better dressed than the rest among those within the circle, who did not meddle, but seemed to be exciting and encouraging others … 283

The description of such a person, appearing “better dressed” than the rabble and though not raising a finger in the destruction, rather appearing to direct the mob (by exciting and encouraging them), recurs in accounts of the Gordon Riots. However, no such figure was brought to trial in the Old Bailey records.284 Jennings would also point out that there were many energies at work, some at complete odds. Among the throng were some people who were actively trying to save Akerman’s home, prison and possessions while others were actively trying to destroy them. Jennings’ definition of activity as determining guilt, as this circumstance illustrates, is insufficient.

282 Ibid.
284 This figure intrigued Charles Dickens and led to the svengali-figure of Gashford. It also appealed to Malcolm McLaren, director and encourager of punk, who interpreted “better dressed” to describe his own brand of dandyism.
Again, from the Old Bailey records of the Gordon Riots, Hugh MacDonald, a porter, in the role of a spectator and therefore by Jennings’s definition an inactive member of the tumult, describes the mob’s attack upon the home of David Miles:

I saw [James Coulsell, coachman] … very active in pulling down the wainscoting … the shelves, and the window shutters, and throw them into the street, where they were burnt in three different places.  

This was frightening enough for anyone watching the mob with detachment, but one Ferdinand Schomberg found his home in Woodstock Street singled out by the mob for attack in the middle of the night. The defendant was Richard Foster, a fourteen-year-old servant boy and Ferdinand Schomberg testified:

… about ten or twelve men came to my house, at about a quarter after twelve o’clock at night; they broke the doors in, and broke all the glasses, and destroyed all the furniture, throwed it out at the windows, and burnt it in the street …

It is noteworthy that though Schomberg’s surname is German in origin, his cockney accent is recorded in “throwed”. So deep was the London mob’s xenophobia, that shared accent or quirks of cockney syntax were not enough to turn the mob from its purpose. The destruction is further catalogued by the witness, William Rose, another servant, but this time in the employ of one Lady Austin:

When I first saw … [Foster] he was coming out at the [Schomberg’s] door with something in his arms, which appeared like chair covers … [He] threw them into the fire which was burning before the door.

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… I saw [Foster] come and stand under the window, receive the things which were thrown out from the one and two pair of stairs’ window, and throw them into the fire likewise.\textsuperscript{287}

Rose further testifies to the methodical nature of Richard Foster’s destructive activities. It should be noted that this methodical nature is certainly characteristic of the ‘active’ members of the mob and amazes many of those who observe it and leading them to remark upon the application, diligence, capability, ingenuity and precision with which the destructors work.\textsuperscript{288} Thus Rose observes Foster with a stick, with which he rakes the piled objects together, and a link (a flaming torch) in the other hand, setting alight to them. Like Richard Foster, through some curious synchronicity, active members of the mob find their specific task within the mob’s industry. As we saw earlier in Beatrix Potter’s \textit{The Tale of the Two Bad Mice}, Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca work independently of each other but in synchronicity. This is replicated in Graham Greene’s ‘The Destructors’, for while Blackie gives orders, the gang members are happily engaged in their own labours for the common cause of bringing down the house.

In describing the mob’s appetite, Canetti suggests the sound of destruction is itself powerful:

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James Crossley, a Moorfield’s clockmaker observed: “… there were many people in the house tearing the inside of the house down. [Jonathan Stacey] began pulling the tiles down and throwing them into the street; after they had cleared a good part of the tiles away, they threw the lead down, and then they took each piece of timber which the lead was nailed to and pushed down the parapet wall, till it was even with the lead, then they shoved the lead of the gutter off into the street; it was a very great weight… The principal piece of timber, which went from one wall to the other, four of them took hold of it, the prisoner was one; he took hold of it, and broke the garret room in the middle… They took hold of it in the middle and swayed it till they broke it in two, which brought down all the roof together into the street …” in “JONATHAN STACEY, breaking the peace: riot, 28 Jun 1780” from the \textit{Proceedings} of the Old Bailey records. Accessed at 3.40 pm on 31/01/05: http://hri.shef.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey/results.jsp?words=mob&format=and&type=&range=&year=bhiaat.
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It is true that the noise of the destruction adds its satisfaction; the banging of windows and the crashing of glass are the robust sounds of fresh life, the cries of something new-born. It is easy to evoke them and that increases their popularity. Everything shouts together; the din is the applause of objects. 289

Canetti likens the smashing of glass here to a high pitched wail like that of an infant’s cry, which demands the immediate attention and calming sounds of a parent if the din is to be stopped and the child settled. Canetti follows this with a birth, as if from out of the mother’s labour comes the birth of a baby; its crying is a moment for joyous applause. What he means precisely by “everything shouts together, the din is the applause of objects” Canetti clarifies:

There seems to be a special need for this kind of noise at the beginning of events, when the crowd is still small and little or nothing has happened. The noise is the promise of the reinforcements the crowd hopes for, and a happy omen for deeds to come. But it would be wrong to suppose that the ease with which things can be broken is the decisive factor in the situation. 290

The applause of objects is an appreciative clapping intended to swell the crowd but it is also self-salutation and an omen of deeds to come. Canetti points out that it is not the fragility of an object that encourages the mob to break it because even the least fragile objects are targeted; rather, it is the noise that causes the mob to gather and increase.

Sculptures of solid stone have been mutilated beyond recognition; Christians have destroyed the heads and arms of Greek Gods and reformers and revolutionaries have hauled down the statues of Saints, sometimes from dangerous heights, though often the stone has been so hard they have achieved only half their purpose. 291

The mob may have possessed things precious to them but they did not possess luxuries. Luxuries are out of reach and out of bounds to them. Luxury is associated with wealth, and wealth represents authority. In turn, authority creates boundaries and

290   Ibid.
291   Ibid.
boundaries repress the mob. When the people force the doors and windows of a two- or three-storey dwelling they are acting out of a mixture of fury, curiosity, envy and defiance of authority. In the eighteenth century to possess something fragile and to keep it implied wealth. For the common Londoner, with wealth came authority by a chain of association, therefore fragile items also came to represent a repressive authority. As we have seen, the fragility of an object was not what drove the London mob during the Gordon Riots and the mob’s home invasions, but rather the representational chain of association attached to luxury. Canetti determines that “the destruction of representational images is the destruction of a hierarchy which is no longer recognized”.292 In the Gordon Riots, the London mob turned authority on its head.

Boundaries, in the form of walls, fences, glass windows, curtains, laws, statutes, even religion, with its rood and screen, and customs, are what the rich, the powerful, the Catholic (to a London Protestant mob), the Other use to separate themselves. Their privacy is secretive, unknown and not to be trusted; thus, they are thought of as the enemy of the common Londoner. As Canetti concludes: “The more usual kind of destruction mentioned above is simply an attack on all boundaries”.293 And this is how we should interpret his phrase ‘the applause of objects’. Fragile objects such as the chair covers that Richard Foster carries out to the bonfire in the street are here being appropriated but only for their immediate destruction. The law of the mob defies theft for personal profit. A fragile object removed from its context behind closed doors loses that meaning in the street. The object formerly having been defined by its preciousness behind doors, a preciousness based in the ease with which it can be broken, this object now in the context of the street acquires a new meaning. For a common Londoner to break such an object is to discover its ‘negative utility’.294 In discovering an object’s negative utility, the mob now celebrates the object, or in Canetti’s term ‘applauds’ the object by burning it. As we will see in the next chapter, when the lead singer of the Sex Pistols, Johnny Rotten, took a found object such as a Pink Floyd t-shirt and scrawled “I hate” on it, or

292 Ibid.
293 Ibid: pp. 19–20
294 The use by which a found object can be turned by the ingenuity of a mob, and to such use, as the object was never intended by its maker. For example, the use of milk bottles to make Molotov cocktails.
took a popular lyric and, rather than treat it as precious, turned its meaning on its head, he discovered its negative utility; by using this new lyric over and over he sought its negative capability.

For the London mob who live their days on the street and nights in overcrowded tenements without any privacy, parents and children sleeping in one room, there is a strange and terrible fascination for those people who conceal their lives behind doors, behind shutters and curtains and partitions, or above the prying eyes of the observer by living upstairs. The Old Bailey records show the recently invented sash window, with its hidden cord and lead counter-weights, was among the first things to be smashed; the frames prised out of the fabric of the buildings. Once inside, the mob’s fury falls upon the soft furnishings and, when the curtains and cushions are shredded, the rooms become a sea of feathers and horsehair. The mob discovers the negative utility of the lead counterweights by turning them into bludgeons with which to smash furniture into kindling which is then tossed out the window together with the expensive wainscoting torn from the walls. They also tear down the staircases and the whole lot is piled in the street for the rest of the mob to set alight. Canetti writes:

Windows and doors belong to houses; they are the most vulnerable part of their exterior and once they’re smashed, the house has lost its individuality; anyone may enter it and nothing and no-one is

295  John Bradbury, publican of the Crown in Golden Lane recounts “… the mob broke the bar windows, and a little window in front, frames and all…” quoted in ‘THOMAS PRICE, JAMES BURN, JOHN THOMPSON, breaking the peace: riot, 28 Jun 1780’ from the Proceedings of the Old Bailey records. Accessed at 3.40 pm on 31/01/05: http://hri.shef.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey/results.jsp?words=mob&format=and&type=&range=&year=bhiaat.
Along with cartwheel spokes William Russel, a shoemaker describes one mob member as armed: “He had a long flat iron bar in his hand; it appeared to me to be the bar to an inside window” quoted in ‘MICHAEL MARTIN, breaking the peace: riot, 13 September 1780’ from the Proceedings of the Old Bailey records. Accessed at 3.40 pm on 31/01/05: http://hri.shef.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey/results.jsp?words=mob&format=and&type=&range=&year=bhiaat.
protected any more. In these houses live the supposed enemies of the crowd, those who try to keep away from it. 296

Among those whose homes were attacked, were not only Catholics, the wealthy, those in authority, but also the poor Irish workers who worked for less than their London cousins and were despised for it, and the lodging houses of the poor.

Charles Lee, a lodger at Mr Bradbury’s public house in Golden Lane gives a detailed account of the actions of individual members of the mob enacting mob rituals. Lee tells us that at 1.30am the mob gathered at Bradbury’s pub. Lee immediately strung up a blue ribbon, the sign of the Protestant Association, and told the congregation that there was “no Popery” to be found in this home. To convince them of his case, Lee went upstairs and brought down a large church bible that he carried out into the street. The mob had several barrels of beer that they were drinking from. Telling anyone who would listen, Lee cried: “This is my religion; here is no Popery” and perhaps a little too quickly added, “for God’s sake do not pull the house down”.

The mob encircled him and made Lee swear upon his life to being a Protestant. This done, several of the mob entered Bradbury’s pub and had liquor at the bar. But it was the appearance of a lamplighter, a very tall man and a natural mob leader, who shifts the mood, “Blast you, come along, and let us go upstairs and see what is there”. Lee follows them upstairs.

I suppose I was the third who went up; when they came up the first pair of stairs they saw the bedsteads, the beds were removed. They said Blast their eyes, there is Popery here, else they would not have moved; then they began to break the windows, then they went from the one-pair-of-stairs into the two-pair-of-stairs to my room; when they were in my room there was only a case of a chest of drawers left; they went to stamp out the partitions of the case of the chest of drawers; and then they broke the windows and part of the window frames. [The accused, Thomas] Price and [James] Burn were into my

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297 ‘THOMAS PRICE, JAMES BURN, JOHN THOMPSON, breaking the peace: riot, 28 Jun 1780’ from the *Proceedings* of the Old Bailey records. Accessed at 3.40 pm on 31/01/05: http://hri.shef.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey/results.jsp?words=mob&format=and&type=&range=&year=bhiaat.
298 Ibid.
room and in every room of the house assisting and doing mischief. I stopped their hands several times and said, they did not know the consequence; they had bludgeons in their hands; there was a door through to Mr Bradbury’s lodging room and mine, they burst that open and broke down part of the partition; then they proceeded into the garret; the tall lamp-lighter began breaking the windows in the garret, and then looked out at the window, pulled off his hat and huzza’d, No Popery! There was a box locked, they broke it open; there was a fiddle in it; there were eight hands, I suppose in the box at a time. Bradbury took up the fiddle and music books; they broke the garret windows. Then they came down into the club-room, and broke the chairs, and threw things out of the windows into the street. 299

In this instance, Mr Bradbury’s violin is saved but in a similar incident, a member of the mob who finds a fiddle in an upstairs drawing room, seats himself on the windowsill, and plays for the mob as the furnishings shower into the street where they are set alight to his tune.

As we have seen in this instance, the appearance of the lamplighter turns the mood of the crowd to that of a mob. The mob as recorded here are far from rabid, murderous, unreasonable or illogical; however, they are intent upon carrying out their purpose. A purpose they consider to be a patriotic duty to king, country and London: to discover fifth columnists, foreigners, Catholics, Catholic sympathisers, wherever they may be hidden. The lamplighter in his stalwart anti-Catholic stance, through a combination of intimidation, partly dependent upon his height, then invokes (anti-Catholic) patriotism with which he inspires the inactive crowd to consider themselves as patriotic Englishmen, and this turns the crowd to mob. Canetti sees the sting of this patriotism resulting in irritation and it is this irritation that turns them to destructive action:

In the crowd the individual feels that he is transcending the limits of his own person. He has a sense of relief, for the distances are removed which he used to throw back on himself and shut him in. With the lifting of these burdens of distance he feels free; his freedom is the crossing of these boundaries. He wants what is happening to him to happen to others too; and he expects it to happen to them. An earthen pot irritates him, for all its boundaries. The closed doors of a house irritate him, rites and ceremonies,
anything that preserves distances, threaten him and seem unbearable. He fears that, sooner or later, an attempt will be made to force the disintegrating crowd back into these pre-existing vessels. 300

Nowhere is the mob’s fear of confinement better or more literally illustrated than by their attack upon, not just one, but all of the London jails, an action in which, having freed the existing prisoners, they either tore these places to the ground or torched them, so that they might not be used again.

Despite its revelling in violence, the London mob never rose with the intent to kill their monarch. (Although the execution of Charles I in 1649 was not a mob action but instead an action undertaken by Parliament, it did have implications such as reinforcing the anti-Catholic sentiments of the overwhelmingly Protestant London mob).

So what did the mob want if it did not want revolution? In 1381 the London mob desired retribution upon the authorities that had repressed them (invade and burn down the Savoy Palace and open all the jails), the aliens they feared in their midst (attack those seen to be taking away their custom) and to warn the boy king Richard II that he was being misled by his closest advisors, the robber barons. The London mob never wants revolution, it just wants to revolt; it does not want a rebellion it just wants to rebel. Rebelling was an act of disobedience to get the ear of the authorities but not to change the status quo. The attitude of rebelling rather than seeking revolution is evident in the Sex Pistols’ attack upon icons like Her Majesty the Queen. Although Malcolm McLaren spoke the rhetoric of revolution he nevertheless ran a fashion boutique and traded upon things remaining the same. McLaren’s idea of revolt was an anarchic and chaotic, drunken feast of a street party, not a bloody revolution with the beheading of monarchs.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the London mob regularly rose in defiance against authority and luxuries and obvious consumption of their ‘betters’. Coming together under a common banner of anti-papacy and the misnomer of ‘Liberty’, the mob set in motion a chaos of bonfire, demolition (of Catholic residences), with crowds flowing across the city; attacks on the chapels attached to embassies, on gaols where the

prisoners who asked to join the crowd were released and, ultimately, in the Gordon Riots of June 1780, upon the symbolic figurehead of London commerce (and also the former site of the Maypole), the Bank of England.

4.1.4 The Paris mob and mob theory

The crowd becomes an undeniable force in the modern world after the Paris mob’s storming of the Bastille in 1789. This was the moment at which the crowd, the people, the mob, the canaille, the masses were seen as a permanent political force in the world. Modern France, with its principles of liberty, equality, fraternity, had been borne out of riot. Not since the ancient republics had the people been a legitimate base of power and again they would have to be accommodated by politicians.

One result of the Paris mob’s storming of the Bastille was that the mob first became a conscious area of study in the nineteenth century. In 1890, Hippolyte Taine published *The Origins of Contemporary France*. The first ten volumes — in which Taine attacked the Republican ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity — appeared in 1890. Writing in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune, Taine was not the first to challenge these republican ideals; however, Taine’s *Origins* was in a unique position to critically assess the impact of the Revolution at its centenary and this played a part in its popular acclaim. Taine, like a long list of crowd studiers before him, believed that democracy – the rule of the people by the people – necessarily turns into demagogic dictatorship. The people, left to rule themselves, turn into a mob and the mob, with its base, plebeian slave mentality, eventually craves a demagogue to rule over it. *The Origins* was a conservative attack on the Enlightenment and the *philosophes*, which Taine saw as having poisoned the people’s minds and led inextricably towards the Terror. Taine argued that, in turn, the bloody excesses of the French Revolution led directly to the demagoguery of Napoleon.

Taine’s works were followed in 1895, by Gustave Le Bon’s *Crowds* in which Le Bon tried to create a science of collective behaviour and to address the problems of what
he referred to as “the new era of crowds”.\(^{50}\) (McClelland summarily dismisses Le Bon’s work: “Le Bon cobbled together the insights of others, added a few of his own, and formulated what he called rather grandly: the Law of the Mental Unity of Crowds”\(^{301}\)) It was Le Bon’s assertion that the crowd had an unconscious group mind separate to and distinct from the individuals’ minds that made up that group. And Le Bon claimed that the intelligence of the many was less than the intelligence of the individuals that make up that aggregate. The work was an extraordinarily popular success and this pseudoscientific definition of the crowd, as an unconscious state, led first to scientific studies of the physiological aspects of mesmerism and then the incorporation of these scientific studies into the theory of the crowd. When mesmerism failed to definitively explain the power of a crowd leader over the crowd, there followed a theory of eugenics. This theory of eugenic-influence, suggested that individuals carried a buried “race-memory”\(^{302}\) which could be played upon by crowd leaders.

Mesmerism suggested that the leader hypnotised the crowd to do his bidding. It is not scientifically possible to examine such events as mesmeric control or summoning eugenic memory by a crowd leader, nor has any crowd theorist recreated them for controlled testing. However, we can turn to imaginative explorations. Mesmerism is explored in this way in Fritz Lang’s anti-Nazi film *The Testament of Dr Mabuse* (1933) and Robert Weine’s *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* (1920), while, the role of eugenics is considered by the British screenwriter, Nigel Kneale.

In *The Testament of Dr Mabuse*, Mabuse has written a manifesto that proposes a future empire of crime. Lang envisaged a madman genius able to control individuals beyond asylum walls with hypnotic orders delivered through radios. For Mabuse’s manifesto, Lang took the slogans of the rising Nazi party and put them into the mouth of his madman, Mabuse.


\(^{302}\) While this idea of race memory is most famously associated with Adolf Hitler’s Aryan and anti-Semitic message, it was also a theory that Sigmund Freud believed was influential among Jews, who he believed carried a subconscious memory of their murder of Moses.
In Weine’s Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari, Caligari operates a carnival sideshow as a hypnotist. However, Caligari is actually an evil genius, who employs the somnambulations of Cesare, his faithful carnival assistant, to commit murder by proxy. While Lang’s Dr Mabuse is a patient in an insane asylum, Weine’s Caligari is the head doctor at the local insane asylum. After Caligari is forced by the town’s people to admit his crimes, Caligari (like Mabuse) is incarcerated: fittingly, in his own insane asylum.  

Eugenics, on the other hand, suggested that the unconscious crowd returned to primordial sentiments deeply embedded in the heritage of the race. This irrational idea was ‘rationalised’ by Adolf Hitler through his appeals to the German crowd as an Aryan race and nation. This has also been a subject explored imaginatively in many of the macabre science fiction works of Nigel Kneale. Because of the association of Kneale’s work with punk by Greil Marcus, to be considered more deeply in Chapter 8, Kneale’s work deserves a brief introduction. In the fifties and sixties, Kneale thrilled first television audiences and then filmgoers with his character Professor Bernard Quatermass.

Kneale’s work is a particularly English take upon the idea of Psychogeography as espoused by Guy Debord. In Quatermass and the Pit (1958), Kneale first suggests that

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304 Guy Debord described Psychogeography as: “the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals”. Guy-Ernest Debord, Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography, 1955. Accessed on-line 14.05.08 @ www.nothingness.org. However, a London version that circumvents the proprietorial work of Debord and the Situationists, and raises William Blake in Debord’s place, includes the work of Ian Sinclair, Will Self, Stewart Home, J. G. Ballard and – je suis Psychogeographer, tendance Groucho – Peter Ackroyd. Merlin Coverley in Psychogeography, describes the work of Ian Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd (whose works share a common sensibility with the screenwriter, Nigel Kneale) thus: “The occult symbolism and sense of tradition espoused by Sinclair [in his Lud Heat with its proposed alignment of Hawksmoor’s London churches in a pentagram] is echoed by Peter Ackroyd who explicitly invokes the visionary tradition of the nineteenth century in his writing. Ackroyd has been described, not altogether helpfully, as a ‘historico-mystical Psychogeographer’ and, with its recognition of cyclical currents unfolding across history, Ackroyd’s vision of the city also owes less to the rigorous approach of the situationists than it does to a conservative sense of national identity and a belief in the enduring power of the city.” See Merlin Coverley, Psychogeography, Pocket Essentials, London 2006: p. 113. Further, Coverley quotes Ackroyd: “the nature
primordial instincts and ‘race memory’, in conjunction with place, can direct human identity and action; so much so, that our faith in rationality and science and our own self-determination and will to rationality can be overwhelmed by fear, superstition and terror. This reliance upon emotions, feelings and irrationality over reason, Kneale suggests, results directly from ancient messages encoded in our genes. Kneale’s approach to gothic subjects would always see a logical scientific explanation; but where scientific investigation would lead to an explanation that rationalised the gothic and allowed both the cosmic unknown and the quotidian to exist simultaneously.

The last of these works The Quatermass Conclusion, made in 1978 takes its cues for Britain’s dystopic future; most explicitly from Derek Jarman’s Jubilee, Anthony Burgess’s novel Clockwork Orange (and the Stanley Kubrick film) and the then-current punk eruption. The mob – in this case, young people – are drawn either to violent street battles fought with machine guns, or hypnotised by leylines, which they follow to ancient stone circles where an unknowable alien force from space consumes them, leaving only ash. As we will see in Chapter 8: Punk’s Legacy, the musicologist Greil Marcus in his own theorising about the crowd – in this case the audience attending the Sex Pistols’ final gig at Winterland (14 January 1978) – turns to a work of fiction, Kneale’s Quatermass and the Pit, to attempt an explanation of his emotional turmoil, caused by crowd leader Johnny Rotten and Marcus’s experience of an audience/crowd turning mob.

To return to the history of crowd theory: the crowd was seen as a primordial human unit, one that crowded or, better still, mobbed together for protection. This unit could find safety in numbers, but in panic, this unit became, to use Canetti’s terms, the flight crowd, or in blood retribution, the baiting crowd. The crowd was also, especially as a mob, seen as an anti-social and criminal entity that required policing. Policing, in turn, raised issues of sentencing with regard to criminal responsibility. Crowd theorists of the nineteenth of time is mysterious, sometimes it moves steadily forward, before springing or leaping out. Sometimes it slows down and, on occasions, it drifts and begins to stop altogether.” Writes Coverley, “Ackroyd labels this idea ‘chronological resonance’ and argues that these temporal patterns not only have clearly observable effects upon the behaviour of Londoners themselves but also go some way to defining individual character and identity” (p.125).
century now argued that the immersion of an individual within the mob was a regression, in which individuals had diminished control over their actions. The sociologists, Scipio Sighele and Gabriel Tarde argued that such a regression was a return to a primitive state. That is to say, crowds were not progressive and they had not, in Darwinian terms, evolved. A truth held to be self-evident was that the modern age was built on progress; however, the modern age was defined, as ‘the new era of the crowd’ and yet the crowd was an atavism, harking back to an earlier stage of human evolution.\textsuperscript{305}

The aristocratic trope initiated by the Greeks and Romans that postulates the mob as mindless and ruled over by a dominant patriarch or “aristocratic” male, gets some pseudo-scientific attention in the nineteenth century but this ideological inflection remains, until we get to Canetti in the twentieth century.

In 1921 Sigmund Freud wrote his own study of collective behaviour in \textit{Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego} as a response to Le Bon’s work.\textsuperscript{306} Rather than a history of political thought, Freud’s work was a politics of culture. Freud saw that:

\begin{quote}
… the common man’s claim to universalise himself came at a time when it was coming increasingly to be recognised that the constraints on the behaviour of individuals living in society were cultural constraints, and that high culture in the possession of a ruling class was one of the means by which the ruled were kept in their place, or, at the very least, high culture mapped out the distance between those on top and those below.\textsuperscript{307}
\end{quote}

While Freud considered the crowd within a cultural framework grounded in Greek and Mesopotamian mythologies, the socio-economic work of Karl Marx would offer yet another frame of reference. Marx and his co-author Friedrich Engels theorised that:

\begin{quote}
… the working class would have to establish its own state power, which would be more democratic because it would be the rule of the majority of the population, the working class. As classes gradually disappeared, however, state power would also wither away since the state was fundamentally an
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{306} Ibid: p. 237.
\textsuperscript{307} Ibid: p. 241.
instrument by which one class ruled over other classes. The classless society of the future would allow the fullest developments of individuals through cooperation.  

Marxist historiography follows Marx’s political and economic theories in their interpretation of history and historical events. However, there came to be schools of Marxist historiography that interpreted Marxism to varying degrees and differing ends. The French sociologist, Georges Lefebvre’s neo-Marxist studies of popular protest at the beginning of the French Revolution, came to be known as ‘history from below’. Meanwhile, the French social historians, Richard Cobb and Albert Soboul, took up this theory in the 1950s. Cobb and Soboul reconstructed “the lives of the common people in terms of their own standards, expectations, and experience”, while in Britain, the Marxist approach to the modern era was in the hands of Eric Hobsbawm and E. P. Thompson.

Common to both the French and British schools was another of Lefebvre’s pupils, George Rude, whose influential work *The Crowd in History* (1964) saw Rude turn over the same Old Bailey documents that had been Charles Dickens’s primary source for *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) and Christopher Hibbert’s popular history, *King Mob* (1958). From this aggregate, Rude was able to draw and support his conclusion that the rioting crowd was not the so-often cited, criminal underclass of vagrants and beggars popularly held to be the instigators of riot. Almost all of those arrested, bar two or three of several hundred, were employed and would be best described as lower middle-class. They were not the migratory poor, they were not riffraff, or marginalised sections of the population. Only a couple had prior criminal records. Those arrested were apprentices, journeymen, small masters and shop owners. Of course, some of those arrested were prostitutes and

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309 The phrase is Lefebvre’s but was taken up by the British Marxists, E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm among others.
Nicholas Rogers says: “the late George Rude was very insistent upon avoiding the term ‘mob’ in his pioneering studies because of its pejorative connotations, in terms of both the disreputable status of the participants and the illegitimacy of their activity”.  

Though criticised now for his refusal to use the common but pejorative term, I believe that Rude was right to avoid using mob in his historical study. Nobody ever called himself or herself, ‘the mob’: the mob is the term used by outsiders observing the crowd but not of the crowd. Ignatius Sancho, a freed slave of African extraction, and then a London shopkeeper and novelist, was shocked to see the Gordon rioters, viewed from his third-storey window, behaving as badly as blacks in the West Indies. The mob was never an ‘us’ in the sense of you and me, and while there are accounts in the Old Bailey records from an observer at street level (and ‘observers’ are those emotionally disconnected from the crowd, even if they are in its midst), this point of view is still from outside. McClelland considers the semantics of the age:

Mob was the word for the crowd when it threatened civilized living; crowd was the word for the mob while it gathered its strength between riots; civilization was the word for what the crowd threatened; rule was the word for what kept the crowd from becoming a mob; riot or revolution the word for the mob’s own life.

This ‘othering’ was to change with Canetti’s work, with Canetti described by McClelland as the first autobiographer of the crowd. This active crowd, first categorised and

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312 Ibid: p. 20
315 “Canetti is remarkable as the first autobiographer of crowds. He is the first to have a sense of what being-in-the-crowd is like and to describe it. Other crowd theorists had felt the crowd’s menace, Freud in Vienna, for instance, or Taine frightened for his wife’s safety and of his Paris apartment being set on fire
championed by Elias Canetti, was now about to find another unlikely champion in the last quarter of the twentieth century in London.

4.2 THE SEX PISTOLS AS AUTOBIOGRAPHERS OF THE LONDON MOB

It is my contention that the Sex Pistols and the London punks were the first ‘autobiographers’ of the London mob. This wave of people born in the early 1950s was the first to see where the passive London crowd stopped and where they began. These London punks saw themselves as separate from the London crowd but unable to escape it. They became conscious of being able to stand out from the passive London crowd by becoming, at first a gang, marked by the punk look, and then, for greater safety in numbers, in what Canetti would call ‘a pack’. Whereas we have seen that the term ‘gang’ is associated in both Graham Greene’s ‘The Destructors’ and in John Lydon’s childhood memory with the exclusive ‘ownership’ or association with a particular locale, the term ‘pack’, on the other hand, suggests ranging movement beyond the gang’s territory. Packs are defined by their intimate or close relations but are further defined by being a group that hunts, either chasing or attacking. A pack is less hierarchical than a gang, with the pack recognising its inherent strength in unity and its clearly defined Other: its enemies or its quarry. The pack is historically older and it is closer to Canetti’s baiting or lynching crowds than is the crowd. Whereas a gang leader would need to clearly articulate why the gang should undertake a lynching or baiting role, it is inherent in the pack’s mentality to undertake such activities without the necessity of persuasion. In an act closer to imitation than direction, the pack unhesitatingly follows its leader.

The pack does not exclude gangs and gangs can appear as packs as well as within packs. This occurs when the common purpose of a pack is shared by one or more gangs and when those gangs are prepared to accept parallel hierarchies working for a common

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316 Though technically ‘baby boomers’, punks are so significantly different from, and go to such lengths to distinguish themselves from the hippies (largely made up of those people born in the 1940s), that punks would be better sub categorised as second-wave baby boomers.
purpose. Unlike the home invasion illustrated in ‘The Destructors’, where ‘mob’ activity is undertaken within the relative safety of their own patch, in contrast, the pack by definition is a ranging or travelling collective.

In general, cultist groups like the teds, beats, mods, rockers, bikers and skinheads are best defined as packs. There are gangs within these packs, but the cult provides a common purpose that subsumes the gang’s identity under the uniformity of the pack. Therefore, it is packs, rather than hierarchical gangs, that seek to increase their numbers.

In the mid-seventies, the gangs that had accumulated in white cultist packs like the Teds, Mods, and Rockers etc, found they had a common heritage: they all belonged to a disaffected generation. (It should be noted that, because these packs defined themselves by a cultural marker, even black Londoners, formerly ‘othered’ for their skin colour by white gangs, also accepted and found acceptance alongside the punks.)

When these cultist packs began to break down along generational lines, they became so numerous that they coalesced into a generational mob. McLaren himself propounded the need to create generation ‘gaps’. So, for example, one of the things that many of the punks, from John Lydon to Siouxsie Sioux, objected to about their parents’ and grandparents’ generation was just how smug they all were about having beaten Hitler.317

What this suggests to me is that the profound events of living through the Second World War had created an older group who were a generational ‘gang’ of sorts. They had experienced the events of the war – the evacuation of children, the Blitz, the rationing, the sheltering in the London underground, the loss of loved ones, the indiscriminate carnage of the ‘buzz’ bombs – and borne them stoically. These experiences united them across classes, age and gender in their opposition to the Nazis and brought them closer to the medieval London commune: a people united in defence, self-sacrifice and rigorous self-regulation.

317 Siouxsie Sioux quoted in Jon Savage, England’s Dreaming, Faber, London 1992: p. 241. “[Punk] was very much an anti-mums and anti-dads thing. We hated older people – not across the board but particularly in suburbia – always harping on about Hitler, ‘We showed him’, and that smug pride. [Punk] was a way of saying, ‘Well I think Hitler was very good actually’: a way of watching someone go completely red-faced.”
Before the leather jackets and colourful mohawks, the punks who had first gathered around the boutique at 430 The King’s Road, then around the performances of the Sex Pistols and The Clash, and finally around the Bromley Contingent, were fiercely individualistic. Annoyance at their exclusion from their parents’ and grandparents’ generational gang caused these kids to taunt their parents. The swastika graffiti, the Luftwaffe lapel pins, the Nazi armbands, all of these items were intended to annoy their elders. These decontextualised wartime references were punk’s white noise, not saying anything in particular, simply displaying taboo symbols in order to irritate the other gang, in this case another generation, ‘the oldies’ who had experienced the war.

Just as Canetti identified with the crowd, so the punks identified with the mob; and just as Canetti is held to be the first autobiographer of the crowd, so it can be argued, the London or English punks were the first post-industrial, post modern, multi media autobiographers of the mob.

Punk was a spontaneous reaction to the injustice of a recession, the brunt of which would be felt acutely by the youth. The punks knew they were dancing in the ashes of the Golden Years of the Teen Age. The economic boom that had begun in the mid-fifties led to inflation, wage freezes, and rising discontent of the sixties, culminating in the year of revolt, 1968. Economic recession and growing social inequality worsened with the oil crisis in the early seventies. By the time the nation celebrated Queen Elizabeth II’s Silver

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318 In ‘I Won’t Let That Dago By’, Roger Sabin’s contribution to the collection of academic essay he also edited, Punk Rock: So What?, Sabin makes a feasible case that tars punk as a racist movement. Sabin argues that even though such groups as The Clash put their weight behind worthy causes like Rock Against Racism (RAR), their concerns were for entirely for West Indian emigres and subsequently, Sabin makes a strong case for RAR blatantly ignoring such daily racism directed against people of Pakistani origin or Indians fleeing African countries, that had been former British colonies. Two people he singles out as exemplary of the a casual and callous racism, Siouxsie Sioux for her comments about “too many Jews” and her ill-considered wearing of swastikas for fashion, while even the cockney Jewish Bernie Rhodes, who loathed punk’s associations with the swastika, was foolish enough to make a statement to the press about how in his opinion some Pakistanis deserved the racism and racist violence they received.

Jubilee in 1977, the British Empire, with its origins in the first Elizabethan Age, was no more.

The passive London crowd of Jubilee Year was old, passive and boring, while the London mob – unemployed, poor, squatting, disgruntled and amphetamine-fuelled – felt it was being force-fed a culture completely out of touch with them and their generation. Radically educated, but too young to have taken part in the rebellious upheavals of 1968,\(^{320}\) increasingly feeling that they had missed the post war party, threatened by nuclear annihilation and ready to make their own fun in its shadow, the London mob was energetic, youthful and prone to direct action. And this second wave of baby boomers, most of them born after 1950, also set out to taunt their older siblings born in the 1940s.

I believe that in the case of punk, a generation became a crowd, or the crowd became a generation. That generation was born in a very small window of time: the early 1950s. Entering childhood simultaneously with the end of rationing and the declaration of England’s post war boom, they were young enough not to be aware of deprivation. Their school years witnessed the declaration and assertion of youth, and in the new youth or teen culture they foresaw freedom: in dress, in behaviour, and from the dreadful, political and social mismanagement of a previous generation. But also a darker side was perceived: through some twist of fate they were going to be young and strong and beautiful and it was all going to be over.

In 1957, describing the financial state of Britain, the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan declared, “Let us be frank about it: most of our people have never had it so good”.\(^{321}\) By 1975 the British Labour politician, Anthony Crosland, Minister for the Environment, acknowledged: “The party’s over”.\(^{322}\) Here was the worst sort of recession

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\(^{320}\) England did not experience the same political upheavals that convulsed the rest of continental Europe and the margins of the eastern bloc, however influential anti-Vietnam war protests were conducted in London and a whiff of revolution was in the air with The Rolling Stones recording ‘Street Fighting Man’ and The Beatle’s ‘(So You Want A) Revolution’ both in 1968. See Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Man: An Autobiography of the Sixties*, Fontana, Glasgow 1987.


that anyone could have predicted. Like some Third World country, Britain would now have to go cap-in-hand to the International Monetary Fund. If the Second World War had galvanised one crowd as a generation, then the collapse of the pound created another. According to Canetti the “equality felt by the crowd during inflation is no illusion. The ‘inflation crowd’ really does cancel out social distances; the wage earner and the rentier are equally affected, and neither ever forgets his humiliation”.

Earlier we saw that Canetti describes a ‘reversal crowd’ as being revolutionary and an underclass’s revolt, as a ‘prohibition crowd’, is a strike or a refusal. The negativity and nihilism of punk occupies both these emotional states but the punks never formed a revolutionary crowd demanding the heads of parliamentarians or the monarch. It was instead an act of jeering disobedience and a refusal to play its scripted part in the Queen’s Jubilee celebrations.

Describing the earlier Elizabethan period, Nicholas Rogers states in *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain*:

... there was a series of well-defined occasions when the people-as-the-community was invited to occupy public space to endorse the public acts of state power, whether to celebrate political anniversaries, to witness royal or civic inaugurations, to hear royal proclamations, to sanction criminal sentences, or to approve as well as participate in the practices of the open market: Consequently, the crowd as representative of the community was ‘a definable actor’ in the drama of early modern politics.

Rogers concludes: “the majesty of power required popular endorsement”. Four hundred years later, the London crowd – and that included London’s mob identifying punks – was still expected to legitimate the rule of sovereignty by their presence at the Jubilee celebrations. As punk was saying “no, I may have to be here but I won’t do what you want. The fact that you want it, gives me the only power I have: the power to say

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325 Ibid.
‘no’, to refuse you and not give you what you need.” Punk also said it with attitude: “no, fuck off” and held up two extended fingers for good measure.

4.3 MCLAREN AS CROWD THEORIST

The events of 1968 made Malcolm McLaren an amateur crowd theorist, or better still, a mob practitioner, that is, one who was interested in ideas about the crowd and exploiting crowd theory and putting it into practice. McLaren was attracted to the spectacle of the riot, which to him turned the streets into a carnival. Malcolm McLaren was not a revolutionary; he was, first and foremost, a shopkeeper on the High Street. He was a rebel but he was a rebellious haberdasher and never a serious revolutionary. He told people he was a revolutionary and he was certainly drawn to the artworks and acts of revolt such as the Gordon Riots; but he was foremost a salesman with a shopfront. For all McLaren’s talk of anarchy, chaos and riot, it never occurred to him that his precious boutique might attract the destructive energies of a mob. Curiously, it never did.326 Peter Cresswell, Malcolm McLaren’s teacher at Goldsmith’s Art School is insightful:

In Britain any successful artist must be a harmless radical. Serious radicals we put in jail or executed. It happened to Shaw: He was an uncompromising sort of bloke but he didn’t change anything. Shaw’s lack of compromise was within the structure of society; Malcolm’s is the same. Malcolm’s success is based upon society not changing, on allowing people an outlet for expression without actually changing anything. He can leave everything safely as it is.327

McLaren sought a teen age revolt, with lots of sound and fury to draw the attention of more kids and frighten the adults away. In McLaren’s mind it would be a fashionable insurrection, whose rebellion was open-ended and certainly not a revolution. His role, he had decided, would be like the mysterious well-dressed man who, though not raising a

326 ‘430’ did come under regular assault by individual teddy boys and girls, even as a gang, but never as a mob.
finger, was seen to be exciting and directing the mob in its activities during the Gordon Riots.

More damning than Peter Cresswell’s put down, is that of Hollywood screenwriter Danny Opatoshu as reported in Craig Bromberg’s *The Wicked Ways of Malcolm McLaren*. Opatoshu collaborated on an early version of *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle* (then called *Who Killed Bambi?*) for which McLaren suggested filming a live concert, a kind of punk Woodstock, but one, which might have had more in common with the stabbing murder at Altamont Speedway, when the Hells Angels acted as security for The Rolling Stones. McLaren’s idea for this concert film was to call the police ahead of time and then stick around to film the riot. Says Opatoshu:

> It’s one thing to hear and respect the anarchist-Trotskyite spiel Malcolm gives you; we [Danny and collaborator, Jonathon Kaplan] thought he was interesting and we respected him. But the longer we were there, I began to see there was a different sort of philosophy behind all this and that was the politics of flim-flam, a politics that licences you to lie and cheat and steal and double-deal and then celebrate it as a great revolutionary act. Unfortunately it tends ultimately to be self-promotion and not particularly revolutionary. Even at the very beginning, I found it questionable that a real political revolution could be born in a fashion boutique.  

Self-promotion is exactly what *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle* was to become. At the outset, however, punk was McLaren’s clarion call to the crowd, via the medium of the tabloid press. McLaren is unlikely to have read Canetti’s theories about the role of newspapers in inciting the so-called baiting crowd (which has its origins in the execution or lynching mob). “Today,” Canetti wrote, “everyone takes part in public executions through the newspapers”.  

> Foreshadowing the violent response to the tabloid coverage McLaren achieved for the Sex Pistols, Canetti continues:

> The baiting crowd is preserved in the newspaper reading public, in a milder form it is true, but, because of its distance from events, a more irresponsible one. One is tempted to say that it is the most despicable

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328 Ibid: pp. 164–5
and, at the same time, most stable form of such a crowd. Since it does not even have to assemble, it escapes disintegration; variety is catered for by the daily re-appearance of the papers.\textsuperscript{330}

This description of a crowd that does not even need to assemble, is daily provided with variety and, because of its distance from events, is even more irresponsible, applies equally to the television audience. When the Sex Pistols appeared on Bill Grundy’s television show and swore live-to-air, they smashed boundaries. When they beamed out live, they revealed how contrived the presentation of pre-recorded television was: which was all television. Like Mr Punch of Punch and Judy, who refuses to be contained by his box stage, the Sex Pistols had violated the fourth wall. Here they were, real people, working class, gutter types who had invaded the genteel, chintz living rooms of the proper sorts. With their antics and outrageous behaviour, the Sex Pistols had conducted a virtual home invasion. Slouching, showing disrespect, swearing live-to-air and baiting an older man, they were smashing a taboo so close to an Englishman’s heart that it began a tabloid frenzy. With banner headlines such as ‘The Filth and the Fury’ and ‘Call it Filthy Lucre’, the press set about calling up another pack in the London mob, the invisible, conservative crowd who, they expected, would demand retribution and more of the same each day.

4.4 PROSELYTISING THE MOB

In Crowds and Power, Elias Canetti coins the expression ‘crowd crystals’. Crowd crystals are units of a crowd that are capable of bringing a crowd together very quickly. Canetti explains:

The pack is a crowd crystal without a crowd. The pack cannot grow though the crowd’s ‘fiercest wish is to be more’ … not being a ‘multitude’, the crowd have to make up in intensity what they lack in actual numbers.\textsuperscript{331}

\textsuperscript{330} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{331} Ibid: p. 93.
The pack and the gang and the punk rock band are all crowd crystals. Canetti could not have foreseen how the crowd would gravitate to hear rock music. But if we see the Sex Pistols as a crowd crystal, that is, a band of four members making noisy music, then it is true that they want to draw the crowd: this would fulfil Canetti’s statement that their “fiercest wish … is to be more” (Canetti, 93). It is certainly true that the Sex Pistols make up “in intensity what they lack in actual numbers” (Canetti, 93). Recordings of the Sex Pistols literally multiply the performers by the process of overlaying, so that even though there was just Steve Jones playing guitar, the singles ‘Anarchy in the UK’ and ‘God save the Queen’ sound like a metal storm in a wind tunnel. This noise was intended to draw a crowd.

According to Canetti: “life outside the crystal does not count for them.” Again, if we see this in terms of the Sex Pistols who need to make a living from their group, they are only concerned with practise, performance, recording and reaping.

The Sex Pistols’ sound has also been compared to that of breaking glass, which, as we saw above, Canetti singles out as a noise that excites crowd violence. McClelland summarises Canetti:

… the destructiveness of the crowd ‘which is often mentioned as its most conspicuous quality’, but which is often only ‘discussed and disapproved of’ but ‘never really explained’ is not a fundamental crowd characteristic; it is a derivative of the crowd’s desire for growth and for equality; it is not the fragility of objects which attracts crowd violence (the crowd is not brutal), but rather the noise of broken glass,332 which represents ‘fresh life’; windows and doors are broken by the crowd as ‘boundaries’, obstacles to growth; houses are destroyed because the crowd fears it will be shut up again.333

In his essay ‘Too Low To Be Low; art pop and the Sex Pistols’, Robert Garnet writes: “Nothing, at the time, so vividly articulated what it was like to hear the [Sex] Pistols shattering the edifice of rock ‘n’ roll mythology; it was exactly like the sound of breaking

glass – and you didn’t know where the shards were going to fall".\textsuperscript{334} The group’s live sound was described by Dave Goodman, their sound engineer, as “broken glass and rusty razors”.\textsuperscript{335} Greil Marcus also describes it as a breach, as if a rent had been torn in the fabric of the times and the \textit{now} had come flooding in. It is the delirious terrible experience of history being made.\textsuperscript{336}

For punk rock music, the noise is able to pass across ‘boundaries’, it does not face ‘obstacles of growth’ it is recorded and played over and over and can be amplified, so that it may be turned up and up; it can pass through closed doors and shut windows, and it will draw more people to its source: the Sex Pistols. In this way it is a lot like the fire the mob loves and which was so much a part of The Gordon Riots. Canetti describes fire as irresistible to the mob and the mob’s activities where it takes on both a purely practical role and a seemingly symbolic one. As long as the fires burned the mob was unified:

Of all means of destruction the most impressive is \textit{fire}. It can be seen from far off and it attracts ever more people. It destroys irrevocably; nothing after a fire is as it was before. A crowd setting fire to something feels irresistible; so long as the fire spreads, everyone will join it and everything hostile will be destroyed. After the destruction, crowd and fire die away.\textsuperscript{337}

Rioters refused to allow fire engines access to conflagrations during the Gordon Riots (1780), the Notting Hill Race Riots (1958) the Brixton Riots (1981) and the Broadwater Farm Riot (1985). Punk rock music is ‘fire’, people watch the performance, their senses overwhelmed by the noise, the dancing, drinking beer – the same way people stare into the flames of a bonfire – it is satisfying in its communality, its attractiveness to others and its purity of destructiveness.

Canetti tells us that packs, cut off from the crowd, can survive as a pack for thousands of years. By doing the same thing over and over, the pack is always there. It can be argued that this is true of the Sex Pistols. Even though the band broke up after eighteen months, the pack survived in its recordings, and the ‘crowd crystals’. Now, with the worldwide web and digital music downloads, their punk rock plays continuously to the virtual crowd and the surviving band members regularly reform to perform the same bundle of songs from 1975 and 1976.\footnote{338}

Punk fashion is aware of its mob precedents, putting them all on like the cast-offs to be found in a child’s dress-up box; and at first, that’s exactly what it was. As the bass player of Adam and the Ants, Marco Pirroni recalls in Lydon’s’ biography, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs*:

> The 1976 punk look was a mixture of absolutely everything. A lot of ted, a lot of rocker, a lot of fetish stuff, a bit of mod, and a lot of glam. That’s what it was. People didn’t wear leather motorcycle jackets in 1976. Mohicans didn’t exist then either … The real impact of John Lydon’s look was, ‘Fuck, he’s ripped everything up!’ \footnote{339}

By ripping it up and then using it, they had sought and discovered the object’s negative utility. By wearing this object you display its negative capability, thereby placing yourself outside the passive crowd and revealing your identification with the sexy and dangerous energies of the mob. As we will see in the following chapter, John Lydon, in his persona Johnny Rotten, proved a master at discovering a found object’s negative utility and exploiting its negative capability.\footnote{340}

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\footnote{340} Some critics have made the association with Lydon’s technique and the Situationist term, *detournement*. *Detournement* is the act of literally detouring or turning an object’s meaning upon its head, both of which could be used to describe Lydon’s methods. However, Lydon is hostile to the theory that he and the Sex Pistols were a Situationist prank. Without any knowledge of Situationism, he was already practising such methods before he came into McLaren’s orbit. Subsequently, I have chosen to reconsider the practice in light of the mob technique’s of appropriation, which I describe as an instance of negative
The army is a crowd, a disciplined crowd, but it can also be said that an army is a mob waiting to get out. The cast-off uniforms are yet another symbol for the deliberately undisciplined punks; for the punk to wear army disposal goods was subversive: you ripped it up or scrawled on it. Canetti says that the crowd loves especially to destroy “representative images”. What punk fashion does is go on to alter them and use their negative utility to display positive or active ends. For example: punk takes the image of Queen Elizabeth II and puts a safety pin through her lips, punks wear the Union Jack, cut up and sewn back together, Steve Jones wears the working class symbol of the knotted Union Jack handkerchief on his head, and in his passport photograph John Lydon wears the symbol of a past crowd, a Nazi Luftwaffe lapel pin, but he wears it upside down, as if this could reverse its iconography. Such active or charged displays are the pack instinct of seeking increase in numbers and converting them.

Crowd crystals convert others to the crowd: “only ‘true conversion’ leads men to give up their old terms of association; the true converts are the crowd crystals of the future …” At the Sex Pistols’ gigs in London the ‘Bromley contingent’ (who had largely grown up in the suburb of Bromley), were to become ‘true converts’ and they themselves would in turn become crowd crystals, preaching punk. Among the Bromley contingent were the people who would go on to become the second wave of punk, who would in turn, inspire New Wave. When the Sex Pistols played in Manchester (4 June 1976) they were to set off the explosion of what would be called the new Mersey Beat. In the audience that Friday night were the musicians who would become the Buzzcocks, Morrissey, Adam Ant, Simply Red, Joy Division (who would become New Order after the suicide of lead singer Ian Curtis) and Tony Wilson. Wilson would become a director of the world famous Hacienda nightclub and live music venue promoting acid house and the eighties and nineties rave culture.

utility; when extended or repeated, I describe it as negative capability. More on this will follow in Chapter 5.


Canetti says that the pack is a ‘closed crowd’, it has “renounced growth and puts the stress on permanence”.\textsuperscript{343} This ‘closed crowd’ survives through repetition; so in his terms, the rock band is a pack that survives through practising and playing the same songs and regular gigs: “It is the expectation of reassembly which enables its members to accept each dispersal”.\textsuperscript{344} The closed crowd or pack’s boundaries, according to Canetti, protect it from outside influence that could be hostile. Not so in the case of the Sex Pistols, who deliberately aggravated hostility in their audiences at gigs or even through their media coverage. The Sex Pistols and punk blurred the tradition boundaries between performer and spectator, with punk attendees far from the traditionally passive role of an audience receiving a performance but were in fact, half the entertainment. I would argue that this baiting the audience was Lydon’s way of maintaining an active audience, while his hostility was the psychic armour with which he clad himself and maintained his stage persona, Johnny Rotten.

Canetti’s wishful thinking continued: “these boundaries prevent ‘disorderly increase’ and keep the closed crowd from eruption”. In San Francisco at the end of the disastrous American tour, just such an eruption occurred as Johnny Rotten’s psychological armour broke apart on stage as he sang the Stooges’ song ‘No Fun’. At this very point the band fell apart and the Sex Pistols made their pack’s transition from the closed to the open crowd. This, Canetti tells us: “For just as suddenly as it originates, the [open] crowd disintegrates. In its spontaneous form it is a sensitive thing. The openness which enables it to grow is, at the same time, its danger”.\textsuperscript{345} And suddenly the Sex Pistols were dead but the punk look and attitude was owned by anyone who wanted it. And the result of this eruption was that the gang’s look, like the look of ted, of mod, of the rockers, or like army surplus, the uniform of punk was now a cast-off. It had become the uniform of a past crowd and available to all.

\textsuperscript{344} Ibid.
In *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* Malcolm McLaren linked the chaotic and anarchic energies of punk and the Gordon Riots. This chapter has undertaken to explore that link through an examination of the London mob as recorded and described in a variety of sources, from 1381 to 1780, all of which were accessible to mid-1970s Londoners.

As previously mentioned, the primary source for the behaviour of the London mob during the Gordon Riots is the *Proceedings* of the Old Bailey trials some weeks after the Riots. Curiously (and this is true of all first-hand accounts until 1960), eyewitnesses within the mob all spoke of themselves as inactive observers, not as active participants. Even those rioters on trial spoke of themselves upon the night of their arrests, as if relating their actions to those of a sleepwalker. For insight into mob motives and behaviour, we turned to imaginative studies. *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), Charles Dickens’s novel about the Gordon Riots, based in part on the Old Bailey records, was concerned with individuals and their relationships in the context of the riots, not with the mob itself, which is the protean subject of Christopher Hibbert’s 1958 history, *King Mob*. Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of the Two Bad Mice* (1904) and Graham Greene’s ‘The Destructors’ (1955) showed us the London mob in microcosm. From these we saw how the London mob can spring to life in couples, gangs, packs; that gangs can exist within packs within mobs. With this literature we also began to establish patterns of behaviour that defined the mob, in particular, the home invasion or ‘pulling down’.

A summary of studies of the crowd from Plato to Elias Canetti was undertaken. Latter-day Marxist historians (though still observing from without) revealed sympathies for people caught up in mob activity, but for two and a half millennia pejorative assumptions about the crowd prevailed, until Elias Canetti drew on personal experience to become the first empathetic crowd theorist. This signalled a similar change of sensibility that allowed the disenchanted of the generation born after 1950 to empathise with the mob, and turn to it as an outlet for their destructive/creative energies. In turn, I made an argument for the Sex Pistols and their punk converts as self-aware performers and documenters of the London mob with clear sympathies for the eighteenth-century London mob. Like the carnival of the street, the tendency of punk was to rebellion not revolution. Punk’s self-aware performance was initially for themselves, but its costume, music, poetry, graffiti, film, projections, photographs would become a multimedia event.
about them. In the following chapter we turn to the most iconic of punks, Johnny Rotten, and consider this persona’s manufacture at the hands of John Lydon.
Chapter 5: John Lydon’s Negative Capability

“I want you to know that I hate you baby, I want you to know that I don’t care.”
- ‘Whatcha Gonna Do About It’. 346

I hate love. There isn’t a love song in us … it’s bullshit.
Lydon in *Sex Pistols*. 347

No one more than John Lydon performed London punk. Whatever Lydon in his Johnny Rotten persona did and said was punk: punk was the new cool and what Johnny said he hated wasn’t punk and therefore wasn’t cool. Later in life, John Lydon would discover that “anger is an energy”348 but in 1975, first and foremost, Johnny Rotten was a hater. Rotten hated hippies, he hated prog rock and art rock, he hated long hair and bell-bottom flairs. He hated pretentiousness – unless it was his own – and he hated class, religion, poor education and the system. He hated Top of the Pops and big stupid bands, hypocrisy and absurdity and he also hated himself. Rotten hated so many things that he just had to have an outlet, but unlike the London mob who exhausted their energies demolishing buildings, Lydon was both an artist and philosopher. Lydon the artist took his hatred out on the value objects whose meanings were held to be self-evident, while Lydon the philosopher proved they were as fragile as eggshell.

Lydon’s skill was in his total mastery of the found object, the found phrase, the found idea. By inverting that object, phrase or idea Lydon discovered its negative utility, harnessed it, and then as Johnny Rotten, with the chaotic energies that reversing the polarities had released, he armed himself to take on the hated world.

346 Original song performed by the Small Faces, here with lyrics reinterpreted negatively by Johnny Rotten.
348 ‘Rise’ appears on the variously named Album/Cassette/Compact Disc depending which format was chosen and released in 1986.
London punk was staunchly yobbish, fiercely anti-intellectual and owed more than a nod to the ideal of the working-class heroes who made up some of its fan base, and to whom some of the band members owed a little of their own swagger. The relationship between London punk and its leading media figures, the Sex Pistols, was one of contradictions. Steve Jones, the guitarist, and Paul Cook, the drummer, were borderline criminals and lager louts with basic educations, in contrast to the better-educated Glen Matlock, the bass player, who lacked a sense of adventure. However, the band had two catalytic figures: a manager and a lead singer who were interested in ideas. Malcolm McLaren and John Lydon were both provocateurs; both were intellectually inclined anti-intellectuals and were at loggerheads from the outset. The idea arose that the Sex Pistols were art-school rock simply because some of the Sex Pistols’ earliest gigs were played in art-schools. It is true that Malcolm McLaren and Glen Matlock were art-school educated but art rock was definitely not how the band saw itself: Steve Jones and Paul Cook pulled the band toward pub rock, while John Lydon threw all preconceptions to the wind.

If this band had anything new to offer it was John Lydon. But quite what that was, nobody knew, not even Lydon, for whom every performance was an improvisation. McLaren was his own mouthpiece, but he also liked to speak on behalf of ‘his boys’, something that Lydon found offensive. Lydon ‘got’ what McLaren was on about, unlike the other band members, and was smart enough to know how to give it his very own spin: Lydon became the band’s negative spokesperson.

Armed with a cursory knowledge of English literature (largely gleaned from his O levels and an A level in English Literature), Lydon was an odd combination of intellectual poseur and Irish Catholic working-class stroppiness. Lydon liked telling people he hated things, especially things that most people had never given a thought to; or rather, thought they liked because others did. He especially targeted those things that people assumed everybody liked. Later, he transferred this tendency from things to personal relationships. He would even start telling the people he was supposed to like, like poor Glen Matlock, that he hated them and wished they would drop dead. Lydon’s mother, Eileen, would warn Sex Pistols’ cliquery, Helen Wellington-Lloyd, “…he’s very

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contrary. If he likes you, he will say he hates you. He always says the opposite of what he means." Lydon was a paradoxical figure, wielding his A level in English literature like the clenched fist of a street-fighting man and spitting contempt and hatred at every passerby like playwright, John Osborne’s splenetic young man of an earlier generation, Jimmy Porter.

It was Lydon’s home made t-shirt with its Texta scrawl “I hate” above the name of the band Pink Floyd that brought Lydon into McLaren’s orbit. But where did this fissile combination of intellect and contempt spring from? In found footage incorporated into The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle, Lydon tells a journalist that he has “no heroes, none at all, none are accessible”. Presumably the journalist is asking about musical influences because Lydon does have heroes. They are not musical heroes, but literary ones and, as one might expect of Lydon, they are an eclectic collection who, more accurately, can be described as anti heroes.

Although many of Lydon’s heroes are literary creations, one who is not and deserves immediate – although passing – attention is Oscar Wilde. It could be argued that Lydon came to Wilde not through any of his literary works but because he was drawn to Wilde as a self-created literary eminence, at once outsider and observer. Lydon identified with Wilde’s razor wit, his outsider status, his Irishness in a London context; he despised the hypocrisy of the Victorian establishment who hounded and jailed Wilde for being Wilde.

Both Lydon and McLaren paradoxically identified themselves by accent as cockneys. McLaren was born Jewish and Lydon was born into a first generation, Irish

351 This footage appears in both The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle and The Filth and the Fury.
352 “Here was a man ruined by his mother, so his whole life becomes a kind of vengeance against her. He turned out to be the biggest poof on earth at a time when that was completely unacceptable. What a genius.” See John Lydon, Rotten, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1994: p. 63. Lydon was neither latently gay nor homophobic yet, was dismissive of the sexual act describing it as “two and a half minutes of squelching noises”.
353 “For all intents and purposes I was a Londoner. That’s the place that educated me …”. John Lydon quoted in Ibid: p. 11.
Catholic home. No matter that both boys refused their parents’ faiths, McLaren and Lydon found themselves clearly identifiable to their fellow cockneys as not Protestant and therefore not ‘real’ Londoners. Even to fellow band members, Glen Matlock, Paul Cook and Steve Jones, Lydon and McLaren were both outsiders.

Cockney is an exclusive behavioural culture that one, theoretically has to be born into; literally being born within the sound of the bells of Bow Church. Over time as London spilled beyond its city walls, there was increased latitude, and East Enders were unquestionably cockney. Cockney was an underclass that refused to be treated as such. Although they fit the working-class label they are not bound by working-class ethics; therefore, cockneys are proud to be considered shysters, thieves, swindlers, scroungers and skivers.\(^{354}\)

As Londoners, Matlock, Cook and Jones accepted each other’s quirks, faults and foibles without question. Jones was a talented and flamboyant thief, Cook was a lager lout (he worked in a brewery) and Matlock was the lower-middle class, educated naif who had fallen in among thieves and maintained a kind of feigned innocence by turning a blind eye to his fellows’ excesses. The three accepted Lydon and McLaren as long as they accepted their outsider status, but when they transgressed this role, as Lydon in Jones’s opinion did all too regularly, Jones especially made it clear that Lydon’s place in the band was on sufferance.

5.1 BRIGHTON ROCK

One book, Graham Greene’s *Brighton Rock* (1938), was a shared imaginative terrain for the two outsiders, Lydon and McLaren.\(^{355}\) As a seventeen-year-old Catholic boy, Lydon appears to have identified closely with Greene’s seventeen-year-old Catholic mobster, Pinkie. In his autobiography *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs*, Lydon describes himself as being “a spiteful bastard. I always have been. If I can make trouble, then that’s

\(^{354}\) As cockney cultural prototypes like John Gay’s *The Beggars Opera*, and the popularity of *The Newgate Chronicles*, the myth of Jack Sheppard, Dick Turpin and Jonathan Wild demonstrate.

perfect for me. My school reports show this thoroughly. Negative attitude. Well of course”.

According to Jon Savage, Lydon had studied *Brighton Rock* for his A level in English Literature and, like McLaren, was attracted to the vengeful, Catholic boy-gangster, Pinkie: “There was poison in his veins, though he grinned and bore it. He had been insulted. [He] was going to show the world. They thought because he was seventeen …”.  

With its story of the struggle over the Brighton patch by two mobsters, one a teenage lapsed Roman Catholic and the other a middle-aged Jew, *Brighton Rock* would prove strangely prophetic when Lydon and McLaren faced-off on the Sex Pistols’ 1978 American tour. Greene’s book is also a book about the Old Testament God and the rebellion of one of his angels, who commits all manner of evils in the belief that he may yet repent in that fraction of a moment before his death; in that moment’s fall between the saddle and the earth. Greene is drawing upon John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in which Milton examines the rebellious angel Satan, his fall, and the paradox of a universe where man has free will and self-determination, while God is supposedly all powerful. In *Paradise Lost*, God’s most favoured angel, Satan, challenges God and for his hubris is expelled from heaven and falls to earth. Satan sets about demonstrating his free will on earth in acts of rebellion. Milton concludes *Paradise Lost* with *Paradise Regained*, in which it is revealed that God had foreseen Satan’s every action, thereby proving both God’s omniscience and that Satan’s acts of ‘free will’ were predetermined. Satan may rebel but the order will remain eternal.

It is a story that reverberates in the narrative of the Sex Pistols and their manager: did the manager create the stars or the stars create themselves? The question is tendentiously addressed in *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle*, with Malcolm McLaren’s portrait of himself as the arch manipulator behind the band’s notoriety and rise to infamy. It is explicitly addressed in the court proceedings, Sex Pistols versus Glitterbest, in which McLaren tried to claim ownership for having created both the Sex Pistols concept and the name and character: Johnny Rotten. But when Lydon, the ‘rebellious angel’, laughs

bitterly and says, “you don’t create me, I am me”, just what was this identity that he had created? In the pages that follow, I will explore the bizarre Lydonesque tropes out of which John Lydon’s stage persona, Johnny Rotten was performed, and dig deeper into his unique ability to uncover an object’s negative utility.

Steve Chibnall, writing on the film adaptation of Greene’s novel, cites the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Harold Scot, who wrote in 1954:

The normal boy likes excitement […] but I doubt if he often copies deliberately what he reads or sees in the films. He may imitate the externals: the swaggering walk and boastful methods of the fictional gangster but this influence does not go deeper.  

I assume Chibnall includes Sir Harold’s words for irony but I hope to show just how relevant this statement is in describing John Joseph Lydon’s invention of himself as Johnny Rotten.

Cinema informed the punk era, with films such as The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975), A Clockwork Orange (1971) and Cabaret (1972). All were background noise to the formation of punk. The stage play of the Rocky Horror Show had begun its life on the King’s Road and had been playing continuously since 1973, while Stanley Kubrick had filmed scenes for A Clockwork Orange along the nearby Chelsea Embankment and set the Milk Bar scene on the King’s Road. Although Cabaret had no site-specific claim to The King’s Road, its influence was to be felt in London punk’s millenarian tropes of decadence and decay, as well as its Nazi fashions and swastika. And it was filmed musicals, in particular, that seemed to have had a strange fascination for Malcolm McLaren who would try to cast himself and his band members in roles from musicals. Even the Sex Pistols’ ‘Pretty Vacant’ – written about Vivienne Westwood – would owe a lyrical debt to West Side Story’s lyric “I’m so pretty, oh so pretty”.

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360 The lyrics were written by Glen Matlock.
However, it would be the film of the stage-musical adaptation of *Oliver Twist* as *Oliver!*, along with the 1958 Cliff Richard-vehicle *Expresso Bongo*, that would prove to be among the most significant influences on the Sex Pistols’ manager Malcolm McLaren. Both would shape his mythologising in 1980 in *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*. But back in 1975, with Malcolm self-cast as Fagin, and the ‘artful dodger’ firmly assigned to the shoplifter, Steve Jones, the role of Oliver went begging. Unlike Sid Vicious who would fall effortlessly and tragically into the role of Bill Sykes with his moll, Nancy, John Lydon would refuse the role of Oliver.

5.2 YOU DON’T CREATE ME, I AM ME

As previously stated, Lydon and McLaren found common ground in both Graham Greene’s novel *Brighton Rock* and in its 1947 screen adaptation starring Richard Attenborough. Lydon would recreate himself in the image of Attenborough’s depiction of Pinkie, a seventeen-year-old, lapsed Roman Catholic Brighton mobster, whose face, writes Chibnall, “with its cod eyes and tight lips, is at once brutal and angelic: the face of a sadistic choirboy”. ³⁶¹ This is a description of Attenborough as Pinkie, but also describes Lydon’s stage persona Johnny Rotten: what is Johnny Rotten if not a sadistic choirboy? ³⁶²

Lydon derived many of his trademark stage moves from Attenborough’s Pinkie, particularly his practised, malevolent unblinking stare. As Greene describes Pinkie in his novel: Pinkie had “slaty eyes [which] were touched with the annihilating eternity from which he had come and to which he went”. ³⁶³ With this and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in mind it is not a great step to Lydon’s lyrical declaration, “I am an anti-Christ” in ‘Anarchy in the UK’. Lydon’s mother Eileen, however, attributes her son’s staring to another cause: his childhood experience of viral spinal meningitis which left him with

impaired vision, a slightly hunched back and epilepsy. “It left him with bad eyesight and I don’t know if you notice John, he stares. Sort of stares in his eyes”.\textsuperscript{364}

Not only did the meningitis leave Lydon with staring eyes, a twisted spine and epilepsy, it also erased his memories so that at the age of eight he had to begin again. Recalling himself at this age in \textit{The Filth and the Fury}, Lydon said he was “completely backward in everything”.\textsuperscript{365} The maxim, “give me a child until they are seven and I will show you the man”, attributed to the Jesuits, has been explored by the film director Michael Apted in his ongoing series of documentaries known collectively as the \textit{Up Series}.\textsuperscript{366} What this propounds is that all of the formative experiences that will shape the identity, personality, needs and desires that drive an individual throughout their life are sown during these infant years. If this is the case, as the \textit{Up Series} would have us believe, just what does this mean for someone like John Lydon for whom all of those early formative experiences were wiped out? And whose knowledge of his early self was derived from photos and family anecdotes told about him, and as if about somebody who had died?\textsuperscript{367}

It is a small leap to conjecture about the connection between Lydon’s mind wiping and punk’s back-to-basics, do-it-yourself, ‘year zero’ approach to music that he epitomised. For a child of eight who has no memory of his rearing and nurture by his

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{365} Julien Temple, \textit{The Filth and the Fury}, 2000, DVD.
\textsuperscript{366} “Give me a child for the first seven years, and you may do what you like with him afterwards.” Anonymous: attributed as a Jesuit maxim, in Lean's \textit{Collectanea} (1903) under the subject of Education in \textit{Little Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, Second Edition}, Susan Ratcliffe (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001. \textit{The Up Series} documentaries, with the inaugural \textit{7 Up} beginning with fourteen child participants (directed by Paul Armond and instalments thereafter by Michael Apted), began in 1964 and have been filmed at seven year intervals, thus far to \textit{49 Up} released in 2005.
\textsuperscript{367} … I was in hospital for a year from age seven to eight. I almost died of meningitis, a condition where the fluid in the spinal column affects the brain. … I slipped into a coma. … I was in and out of a coma for six or seven months, with a few more months of rehabilitation.” and “When my parents came to the hospital to take me home, I did not recognize them.” John Lydon quoted in \textit{Rotten}, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1993: pp. 17, 18. John Lydon claims in \textit{The Filth and the Fury} that he was completely backward in everything, and that he had to relearn everything.
\end{footnotesize}
mother and father, who is at the age of eight thrown into the next matrix of social conditioning, that of his peers, there is certainly reason for further speculation upon the later effects of Lydon’s meningitis upon his seeking both acceptance and safety in a gang. This gang would later be known as ‘the gang of Johns’, because all of its members had that Christian name. In addition to Lydon, there was John Simon Beverley, who later became Sid Vicious, John Gray and John Warble, who was nicknamed ‘Wobble’. In *The Filth and the Fury*, Lydon tells Julien Temple that the ‘gang of Johns’ had a reputation comparable to Alex and his droogs in Anthony Burgess’s novel *A Clockwork Orange*. However in his memoir, Lydon denies this and claims instead Greene’s *Brighton Rock* as the major influence:

Sex Pistols influenced by the characters in the film version of *Clockwork Orange*? Definitely not! Stanley Kubrick’s film centred around a gang-mentality, not individuality. It was about everyone looking and being the same. … We were more like Pinky [sic] and his gang from Graham Greene’s *Brighton Rock*. That’s what made that book so riveting for me. His gang was deeply peculiar, extremely different from each other. They weren’t a bunch of clones, nor was it ever explained how Pinkie, being as young as he was, could be leading around this bizarre collection of strange, older people.

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369 Both Burgess’s novel *A Clockwork Orange* and the Kubrick-adaptation are alternately cited by punks. The film was the more accessible medium; more easily and more quickly consumed, and did not require that its watcher be literate, which let us face it, many of the punks were not.
370 John Lydon in *Rotten*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1994: p. 77. In fact, Lydon is wrong. It is explained in Graham Greene’s novel, if not the film, that Pinkie was second to a man named Kite; when Kite was murdered, by a rival mobster, the seventeen-year-old Pinkie inherited Kite’s patch. There is even the suggestion of a pick-up, a covert homosexual relationship, or perhaps Greene hopes to evoke a classical exchange like that extolled by Socrates in the love between mentor and student, or just a bit of sentiment between an old queer and a boy not quite a young man, a bit of sentiment like ‘keeping a pet Pekinese’. Although there is some similarity in this relationship to that of Lydon and McLaren it is not exactly parallel. Lydon himself was out but not down when he came into McLaren’s orbit. He was poor, his clothes were held together with safety pins and he couldn’t afford a London tube train ticket but he was employed with his dad at a sanitation farm where he killed rats.
The band that would later become the Sex Pistols, had been put together by Warwick ‘Wally’ Nightingale. Wally’s father, an electrician, secured the band its first rehearsal space, but McLaren, for no very good reason, insisted that he would not manage the band unless they kicked Wally out. Steve Jones, Paul Cook and Glen Matlock promptly complied. As Glen Matlock recalled: “Wally was outed rather unceremoniously, and then we thought ‘We’ve got to get a front man.’ It was quite clinical really, but we knew what we had to do”. Interviewed by Savage, Wally Nightingale said:

Malcolm was there, and they just said: ‘You're not in the group any more.’ It was very hard. I was virtually in tears. Didn’t cry, but I was so gutted that I didn’t say anything. I even went for a drink with them that evening. As far as they were concerned, it was no reaction.

Nightingale’s exit from the band is not lamented in any punk biographies. Julien Temple satirises his demise in *The Filth and the Fury* by overdubbing Olivier’s graveyard monologue in *Hamlet* (1948) with the words “Alas Poor Wally”. Matlock certainly showed no remorse for their actions:

I think I might have bumped into [Wally] once and he was always very bitter about it. I mean that’s the way things worked out. He died eventually – took loads of pills or something. He always used to be on pills.

Ironically, Glen Matlock was the next to exit after Nightingale; either pushed, according to McLaren, or because of that old chestnut, ‘artistic differences’, as Matlock himself still says.

In this way, like Pinkie, Lydon inherits another man’s “patch”. In *Brighton Rock* Greene describes Pinkie’s inheritance thus:

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This was his territory: the populous foreshore, a few thousand acres of house [sic], a narrow peninsula of electrified track running to London, two or three railways with their buffets and buns. It had been Kite’s territory, it had been good enough for Kite, and when Kite had died in the waiting room at St Pancras, it had been as if a father had died, leaving him an inheritance it was his duty never to leave for strange acres. He had inherited even the mannerisms, the bitten thumbnail, the soft drinks.  

Pinkie is just seventeen years of age but his mob is made up of middle-aged men – Spicer, Cubitt and Dallow – who at different points in the story challenge Pinkie’s youthful and untried authority. Emphasising this, in the film adaptation, all of Pinkie’s mob are played by seasoned character actors – Wylie Watson, Nigel Stock, William Hartnell (later to play the first Doctor Who) – all of who came to Brighton Rock with a history of having played heavies, while Pinkie was Attenborough’s cinematic debut. What is interesting is that Lydon is aware of the gang’s individuality, that they are, as he says, deeply peculiar. For him, Pinkie’s mob is a gang, but they are clearly delineated as individuals in contrast to the uniformed droogs in A Clockwork Orange. In his guide to the film of Brighton Rock, film commentator Steve Chibnall says: “Kite’s gang encompasses the three narcissistic criminal types of this period: the spiv (Cubitt), the gangster (Dallow) and the delinquent (Pinkie).”

According to Graham Greene’s biographer, Norman Sherry, Greene’s model for Pinkie was a fellow pupil, drawn from Greene’s unhappy experiences at St John’s, a Catholic school where his father was headmaster. Even Greene’s description of Pinkie’s ‘slaty eyes’ touched with ‘annihilating eternity’ captured in Attenborough’s basilisk stare, seem to be drawn from Greene’s childhood experience. Greene’s mother Marion wrote in a letter to his wife Vivien:

375 Chibnall omits Spicer, the fourth member of the gang. A nervous, cowardly alcoholic afraid of the law, of Pinkie, of rival mobsters, of razors and vitriol, Spicer fulfils the role of the man out of his depth, an everyman for whom petty crime is turning hard. A man not cut out to be a part of Pinkie’s mob, Spicer dreams of escaping to tend the ale pumps at an idealised pub in Nottingham where “the girls are kind”. He is the weakest link. After failing to have Spicer carved by the rival Colleoni gang, Pinkie kills Spicer in a staged accident on a staircase. See Steve Chibnall, Brighton Rock, I. B. Tauris, London 2005: p. 58.
I think Graham was not well the morning he should have gone back to St John’s – slight temperature and eyes peculiar. Doctor could not understand the eyes. I kept him in bed and went to do housekeeping and returned to find he was not there and a note to say that he would not go back to St John’s – had tried to poison himself with eye-drops …

As a junior boarder, Greene experienced sudden and inexplicable attacks by a boy named Lionel Arthur Carter whom, Sherry argues, reappears throughout Greene’s oeuvre and who shaped Greene’s moral universe.

For Carter’s lasting effects on Greene, Sherry looks to Greene’s unpublished first novel Prologue to Pilgrimage which he described as ‘convincing in its reconstruction of the schoolroom situation’:

Slowly Anthony felt an arm creeping behind his back … There was a jerk and a muttered exclamation from Hardy. The hand withdrew itself and Anthony saw that Webber had been using a pair of dividers.

Like a grown-up Carter/Webber, Pinkie in Brighton Rock arms himself with a razor, taped beneath his thumb, for the fellas and a small bottle of vitriol for spoiling the looks of girls.

He sat there, anger like a live coal in his belly, as the music came on again; all the good times he’d had in the old days with nails and splinters, the tricks he’d learnt later with a razor blade: what would be the fun if people didn’t squeal?

The reference is made more explicit as Greene continues: “he had graduated in pain: first the school dividers had been left behind, next the razor”. When Pinkie sets Spicer up for a razor attack from his rival, Colleoni’s gang, Greene writes: “Like a cruel child who

hides the dividers behind him, he put his hand with spurious affection on Spicer’s arm”; 380 and then when Pinkie finds that he too is to be razored:

He put his hand to his pocket to get his blade, and the man immediately facing him leant across and slashed his knuckles. Pain happened to him; and he was filled with horror and astonishment as if one of the bullied brats at school had stabbed first with the dividers. 381

If John Lydon identified with Pinkie’s youth, his control of adults and of adult situations, as well as Pinkie’s tortured Roman Catholicism and dystopic moral universe, he could also have identified with Pinkie’s rival and nemesis, the mobster Colleoni.

Mr Colleoni came across an acre of deep carpet from the Louis Seize Writing Room, walking on tiptoe in glace shoes.
He was a small Jew with a neat round belly; he wore a grey double-breasted waistcoat, and his eyes gleamed like raisins. His hair was thin and grey… He clinked very gently as he moved; it was the only sound. 382

…

His old Semitic face showed few emotions but a mild amusement, a mild friendliness, but suddenly sitting there in the rich Victorian room, with the gold lighter in his pocket and the cigar case on his lap, he looked as a man might look who owned the whole world, the whole visible world that is: the cash registers and policemen and prostitutes, Parliament and the laws which say ‘this is Right and this wrong.’ 383

Another Jew is seen in the form of Pinkie’s double, a man called Crab who is described as “a young man in a mauve suit, with shoulders like coathangers and a small waist”. 384

His hair was carroty, except at the roots, and his nose was straightened and scarred. He had been a Jew once, but a hairdresser and a surgeon had altered that. 385

383 Ibid: p. 66.
This description of Crab, with his caroety hair, pale complexion, coathanger shoulders wasp waist and his confusion about his Jewishness could very well be a description of Malcolm McLaren. Like Pinkie and Colleoni, there would yet be a reckoning between Lydon and McLaren; as Savage writes “Like Pinkie, John Lydon was ready to murder a world”. 386

5.3  NEGATIVE CAPABILITY

Like Pinkie, Lydon also went to a Catholic comprehensive school, William of York in Gifford, which was, writes Savage, “a particularly grim Victorian backwater near Pentonville [Prison]” 387 Lydon describes the school as a “shithole” 388 before, uncannily, echoing the very sentiments of the London mob in stating that:

Catholic schools should be pulled down: They separate you from everyone else. I learnt hate and resentment there. And I learned to despise tradition and this sham we call culture. 389

Lydon’s experiences at William of York were far from happy, but in no account available has Lydon ever alluded to having been a ‘victim’, that is, someone who is bullied more than any other boy or the regular subject of schoolyard violence (unlike Graham Greene). The schoolyard violence he alludes to was either laddish behaviour or violence delivered by the teachers as punishment. 390 In his autobiography, Lydon says:

385  Ibid.
388  Ibid.
390  “Irish Catholic schools had very wicked teachers. A lot of them were particularly vicious and very cruel. They used to love to whack you on the hand with the sharp edge of a ruler. That used to hurt like fuck.” John Lydon quoted in Rotten, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1994: p. 16.
To get to the Catholic school you had to go through a predominantly Protestant area. That was most unpleasant. It would always be done on a quick run. “Those dirty Irish bastards!” That kind of shit. Now they transfer it onto the blacks or whomever. There will always be hate in the English because they’re a hateful nation. \(^\text{391}\)

John Lydon had little fear of standing out from the crowd, one could say that he relished it. Lydon tells Savage: “… because my parents were poor, they couldn’t afford the uniform”. \(^\text{392}\) The result was that while his fellow students were each replicated in short hair and a grey uniform, at fourteen, Lydon wore his hair down to his shoulders, a jean’s shirt, hobnail boots that he’d painted bright green and: “… I had to cycle to school and I’d wear a leather jacket in the rain”. \(^\text{393}\) To the school’s Catholic authorities and largely because of the leather jacket, John Lydon earned the tag of God’s rebellious angel Satan. Lydon was henceforth known as a Hell’s Angel. \(^\text{394}\)

In *The Filth and the Fury*, Lydon complained of having being “passed off a shoddy and third-rate version of reality” at school. If he saw himself as bullied at all it was by the Irish Catholic nuns and priests.

I enjoyed reading and learning things, but I thought the way they were trying to teach us was stupid and ridiculous. If anything, school was hindering me, and I resented that. I didn’t like the way we were taught English literature, for instance. … If asking questions makes you a troublemaker, then that’s what I became … I would disrupt lessons as much as possible. I would question everything … \(^\text{395}\)

What is clear is that Lydon’s questioning was not the only thing that drove his teachers to distraction. In senior school “the teachers were absolutely furious because I’d fight them in such a clever way. It was all about manipulating their anger, annoying them by staring without blinking throughout an entire lesson. That used to drive them crazy”. \(^\text{396}\) Lydon

\(^{393}\) Ibid.  
\(^{394}\) Ibid.  
\(^{396}\) Ibid. pp. 22–3.
discovered other ways to rebel: if he could find an object’s negative utility, then he could similarly make an enemy an ally:

School was just like prison. They try to use the bullies to keep the masses down. All you have to do is find a way to bribe the bully into a better way of life. That’s what we did. Just roped them in with us. You tell them what you’re doing and why you’re doing it. That’s very appealing to a bully. They don’t like the system any more than anyone else. If you show them by the effort of your work that you’re cracking it at the seams, they like the deviousness of it. Maybe I was lucky. We had good bullies. 397

Having pushed the buttons of one of his teachers once too often, and barely a few months before sitting for his O-levels, John Joseph Lydon was expelled by his teacher. The headmaster had not been consulted and although he did not revoke Lydon’s expulsion he did suggest that Lydon sit his O-levels elsewhere.

Although I have emphasised John Lydon’s negativity, I would also like to point out that he is a very literal interpreter whose creativity consists of turning a thing upside down, or reversing it. Lydon also studied the poetry of John Keats and it is likely that he would have encountered Keats’ theory of “negative capability”. For Keats, negative capability was a form of empathy, with which a poet is able to completely inhabit his subject, whether it be a sparrow, a man or a Grecian urn. Keats used the phrase to praise Shakespeare above all other writers, for his ability to identify with, inhabit and empathise with his characters.

Understanding Lydon’s tendency to literal mindedness, we can speculate that he would interpret negative capability as a useful capacity for negativity, similar to the London mob’s seeking out of an object’s negative utility. Although this is speculative, what is not speculative is Lydon’s creative use of negativity. Lydon’s negative capability is not an act of negation but a creative process whereby Lydon takes an object or lyric and reverses its polarities. For example, Lydon takes a Luftwaffe insignia and wears it upside down. And, most importantly, it was Lydon’s capability with the negative that brought him (via Bernie Rhodes) to the attention of Malcolm McLaren through a t-shirt whose meaning he had inverted.

397 Ibid: p. 53.
As a teenager on The King’s Road, London’s famous fashion strip now in decline, Lydon was sensitively aware that he and his friends had no place there: “we’d go to The King’s Road to annoy people … . We were extremely ugly people, we were the outcasts, the unwanted”. 398 Lydon felt himself silenced, yet he discovered the negative capability of a found object. 399 Using a Texta and a generic Pink Floyd t-shirt, he made one of punk’s first statements; it took very little time or craft, all Lydon needed to do was scrawl ‘I hate’ across the Pink Floyd t-shirt to make a provocative message. As Lydon recalled: “Once you add the words I hate, you’ve made it something completely different”. 400 That was Lydon’s genius; he could sense an object, phrase or idea’s capacity to negate itself and, by displaying this, he would produce something fresh and invigorating.

But this capacity could also veer into a general negativity. All of the Sex Pistols’ band members complained about Lydon’s negativity as ‘draining’ to be around for any extended length of time. Over time Lydon’s negativity was increasingly expressed as a very long list of things and people that he hated.

In Greene’s novel, that same anger, an equal combination of contempt and hate, also fuelled Pinkie. Facing the possibility of a murder charge and knowing that the sixteen-year old waitress Rose holds vital information that could be used to convict him, Pinkie proposes to her, in the knowledge that a wife cannot give evidence against her husband in a court of law. After marrying Rose, Pinkie takes Rose to the best and smartest hotel on the Esplanade, the Continental, but the desk clerk tells them there are no rooms at the inn:

399 Greil Marcus in his Lipstick Traces (1990) quite rightly points out that this technique is already closely associated with the Marchel Duchamp and Dada, most famously through his signature upon a found object like a men’s urinal and displayed as a fountain. It is also to be found in the titling of the Surrealist Rene Magritte’s painting Ceci n’est pas une pipe. However, unlike Malcolm McLaren who had a solid seven-year art school education, John Lydon had no educational access to such art history.
He had an insane impulse to shout out to them all that they couldn’t treat him like that, that he was a killer, he could kill men and not be caught. He wanted to boast. He could afford that place as well as anyone: he had a car, a lawyer, two hundred pounds in the bank … 401

On Brighton Pier, Rose demands a wedding gift:

He went into the box and closed the door. There was a slot for his sixpence, a mouthpiece, an instruction: ‘Speak clearly and close to the instrument’. The scientific paraphernalia made him nervous; he looked over his shoulder and there outside she was watching him – without a smile; he saw her as a stranger, a shabby child from Nelson Place, and he was shaken by an appalling resentment. He put in a sixpence and speaking in a low voice for fear it might carry beyond the box he gave his message up to be graven on vulcanite: ‘God damn you, you little bitch, why can’t you go back home for ever and let me be?’; he heard the needle scratch and the record whir, then a click and silence.

Carrying the black disc he came out to her, ‘Here,’ he said, ‘take it, I put something on it – loving.’ 402

This was no love song and like Pinkie, John Lydon never wrote a love song. Even before Lydon penned the lyrics to the Sex Pistols’ original material, he began by manipulating other people’s songs. He took the Faces’ song ‘Whatcha Going to Do About It’ with the lyrics, “I want you to know that I love you baby, I want you to know that I care”, and using it as a found object like the Pink Floyd t-shirt, made it mean something entirely new, something sinister. Lydon took his hatred to ‘Whatcha Going To Do About It’, the lyrics becoming: “I want you to know that I hate you baby, I want you to know that I don’t care”. Taking a common phrase and twisting it to make a new meaning, as The Who had done in ‘Substitute’, “I was born with a plastic spoon in my mouth”, appealed to Lydon. But the plastic/silver spoon synecdoche was also how he saw the world; that life and the future ahead were going to be more of the same but blander, more insipid and devoid of taste than we could possibly imagine. The cheapness of it all amused him.

402 Ibid: p. 179. In Lydon’s later musical incarnation with Public Image Limited, he would chant the single phrase “This is not a love song” on the song of the same title. There may not have been a love song in the Sex Pistols but there was no love song in John Lydon either.
Pinkie’s record of hate made its way into Lydon’s psyche; what are the mock anthems ‘Anarchy in the UK’ and ‘God Save the Queen’ but songs of hate? Fellow band member and bass player Glen Matlock is described in Lydon’s autobiography as always asking why John’s lyrics had to be so negative; while many others have accused Lydon, the Sex Pistols and punk of nihilism. While I don’t agree with the overall thesis that Greil Marcus propounds in his *Lipstick Traces* – that in writing the lyrics for ‘Anarchy in the UK’ John Lydon was a “medium”, possessed by the International Situationist, Guy Debord – Marcus nonetheless makes many insightful asides about punk. For instance, Marcus shows that “oblivion was not the ruling passion” of the Sex Pistols (at least not until Sid and Nancy stole the show) and that the band neither believed in nothing, nor wished for annihilation. Marcus argues that the Sex Pistols called for negation rather than nihilism and Lydon agrees:

I don’t think anything about the Pistols was nihilistic. We certainly weren’t on a death trip. Maybe it was wreck-and-destroy stupidity, but I would hardly think that’s nihilistic. Quite the opposite. It’s very constructive because we were offering an alternative. Not just anarchy for the sake of it. This was a very antistar band.

Marcus looks positively upon negation, because unlike nihilism’s insistence upon the insignificance of existence, negation is political because it engages with existence. Marcus suggests that, unlike the passivity of nihilism, the Sex Pistols’ negativity was in fact a “social critique” and this social critique made sense both as a demand and a refusal. Punk was refusing the culture it was force-fed and demanded something in its

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403 The self-same people who argue that the Sex Pistols were not nihilistic, now make up the overwhelming historical record. They begin their argument and defence of the Sex Pistols by alluding to the Sex Pistols’ accusers and ironically, those actual people (if they existed) who accused the Sex Pistols of nihilism have disappeared in face and name from the Sex Pistols’ historical record.


place. Far from wallowing in self-pity, it set out to discover and provide it. Again John Lydon concurs:

Sometimes the absolute most positive thing you can be in a boring society is completely negative. 408

The Sex Pistols’ negativity became both a banner and a positive political act that inspired others to go out and form a band and use this platform on which to say absolutely anything at all. Thus, concludes Marcus, the Sex Pistols’ negativity – the refusal of all repressive social facts – produced the inspiring and euphoric affirmation that anything was possible. 409

Lydon embraced Pinkie’s villainy. Pinkie’s girlfriend Rose “could imagine the exhilaration, the bitter excitement, that anarchy in [his] eyes”. 410 “He was going to damn himself …”, 411 and Pinkie’s last words are: “My God have I got to have a massacre?” 412

According to Lydon, both ‘Anarchy in the UK’ and ‘God Save the Queen’ were written in the time it takes for a tin of baked beans to heat on the stove:

I wrote ‘God Save the Queen’ at the kitchen table that is still there to this day. I wrote it one morning waiting for my baked beans to cook. I wrote the lyrics in one sitting and went straight to the rehearsal studio. The tune was already worked out, and I just put the lyrics over it. 413

Says Lydon in hindsight:

It was worth the risk. Nobody had openly declared any anti-opinions of the royal family in ever such a long time in our ridiculous feudal Great Britain. I thought it was about time someone stood up and said something – and I was more than pleased that it was me. 414

408 Ibid: p. 79.
412 Ibid: p. 245.
413 Ibid: p. 83.
414 There was anti-monarchical comedy but it was not to be found in popular music. Ibid.
Malcolm McLaren has been reported in the press as saying that he thought it was more interesting to be hated\textsuperscript{415} than to be liked, that it was a more invigorating idea. Invigorating or interesting for McLaren, Lydon came to hate McLaren with an intensity that would fuel almost twenty years of lawsuits.

Like Pinkie’s stare, as represented in the performance of Richard Attenborough, Lydon took his own physical deformities and made them work for him; he did so by adopting another villain: Laurence Olivier’s portrayal of the hunchbacked Richard III.\textsuperscript{416}

If I could caricature myself, the closest I’ve seen to it would be Laurence Olivier’s Richard III. That’s so funny. I can see bits of me in there. Fucking excellent. What an absolute bastard he was! Beneath his hunched deformity, Shakespeare’s Richard was wicked and psychotic, mixed with a fatally cruel sense of humour.\textsuperscript{417}

If punk is continually referred to as an attitude, then Lydon’s attitude mirrors Richard III’s resentment and hate. This attitude embraces the sinister and malign, the grotesque and absurd, and laughs at itself – it is a product of Lydon’s insecurity and his powerful survival instinct and there is no room for self-pity, only for self-mockery. Fuelled by hate, this attitude is also hubristic. Lydon identifies with over-reachers, as he says in The Filth and the Fury:

In a weird way that whole persona of say, Richard III helped when I joined the Sex Pistols: deformed, hilarious, grotesque.\textsuperscript{418}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{416} Craig Bromberg asserts: “it’s often said that Rotten picked up his best moves from watching Ian Drury [later of Ian Drury and the Blockheads], a childhood polio victim, performing with Kilburn & the High Roads at the Hope and Anchor.” Though for something that Bromberg says is often said, his book is the only source I have come across suggesting this. See Craig Bromberg, \textit{The Wicked Ways of Malcolm McLaren}, Perennial, New York 1989, p. 96.
\textsuperscript{418} Lydon interviewed in Julien Temple, \textit{The Filth and the Fury}, (2000) DVD.
\end{flushright}
The British Press dubbed the winter of 1975 ‘The Winter of Discontent’ because of rising inflation and unemployment, the falling value of the pound, Labour party infighting, strikes and union actions. ‘Anarchy in the UK’ was inspired by the opening lines of Richard III, “Now is the winter of our discontent”, reduced to “‘Right! Now! Ha ha ha ha ha …’”.

Was it Westwood and McLaren’s influence that led John Lydon to write his anti-Jubilee anthem ‘God Save the Queen’ a year later, or did Lydon’s oppositional attitude lead him to this end himself?419 Lydon saw the Jubilee celebrations as absurd: a bit of patriotism dressed up as good will to the monarchy. Just what was there to celebrate? The British Empire was no more, the Commonwealth was disintegrating, the country was in recession, London was bankrupt and unemployment was at an all time high.

Roped into the celebration of twenty-five years of being a subject under the monarchy, Lydon loathed every minute of his compulsory presence as an unpaid and unconsulted extra in the farcical Jubilee celebration. He hated the role dictated to him: a dumb sightseer, a tourist in his own town. Worse, to Lydon, the Jubilee celebration was the updating of an undeclared social contract: the reaffirmation of fealty to the crown by peasants like himself. In these times, for Lydon, it wasn’t just a matter of asking, “why should we?” It was quite simply – replete with the time-honoured Englishman’s two-fingered salute – “no way, fuck off!”

‘God Save the Queen’ was an act of sedition that in earlier times would have led to a charge of treason and the death sentence. Released on 27 May 1977, the single was denied radio play but, nonetheless, was number two in Jubilee week. The song was damned by the ‘general’ public and the tabloid newspapers as an attack on her majesty – which it was, “she ain’t no human being” – and on the state, which Lydon described as a fascist regime ruled by a “figurehead” who was “not what she seems”. Ultimately the

419 There is another school of thought that even attributes it to the influence of Bernie Rhodes or Jamie Reid.
song attacked the jingoism of the celebrations reflected in the incessant refrain “no future”.

As Lydon told Julien Temple in *The Filth and the Fury*, they had whipped up the London mob, the lynching mob:

[We had] alienated the entire country. If they’d have hung us at Traitor’s Gate it would have been applauded by 56 million. We were the Maypole they danced around.  

In this statement Lydon conflates the Tyburn tree at Marble Arch, the traditional site of the city’s public hangings throughout the eighteenth century, with the gateway from the Thames through which traitors in the Elizabethan era entered the Tower of London where they were kept until their execution on Tower Hill. The psycho-geographical resonances of Lydon’s statement continue in his reference to the Maypole here. May Day, or Shrove Tuesday, had been the days when the apprentices of London had traditionally run wild. Outlawed since 1697, the last Maypole in the city had occupied the site upon which the Bank of England was constructed.  

Ironically, in the early hours of the morning on 9 June 1780, the Gordon Rioters converged on this same spot with the intent of ‘pulling down’ the Bank of England. Lydon’s description of a

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421 I use the term psychogeographical in the sense of its London practitioners, and not the version put forth and practiced by Guy Debord and the Situationists, as derived from the Lettrist movement. London psychogeographers include Will Self, Ian Sinclair, Stewart Home, Tom Vague, and though distancing himself from the club – but nonetheless reaching similar conclusions – the historian, biographer and biographer of place, Peter Ackroyd. As we see in Lydon’s statement, such a geographical site as the spot occupied by the Maypole resonates simultaneously with its multiple historical associations. For the psychogeographer it is as if the multiple layerings of time, event and association, peculiar to that site were all clamouring for attention at once, and thus affect the psychogeographer’s perception of that place through a sense or feeling for place. Ackroyd even suggests that the city of London is an organism and that the city, through its psychic resonances, can actually direct the lives of people living upon that site. Screenwriter Nigel Kneale also explores this theme in his science fiction works like the Quatermass series and *The Stone Tapes* (1972).

422 The 100-foot Maypole was taken down in 1717 and, on the advice of Sir Isaac Newton, used as the base for a telescope.
gleeful multitude dancing around the universally hated Sex Pistols also evokes the burning of Guy Fawkes on bonfire night. Although this is celebrated on 5 November each year, Lydon unconsciously evokes the mid-summer bonfires (which took place during the summer solstice on 19 June: the longest day of the year and the shortest night in the Northern hemisphere) which were formerly a major part of the agrarian calendar, and which were banned in the city due to combined drunkenness and the risk of fire. Lydon evokes, either intuitively or subconsciously, a folk memory of these events; as does McLaren, who explicitly incorporates all these elements into the opening sequence of The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle.

The performance of ‘God Save the Queen’ aboard the Thames pleasure cruiser named The Elizabeth (the name being – rather obviously if still ironically – exploited by McLaren who had booked it) on Jubilee Day (7 June 1977) led to the London River Police boarding the vessel mid-Thames, bringing the vessel to the Embankment and charging McLaren with ‘breaking the peace’.423

Some believed that the river cruiser was boarded by the river police for political reasons,424 directed by higher authorities425 who were worried about the anti-monarchical content of ‘God Save the Queen’. Even Richard Branson – owner of Virgin Records and present when the police boarded The Elizabeth – told the officer in charge: “The reason you’re here is because it’s the Sex Pistols. If it wasn’t the Sex Pistols there would be no...

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423 This charge is derived from ‘breaking the King’s peace’, the same charge that was levelled at all of those arrested during the Gordon Riots.


425 “No one said the word ‘conspiracy’ but that’s what most of them then believed, even though the tabloids had whipped up the feelings of their less discerning readers (‘Punish the Punks’), it is a fact, later revealed by ex-MI5 spy David Shayler, that MI5 did indeed have a 1977 file named ‘Subversion in the Music Industry’. In the file were pages about McLaren, the Sex Pistols and ‘other leading groups’.” See Phil Strongman, Pretty Vacant, Orion, London 2007: pp. 182–3.
interest in this boat tonight”.\textsuperscript{426} Despite the seductiveness of such conspiracy theories, this seems not to have been the case. Craig Bromberg reports that, after fisticuffs broke out on board between John Wardle ‘Wobble’ and an unnamed French photographer, the captain of \textit{The Elizabeth} radioed the river police to come aboard and end the fight.\textsuperscript{427} Ironically, by the time the police did arrive, the fisticuffs were long over.

Like previous mob leaders, Lydon argued that his song was a patriotic call to England. He claimed it was sympathetic to the Queen, but was critical of the forces around her and, by extension, the hype surrounding the Jubilee. In \textit{The Filth and the Fury}, Lydon claimed: “You don’t write ‘God Save the Queen’ because you hate the English race, you write it because you love them”.\textsuperscript{428} In saying this, Lydon is following the tradition of other insurrectionists such as Wat Tyler who, in the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, hoped to separate the fourteen-year-old boy king, Richard II, from the ‘robber’ Barons who were advising him. ‘God Save the Queen’ was seen quite differently by the public and Lydon would add: “We had declared war on England without meaning to”.\textsuperscript{429}

Lydon’s performance of hatred, Punk’s spectacle of feigned violence – which was the vehicle for the Sex Pistols’ stellar rise to infamy and notoriety – would ignite the tabloids, who, in turn, would make it their duty to incite the London mob to rise up and do their duty to their city and country by “punishing the punks”.\textsuperscript{430} Like all mob actions

\begin{itemize}
\item Footage of Richard Branson uttering these lines can be seen in Julien Temple, \textit{The Filth and the Fury} (2000) DVD.
\item John Lydon interviewed in Julien Temple, \textit{The Filth and the Fury}, (2000) DVD.
\item This song would be a major influence on Derek Jarman who that same year would make his movie \textit{Jubilee}, which depicted a dystopic future, the no future of Lydon’s lyrics, where England was in steady decline into senseless violence. It was shot around the abandoned and derelict Canary Wharf, until a few years earlier, the heart of London’s Docklands, in particular the West India docks. It is no wonder then that the iconic punk fashion model Jordan should mime to a rapped version of ‘Rule Britannia’, dressed as Britannia herself, while the phrase ‘Rule Britannia’ is rapped, that is repeated, without the following line “Britannia rules the waves” because obviously, Britannia no longer did rule the waves.
\end{itemize}
from 1381 to 1780, the London mob was fuelled by its own brand of patriotism, that of Londoners. This patriotism, as we saw in the previous chapter, was based on a history of hatred for foreigners: the Irish, Jacobites, Catholics, or people who just did not know their place. Even more, it tapped into Londoners’ almost subconscious, even primitive and irrational, desire to protect their monarch. As Bromberg writes:

One by one, the Sex Pistols and their friends were set upon by angry thugs who had somehow come to the common (and mistaken) perception that ‘God Save the Queen’ described the queen herself as a moron … First was Jamie Reid, viciously attacked by four people near his home in south London and left lying in the street with a broken nose and cracked leg. Next was Rotten, who together with producer Chris Thomas and studio engineer Bill Price [were bottled, knifed and macheted]… The next day it was Paul Cook’s turn: banged over the head with an iron bar outside Shepherd’s Bush tube. 431

As John Lydon tells Julien Temple in The Filth and the Fury:

I still had to bunk on the subways. Couldn’t afford a cab … Walking around the streets of London on my own was impossible. I would be attacked on sight. You felt like a werewolf, being hounded, constantly in fear of your life, really.

I got a machete blade ripped down this leg and the blade stuck in my kneecap and they couldn’t pull it out, so [laughs] I got to walk off with that. I got a stiletto blade from my wrist here [he draws a finger down from his wrist to demonstrate] … Lucky not to have one of my eyes gouged out because the bottle was shoved in here. 432

Hate proves poisonous to its owner, and against the background of England’s depressed social-psyche, Lydon’s hate and resentment – which had seemed empowering and inspired – rebounded on its owner. Lydon’s therapy would come later, with his next band Public Image Limited, where he would give away the black bile of hatred and resentment that had proved two-edged, for another emotion that burned cleaner and purer, that of anger.

So, Johnny Rotten was punk and punk was Johnny Rotten. But it is easy to forget that once upon a time this tautology, now held to be self-evident, would have been at least ambiguous if not dubious. With the hindsight of thirty years, there is no question that in stage performance, in his lyrics, his look and in his attitude, Johnny Rotten was punk’s figurehead, and whatever Rotten did – whether repetition or precedent – was punk. By John Lydon performing punk others were able to follow Lydon’s lead: first, the other band members, who made up the Sex Pistols; second, Westwood and McLaren, who were able to extend and commodify the punk fashion and co-opt Lydon’s look; thirdly, Lydon’s biggest fan, John Beverley, who observed Lydon at close quarters and mastered punk so completely that he would come to eclipse Lydon’s punk as the ‘uberpunk’, Sid Vicious; fourth, the punk converts like the ‘Bromley contingent’, and the audience at the Manchester Lesser Free Trade Hall, and finally all those other people who followed the Sex Pistols and were influenced to go punk and/or start their own punk band.

It is easy to forget that Lydon was making it up as he went along; that he was improvising, winging it, that there was no punk script: Lydon had to work with what was available to him. And thus far removed it is also easy to forget that you could actually get punk wrong: that there were mistakes, atavisms, moments when something was thrown into the mix and failed to take. There were things that were ‘kind of’ punk, but only for a short time, before they were rejected by McLaren or when Lydon grew bored of them. In the following chapter I will explore one of the first texts dealing with London punk, Derek Jarman’s film *Jubilee* (1977). If the Sex Pistols were biographers of the crowd, then Jarman nearly was the first biographer of punk. However, in his imbrication of punk tropes and the mob, together with a somewhat arch Elizabethan framing plot, Jarman got it wrong. Nonetheless, despite this failure, *Jubilee* remains a key text in the cultural narrative of London punk.
Chapter 6: *Jubilee* and Misunderstanding Punk

Don’t remember punk this way. 433

6.1 430 THE KING’S ROAD

6.1.1 Rehearsing punk

While there will always be debate over who actually invented the punk look – electro-shock hair, clothes held together with safety pins, slogans, leather jacket – and whether this look originated in London with Johnny Rotten or hailed from New York with Richard Hell, there is no question that the punk look will be forever associated with London. The punk look, with its tartan bondage trousers, torn fishnet stockings, studded and chained leather motorcycle jackets, leopard skin print, brightly coloured Mohawks, slogans reduced to the single words of ‘chaos’, ‘anarchy’ and ‘apathy’, is now referred to as ‘postcard punk’. All of these elements emanated from McLaren and Westwood’s shop at number 430, located just past the kink in The King’s Road that marks the end of the fashion strip, and where, ironically, given the way that punk would be interpreted by many public figures, a nineteenth-century pub called the World’s End stood.434 Here, Malcolm McLaren, Vivienne Westwood and their circle of art school friends found not only a forum for the continuing discussion of the theories, politics and art practices that they had learnt, discussed and fought over at art school, but also a theatrical space in which to perform.

Not only were their ideas and the theories made manifest, conjured if you like into objects for sale, but in 430 The King’s Road, the shop and its daily interactions was performed. The staff all knew this was theatre. Even some of the shoppers knew that when crossing the threshold of ‘430’, they were stepping onto a stage. McLaren and

433 Chris Brazier in *Melody Maker* as cited by Vivienne Westwood in her t-shirt response ‘Open t-shirt to Derek Jarman from Vivienne Westwood’ written after seeing Derek Jarman’s *Jubilee* for a second time.

434 A more recent establishment also called The World’s End now stands at 459 The King’s Road.
Westwood were both actors in this pageant but they were also the play’s producers. Each time the bell rang and custom entered, McLaren and Westwood “auditioned” their shoppers in order to assess whether this person was someone they should associate with and who could promote their message. It was actually very difficult to purchase anything because the clothes that McLaren envisioned, Westwood manufactured, and that ‘430’ displayed, were only to be worn by the right people. The right people were those that already stood out and who would put the shop’s clothes in the right places and among the right people. This exclusivity was no way to run a business – at least not in the beginning – and during their early years, Westwood, McLaren and their two children starved.  

However, over time, the shop began to attract the core that would become the punk inner circle, including the kids who would become the band that would promote the clothes: the Sex Pistols. There was a synchronicity here, or what marketeers prefer to call a synergy, or a mutual benefit, where the clothes also made the band look and feel exciting, sexy, a little dangerous and, above all, different. The clothes and the noise the band made would attract the second wave of punk with the Bromley contingent and their emulators. And the store was ‘exclusive’ in that it excluded people: McLaren literally threw the types he did not want associated with the ‘430’ product out onto the street.  

But 430 The King’s Road was also a matrix for some extraordinary stylists who provoked Westwood and McLaren to make more and more outrageous fashion statements. For example, John Lydon with his extraordinary showmanship, which he combined with a sense of tramp-like style, meant that when he wore his trousers backwards, his emulators followed. His designs and reworkings of the ‘430’ product were co-opted and incorporated into the shop’s product line. John Lydon’s stage persona Johnny Rotten was ‘punk’, so his attitude and style meant that whatever he wore was also punk.  

But if Johnny Rotten, stepping out into the street and airing the punk look, was its emblem, the story of that punk look always returns to 430 The King’s Road. It was here that things were tried out, proposed, refitted and recycled. And punk’s show, with all its

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436 Among them were Mick Jagger and even Iggy Pop, a key progenitor of American punk mistaken by McLaren for a long-haired hippy.
attendant theatrics, was literally rehearsed on the shopfloor. It was here that John Lydon auditioned for the Sex Pistols, performing Alice Cooper’s ‘Eighteen’ with a showerhead for a make-believe microphone and accompanied by the store’s jukebox; in its backroom, Malcolm and Vivienne argued, plotted, conspired, and Westwood indulged in her obsessive fascination with the Queen. This shopfront, acquired by Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood in 1972, would go through a series of radical changes, from dealing exclusively in Teddy boy fashion, through leather and studs, to fetish and sex wear. With each change, the left-over fashions were recycled and incorporated into the shop’s latest style, so that the London punk look coalesced from the odds and ends of retro fashions.

What London punk was and was not, who owned it and its copyright (in the literal sense of the right to copy, and the right to make money from that copy) is the subject of the next chapter. But in this chapter, by examining the filmmaker Derek Jarman’s foray into the punk world through his film *Jubilee*, along with its critique by Vivienne Westwood, we can see more of what punk was about by examining how Jarman misinterpreted it. And if Jarman misunderstood punk, then what was it precisely that he was saying, and why was it so clearly wrong-footed in the mind of one of punk’s luminaries, Vivienne Westwood?

6.1.2   Punk’s manifesto

Punk never had a mission statement: the closest it came to a manifesto, in the sense of making abstract ideas manifest, was the list drawn up by Malcolm McLaren, Vivienne Westwood and their friend Bernie Rhodes in the backroom at ‘430’, sometime in late 1974, over six months before Lydon entered the shop. This proclamation, entitled ‘You’re gonna wake up one morning and know what side of the bed you’ve been lying on!’; was a list of ‘hates’ screen-printed on one side of a t-shirt and a list of ‘loves’ on the other, and sold to the public on the shopfloor. The hates – largely comprised of what had

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437 An obsession, part revulsion but aspiration that would fire the Sex Pistols anti-monarchical manifesto ‘God Save the Queen’. 
been ‘cutting-edge’ until then – far outnumbered the loves. For Rhodes, McLaren and Westwood, the sixties anti-Establishment had become seventies Establishment. Where once, long hair had been a rebellious statement, now – along with the ubiquitous bell-bottom flairs and t-shirts – it was the only fashion. McLaren, Westwood and Rhodes were acutely aware that, although they were living in the mid-seventies, they were still under the shadow of sixties culture, but now it was declawed, co-opted and sold out. Beginning with “TV”, the hates end with “all those fucking saints”; the loves start with “Eddie Cochran”, the fifties rocker, and end with the open-ended possibility of “Imagination …”. In between, there is a wide collection of individuals, brands, magazines, cultural commentators and cultural institutions. Among the hates are sixties icons, establishment figures and organisations felt to be out of touch, such as “Mick Jagger/The Liberal Party/John Betjeman/George Melly …”. With their history of killing father figures and their love of the shadow, it is perhaps not surprising that amongst the hates is Andy Warhol who was once a great influence for Westwood and McLaren. Or that among the loves, in symmetrical opposition to Warhol, is Valerie Solanas, the woman who shot Warhol. Not only is she mentioned by name, so too is her manifesto for her collective of one, the Society for Cutting Up Men or SCUM.

The inclusion of the SCUM manifesto in the lists of loves and hates, with hindsight, reveals a source for many of punk’s slogans: Solanos’s aphorisms would decorate the walls of ‘430’ when it became ‘SEX’. Also apparent was McLaren’s obsession with the fifties rocker, Eddie Cochran, and the man known as the Great Train Robber, Ronald ‘Ronnie’ Biggs, who would appear in The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle and record ‘A Punk Prayer’. The up-and-coming music journalist, Nick Kent, was also favoured and the love and hate lists mark the first appearance in print of Steve Jones and the name of his band: QT Jones and his Sex Pistols. It is this document that unites Westwood, McLaren and Rhodes in a punk pact, with McLaren as punk’s visionary seer

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439 ‘Open t-shirt to Derek Jarman from Vivienne Westwood’.
and sloganeer, Westwood as fashion designer and Rhodes as a secondary agent for punk, setting up the first Sex Pistols’ spin-off and rival to punk’s London mantle, The Clash.

So if there was no actual punk manifesto, just a shared list of loves and hates printed on a t-shirt to guide the outsider, how did the outsider, who was not privy to this inner sanctum, decide just what was punk and what was not? In hindsight, there is an easily discernible set of signifiers that spell out punk, but in 1974, none of these were known even to punk’s inner circle. There was not even a name for what they were doing and it would take another year before the punk label would be appropriated and applied to the London phenomenon by McLaren after his 1975 trip to New York.

With the transition of 430 The King’s Road, from the fifties studded leather goods of ‘Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die’ into the fetishist store ‘SEX’, the elements that would define punk found their initial embodiment in punk’s muse, the shopgirl, Jordan. With the discovery of John Lydon in August 1975, there quickly followed the formation of the band, the Sex Pistols, with John Lydon as its lead singer; and with their first performances in early 1976, the siren call of punk went out. Then, quite suddenly, or so it seemed, especially to the outsider, every kid was forming a punk band, wearing punk garb and converting to the new cult of punk.

6.1.3 Wearable statements
If Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood were producing anything that could be described as punk manifestoes, it was in the form of t-shirts. These, of course, bore slogans but Westwood was deconstructing even the iconic style of the t-shirt. In her hands the t-shirt became two pieces of cloth sewn together, without the addition of sleeves, and open at the sides so that the ends could be knotted:

The first line to be expanded was the sleeveless slogan T-shirt, by now the shop’s best-selling item: not cheap at two pounds each. Cire and leather were used as fabrics while zips, tears and studded leather or plastic pockets were added. 441

Jon Savage describes these t-shirts as manifestos but also points out that punk’s overriding aim was to outrage and shock, and many of the images used to accompany its slogans were drawn from pornography:

There was a naked black footballer with pendulous cock, Alex Trocchi’s fervid lesbian fantasies, or the troubling image of a twelve-year-old boy, suggestively exhaling a cigarette, which came from *Boys Express*, a small paedophile magazine sold openly with a contact address in Essex.  

In addition to these risqué t-shirts there were the playful – a pair of naked female breasts screen-printed at chest height – and the queasy – an image of the ‘Cambridge rapist’ mask accompanied by the name of the Beatles’ tune ‘A Hard Day’s Night’, or the phrase: ‘Brian Epstein – found dead Aug 27th 1967 after taking part in sado-masochistic practices/S&M made him feel at home’ (another example of McLaren’s hero-killing). However, it was the t-shirt that bore the image of two Stetsoned but trouserless cowboys, their flaccid penises almost touching, that led to the arrest of the shop assistant, Alan Jones, by two undercover police in Piccadilly Circus. For wearing an ‘obscenity’, Jones was charged with violating an obscure nineteenth-century vagrancy law called gross indecency. Jones duly appeared in court and was fined fifty pounds.

Vivienne Westwood would also design a collared shirt that would be as visually definitive as any words written about and defining punk. This was the Anarchy shirt. Despite its ‘low rent’ aesthetic, there was nothing cheap about the price, £25, which reinforced the exclusivity of this fashion statement. In a footnote to *Pretty Vacant*, author Phil Strongman tells us that “the shirts were 1950s Wemblex shirts, bought in bulk at 50 pence each from a Portsmouth warehouse”.

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442 Ibid: p. 100.
443 One could argue that Jones was being charged for the homosexual content of the t-shirt rather than its obscenity because ‘gross indecency’ was the same charge with which Oscar Wilde was prosecuted and found guilty in 1869.
These shirts had then been dyed and bleach-striped with large red and black oblong patches which were themselves splashed with italic bleached-out writing, usually quotes from the Situationists and/or 1968 – ‘A bas Le Coca-Cola!’ (Screw Coca-Cola!) plus the odd Durruti saying, ‘We are not in the least afraid of ruins!’

In addition there were paint stripes and a choice of stencilled phrases over the breast: ‘Only Anarchists Are Pretty’ or ‘Dangerously Close To Love’. Down one arm was printed ‘Try subversion, It’s Fun’ and on the other was an armband, spelling out in capitals: ‘CHAOS’. More will be said of this later, but this is a key aspect of punk, that being subversive, or whatever you might call the will to challenge authority and get away with it, was fun.

Malcolm found the prototype shirt hidden beneath a basket in the laundry and, to Westwood’s surprise and joy, so admired her handiwork that he felt he had to add his own touch in the form of two found objects: a genuine People’s Republic of China silk print of Karl Marx’s face and a Nazi eagle badge from a stall in Portobello Road. Unintentionally, the shirt’s stripes resembled the striped uniforms of the prisoners in Nazi death camps: this, coupled with the Nazi eagle (although worn upside down to cast it as anti-fascist), would taint punk in the public’s imagination and, even thirty years later, the swastika armband is still closely associated with punk garb. What these clothes did was send out the message that something was happening at 430 The King’s Road, and by owning a piece of this thing you could instantly seem exciting and sexy and dangerous.

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446 “… from China’s Guanghwa trading centre in Newport Place, Soho …”, Phil Strongman, Pretty Vacant, Orion, London 2007: Ibid.
6.2 PUNK’S FIRST BIOGRAPHER

Among the clique that ‘430’ attracted was the young artist and designer, Derek Jarman. Jarman was employed by the British film director, Ken Russell, and in 1974 Russell made *Mahler*, his biopic of the Austrian Jewish composer Gustav Mahler. Either Russell or Jarman commissioned McLaren and Westwood’s ‘Too Fast To Live Too Young To Die’ to design and manufacture a costume for a dream sequence in which the Jewish composer faced his anima/Aryan shadow: a giant German Catholic woman in a Nazi helmet. As Malcolm described her:

> We used a Dominator bike-tyre T-shirt and the skirt was very short, in leather, and had a zip right down the front of it. Either side of that we had this huge Jesus cross in brass studs. This was right down the centre of the crotch and then on the back was this huge swastika in brass studs.  

Russell’s idea for Mahler’s dream is dubious as Mahler died three years before the First World War in New York in 1911, more than twenty years before the Nazis rose to power. True to form, the sequence in which the costume was used was hardly tasteful: the actress, costumed as described, stands, legs astride, one arm raised in a Nazi salute and a coiled bullwhip in the other, atop a slate plinth, while the actor portraying Mahler, in Hassidic hat, squints through his thick glasses admiringly up into her crucifix studded crotch.  

What is interesting about this grotesquery is that it was a product of Malcolm’s imagination realised by Vivienne Westwood. The female Aryan dominatrix is a product of Malcolm’s world of sexy danger and also strangely mirrors his and Vivienne’s relationship: Malcolm, a slightly built young man in some confusion over his Jewish identity, sexually partnered to Westwood, a strong willed, former schoolteacher, five years his senior. This costume with its Nazi imagery, leather and studs, and overtones of sexy domination and perversity seems to have foreshadowed the transformation from ‘Too Fast To Live Too Young To Die’ into ‘SEX’.

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As a result of Mahler, Derek Jarman entered the orbit of ‘430’. To Malcolm and Vivienne, Jarman was a friend to be cultivated. His connections with London’s gay and art circles, as well as his influential film contacts, put him in touch with people they wanted to know. In 1975, Jarman would become a filmmaker in his own right with the success of his first feature Sebastiane. Jarman was never a convert to punk, but he was the first filmmaker to engage with punk critically and analytically and, I think, sympathetically.

Derek Jarman’s punk film, Jubilee (1977) was simultaneously a critique of punk and Jarman’s own manifesto for artists and anarchists. Jubilee liberally mixes Jarman’s tastes and interests and uses punk as a vehicle to explore themes close to Jarman’s heart, but quite irrelevant to punk. For example, whereas punk looked to the street for inspiration, even to the gutter, Jarman imported his own elite interests in the historical, the artistic, the philosophic, the metaphysical, the cultural, the anagogical and so forth, so that there is the feeling that Jubilee is two films, if not artfully melded, then at least artfully cut together. Certainly Jarman’s backers at Megalovision provided the money in order to exploit the punk phenomenon. But it might be more accurate to suggest that Jarman hijacks punk. Jarman’s misinterpretation of punk can be attributed to his education, his elite cultural tastes, even his sexual orientation and his will to champion homosexuality in all its diversity. For example, whereas punks saw deviance and perversion as subversion, and literally wore their politics on their sleeves, Jarman as a gay man felt the persecution personally and was more deeply politically motivated as a result. Where the punks gained their thrill from acts of naughtiness, Jarman had experienced injustice and sought liberation. While the punks were content with poking fun at the stupidities of the State, Jarman wanted to change the law and the State.451

450 For example, Westwood’s use of gnawed fried chicken bones to spell out words and incorporated into her t-shirt designs. Examples are held in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection but one can be seen worn by Alan Jones in Stephen Colegrave and Chris Sullivan, Punk, Cassell, London 2005: p. 134.

451 Jarman was at risk of being charged with criminal behaviour because it was illegal for a man of less than twenty-one to have consenting homosexual sex.
For the viewer, regarding it in hindsight, *Jubilee* is a curiosity and a blind alley in the evolution of punk. However, some of the punk themes established and explored by Jarman subsequently became punk tropes. For instance, Jarman was the first filmmaker to make ‘punk’ a metaphor for the coming apocalypse. In *Jubilee*, Jarman equates punk with imminent societal breakdown. This would be reproduced on television in Nigel Kneale’s *Quatermass Conclusion* (1978), in the mohawked punks that appear as post-apocalyptic gangs in George Miller’s *Mad Max II* (1981), as violent feral urban high schools students in *Class of 1984* (1982), and roaming the colour film noir streets of Los Angeles circa 2016 in Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982).

### 6.2.1 London dystopia

Although a dystopic vision was already contained in the lyrics of the Sex Pistols’ song ‘God Save the Queen’ – in lines like ‘no future in England’s dreaming’ – in *Jubilee*, it was based on Jarman’s observation of the demise of his own Southwark neighbourhood. Jarman’s biographer Anthony Peake believes Jarman was “acutely sensitive to changes in the fabric of society” as well as, in the mid-seventies, “the despairing and angry mood … of a country facing economic recession [and] virtual war with the IRA”. For Jarman, Britain’s “uncertain post-imperial future” was “a mood epitomised by punk ...”. Punk was a symptom of the end of Empire, the end of Britishness and the psychic razing of London, and erasure of its culture with its past. Writing in 1994, the social historian Roy Porter introduces his *London: A Social History* thus:

> London is not the eternal city; it had its hour upon the stage. Between the two Elizabeths, between 1570 and 1986 to be more precise, it was to become the world’s greatest city.

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453 Ibid.
454 Ibid.
455 Ibid.
Porter, like Jarman in *Jubilee*, holds the ages of the two Elizabths up for examination and finds the latter age of Elizabeth II wanting. For Porter, it is the decline of the once great city of London itself that is his lament, while for Jarman, this second Elizabethan age is a shallow, unimaginative and culturally bereft era, presided over by a stupid and uneducated monarch. For Porter, London’s greatness came to an end in 1986 when the conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher abolished the Greater London Council “leaving the metropolis the only Western ‘world city’ without its representative government”. In *Jubilee*, filmed in 1977, nine years before Thatcher’s decision, Jarman had already declared London and by extension England, to be finished. Also, more extremely, in *Jubilee* Jarman depicted the world as a globe with large areas blacked out and named negative spaces. These negative spaces – including Great Britain – echoed Cold War geography, ‘no go’ zones hidden behind the iron curtain. These negative spaces suggest the blackout of North Korea with its juxtaposition seen by satellite from space in extreme contrast to the lights of South Korea.

*Jubilee* chronicles the lives of the people Jarman saw as the survivors of this dead metropolis and inheritors of this ‘negative space’. In Jarman’s vision these people were the punks; in particular, strong punk women like Jordan. Jarman was impressed by Jordan’s attitude to herself and her body. Jordan in the seventies was Reubenesque, her figure full and ample and out of keeping with the ‘Twiggy’ icon of the sixties. Jarman appears to have been attracted to Jordan as a kind of female drag queen. Jordan, like Jarman, liked to dress up and it is no coincidence that they both attended Andrew Logan’s Miss Alternative World party on 14 February 1976. Jarman also seems to have been interested in Jordan’s personal credo, itself a kind of feminist anarchism. However, Jarman was confused about feminism. In *Jubilee* he envisioned a kind of post-feminism, that is, a time after feminism, where all-girl gangs roamed and dykes rode motorbikes, where heterosexual men were, if not completely dispensed with, then dispensable playthings, used for sexual gratification and then thrillkilled. In this new world order, Jarman did envision a place for a homosexual couple and a heterosexual woman to live happily together as friends and lovers, with the woman in a maternal role to the men’s

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457 Ibid.
boy-like roles. It should be noted that Derek Jarman was not a misogynist. He may not have made love to women but he did love women. His last years were spent in the intimate company of the actress Tilda Swinton and *Jubilee* is a film for Jordan. The fact that this future world is in decay is not the fault of the women characters who inhabit it but their unhappy inheritance from the former patriarchal world.

However, there is certainly something troubling in Jarman’s appropriating the substance of William Burroughs’s *The Wild Boys*. *The Wild Boys* abounds with Burroughs’s homosexual and paedophilic fantasies of an all-boy world whose currency is the orgasm and its culture is entirely built around sex and death: death from sex and sex from death. With *Jubilee*, Jarman would attempt the exchange of one sex for another by turning the *The Wild Boys*’ world into an all-girl world. It simply doesn’t work because Jordan unlike the character Crabs would prefer a game of Monopoly, or a nice hot cup of tea rather than sex with either a man or a woman, but it is not for us to denigrate Jarman as an artist in his attempt to create *The Wild Girls*.

Sympathetic to, if not identifying with the punks, Jarman saw punk as a symptom of Empire’s end. Others, like Bernard Brooke Partridge, a Conservative member of the Greater London Council and its spokesman on law and order, mistook them for the malaise itself. Partridge had this to say about punk in the wake of the Grundy incident and on the eve of the Jubilee year, December 1976:

> My personal view on punk rock is that it’s nauseating, disgusting, degrading, ghastly, sleazy, prurient, voyeuristic and generally nauseating. I think that just about covers it as far as I’m concerned. I think most of these groups would be vastly improved by sudden death. The worst of the punk rock groups I suppose currently are the Sex Pistols; they are unbelievably nauseating. They are the antithesis of humankind. I would like to see somebody dig an exceedingly deep hole and drop the whole bloody lot


459 Divining punk’s very literal reading and then inversion technique, Jarman’s literary pedigree is begun by William S. Burroughs, with *Jubilee’s* girl biker gang and their thrill-kills derived from the gay boy gangs of Burrough’s auto-erotic novel *The Wild Boys*. 
down it. You know, I think the whole world would be vastly improved by their total and utter non-existence.  

Partridge stares into an abyss and the abyss stares back. His horror is hysterical and abject: on the one hand there is humankind and on the other, there is humankind’s antithesis: the Sex Pistols. In language that itself evokes punk philosophy, Partridge calls for the Sex Pistols’ “annihilation”, their “total and utter non-existence” and their improvement by “sudden death”. Yet he is certainly not a disinterested party; in the wake of the Grundy incident when the Sex Pistols, taunted by their drunken host, Bill Grundy, swore live-to-air on the Today show, Partridge promptly banned the Sex Pistols from performing in the Greater London area. Ironically, this incident was successfully spun by Malcolm McLaren to increase the audience’s appetite to see and hear the Sex Pistols. Partridge was the sort of officious bureaucrat and Establishment figure against whom McLaren and the Sex Pistols’ anti-authoritarianism could be directed. And here was a generation gap to be prised yet further apart.

6.2.2 Punk puritans

Jarman was genuinely excited and interested about the phenomenon he felt he had stumbled upon and he wanted to capture it and get it right. Jarman researched Jubilee by gathering every punk publication he could. This included the underground British publications Sniffin’ Glue and Bondage and the American publication Punk, as well as mainstream music press titles like the New Musical Express (NME) and Sounds. Jarman analysed the lyrics of ‘Anarchy in the UK’ and spent many hours in discussion with

460 The footage can be seen in Julien Temple, The Filth and Fury (2000) DVD.
461 “He who fights against monsters should see to it that he does not become a monster in the process. And when you stare persistently into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you.” See Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, Fourth Part: Maxims and Interludes, section 146. Accessed: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4363.
462 Jubilee began as a “documentary” and although the finished film became a work of drama, Jarman’s initial researches (collecting punk fanzines, discussions with Jordan and Adam Ant, which directed him to reading Solanas’ Scum Manifesto and William Burroughs’ The Wild Boys) support this. See Anthony Peake, Derek Jarman, Little Brown, London 1999: p. 245.
Jordan. Although not a convert to punk, to give Jarman his due, he is punk’s first sympathetic listener, as well as its first critic. *Jubilee* was shot largely around Southwark, envisaged by Jarman as a wasteland of abandoned redbrick workers’ cottages, vandalised vehicles, graffitied corrugated-iron-clad laneways and flat weedy horizons. Here, his violent girl gangs roam the post-industrial landscape, attacking housewives, robbing, bashing and killing them, setting their prams alight. Like the Australian press baron, Rupert Murdoch’s 1977 takeover of the London *Times* newspaper and past purchase of Thames Television, *Jubilee* also features a megalomaniac media mogul. With a greater sense of style than Murdoch, Jarman’s mogul, Borgia Ginz, has transformed Westminster Cathedral into a sexually transgressive *discothèque* and requisitioned Buckingham Palace to transform it into a recording studio that stupefyingly dictates the public’s tastes.⁴⁶³

This dystopic vision – albeit, exaggerated – reflects the view from Jarman’s own backyard in the year of Queen Elizabeth II’s Silver Jubilee. As Anthony Peake, his biographer, writes: “All along the river, the property developers were as active as ever, and throughout 1977 the empty warehouses continued to go up in flames”.⁴⁶⁴ In this landscape Jarman saw the natural inheritors of fire-sale London as the punks, both in practice and in terms of ethos. As squatters, the punks were prepared to live in derelict buildings, and philosophically, punk was a subculture whose own will to destroy, in order to start afresh at a kind of Year Zero, mirrored that of the developers. Jarman also saw the punks, who were fundamentally opposed to the culture and values of the 1960s, as proponents of a new Puritanism. Puritanically, punks derided the hippy ideals of peace and free love, and refused the sacrament of marijuana.⁴⁶⁵ Like the puritan anti-

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⁴⁶³ Borgia Ginz is a pantomime villain, played by the blind actor, The Great Orlando (Jack Birkett): someone whose villainy and decadence we can be titillated by. Borgia Ginz is an interesting name to dissect. It is Ginsberg or Ginsbourg reconfigured and may refer to Jarman’s friend Michael Ginsbourg or to the Beat poet and gay icon, Allen Ginsberg, here transformed into Borgia Ginz. Borgia of course, evokes the Medici popes, the Borgias and their own era of wealth, decadence and decay that is popularly thought of as the decline and end of the Italian Renaissance.


⁴⁶⁵ This would change to the predominantly white London punk scene fused with predominantly black West Indian reggae and its dub scene.
theatricalists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who railed against the sexually ambiguous actors on the London stage, Jarman interpreted punk’s electro-shock haircuts on boys and girls as similar to the Puritans who sought to stamp out vanity and homosexuality by shaving the golden locks of boys. Just such a scene appears in Jubilee when the shoulder-length hair of a youth is hacked with blunt scissors before a flaming bonfire of books. It is repeated in The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle, when a prepubescent girl is transformed into the image of Soo ‘Catwoman’ Lucas. The boys and girls of punk certainly shaved their hair and, along with it, the easy perception of their sexual identity. It is also possible to make parallels between, for instance, the Puritans’ advocacy of austerity and punk’s reduction of music to three power chords, played loud and fast for two minutes, which moved pop music away from the decadence of the early seventies, Prog or Progressive Rock and Art Rock.

But punk was also about dressing up outrageously, making a spectacle and having fun: its music was noise and its entertainment was disruption. Fun was not a Puritan concept. On the whole, Jarman’s idea of punk as ‘puritanical’ is dubious: punks consumed their own peculiar sacraments of amphetamines, stolen or misappropriated pharmaceuticals, vast amounts of lager and, later, heroin with abandon. Perhaps, rather than continue with Jarman’s puritan argument, it is enough to acknowledge that like the Puritans, the punks were, in Canetti’s terms, a refusal crowd. With a unique combination of contempt and belligerence, punk had learned to say ‘no, get fucked, fuck off’; but without expressing anything else beyond a nihilistic disgust for both the Establishment and an almost neurotic fear of boredom.

6.2.3 Westwood’s critique

Jarman’s second feature film Jubilee premiered in February 1978. Like Roy Porter’s later study of all that had gone wrong with London, Jubilee was a lament for the end of London, a synecdoche for the late Great Britain. Situated “at the heart of the empire on which the sun never set”, London had been the centre of trade with Europe and the Atlantic; it was the site of capital and crown. In Jubilee, the London of 1977 was

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transformed into a bleak dystopia where the rest of the world had forgotten the former ruler of the waves.

*Jubilee* screened at the National Film Institute and received mixed reviews. While some lauded its bravery and poetry, others were dismissive or even angered by it. The most damning response came from within punk’s inner circle, from Vivienne Westwood. In a detailed critique she attacked the ‘Shakespearese’ written by Jarman as utter nonsense, took umbrage at Jarman’s moralising on punk and objected to his metonymic depiction of an explicitly gay crucifixion in a Westminster Abbey, now made over into a nightclub, to represent the collapse of western civilisation into irremediable decadence and decay.

Westwood also incorporated the comments of *Melody Maker*’s film critic, Chris Brazier who had stated:

… the pervasive reek of perverse and esoteric artiness, the delight in degradation and decay simply for its beauty when stylised. An irresponsible movie – don’t remember punk this way …  

Westwood screen-printed her film review on the ‘SEX’ t-shirt design and titled it ‘Open T-shirt to Derek Jarman from Vivienne Westwood’. Westwood did deliver some faint praise, partly to her friends Helen Wellington-Lloyd and employee Jordan for their performances. Westwood even allowed the film to have “some sort of a soul” but this faint praise is followed by her assertion that Jarman was “not brave enough to follow through”. Westwood dismissed Jenny Runacre’s performance as lacklustre. With Runacre portraying Bod, a character based on Westwood, this criticism is far from disinterested. She concludes her critical analysis with: “You pointed your nose in the right direction then you wanked. It was even more boring than Uncle Tom Letts’ even

467 Chris Brazier in *Melody Maker* as quoted by Vivienne Westwood in her “Open T-shirt to Derek Jarman” and transcribed from ‘extras’ on the *Jubilee* DVD as released by Criterion DVD/Janus Films. Certainly, Brazier is right to criticise the “esoteric artiness”, and *Jubilee* does revel in wastelands and decadence for the sake of stylisation. But surely, if punk was anything, it was irresponsible? (Surely it is irresponsible to stick safety pins through your nose and ears, and irresponsible to wear swastikas as fashion?) So is it really fair to accuse Jarman of making an irresponsible movie?
lower budget film”. In a gesture of goodwill and what could also be described as punk attitude, Jarman obtained one of these t-shirts and posed for photographs in it. More will be said about Westwood’s reaction and damning critique below but it is necessary to examine Jarman’s aims and intentions first.

6.2.4 Punk’s muse

McLaren and Westwood were already known to Jarman through the costume design for Mahler, but the phenomenon of punk first came to his attention on Valentine’s Day, 1976, in the studio of artist, Andrew Logan. The appearance of the Sex Pistols caused Jarman to focus his attention more closely upon the scene that was burgeoning and extending its influence out of 430 The King’s Road. Logan’s digs were situated near Jarman’s home studio at Butler’s Wharf, on the Thames, close by Tower Bridge. Butler’s Wharf was then the largest collection of warehouses on the Thames. Built in the 1870s, for nearly one hundred years it dealt with goods unloaded at Surrey Docks or Hay’s Wharf. By 1972, London was no longer a destination for cargo and the warehouses were let as studios to the likes of David Hockney, Jarman and Andrew Logan. The lanes and exteriors of these warehouses were also favoured sites for film and television recreations of Dickensian London.

Andrew Logan was famous for his annual transvestite party called The Alternative Miss World, which drew the ‘Somebodies’ (David Hockney, Zandra Rhodes and others); the up and coming or ‘wannabes’; or in the case of the Sex Pistols, the nobodies or ‘yet-to-bes’. Jarman had used Logan’s studio space for filming interior

468 Don Letts, the son of West Indian migrants, also ran a clothing store on King’s Road called ACME attraction and is credited with shooting the earliest footage of the punk scene on Super 8, which became The Punk Rock Movie. Letts’ contribution to the documentation of punk is considerable, however with regard to this thesis, Letts’ is – except in the case of introducing Reggae and Jamaican Dub as a background sound to punk – a marginal figure, who arrives after the Sex Pistols have formed. In 2005, he made Punk: Attitude: A Film By Don Letts that attempts to analyse and define exactly what the global punk phenomenon was, by interviewing rockers, punks and punk identifiers from around the world.

469 Jarman’s wearing of Westwood’s film review t-shirt may of course, have been more mischievous than sporting.

scenes for his debut-feature *Sebastiane* and, fortuitously, Jarman’s film set for the opening feast-scene was – in all its baroque splendour – still in place. Here, on 14 February 1976, the Sex Pistols performed one of their earliest public gigs and Jarman was there to record it on Super 8. The black and white footage (which is included in *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle*) was shot at 16 frames per second and, when played back at 24 fps, depicts the band as jerky marionettes, far from happy to be filmed. Jarman recalled this performance in his autobiographical *Dancing Ledge*:

The Sex Pistols were playing on Andrew’s stage for a slightly bemused audience of glitterati while Jordan and [Vivienne] threw themselves about with bacchic abandon, hurling insults at the band and the audience. John Rotten turned his back on us and sang to the Roman frescoes, while the drummer, Paul, picked his nose. Christopher [Hobbs], who guarded me and the camera from the pushing and shoving said when it was all over – ‘Thank God that’s finished and we’ll never hear of them again’. 471

This was not the first time that Jarman had laid eyes on Jordan, the shop girl from Westwood and McLaren’s clothing boutique at 430 The King’s Road. As well as her role as an extra in *Sebastiane* in 1975, as early as 1974, Jordan had:

... stepped off the Brighton Belle at Victoria. White patent boots clattering down the platform, transparent plastic mini skirt revealing a hazy pudenda. Venus T shirt. Smudged eye paint, covered with a flaming blonde beehive … the face that launched a thousand tabloids … art history as make-up. 472

Born Pamela Rooke in 1955, Jordan grew up on “a council estate on the hills just outside Seaford in Sussex, a genteel, fading, seaside resort”. 473 Contrary to the report by art historian William Pencak in his study *The Films of Derek Jarman*, Jordan was not the Sex Pistols’ singer at any time, not even at Logan’s party. 474 While Jordan did appear on stage at Andrew Logan’s party with the Sex Pistols, her role was silent dancing and a half-hearted striptease. As Bromberg relates:

472 Ibid.
… the Sex Pistols assembled at Logan’s loft to discover themselves vastly outnumbered and outclassed by the Them’s – socialites, stylists, and Bryan Ferry look-alikes. McLaren’s boys immediately went to work, stalking the party like ferocious animals let loose in the city, gobbling up canapés and guzzling down booze, leering and plucking at the pretty girls surrounding them, and when the boys struck up the band to play what would be the first of three identical sets … Andrew Logan’s tin-roof ceiling rattled and shook and the audience took cover. 475

Jordan told Bromberg: “The Sex Pistols started up, and they did not know what had hit them. Andrew [Logan] was freaking out, actually because it was like anarchy had been transported into his little paradise”. 476

The bad boy performance of the Sex Pistols was being orchestrated by Westwood and McLaren. There were music press people present and, sensing a photo opportunity, McLaren told Jordan to strip as the band played. Jordan ignored McLaren’s request but John Lydon languidly undertook what McLaren was hand signalling. As an experience, Jordan described it to Craig Bromberg: “in the middle of Iggy Pop’s ‘No Fun’, John broke all the zips on my leotard, which was a real piss off”. 477

There is a controversy over who originated the ‘punk look’. From her initial appearance with the Sex Pistols, Jordan became the poster girl for London punk, for ‘SEX’ and the Sex Pistols. However, both Craig Bromberg and Clinton Heylin credit the punk look to the American singer and poet, Richard Hell. In Bromberg’s The Wicked Ways of Malcolm McLaren, Hell states:

I originated virtually all the visuals – haircut, torn … and safety-pinned clothes, fifties suits with loosened ties, leather jackets … and shirts with scattered geometrical shapes … and messages drawn on them. 478

476 Ibid. Jordan’s description of the events as anarchy in paradise suggests it was at Logan’s party that Jarman found inspiration to depict an Elizabethan walled garden and a future wasteland of weeds, murder and flaming docklands, populated by anarchists in Jubilee.
477 Ibid.
Of course, Malcolm McLaren encountered Hell on his trip to New York in 1975 and 
would later describe him in Romantic terms, endowing Hell with the ‘look’ of the poet, 
Thomas Chatterton. But other writers, like Jon Savage credit the very first appearance 
of London’s punk look entirely to Jordan.

This is reinforced by John Lydon, who says, unequivocally that Jordan had the 
‘original’ punk look. Jordan was also muse to Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm 
McLaren, and it was her look that inspired them to shift their fashion boutique from ‘Too 
Fast To Live, Too Young to Die’ into the fetishist store ‘SEX’ in 1975. Jordan was the 
inspiration and muse to Derek Jarman; Jubilee was his attempt to mythologise Jordan and 
her milieu. Finally, Jordan bewitched the young Stuart Leslie Goddard, who would play 
the role of Kid in Jubilee and then became Jordan’s lover. She, in turn, became his muse 
and manager. Under Jordan’s guidance Stuart Leslie Goddard was restyled as the major 
teenybopper punk and New Romantic, Adam Ant. In all, five of London’s punk 
progenitors name Jordan as their muse.

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479 McLaren’s idea about the ‘look’ derives from The Death of Chatterton painted by Henry Wallis in 1856, which hangs in the Tate Gallery. The irony is that the ‘portrait’ is imagined. It was painted eighty years after Chatterton’s suicide by arsenic, when no authentic likeness or portrait survived. For a full account see Richard Holmes study of ‘Chatterton’ in Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer, King Penguin, Harmondsworth 2005.

480 As can be seen in his performance in Jarman’s Jubilee, Stuart Leslie Goddard began his punk career with all the right punk credentials, only later did he choose or allow himself to be repackaged in the teenybopper guise. Alex Ogg describes the early career of Adam and the Ants as “one of the most dangerous, exciting, daring, and, sadly on reflection unhinged bands of the 70s.” Alex Ogg, No More Heroes, Cherry Red Books, London, 2006: p. 19.

481 Possibly Jordan’s buxom figure may have been behind Malcolm McLaren’s impetuous decision to hire the American film director, Russ Meyer, famed for his predilection for actresses with pendulous bosoms, to direct The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle.
In *England’s Dreaming* Jon Savage concludes that Jordan was, if not the first punk in the world – this honour being reserved for Richard Hell – then the very first Sex Pistol. Jordan’s look was therefore synonymous as London punk.\(^{482}\)

In an interview with Savage, Jordan told him: “I liked to treat myself as a painting. I did not consider that people would be offended by it.” But they were. “Every time she stepped out the door”, Savage comments, “she put herself on the line. Her life was a *pas de deux* with outrage”.\(^{483}\) Savage tells us that Jordan was “a living advertisement”\(^{484}\) for Westwood and McLaren’s ‘SEX’. At the time, nobody would wear the gear from ‘SEX’ outside the store; but Jordan changed that. So even if Jordan was not the leadsinger of the Sex Pistols, she was still their front-woman back at HQ, 430 The King’s Road. Along with ‘SEX’, according to Savage, Jordan was the originator of British punk’s essence: shock and outrage.

Although Jordan had already played a role in the opening sequence of *Sebastiane*, it was the spectacle of Jordan and the Sex Pistols on the night of the Miss World Alternative Universe party that piqued Jarman’s interest. After Logan’s party, Jarman sought Jordan out. He suggested a filmic collaboration in which Jarman would record Jordan’s *milieu* on Super 8, in more or less documentary fashion. Jarman’s associates at Megalovision, James Whaley and Howard Malin, the backers and distributors of *Sebastiane*, saw the possibilities of a feature-length, subculture exploitation flick. And to give Jarman his due, this was long before Malcolm McLaren would seek the low budget exploitation talents of the American filmmaker, Russ Meyer, in directing McLaren’s concept for a film about the Sex Pistols and punk that would become *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle*. It is important to note that McLaren and Temple utilised Jarman’s *Jubilee* like a cast off

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\(^{482}\) Jordan certainly put the ‘punque’ back into punk. The word punk derives from the archaic English, in turn originating from the French *punque*. It means a female prostitute, ‘a painted lady’, rather than the American derived ‘punk’, a young, male petty criminal who is made a sexual partner by hardened male criminals in a United States jail. Although it must also be said that unlike many of the other shop assistants at SEX, Jordan was never ‘on the game’ but she certainly dressed the part.


\(^{484}\) Ibid.
garment from which to scavenge ideas and to re-tailor a new, refashioned and remodelled version that they might call their own.

6.3 **JUBILEE: MISUNDERSTANDING PUNK**

6.3.1 *Defying gravity*

Episodic and off-putting in its amateurishness, Derek Jarman’s *Jubilee* is not an accessible film. The performers lack ‘acting’ talent; it is slow, heavy with dialogue, static, pretentious, indulgent, and somewhat undergraduate in its earnest art student approach to big ideas, or what Chris Brazier described as “esoteric artiness”. The written word far exceeds the possibilities of the cinema, while the lyrical so eluded Jarman when it came to representing poetic and abstract notions on film (especially on a low budget), that there is a gulf between the images that have been captured on celluloid and Jarman’s writing in the screenplay.

*Jubilee* opens with a framing story set in Elizabethan England which functions as a play-within-a-play induction scene typical of Elizabethan dramaturgy. Jarman’s induction scene introduces the themes of the enclosed garden within the city and the country, the pastoral and the *urbis*, which he will use to compare the cultivated Renaissance garden and the weed-choked, infertile wastelands of a future city in decline. The Elizabethan era is Jarman’s idealised England. It is an idyll of English gardens, embodying a love of art and the patronage of great artists, and an age that revels in ideas, beauty and learning: it is also regarded as a far less repressive age for homosexuals (like Jarman and Richard O’Brien), than the modern Elizabethan age. Like Shakespeare, Jarman uses the untended garden as a symbol of poor government. For Jarman, the wasteland and the plastic or over-tended garden is a metaphor for the welfare state of London under the Wilson Labour Government of 1964–70 and 1974–6. Jarman’s anarchistic dedication at the front of *Jubilee* reads:

485 Chris Brazier in Melody Maker as cited by Vivienne Westwood in her ‘Open t-shirt to Derek Jarman ...’. 
Punk revelled in negativity where anarchy, chaos, riot and destruction were ends in themselves; but Jarman’s apocalyptic future is what has befallen the England that for William Blake was ‘Jerusalem’: post-industrial England’s once green and pleasant land had become overrun by dark Satanic mills. Another of Jarman’s influences is Edward Gibbon who was writing his six-volume *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–8) during the Gordon Riots, and *Jubilee* and its 1986 companion-piece, *The Last of England*, are Jarman’s *History and Decline and Fall*.\(^{487}\)

There is also a more practical reason for this curious opening in Elizabethan England. For *Jubilee*, Jarman cannibalised a former unproduced script about Elizabeth I and her court astrologer, the magician John Dee, titled *The Angelic Conversation of John Dee*. *Jubilee* is a bricolage of Jarman’s own ‘Elizabethan’ play and the peculiar elements of punk.

The Induction scene at the start of *Jubilee* is set in a high-walled garden; the year is 1578, precisely 400 years prior to the film’s release. Helen Wellington-Lloyd, dressed in Elizabethan garb, carries a goblet into the home of John Dee at Mortlake, halfway between London and the Queen’s residence at Richmond Palace.\(^{488}\) The role of John Dee is played by Richard O’Brien of *Rocky Horror* fame.\(^{489}\)

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\(^{487}\) In a coffee shop scene a character will refer to the absence of Amyl Nitrate as due to her writing her *Decline and Fall*.

\(^{488}\) In 1583 John Dee would have his own experience of the London mob – by proxy, while he was travelling in Europe – when this Mortlake residence was invaded and his library of esoteric texts destroyed by superstitious rioters who feared his magical skills.

\(^{489}\) O’Brien is the writer of the smash-hit rock musical stageplay *The Rocky Horror Show*, in which he also played the role of Frankenfurter’s handyman and butler, Riff-Raff. O’Brien’s presence is an important and iconic homage for Jarman because the lyrics of *The Rocky Horror Show*’s penultimate tune ‘Don’t Dream It, Be It’ echo in *Jubilee* and this sentiment is something of a mantra for Jarman. Another actor from
Standing with her back to the Tudor fireplace, is Queen Elizabeth as played by Jenny Runacre. (Runacre plays two roles in *Jubilee*, Elizabeth, and one of the wild girls’ gang, Bod). Dee casts a spell whereupon, a young man dressed in lycra (David Haughton) appears. Dee describes him as an angel.\(^{490}\) In an example of Jarman’s undergraduate Shakespearian, Dee proposes that Elizabeth should “descant upon the shadow of her times”.

The frame story or Induction is complete and we are thrown forward in time to Jarman’s vision of a dystopic future. The first thing that the juxtaposition shows up is the discrepancy between the concept of an Elizabethan garden and the weeds, smoke, bonfires, piles of bricks, and burnt out and abandoned workers’ cottages of London’s post-industrial landscape. Low Victorian redbrick terraces are towered over by the rusty steel frame of an abandoned gasworks, its skeletal ribcage a post-industrial reminder against grey skies. In the foreground, three youths loiter and smoke cigarettes beneath a piece of graffiti stating ‘Post Modern’. There is a crashed Volkswagen lying on its side. Inside is a young, bearded man, a hippy perhaps, who is either dead or concussed.\(^{491}\) The loitering youths do nothing to help him. Instead, one of the youths takes the victim’s sunglasses and puts them on.

From the rear seat of a Rolls Royce, we are given a moving POV shot that looks out across the long silver bonnet and its Rolls Royce emblem onto a broken tarmac road that winds through a laneway with walls of corrugated iron.\(^{492}\) There are distant and

\(^{490}\) Historically, Dee claimed to have the power to summon the spirit Uriel, who would make his way into Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* as Ariel, filmed by Jarman in the year after *Jubilee*’s release.

\(^{491}\) In an uncanny parallel with this image from Jarman’s *Jubilee*, in a photo taken by Jane Ashley in summer, 1976: Paul Simonon (The Clash) and Viv Albertine (later of the Slits) pose beside an upturned VW wreck in a ruined urban landscape (possibly Chalk Farm). The image is reproduced in Caroline Coon’s 1988: *The New Wave Punk Rock Explosion*, Omnibus, London, 1982: p. 6, and was published in 1977 and might have been available to Jarman in his researches.

\(^{492}\) A similar image will appear in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* with the Sex Pistols’ roadie, ‘Boogie’ Tiberi ferrying the Soo ‘Catwoman’ Lucas look-alike to join Malcolm aboard a train where she will assassinate the Mick Jagger proxy, B.J.
sporadic ‘rat-a-tat-tat’ sounds that could be either jackhammers at work or machine gun fire. The conflation or confusion of the two is ironic and quite suitable to the landscape and to Jarman’s theme. In this laneway a gang of teenage punk girls are beating and kicking a woman with curly hair. Another woman dressed in army fatigue pants, her hair cropped and dyed a bright carrot orange, enters with a machine gun. She wears a black jacket painted with a white handwritten scrawl: a few words and half words are discernible, including ‘Mother’ and ‘Apathet’. Played by Toyah Wilcox, this character will be introduced to us as Mad. She herds the gang of girls away from their victim, a housewife and mother. The frame widens to reveal a perambulator, abandoned in the street with fiery red flames and dark smoke issuing from its interior. Toting her gun, Mad tells the punk girls to “Run, c’mon run!”

Jarman’s near-future dystopia is populated by feral women, who run amok in packs. With the dual icons of Valerie Solanas and Myra Hindley, the castration and murder of men would seem de rigueur, however under this reign of anarchy there is no solidarity among the women, except perhaps within their pack, and so these packs cheerfully attack and kill other women, especially mothers with children.

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493 The cast for this gang of girls are all members of another of Malcolm McLaren’s projects, the punk rock group The Slits.

494 This pram threatened by the modern is an apocalyptic trope and it might owe its origins to playwright, Edward Bond’s play Saved. Saved was a major controversy from its first performance at the Royal Court in Sloane Square in 1966. The play depicted the stoning to death of a child in its pram on a South London estate. The play was prosecuted by the Lord Chamberlain, closed and the Royal Court ordered to pay fifty guineas. It established a strong anti-censorship ideal among London artists who questioned the role of the Lord Chamberlain, whose authority to vet what the public chose to see, seemed anachronistic and archaic, as this authority had been established as far back as Elizabeth. George Miller’s Mad Max, shot in 1978 and released in 1979, opens with a car chase on the semi-industrial outskirts of a metropolis, where a young mother pushing a pram almost falls victim to the irresponsible driving of a testosterone-fuelled road rager.
6.3.2 *Amyl nitrate makes history*

With the twin settings of Elizabethan past and postmodern near future established, Jarman now introduces his main character, Amyl Nitrate (Jordan). Over the image of a largely blacked out world globe, Amyl Nitrate, the film’s ‘historian’ reads aloud:

They discovered this: they took to fighting with guns. The rest of the world sighed a sigh of relief to be rid of them and got on with their own business. England slowly sank into the sea. Very little is surprising today because in this age … we are not prepared to be surprised. From the dull blank suburbs – a generation of people who have grown up, not with cinema but with the T.V. Because of television we know about social problems, political problems and racial problems.

This is one of Jarman’s complicated themes: firstly, we hear contempt for television, a medium that has simplified society into images of intractable social problems. But secondly, and deeper than this, for Jarman, postmodernism had delivered a fatal blow to history, when all grand narratives became suspect, including that of art and *Ars Gratias Ars*. Thirdly, here we see Amyl Nitrate, a woman with her own authoritative voice writing history or ‘her story’. The dystopic future has been inherited by the formerly ‘weaker’ sex. Indeed, the two incestuous brothers Sphinx and Angel make speeches to the artist Viv about how men have ruled for the past 5000 years and now that society, through their mismanagement, has devolved into anarchy and chaos, finally men are intellectually capable of giving over the reins to women. In a country at war with itself, forgotten by the rest of the world, Amyl Nitrate concludes her lecture by delivering one rule to live by: “Our school motto: make your desires reality. Don’t dream it, be it.”

While civilisation, with its law and order, is about the enforcement of powerful and primal social taboos, such as not sleeping with or killing your mother, your father, your siblings, (killing) your wife or your children, in this dystopic future, the archaic and

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495 Amyl Nitrate is a jokey reference to the chemical compound amyl nitrate or butyl nitrate, also known as ‘poppers’ (the phial in which it is stored has a resemblance to a party popper). The chemical amyl nitrate was popular in gay clubs at the time *Jubilee* was made as its inhalation relaxed the anal sphincter and its ‘rush’ prolonged the euphoria of orgasm. Jarman was purportedly rather too fond of poppers. See Anthony Peake, *Derek Jarman*, Quartet, London 1999: p. 241.

496 *Jubilee.*
quaint rule of law and order has been abolished in favour of the fulfilment of a fierce individualism. The family unit has utterly disappeared and been replaced by the gang and the pack. Civilization is no more and the only rule to live by is the pursuit of, enactment and gratification of one’s own desires. Unlike Existentialist philosophy that allows for the presence of others – albeit, as Jean Paul Sartre remarked, “Hell is other people” – Amyl’s anarchism is totally atomised and absolutely selfish. Amyl considers the *ncien regime* thus:

In those days, desires weren’t allowed to become reality, so fantasy was substituted for them. Films, books, pictures – they called it art. When your desires become reality you don’t need fantasy or art. 497

But is this conflation of art and fantasy valid? Art and fantasy may share the same root beginnings in the imagination but a fantasy is only ever that, something imagined. Even when a fantasy is enacted, it is still just pretend. In fact, to make a fantasy real is to end its life as fantasy. Art, on the other hand, suggests manufacturing a hard copy of the imagined or envisioned. Amyl Nitrate applauds the convicted child killer Myra Hindley for making her darkest fantasies real. For Amyl Nitrate, Myra Hindley is a martyr, punished by the unenlightened ways of the Old World.498

But, muses Jarman, could murder ever possibly be art? Myra and her lover Ian Brady500 may have shared fantasies of raping and murdering children, but they went

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497 *Jubilee.*

498 Jordan’s appreciation of Myra Hindley and Valerie Solanas as proto-postfeminist figures, makes Jarman uneasy.

499 On a purely superficial level there is a resemblance between Myra Hindley’s mugshot hairdo and Jordan’s beehive. This may suggest that punk’s progenitors had a tendency to adopt an image, without judgement, other than they were attracted to their reflection and only afterwards, rationalise a reason for adopting this image as icon, in order to hide their initial unrationised narcissistic attraction.

500 Myra Hindley was arrested in 1965 for her involvement in five separate abductions of three children and two teenagers in conjunction with Ian Brady. Each of these involved sexual abuse, torture and murder. Known collectively as the ‘Moors Murderers’, Hindley and Brady made a tape of one of the children begging for her lives and it was this evidence that led to their conviction. In 2002 Hindley and Brady confessed to the murders of two more children.
beyond a fantasy and made it reality at least seven times. Amyl suggests that to be an artist is about being strong enough not to be swayed, no matter how much pain and suffering it may cause you or others. Jordan tells us:

Myra’s crimes were the Old because nobody had any imagination then. They did not know how to make their fantasies reality. They were not artists like Myra. One can smile now at the naivety.  

In *Jubilee*, the recording of a murder is presented as an artistic endeavour. I think Jarman’s point is that the selfish and naïve anarchism of the sort he believed the punks espoused was irresponsible. Without a higher morality *Jubilee* illustrates Jarman’s belief that punk’s self-centred anarchism would lead inevitably to thrill kills and snuff movies.

However, it is at this point that Jarman, through the character of Jordan, veers off on a new tangent; here Jarman postulates that if murder has become punk art, then punk’s contribution to art is art’s murder.

When on my fifteenth birthday, law and order were finally abolished; all these statistics that were a substitute for reality disappeared. The crime rate dropped to zero. Who believed in statistics then? Only the vital ones [Jordan adjusts her ample bosom]. In any case, I started to dance. I wanted to defy gravity.  

Here we see Jarman equating punk’s negative art with murder as an art, and this is his way of warning of the end of civilisation. For punk practitioners like Vivienne Westwood, this is why she is so convinced that Jarman misunderstood punk.

6.3.3 *Murdering the arts*

The Super 8 movie filmstock (which this sequence of *Jubilee* was shot on), known as Ektachrome, no longer manufactured, was extremely sensitive to the colour red and produced vivid hues of this colour. When Super 8 is ‘blown up’ to sixteen-millimetre filmstock, a frame-size exactly twice that of Super 8, the ‘grain’ becomes twice as

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501 *Jubilee.*

502 Ibid.
prevalent. Jarman could not resist the Ektachrome filmstock’s combination of gritty grain and exotic hued flame, to deliver an instantaneous sense of nostalgia. It is this nostalgia that gives Jubilee its melancholic tone. In the Super 8 footage, Jordan dances around a bonfire in pointes and ballet costume. A longhaired youth tosses paperback books onto the flames. Beyond the bonfire two figures stand by – one naked and wearing a mask that is a copy of the face of Michelangelo’s David; the other, dressed in a black zoot suit with stovepipe trousers, wears a skull mask – one signifying death and the other desire. As books burn and classical music plays, a pretty young man hacks at his shoulder-length blond locks with a pair of blunt scissors and the scorching image of a flaming Union Jack fills the frame. This could be an oblique reference to Fahrenheit 451, a novel by Ray Bradbury and filmed by the French filmmaker, Francois Truffaut. Fahrenheit 451503 is the parable of a totalitarian state, where firemen, whose job was once to put out fires, are now employed to find and burn books.504

As Amyl Nitrate has made clear, the balletic art, like the book, is dead; nobody is interested in it anymore, not even Amyl and although she is interested in creating her own history, it is problematic:

… you can weave facts anyway you like. Good guys can swap places with bad guys. You might think Richard III of England was bad but you’d be wrong. 505

And Amyl asks self-reflexively:

What separates Hitler from Napoleon, or even Alexander? The size of the destruction or is he nearer to us in time? Was Churchill a hero? Did he alter history for the better? 506

503 Fahrenheit 451 being the temperature at which paper combusts.
504 Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 (1953), George Orwell’s 1984 (1948) and Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World (1932) all chose near-future settings to make their parable of the totalitarian states they feared they were already living in.
505 Jubilee.
506 Ibid.
In a future where morality is reduced to doing unto the others you like, only what you would have done unto you, all Amyl is left with for navigating this brave new world are mouldering monoliths, impossible to know, like Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias’, and unanswerable questions. Jarman’s point is that what we have here is a list of past historical-figures, all makers of history, destroyers and conquerors, all of whom were male.

6.3.4 Regicide
Later in life, Jarman will claim to have predicted the coming of Margaret Thatcher and foresees her in the character of Bod in his film Jubilee. The murderer of Elizabeth II is Bod, whose name is a shortening of Boadicea, and refers to the legendary warrior queen of the Iceni (known to Romans as Boudica). We see a weedy, flat no-man’s land and a redbrick blockhouse. What appears to be a drably attired housewife trots into the frame. The housewife has something wrapped in a bundle that she carries, close to her chest. She takes shelter in the blockhouse. Another woman (shortly to be introduced as Bod) is dressed in stovepipe black pants, a black suitcoat, a croupier’s visor and bare-chested, is given a medium shot followed by a cut back to the weedy no-man’s land with the blockhouse. This clumsy edit reveals the shot as a reverse and that Bod is in pursuit of the fleeing housewife. The fleeing housewife is meant to be Elizabeth II. Even for Jarman, who will show the thrill-kills of Lounge Lizard, Crabs’s toy boy, the castration murder of one policeman and the bombing of another, he nonetheless baulks at illustrating the explicit act of regicide. The self-censoring of an essential visual plot point is one of the things that Westwood criticised about Jubilee as Jarman’s lack of bravery in not showing the murder of Her Majesty the Queen.

Back at HQ, a doorbell sounds and I am struck by how quaint it is that in the dystopic future the door bell will still presage a dramatic entrance. Bod enters and yells, “close

507 Anthony Peake, Derek Jarman, Quartet, London 1999: p. 244.
508 The legend claims that Boadicea was forced to watch the rape of her daughters by Roman agents, and sought revenge by attacking and razing the timber Roman city of London in AD 60. See Clive Bloom, Violent London, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 2003: pp. 10–13.
your eyes”. She poses on the room’s upper balcony with the stolen Queen’s coronation crown on her head, and forms the hand shape and sounds of an imaginary Sten gun firing down upon Mad and Amyl. Asked where she found the crown, Bod tells the girls that she captured it in Deptford. She adds that, in her opinion, it is out of fashion. As befitting her leadership of their motorcycle gang, Bod tells Mad and Amyl that she is going to turn this out-of-date crown into a crash helmet.

Jarman, punk and his intended audience all held, if not anti-monarchical opinions then open mockery of the royalty. Ridicule of the royal family was then common-place. One need look no further than the children’s comedy act The Goodies\(^509\) in which not an episode went by without a laugh at the expense of members of the royal family. Jarman’s adoption of this form of parody is yoked to his own concerns about the Elizabeth age in which he found himself living. As he saw it, this new Elizabethan age was culturally bereft, presided over by a monarch with neither cultural nor artistic sensibilities. The Queen’s Coronation in 1953 and the earlier Festival of Britain in 1951, had promised a new golden age. By the mid-seventies Jarman saw that this second Elizabethan age was clearly in decline. The punks, his audience, the workingclass cockneys and even the middle classes who watched The Goodies with their children would have agreed. This popular comedy reduced Charles to big ears,\(^510\) the Queen to an automated waving hand on a stick at any window,\(^511\) Philip to a bad-tempered, bumbling, racist, polo-playing philanderer,\(^512\) and Princes Anne was compared to a gin-swigging whinnying horse.\(^513\)

\(^509\) The Goodies television format was aimed at children but tackled adult politics and current affairs. Their episode on punk, ‘Punky Business’ is particularly insightful. Doing in one’s betters is real music hall stuff and the cornerstone of working-class cockney humour. We see an instance of this in Graham Greene’s ‘The Destructors’ when the idea of beauty is associated with a man in a top hat with a Lord Haw Haw accent at the local music hall.

\(^510\) Every Goodies episode that presented Prince Charles.


\(^513\) Ibid.
Jarman saw these same savage satiric energies amplified in the Sex Pistols’ act. If the Sex Pistols did not openly call for revolution and the murder of the Royal family then they nonetheless espoused much of the imaginative landscape associated with civil war: anarchy, chaos, violence to passersby, outright abuse of Her Majesty. Jarman was more incisive: his statement went to the root cause. Where punk was a noisy rebellion, Jarman’s vision recognised the source of the problem at that time. More so than Westwood and McLaren and the Sex Pistols who were content with posturing, creating outrage and alarm with t-shirts and slogans and swastikas, with *Jubilee*, Jarman saw regicide as the inevitable outcome.

The idea of a British revolution, like those that had taken place in France and Russia, was never a punk concern. Even the student uprising in Paris in May 1968, was erroneously misunderstood by Malcolm McLaren as a (slightly) dangerous, sexy street carnival. McLaren’s turn to the Gordon Riots is again an expression of revolt without revolution. Punk was a reversal crowd but it was not a revolutionary mob. Punk wanted to say no and to say it with attitude. This is where Jarman and Westwood diverged. Jarman valued what had been lost and warned that by making icons of Hindley and Solanas, fetishising the Cambridge rapist’s mask, the swastika and Nazism, and promoting themes of anarchy and chaos and the anti-Christ, then punk was unleashing terrible mob energies that would end in regicide, the end of civilisation, the murder of art and the unimaginably ugly face of genuine anarchy: that of a civil war of one upon one.

6.3.5  *The uncertainty of art in a fallen world*

*Jubilee* then is Jarman’s rumination upon the extinction of art and especially the superseding of painting by other more modern art forms, especially photography and film. In the postmodern world, art has become mass materialism, mass market, mass reproduced. Jarman was appalled by this: when it came to art Jarman was elitist.

In a picture palace (which may be the Islington Screen on the Green, where the Sex Pistols performed regular midnight to dawn gigs along with Kenneth Anger films, and where Jarman’s *Sebastiane* screened), we meet the character of Borgia Ginz, the future’s
media mogul who dictates the tastes of the people by giving them exactly what they want. Being fed live goldfish out of a fish bowl, Borgia Ginz is great fun:

You want to know my story babe, it is easy. A generation grew up and forgot to lead their lives. They were so busy watching my endless movie. It is power, babe, I don’t create it, I own it. I owned their world of flickering shadow – BBC, TVC, ITV, ABC, ATV, M … G … M, KGB. You name it, I bought them all, the whole fucking alphabet. Without me they don’t exist. 514

In addition to the *Rocky Horror Show* stageplay (filmed in 1975), this is *Jubilee’s* only cinematic intertextual reference. All of Jarman’s intertextual references are to other arts, such as writing, painting, ballet and classical musical. So we will take a moment to consider this film reference in greater detail. Here the character of Borgia Ginz evokes the speech given by the network chairman Arthur Jensen to the former news anchorman, Howard Beale in Paddy Chayefsky’s screenplay for the Sidney Lumet film, *Network* (1976). *Network* is the story of Howard Beale, a network news anchorman of twenty-five years, who is given notice after poor ratings. On air that night, Howard breaks from his autocue to tell his audience that he intends to kill himself live-to-air on Tuesday in one week’s time. Of course his ratings rise and the network doesn’t want him dead and he is given his own show: *The Howard Beale Show* with total editorial control. So begins a series of Savanarola-like rants. Direct to camera Howard gives an insider’s speech about just what absolute power network television has in the United States of America and how absolute power corrupts absolutely.

We’ll tell you any shit you want to hear! We deal in illusion man! None of it’s true. But you people sit there – all of you – day after day, night after night, all ages, colours, creeds. We’re all you know. You’re beginning to believe this illusion we’re spinning here. You’re beginning to think the tube is reality and your own lives are unreal. You do whatever the tube tells you. You dress like the tube, you eat like the tube, you raise your children like the tube. 515

514  *Jubilee.*
This will lead Howard Beale to tell his audience to turn off their televisions and stick their heads out their windows and scream, “I’m mad as hell and I’m not going to take it.” However, it is the network’s president, Arthur Jensen who will tell Howard Beale:

There is no America. There is no democracy. There is only IBM and ITT and AT and T and Dupont, Dow, Union Carbide and Exxon. Those are the nations of the world today … We no longer live in a world of nations and ideologies, Mr Beale. The world is a college of corporations, inexorably determined by the immutable by-laws of business. The world is a business, Mr Beale! 516

For Jarman, with Ginz’s promiscuous comingling of MGM, KGB and BBC, the irony is that entertainment companies who create films purely for profit have been mixed up with a Cold War bogey, the Russian secret police, and state and privately owned entertainment producers. For Jarman, it is a kind of miscegenation of state and business that can only result in misuse of state powers, corruption and graft. Ginz’s monologue is interrupted by plot:

Bod: My god! …[It is] Amyl Nitrate.
Ginz: It is my entry in the Eurovision song contest. 517

Dressed as the iconic ‘ruler of the waves’ Britannia, replete with trident and bronze helmet, Jordan gyrates in knickers, suspenders and Union Jack t-shirt. The music is rapped, so that the phrase ‘Rule Britannia’ is endlessly repeated and the music is rock ‘n’ roll. With ostrich feathers, most associated with backlit adult dancers, 518 Amyl transforms herself into the likeness of a turkey: she is completely unafraid of self-parody. This scene – a filmclip really – transcends the creakiness and overreaching of so much of Jubilee and it is for this scene that Jarman’s foray into the world of punk is remembered fondly: even by his detractors.

517 Jubilee.
518 Once associated with Josephine Baker but now popular among strippers and Vegas showgirls.
After this, the rest of Jubilee is sturm und drang. A critique of the welfare state, of tower blocks and parents who, nannied by the state, in turn take it for granted that it is up to the state to nanny their children. Two lacunae follow. In the first, Viv, Sphinx and Angel steal a car and go to visit an ex-military man, Max, whose working-class English garden is populated entirely by no-maintenance plastic flowers. Max laments all that taxpayer money spent on mutually assured nuclear destruction and nobody with the guts to press the button. In the second lacunae, an improvisation with Kid throwing a bottle of milk at the Albert memorial is a rather muted affair when Kid merely lets the milkbottle slip through his fingers. And thus the chase that will take us to the film’s climax begins. While robbing a bingo hall, two policemen murder Sphinx and Angel. Kid escapes, only to be pursued and he too is murdered. Viv returns to the girls’ hideout weeping. In an act of violent retribution Amyl’s all-girl gang hunt down the two policemen: castrating one and bombing the other.

In the English countryside, safely walled away from the urban chaos, it is revealed that Borgia Ginz is living happily with an aged Adolf Hitler. Given the last word, Borgia Ginz tells us with a maniacal giggle, “They all sign up in the end.” Now on the white lime cliffs of Dover, evoking Vera Lynn’s ‘(There’ll be Bluebirds Over) The White Cliffs of Dover’ the final scene with Elizabeth, Uriel, John Dee and Helen takes place on a cliffshelf above the glistening sea. This spot is an old lime quarry named Dancing Ledge because its size is roughly that of a ballroom dance floor. It was a favourite place of Jarman’s and supplied the title of his autobiography. Jubilee

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519 The song promised returning soldiers but also the East Enders, London’s working class who had suffered the very worst of the Blitz, that: “I’ll never forget the people I met” from all classes, “Braving those angry skies/I remember well as the shadows fell/The light of hope in their eyes/And though I’m far away/I can still hear them say/Bombs up/But when the dawn comes up/There’ll be bluebirds over/The white cliffs of Dover/Tomorrow/Just you wait and see/ There’ll be love and laughter and peace ever after/Tomorrow when the world is free” and for the farmers who had defended their home, a idyll awaits, where “The shepherd will tend his sheep” for the coal miners, “The valley will bloom again” and there will be money enough so that poor “Jimmy will go to sleep/In his own little room again”.

concludes with the haunting sounds of seagulls and the gentle wash of waves on pebbles. In his autobiography *Dancing Ledge* (1983), Derek Jarman says of *Jubilee*:

> Afterwards, the film turned prophetic. Dr Dee’s vision came true – the streets burned in Brixton and Toxteth, Adam [Ant] was on *Top of the Pops* and signed up with Margaret Thatcher to sing at the Falklands Ball. They all sign up in one way or the other.  

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Reading this, I cannot help thinking of all the things prophesied by John Dee via Jarman’s script that did not come to pass.

In Westwood’s eyes, Jarman had failed to capture the spirit of punk. Queens and gardens, Shakespearian, time travel, what did that all mean? Jarman’s Elizabethan themes were completely irrelevant, even anathema to punk, while his depiction of punk’s regicidal views were not in accord with Westwood’s. Westwood never wanted to kill Queen Elizabeth II who in 1992 bestowed the OBE on Westwood at Buckingham Palace. What Jarman got right was the near dystopic future that would feature in upcoming television series and films like *Quatermass*, *Mad Max II*, *Class of 1984* and *Blade Runner*. He also got right his critique of the new tabloid media nexus of print, radio and television that rewarded narcissistic exhibitionism irrelevant of talent, and combined it with stupefying and instantaneous gratification by infinite duplication and immediate playback. But for punk, Jarman’s greatest legacy, was his *Rule Britannia* dance sequence with Jordan that was the inspiration for McLaren to shoot the unforgettable ‘My Way’ sequence with Sid Vicious in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*.

In this chapter we have seen how the shopfloor at 430 The King’s Road was pivotal in the manufacture of punk; that it was here that Bernie Rhodes, Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood conspired, making t-shirt manifestos, gathering individuals like Jordan and Helen Wellington-Lloyd, seeking and auditioning the boy with green hair who would become Johnny Rotten and forge the male punk look, punk attitude and punk ethos with his inflammatory lyrics and hobgoblin performance. We have seen how this

nascent punk scene – all chaotic and anarchic energy – was transported into artist Andrew Logan’s ‘paradise’, the Miss Alternative World held on Valentine’s Day, 1976 where the shopgirl Jordan caught the attention of filmmaker, and punk’s very first biographer, Derek Jarman. Jordan inspired Jarman’s cinematic vision of the role of punk in the imminent dystopic future. As such it proved to be self-fulfilling, if not in reality, then in the virtual world of cinema, capturing the zeitgeist that would be embraced by the international community, becoming cutting-edge popular culture around the world.

Other concerns of Jarman’s were dismissed as not being punk; after all, punk was still fluid and inventing itself in the public and the punks’ own imaginations. Jarman’s personal artistic tropes that recur throughout his *oeuvre* were derided by Vivienne Westwood in her t-shirt film review of *Jubilee*. Westwood derided Jarman’s interest in such historical figures as the magician John Dee, the court of Elizabeth I, the era and poetry of Shakespeare and Marlowe’s plays (which Jarman would film: *The Tempest* [1979] and *Edward II* [1991]).

She did not take direct umbrage with such personal quandaries of Jarman’s: wondering at the role of the artist in a near-future based entirely upon utilitarian concepts where artists and culture makers need not apply; nor his concerns with photography’s negation of painting, a concern to be further tackled in his eponymous biography, *Caravaggio* (1986); nor questioning the autonomy of such mediums as televisions or the tabloids, and their devaluing of the image through instantaneous playback, infinite repetition and proliferation. Westwood did not take umbrage with Jarman smuggling such themes into a film about punk, her punk, the punk she felt she held a copyright over but for Westwood, *Jubilee* really was all so much bollocks.

I have also considered *Jubilee* as no other cultural historian has to this point: teasing out Jarman’s themes about strong iconic women in English culture and history, from Boadicea to Elizabeth I to Britannia and comparing them to the lacklustre era of Elizabeth II. I have also considered Jarman’s idea of Garden England, this sceptred isle, and contrasted it with the declining post-war British welfare state, in *Jubilee* compared unfavourably with redbrick bombsites, Max’s plastic garden and the failed experiment of council tower blocks that became slums in the sky. Jarman could see the New Deal offered to the culture makers and the working class was a failure; where the promise to
the working class, who had had it so hard for so long, voiced by Vera Lynn, had been a lie.

*Jubilee* is Jarman and Jordan’s vision of a women’s world. Strong women dominate *Jubilee* with every one a queen of sorts. All the women are drawn from or modelled on the unusual and strong women that Jordan had befriended through her employment at 430 The King’s Road. They are Jordan’s girlfriends but they are also the women that Malcolm McLaren had gathered to himself: Bod, standing in for Vivienne Westwood, with Jordan and Helen Wellington-Lloyd as themselves. The figure of Crabs is modelled on the sixteen-year-old SEX shop assistant and Bromley contingent member, Debbie Juvenile, and Mad is a female Johnny Rotten (hair dyed carrot red instead of green, but with equally inflammatory antics). Jordan’s all-girl-play-world owes its origins to her girlfriends who gathered at the salon that was 430 The King’s Road but in turn *Jubilee* reveals something about Malcolm McLaren, the man who had gathered this coterie of extraordinary, unusual and strong women around him. It is therefore apt in the next chapter that I turn to the figure of Malcolm McLaren whose absence from Jarman’s *Jubilee* is an act of startling omission. It is almost an expunging. Known for her fierce championing and protection of McLaren, in *Jubilee* Malcolm is negated: is it any wonder that Vivienne Westwood hated *Jubilee!* We will never know whether this expurgation of Malcolm McLaren was intentional. We also know from the diary of Glitterbest’s secretary Sophie Richmond that in February 1977 Malcolm began to formulate and obsess about making his own punk movie. In this way McLaren would put himself back into the punk spectacle from which he had been edited out.

This chapter began with 430 The King’s Road and having now described Derek Jarman’s take on punk, the next chapter will consider the unscrupulous, magpie genius of

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522 Indeed Jarman can’t help his visual punning on the queen and queens. Among the queens represented on screen are Elizabeth I, Elizabeth II, Boadicea, Britannia but also the transvestite or ‘queen’ Lounge Lizard. Further to Jarman’s layering of puns, Lounge Lizard was played by Wayne County (later; post operation, Jayne County), who came to London to perform in Andy Warhol’s theatrical production *Pork*, and fronted a CBGBs group called The Elizabethhs.
Malcolm McLaren and his drive to make – to the detriment and physical harm of the punk rock group about whom it was to be made – *the* punk rock movie starring himself.
Chapter 7: The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindler

Punk came out of this strange culture of Britain that had been repressed through the Victorian times … [Malcolm and I] saw [the Sex Pistols] as something more feral and more dark and native to the English psyche than rock ‘n’ roll and Malcolm saw them very much in a Dickensian way. 523

It was in Malcolm McLaren’s teen years that he grasped the ambiguous semiotics of fashion. Rejected by his mother at the age of two and raised by his nanna, Malcolm McLaren would learn how to get his mother’s attention through a fashion statement. By the simple gesture of wearing a tartan scarf, tied loosely, perhaps flamboyantly around his neck, Malcolm was capable of infuriating his mother. The scarf itself carried a message encoded in the fabric’s tartan pattern. With it, McLaren voiced his quest for his absent father, his confusion over his Scottishness and his search for wholeness. These were all questions that were never to be raised in front of his mother. However, through the wearing of this seemingly innocuous scarf, McLaren discovered the power of fashion to annoy, offend and irritate. In later life, when McLaren was taking on the world with the Sex Pistols, he would declare that he believed it was more interesting to be hated. In his teen years, McLaren learnt that if the only attention available to you is negative, then that was what he would settle for.

Presumably, Malcolm had gone to the trouble of purchasing the MacLaren clan’s tartan, but it is not necessary to delve this deeply to understand Malcolm’s mother’s revulsion. First, it reminded her of her poor choice of marrying Malcolm’s father. Second, it represented her son’s rebellion against his stepfather. Third, it represented Malcolm’s affinity with his absent biological father. Fourth, it was Malcolm’s reproaching her for his father’s absence. Fifth, by becoming a point of contention between them, Malcolm’s continued insistence on wearing the tartan represented his defiance of his mother and his stepfather, and especially of her attempt to erase his father from the family record. Finally, and perhaps on a subconscious level, Malcolm’s

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mother’s attempt to remove this powerful icon might also represent her wish to silence and even erase young Malcolm, to deny him voice, to infantilise him, castrate or even murder him. Against his mother’s hatred and against the world, fashion would become Malcolm’s psychic armour.

Through fashion and its complex semioties, Malcolm would learn to create visual noise. He would learn to hide his feelings of loss, rejection and marginality, and no longer wore his heart – the tartan scarf – upon his sleeve. Instead he began to create fashions of sexy danger and, later, clashing symbols intended to annoy. This noise grabbed attention and often infuriated passers-by on The King’s Road with its mismatch of, for example, tartan fabric made up as sadomasochistic bondage pants. Through their use of ‘cut up’ juxtappropos of past fashions, symbols and icons, McLaren and his partner, Vivienne Westwood, would ultimately secure themselves the exclusive ownership of the punk look.

Born marginalised and psychologically rejected by his mother and stepfather, Malcolm not only invented his identity through clothes, but also through literary references, especially books about orphans, or more specifically, motherless boys. Fred Vermorel, friend, and biographer of the Sex Pistols, believes that Malcolm was first and foremost a visual person. Throughout Malcolm’s life reading always posed difficulties. But when Malcolm did read a text he did it so thoroughly that he identified himself with it, the text becoming his story. Through his reading of Oliver Twist and Peter Pan and Wendy, Malcolm became both Fagin, with his gang of child pickpockets, and Peter Pan.

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524 The ‘cut up’ was a style of writing initiated by the painter, Brion Gysin and the Beat writer, William S. Burroughs in which an existing text was cut up into pieces, with those pieces drawn randomly and then put back together as a newly created, fresh text.


526 As we will see later in this chapter, Malcolm’s childhood reading difficulties were further complicated when at the age of six his refusal to read became an act of rebellion – with rebellion of any kind considered worthy of his grandmother’s praise, Malcolm was then left to choose between these contradictory messages and his preference for rebellion often took the upper hand.

527 This is equally true of Malcolm’s approach to Guy Debord’s Society of the Spectacle.
with his gang of Lost Boys. These two books would not only supply Malcolm with visual motifs but, more insidiously, with templates for his life and, through his vision, the lives of those ‘motherless orphans’ he gathered around him. In this world, Vivienne Westwood was happy to become Wendy to Malcolm’s Peter Pan, whereas John Lydon bridled at the imposition of Malcolm’s prepared narrative.

The identity Malcolm had steeled up as the psychic armour to protect his inner little boy, he would reinvent for his film persona. From his first foray into filmmaking in 1970 with his documentary about Oxford Street, Malcolm had been gathering the materials that would – through the magic of cinema – take that peculiar vision of Malcolm McLaren and put it on the screen for all to see. From the off-cuts, the false starts and set-asides of his imagination, Malcolm would manufacture a film persona by which the world would know him. With his calling card *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, Malcolm McLaren became London’s Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindler to the world. The simple tartan scarf would become a full tartan suit replete with a t-shirt that declared Malcolm’s new motto ‘Cash from Chaos’.528

7.1 BECOMING MALCOLM MCLAREN

7.1.1 Early years

There is a mercurial fluidity to the identity of Malcolm McLaren.529 Some of it is of Malcolm’s own making and some of it is the result of factors beyond his control. To begin, Malcolm McLaren is not the name on his passport. Malcolm’s ‘real’ name is Malcolm MacLaren. It is a minor detail but it is the tip of the iceberg. This name change may have resulted from its incorrect reporting in the music press but Malcolm either did not bother to correct the journal or was unable to turn the tide. However, before Malcolm McLaren was Malcolm MacLaren, he was Malcolm Edwards. Malcolm Edwards changed his name after he was arrested for shoplifting. While MacLaren was the name of

528 McLaren is first seen wearing this tartan suit in his debut song and dance routine ‘You Need Hands’ as filmed in Highgate Cemetery at night, in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*.

Malcolm’s biological father, Peter MacLaren, the name Edwards came from his stepfather, Martin. But as we shall see Edwards too was not Martin’s original name.

Malcolm was born to Emily MacLaren, nee Isaacs: the marriage between Peter and Emily foundered after just eighteen months and this is attributed to the intervention of Emily’s family who, it is said, would not accept a gentile for a son-in-law. To further complicate this Gordian knot in the family tree, Martin Edwards, changed his name from Martin Levi. And in turn, Malcolm’s mother, Emily, changed her name to Eve Edwards. Emily/Eve did not raise either Malcolm or his brother Stuart but instead went to work in Martin Edwards’ clothing factory, now named Eve Edwards Ltd.

Thus the early education and rearing of Malcolm and Stuart fell to their maternal grandmother, Rose Isaacs. Rose was born Rose Corre and this surname would supply yet another name for young Malcolm, as Malcolm Corre. Until weened away from Rose Corre by his relationship with Vivienne Westwood, Rose looms large as the singularly significant figure in the self-mythologising of Malcolm McLaren.

Rose was born in 1887 and is credited by Malcolm as the formative influence on his early life. It was in her care that Malcolm learned to value and perhaps to overvalue the powers of his imagination. Malcolm told Jon Savage in England’s Dreaming that Rose “… was imposing on us her values and her outlook. Which was weird anyway”. \(^530\)

By “weird”, Malcolm means that Rose was eccentric, which in Britain is accepted and even valued. Malcolm told Savage: “We missed a generation. We were being brought up by a woman whose childhood was in the Victorian era”. \(^531\)

And Rose is a trope around which Malcolm conjures such Victorian authorities as the governess, the nurse, the nanny and the grand dame. Just as Elias Canetti tells us that he need never read anything about the French Revolution to know how it felt after his own experience of being of the crowd, Malcolm’s formative experiences with Rose meant that he ‘knew’ intimately what the ‘Dickensian’ was. Unlike Canetti who did experience a revolutionary moment in his youth, Malcolm could not experience the world of Dickens without a significant amount of imagination, the text of Oliver Twist and the medium of his grandmother. Therefore

\(^531\) Ibid.
this intimate ‘knowing’ of the Dickensian which McLaren claims, seems to have been formed by a combination of Rose’s eccentric Victorian manners and Malcolm’s imaginative experience of a book’s characters and its world, ‘the Dickensian’ that was made possible by safe play in the world up in Rose’s attic. It is here that Malcolm – never a strong reader – seems to have ‘inhabited’ a few books, rather than been a reader.\textsuperscript{532}

Rose was bigoted, Malcolm is not.\textsuperscript{533} Malcolm does not blame Rose for his parents’ separation (this he attributes exclusively to his mother) but when he tells us that his grandfather, Rose’s husband, was not allowed to live in the house with Rose (and presumably was accommodated elsewhere), it becomes clear that Rose was something of an autocrat.\textsuperscript{534} Indeed, Rose favoured her younger grandson Malcolm over Stuart which Malcolm suggests was because his older brother physically resembled Peter, their father.\textsuperscript{535} Stuart was encouraged to leave the house and go and play in the street while Malcolm was kept close to nanna. Malcolm lives with gran in the upper storeys of the house. And it is to her influence that he attributes his imaginative ability to jump right out of the twentieth century.

In beneficent nanna’s orbit, the only limit to childhood play was Malcolm’s own imagination: all was permitted and nothing was forbidden. In varying accounts by Malcolm of his early childhood, he is either home-schooled by Rose or she is present while he is privately tutored.\textsuperscript{536} What both his accounts share is that at the age of six, Malcolm is forced to read his very first books by Charlotte Bronte and Charles Dickens.\textsuperscript{537} Made to look up the meaning of every word he read, Malcolm describes

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\textsuperscript{534} “She was a woman who created her own world and everybody else had to live in it or live without it.” McLaren quoted in Ibid.
\textsuperscript{535} “She saw in me the reflection of my father …”, Stuart quoted in, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{537} Ibid: p. 8.
\end{flushright}
having *Jane Eyre* on one knee and the dictionary on the other.\(^{538}\) Reading about ten pages a day, he claims that this exercise took about six months.\(^{539}\) Rose’s authoritarian stance on his learning to read instilled a rebellious attitude in Malcolm: “I was desperately trying not to read and by the age of ten or eleven I actually stopped reading”.\(^{540}\) As Vivienne Westwood told Craig Bromberg: “... everyone knows Malcolm just pretends to read, but really he just reads the first and last pages and skims the rest”.\(^{541}\) This is also attested to by Fred Vermorel who describes Malcolm’s thinking as “fundamentally visual: he thinks with colour and shape and tends to see things in ‘wholes’.”\(^{542}\) While a general reader accepts the conventions of the novel, in that they will identify and empathise with the lead character in their journey through the novel’s geographical and temporal landscape; McLaren does not engage with the story as a linear progression but instead he fixates on individual situations. These situations, he replays, viewing the same scene from within as well as from subjective viewpoints of individual characters within that scene. Malcolm’s interpretation of any individual scene becomes his own. Because Malcolm reads a book synchronically and not diachronically, he tends to inhabit the whole scenario, including all the characters. This is demonstrated by his inhabitation of *Oliver Twist*, casting himself in the role of Bob Fagin, then as Oliver, and even farming out roles within Fagin’s gang to his teenage group, the Sex Pistols.

However, the Dickens’ title Rose forced him to read was not *Oliver Twist* – which would neatly satisfy this thesis – but *A Christmas Carol*, in which the character of the miserly curmudgeon Scrooge is forced by spirits to reform his ways and become a generous man on Christmas Day.\(^{543}\) However, in his December 1977 manifesto using the

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\(^{538}\) Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* features the recurring Romantic figure of the madwoman in the attic further explored in Daphne du Maurier’s novel *Rebecca* and Sandra Gilbert’s feminist psychoanalytic work *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). Suffice to say, the trope mixes an undercurrent of unbridled sexual desire with a cold and harsh, sexually repressive female authority figure.


\(^{540}\) Ibid.

\(^{541}\) Ibid: p. 29.


Cruikshank illustration of ‘Oliver Meeting the Respectable Old Gentleman’ – and again in an article published by *The Guardian* newspaper – Malcolm McLaren attributed his reading of *Oliver Twist* as well as another formative text, *Peter Pan and Wendy* to this same period spent with nanna.\(^{544}\) Indeed this time with nanna Isaacs seems to have extended his early childhood. The combination of generation gap and favouritism would lead Malcolm to see himself in a guise similar to that of a Peter Pan figure: someone who never needed to grow up. In the same article for the online *Guardian*, Malcolm McLaren is asked to name his top ten books. The top three include the tale of the little orphan boy *Oliver Twist* that McLaren describes as:

> An unforgettable journey into criminal behaviour that takes me back to my own childhood fantasies: A book I read when I was extremely young, and one that justified all my desires to create an environment in which I could truthfully run wild, forever recreating those artful dodgers/Sex Pistols.\(^{545}\)

McLaren’s number two is Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, the story of a little girl who must make her way on the London streets after her mother is convicted of theft and transported to Virginia. And continuing this theme of motherless children, McLaren’s number one is J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan and Wendy*, the tale of a mischievous little boy-sprite who lives out a never-ending childhood escapade on the island of Neverland as the leader of his gang, the six Lost Boys. On one level the story could be read as a boy who never grew up, who abducts three little children and takes them to a desert island where the only females tolerated are a fairy called Tinkerbell, a little Indian princess called Tiger Lily, and Wendy. All are a little in love with Peter but Peter, in love with himself, is completely ignorant of their desires. Like Peter Pan, Malcolm McLaren enjoyed the company of extraordinary women, such as Helen Wellington-Lloyd, whose dwarfism made her stand out, and Vivienne Westwood, who had many admirers. Peter Pan’s main attraction for his three “little women” is not only that he is very cocky, talking exclusively about himself, but also, as Wendy suggests, because of the tragedy of his

\(^{544}\) *Guardian* Unlimited: [http://books.guardian.co.uk/top10s/top10/0..99329.00.html](http://books.guardian.co.uk/top10s/top10/0..99329.00.html) as retrieved on 3 Oct 2007: 18:50.

\(^{545}\) Ibid: *Guardian* Unlimited.
being motherless. On the other hand, Peter sees Wendy’s role on this motherless isle as that of a pretend ‘mother’ who keeps house, sews and most importantly, cares for his gang of Lost Boys.

What we do not know is at what age Malcolm encountered Peter Pan and Wendy, which, perversely, he describes as “the best sex book I ever read”. What is interesting is just how much Peter Pan and Wendy mirrors McLaren’s various relationships: with his estranged mother, Emily; with his lost boy teenage charges, the Sex Pistols; and with the Wendy-like Vivienne Westwood. Peter Pan and Wendy would even shape his fashion ideas after the break up of the Sex Pistols for what would become the ‘New Romantic’ style, of pirates and Apaches. Oliver Twist and Peter Pan and Wendy have so profoundly influenced McLaren, that I am led to wonder whether Malcolm McLaren chose them, or these books chose him: although it should be regarded as a combination of reflection and influence.

Vivienne Westwood sees one story that Malcolm McLaren related to her as a quintessential illustration of the modus operandi of Peter Pan/Malcolm McLaren:

When he was a little boy of about six years old, he encouraged all the other children to play truant from school and he built a little camp in a waste ground quite near to the school. There were about six of them, and they would each bring biscuits from home every day. And he managed to do this for four or five days and nobody discovered them.

This idyll could not last and when, on the sixth day, a female adult authority forced herself into Malcolm’s utopia, he experienced homicidal rage. This teacher’s intrusion was a betrayal of Malcolm’s fantasy world, as Westwood reveals:

Malcolm saw his schoolteacher marching across the grounds. She’d discovered them, knew they were there, and was coming to get them. He said to me that he’d never in his whole life, never hated anybody as much as that woman. If he could have killed her in any possible way, he would have.

Westwood’s account concludes with the additional information that: “[Malcolm] had to spend about six months in a class with younger students, but it never really bothered him.”\textsuperscript{549} What is ambiguous about Westwood’s conclusion to this story is whether being held back in a class with students younger than himself was, punishment for his truancy and for inciting his fellow students’ rebellion, or whether his truancy was a revolt against being held back from being educated among students of his own age. This might suggest that on the one hand Malcolm found it quite comfortable to be around younger children, especially as it privileged him in a leadership role (one in which he was able to lead them astray) or, alternatively, Westwood believed that Malcolm made sure that his conquerors would not see him succumbing to his punishment.

What will recur throughout Malcolm’s career as a manager of bands from the Sex Pistols to Adam and the Ants, to Bow Wow Wow is the theme of him leading a gang of boys and encouraging them to debauchery. As Malcolm was uninterested in the recreational use of narcotics, he perversely tended to watch rather than partake,\textsuperscript{550} the thrill for him was in being the leader and in the leading astray of his teenage boy gangs.\textsuperscript{551}

The number six looms large in Malcolm’s autobiography: at six years old, he was forced to learn to read, which took six months; he lead a gang of six little boys and on the sixth day his utopia ended and this was followed by a punishment lasting six months. Much more significantly is that in Malcolm’s sixth year everything changed. His happy

\textsuperscript{549} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{551} There is certainly a recurring pattern, whereby Malcolm creates a gang by forcing unlikely individuals to work closely together, then forcing a rift between the lead singer and the band as he did with John Lydon and the other Sex Pistols; Adam Ant and his band; and Annabella and the other members of Bow Wow Wow. Malcolm harnesses the sparks from the friction and sends them out into the world. Eventually Malcolm gets bored by his role as manager (which seems to be part of his pathology), gets in among the band and divides them. This atomises the group until they finally implode, as happened in San Francisco on the Sex Pistols’ American tour. Malcolm then uses the resulting negative energy from their implosion to propel himself into his next project, to promote himself and to profit.
extended childhood, nursed by his nanna, was abruptly ended. His mother Emily had met Martin Levi and a new oedipal threat\textsuperscript{552} came between Malcolm and his cold and distant mother.\textsuperscript{553} Further, the new male authority would insist that Malcolm no longer be indulged at his doggedly loyal and protective nanna’s knee, but would go to a Jewish school. Rose would still play a maternal role: whenever Malcolm got into trouble at school, which appears to have been often, her favourite phrase for dismissing the complaints of a school authority was “boys will be boys”.\textsuperscript{554} In defence of his own teenage charges, the Sex Pistols, Malcolm McLaren would utter this very phrase on countless occasions.\textsuperscript{555} No such allowances were made for mothers.

At thirteen years of age (the age for bar mitzvah, when the Jewish boy becomes a man), as Malcolm was beginning to explore the world with friends his own age, the presence of other boys’ relationships with their mothers reared:

… just as they were leaving, at the door of his friend’s house, Malcolm’s friend wheeled around and kissed his mother goodbye. As soon as they were past the gate, Malcolm turned round and scratched the boy across the face: ‘What a prick! What a Nancy! How pathetic. Kiss your mother? God, ugh, revolting!’,\textsuperscript{556}

McLaren’s hatred of his mother would extend to all feminine figures, even to Westwood after 1978. Lee Gorman says of his experience in Bow Wow Wow, like Peter Pan who did not like his Lost Boys to even mention their mothers in his presence: “[Malcolm] didn’t even like us to have girlfriends, mothers anything like that. He hated ‘em.”\textsuperscript{557}

Malcolm and Stuart were sent to Avigdor, a private Jewish school in Lordship Lane, Dulwich. Both Malcolm and Stuart were rejected, or felt themselves to be outsiders at the

\textsuperscript{552} From Freud via Barbara Creed, \textit{The Monstrous Feminine}, Routledge, Cornwall 1994.
\textsuperscript{554} Ibid: p. 16.
\textsuperscript{557} Ibid: p. 224.
Throughout this period of his life until his early thirties, Malcolm never comes to terms with his Jewishness. In fact, he tends to compartmentalise all the facets of his identity. For example, Malcolm is a born Londoner, who can and does claim something of the cockney spiv status, which he will later transform into his guise as The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindler. Malcolm related an incident from when he was thirteen to Jon Savage that seems formative. On his way to school, wearing the school uniform, which included a yarmulke (presumably in the school’s colours), he remembers having to pass a Teddy Boy in the street. The Ted was a look that English working-class boys of the 1950s had tailored up and was loosely based on an Edwardian style. Teds were known to carry knives and much of their sharp style was contrived to intimidate. Feeling threatened, Malcolm lowered his eyes and hurried on. Considering that Malcolm would go on to open a boutique clothing store that sold exclusively to Teds, this meeting deserves attention. Both boys dressed in uniforms: Malcolm, just a schoolboy, while this other figure, older and dangerous. Malcolm describes the panic he experienced as simultaneously terrifying and dangerous, but also suggestive. If Malcolm was a gay man perhaps we would associate this meeting with the stirrings of his early sexuality, but he is not. Rather, I conjecture that this encounter suggested the association in Malcolm’s mind between fashion and sexy danger. This subversive idea would certainly inform his and Westwood’s future visions of couture on The King’s Road; and Malcolm himself would dress in this very fashion, as a Teddy Boy, in 1972.

### 7.1.2 Jewishness

By Jewish tradition, through his mother, Emily Isaacs, Malcolm was Jewish. Like many Jewish boys before him, who bridle at this imposition, Malcolm found this aspect of his

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561 “These Teddy Boys would come up and they’d put their hands in their jackets as if to motion that they might be carrying something dangerous. I was terrified.” Ibid.
identity difficult to incorporate.\textsuperscript{563} It could be suggested that Malcolm’s hatred for his mother stems from the imposition of his lineage but this theory seems unlikely, given that before Vivienne Westwood, his closest relationship was with his Jewish grandmother, and Malcolm shows no signs of bigotry towards other Jewish men, in fact, the complete opposite.\textsuperscript{564}

If McLaren was confused about his Jewishness, so were his mother and stepfather, both of whom were at pains to bury it in their name changes and new business, Eve Edwards Ltd, while simultaneously sending their sons to Jewish day school.\textsuperscript{565} The clothing business seems to have been a positive influence on McLaren because he decides that fashion is something that he wants to be part of his life; but like his mother and stepfather, even in this business, McLaren is certainly less sure of where his inherited Jewishness fits in.\textsuperscript{566} Even in his own Jewish family, his dominating grandmother draws her heritage from Sephardic Jewry – and while we have seen that she is prejudiced against gentiles like Malcolm’s father – she also frowns upon her Ashkenazi son-in-law, Martin Levi/Edwards.\textsuperscript{567}

McLaren’s relationship to his Jewish identity parallels John Lydon’s experience of being born Irish Catholic, growing up on London’s fiercely Protestant streets and, like McLaren at Avigdor, also going to a repressive religious school. John Lydon, however, unlike McLaren, had a very close and loving relationship with his mother Eileen and this may also have been a factor in the fractious relationship that he and McLaren shared. Although neither was religious, both were shaped by their religion. So Lydon identified with the vicious lapsed Catholic Pinkie of Graham Greene’s novel \textit{Brighton Rock} while McLaren found Jewish role models among London’s rock entrepreneurs.

\textsuperscript{563} As this subsection will show, Malcolm tried on and discarded Jewish entrepreneurial role models, turned to an historical figure who converted to Judaism, as well as literary creations and Jewish stereotypes.
\textsuperscript{564} Take for example his friendship with Bernie Rhodes or his lawyer, Jeremy Fisher.
\textsuperscript{565} Malcolm seems to have left Avigdor at eleven years old, whether he or Stuart were bar mitzvahed isn’t recorded in any of the texts I have studied.
\textsuperscript{567} Ibid: p. 15.
Malcolm McLaren would tackle the image of a number of these London Jewish entrepreneurs and try them on for size. One of these was Larry Parnes, who was best known for his success during the fifties and early sixties as the manager of teen pop idol Billy Fury. Like McLaren, Parnes’s family was in the rag trade and by the age of eighteen Parnes was running his own line of women’s clothing shops in Essex. Revealing a talent for catchy stage-names (like Malcolm McLaren combining ‘Sex’ and ‘Pistols’), Parnes took one teenager after another and gave them a stage-name that made their fortune: Tommy Steele (Thomas Hicks), Marty Wilde (Reginald Smith), Vince Eager (Roderick Taylor), Billy Fury (Ronald William Wycherley), Dickie Pride (Richard Knellar) and Georgie Fame (Clive Powell).

There are two significant portraits of the Larry Parnes’ figure: one can be found in the Cliff Richards movie-vehicle, *Expresso Bongo* (1958), the other in Colin MacInnes’s novel *Absolute Beginners* (1959). In *Absolute Beginners*, the Parnes’ character is renamed Harry Charms, his business being The Harry Charms School, and Billy Fury is ironically Baby Boom.

Another of McLaren’s role models was Brian Epstein, who would briefly manage the Beatles. Epstein oversaw the Beatles’ transformation from their days in Germany, where they had dressed rough in black leather pants, greasy long hair and white t-shirts, into the adorable collarless suit and tie and the iconic Beatles’ moptop. Epstein unlike Parnes was tortured by his homosexuality. He was probably in love with John Lennon and used pills, LSD and alcohol to self-medicate depression, which resulted in his death in 1967. It was neither the homosexuality of Parnes and Epstein nor an interest in illegal drugs that attracted Malcolm to these two men. Rather it was that here were fellow

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568 Malcolm would later claim in the Glitterbest court case the invention of and therefore ownership of the stage name Johnny Rotten.

569 These portraits of Parnes were known to both McLaren, and filmmaker, Julien Temple [*The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* (1980), *Filth and the Fury* (2000)] who explicitly references *Expresso Bongo* in his film adaptation of *Absolute Beginners* in 1986. Coming full circle, in *Absolute Beginners*, Temple has injected something of the great rock ‘n’ roll swindler, Malcolm McLaren into the Charms’ character, while the arrogance and bad boy attitude of Baby Boom, who displays his outright dislike of his manager is certainly Rottenesque.

Jews who were making a success of managing youth or teen talent and setting fashions.\textsuperscript{571} The idea that he could be an integral part of a gang or a band but remain outside the spectacle, controlling it and shaping it, appealed to McLaren. Both of these figures would influence McLaren as the manager of the Sex Pistols and in his management style; but both would be thrown over, with Epstein in particular, coming in for a savaging. Like Elvis, whom he claimed to have hated ever since the rock idol went into the army, McLaren believed that Epstein had betrayed rock ‘n’ roll by cleaning up the Beatles rock act, “prohibiting them from swearing or smoking on stage” and selling it on to the masses like “soap powder”.\textsuperscript{572} McLaren’s \textit{schtick} was rebellion. On a t-shirt screen-printed by McLaren, he suggested that Epstein had died as the result of an accident resulting from sado-masochistic homosexual practices.\textsuperscript{573}

McLaren’s interest in this thirty-year-old man who becomes the manager of a teenage pop group or pop idol refers back to both McLaren’s fascination with Peter Pan and his Lost Boys and Bob Fagin with his retinue of pickpockets. Even before the appearance of John Lydon, McLaren was already referring to the teenage kleptomaniac, Steve Jones, as the ‘Artful Dodger’. But with the arrival of John Lydon, who wore shoes without socks, his clothes held together with safety pins and who looked like a child tramp, McLaren knew that he had his very own, nasty little guttersnipe. He may not have been following in the role of the sweet little Oliver but Lydon was certainly in a tradition of Dickens: that of the street Arab. As Julien Temple suggests McLaren, the Sex Pistols and punk was

\textsuperscript{572} Ironically, making it look just like an ad for Soap Powder, was the very brief McLaren gave Jamie Reid for designing the \textit{Never Mind the Bollocks} album sleeve. Craig Bromberg, \textit{The Wicked Ways of Malcolm McLaren}, Perennial, New York 1989: p. 19.
\textsuperscript{573} Parnes may have got off lightly because he was very much alive (he lived until 1989) and could have sued McLaren for defamation, as he did Paul McCartney.
something “more feral and more dark and more native to the English psyche than rock ‘n’ roll…”.

Another ‘entrepreneur’ who, would take Malcolm’s fancy, was Lord George Gordon. McLaren gained his knowledge of Gordon from Christopher Hibbert’s *King Mob* and Dicken’s *Barnaby Rudge*. It is easy to see why McLaren was drawn to Gordon. Not only had he led and given his name to the riots that convulsed London in June 1780 but, like McLaren, Gordon was born in England of Scottish ancestry, had carrot red curly hair, and wore tartan as a flamboyant act of rebellion. (Because of its clan association, the wearing or display of tartan had been illegal since the Battle of Culloden in 1745.) What is more, in later life, Gordon converted to Judaism.

However, by the time of the making of *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, McLaren’s hero worship had become egomania. In the opening scenes of *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* we see the shadowy figure of McLaren as Gordon on horseback, galloping through the torchlit London streets crying “fire, fire”. Meanwhile back at HQ, McLaren has assumed the role of Gordon’s secretary Watson and is busy destroying Sex Pistols’ ‘evidence’ by burning it page by page, record by record in the grate. The incident is almost certainly fictitious and derives from the scene in Dickens’s *Barnaby Rudge* when the character Gashford burns all incriminating papers of the Protestant Association. Finally, towards the end of *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, Steve Jones appears upon high, naked from the waist down – exposing his bollocks, which we shouldn’t mind – and bearing two tablets with the ten commandments of punk rock printed (rather than carved) upon them: if Jones represents Moses come down from the

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575 The cry of the raven Grip in *Barnaby Rudge*, “bow wow wow”, supplied McLaren with the name of his next band project after the Sex Pistols. There don’t appear to be any other sources available to him.
577 Curiously, Malcolm takes no interest in Benjamin Disraeli, raised a Christian but maintaining his Jewish traditions, both a novelist and England’s Prime Minister during Queen Victoria’s reign. But then he only seems to have been interested in London’s flamboyant Jewish anti-heroes.
mountain, then this would equate McLaren with the Talmudic or Old Testament God who, unlike the New Testament God of love, was both a maker and a destroyer.

7.2 MALCOLM’S GANG

Before Malcolm installed himself as the leader of his own gang, the Sex Pistols, Malcolm would find and draw together a disparate group of individuals, each creative and intelligent, each peculiar in looks and, above all, united by their negative attitude to the post-1968 world they lived in. Malcolm McLaren became obsessed with this moment in history and fantasised about having been in Paris in May 1968. McLaren had briefly been a little-red-book-carrying Maoist, however, even though he spoke the hardline rhetoric, he was never a revolutionary, more a Romantic. He loved the poetry that appeared upon the wall after the students tore up the streets in the Latin Quarter to battle the gendarmes, “Under the cobblestones, the beach”. For Malcolm, 1968 was a riotous carnival and a party in the street; both of these he longed to create, and art school would allow him to make tentative steps towards realising this.\textsuperscript{578}

7.2.1 ‘Peter Pan’ and ‘Wendy’

McLaren would be in and out of various art schools – Harrow, Goldsmiths, Croydon – for seven years. Friendships were made with Bernie Rhodes, later the manager of The Clash, with Helen Wellington-Lloyd who starred alongside McLaren in \textit{The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle}, with Fred and Judy Vermorel, and with the graphic designer Jamie Reid and his wife, Sophie Richmond. Also at Goldsmiths Art School, through Fred Vermorel, Malcolm was first introduced to Vivienne Westwood. Vivienne Westwood would wean

\textsuperscript{578} “The week before the huge Rolling Stones’ concert in Hyde Park [in 1969], Malcolm talked into existence a free festival in the Goldsmiths’ buildings. … On the final day, there was to be a discussion with ‘R.D. Laing, William Burroughs, Alex Trocchi, Michael X, Jim Dine, squatters, radical students and workers’”. None of these bands or personalities turned up, including Malcolm and the result was chaos, a riot and police intervention. “But Malcolm remembers it as a success, his first taste of showbiz.” See Jon Savage, \textit{England’s Dreaming}, Faber, London, 1992: p. 39.
Malcolm from his crippling emotional dependence upon his grandmother and become the most significant relationship in McLaren’s early adult life.579

When Vivienne separated from her husband Derek Westwood, taking their three-year-old son Benjamin, Malcolm was sharing a house with Vivienne’s brother Gordon Swire and Fred Vermorel, and it was to this home that Vivienne and Benjamin moved. McLaren did not welcome the new additions to the household:

I hated the idea that girls should come and inhabit this house. It was boys only; as far as I was concerned, and girls coming in made it all look dreadfully slimy. I brought her to tears and she had this little kid who I hated and loathed, and I brought him to tears as well.580

To remain in this boys’ club, Vivienne had to fight. Malcolm says: “I almost persuaded her to leave, but because of her northern stubbornness, it defeated that end ...”. It then occurred to Malcolm that if he could not oust Vivienne from his boys’ only gang, there might be another role for her:

… three or four weeks later I decided to feign sick. Curiosity at the thought of being inside a woman’s bed – even though I was twenty-one, God knows why I didn’t think of this before – I decided I would try this out on Vivienne.581

Malcolm’s actions are perverse but they are in keeping with the Peter Pan figure. Here is an immature young man, five years Vivienne’s junior and a virgin, attempting to seduce this primary schoolteacher by feigning a ‘man-cold’. In seducing Wendy away to Neverland, Peter Pan tells her that: “one girl is more use than twenty boys”.582 Malcolm’s ‘use’ for a girl would be as a mother to him, and later as a mother to his Lost Boys/Sex Pistols. This Wendy-inspired role of ‘mother’ involved teaching; tucking in and telling

581 Ibid.
stories; stitching, sewing and darning; preparing food; and spring-cleaning. It is far from sexualised. In Neverland, like the fairy Tinkerbell and Tiger Lily of the Piccaninny Indian tribe, Wendy might yearn for Peter’s kiss, but this desire fuelled by endless anticipation is all she may expect. And for McLaren, this is his style. Apart from a reference to some unsteady fairies making their way home from an orgy, there is no sex in *Peter Pan*; but, like McLaren, who has described *Peter Pan and Wendy* as “the best sex story I’ve ever read”, we have to read this into it.583

Psychologically, for a young man with absolutely no love relationship with his own mother, and a deep attachment to his Victorian authoritarian granny, Malcolm is about to do something that will recur throughout his life,584 he will attempt to lever himself between a mother and her child as a way to get full attention:

> It was very slow and uncertain. She was a schoolteacher, and I felt I was in bed with one. There was something harmlessly perverse about the whole notion of this spoilt brat in bed with a schoolteacher. 585

The coldly manipulative way in which Malcolm inserted himself between Westwood’s sheets foreshadows his later management style, a lot of which seemed to be sexually motivated. Doing business with Malcolm was fraught with undercurrents of sexual manipulation and perversity. Examples can be seen in Malcolm’s later life, when after being hired by Adam Ant, he would fire Adam Ant from his own band and appoint himself leader of the gang. Growing bored with his boy gang, he would then ‘find’ a fourteen year-old girl to front the band and sing its naïvely sexually explicit lyrics, like those of ‘I Want Candy’.586

583  *Guardian* Unlimited: [http://books.guardian.co.uk/top10s/top10/0,99329,00.html](http://books.guardian.co.uk/top10s/top10/0,99329,00.html) as retrieved on 3 Oct 2007: 18:50.

584  We will see it again with the fourteen-year-old Annabella Lwin (of Bow Wow Wow) and her mother as well as Ari Up (of The Slits).


Notably, this same approach would also gain Malcolm access to cliques, nightclubs and parties to which he had no invitation, and was described by Steve Jones as somewhere between bluff, charm and self-assurance: “Malcolm’s blague”. However, Vivienne Westwood was equally attracted to Malcolm: the naughty boy, who had made her cry. For Westwood, the attraction might also have been for a little boy who had never had a mother’s love, like Wendy’s for Peter Pan:

Don’t have a mother, he said. Not only had he no mother, but he had not the slightest desire to have one. He thought them very overrated persons. Wendy, however, felt at once that she was in the presence of a tragedy.

McLaren’s first sexual encounter led to Vivienne’s pregnancy and their son, Joseph Corre, born in 1967. Rose Corre, unsurprisingly – given what we already known of her – did not approve of the relationship or the pregnancy. Rose gave Westwood the sum necessary to procure an abortion. But on the way to the clinic, Westwood spotted a dress she liked and impulsively decided to buy it and have McLaren’s baby. Somewhat more opportunistically, as Westwood recounted to Fred Vermorel, “I’ve got his child, I thought, I’m part of his life”. Though in Westwood’s defence, she faced the insecurity of her ambiguous position in McLaren’s compartmentalising her, as being either a business partner or a lover, but not both. By becoming mother to McLaren’s child she successfully blurred the boundaries of the boxes.

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587 *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Fifth Edition* describes ‘blag’ as a violent robbery, while the French *blagueur* describes a pretentious talker; a joker, a teller of tall stories. Steve Jones’ cockney street talk could very well be referencing either, or might even have conflated the meanings. However, I prefer the meaning of *blagueur* to describe McLaren.

588 Her account of Malcolm’s sexual seduction can be found in her autobiography written with Fred Vermorel. Vivienne’s account is also one to make the skin crawl, as she compares Malcolm’s erect penis to a Buckingham Palace guard, standing to attention, replete in pink busby and red pubic hair. Fred Vermorel, *Vivienne Westwood: Fashion, Perversity, and the Sixties Laid Bare*, Bloomsbury, London 1997: p. 55.


McLaren would prove to be a cuckoo in the domestic nest, behaving badly with both his stepson Ben and his own son Joseph by competing with both children for their mother’s total attention. Nonetheless, the relationship, like that of Peter Pan and Wendy, seemed to work; Jon Savage quotes Robin Scott who shared a home with Vivienne and Malcolm in 1969:

I always think the only stable relationship [Malcolm] seemed to have, the only person he seemed to trust, was his grandmother. Vivienne helped to wean him off that strange relationship …

Unfortunately this weaning away was so successful that Malcolm, who had been made Rose’s carer by his family, was lax about his duties. One day, realising he should pay a call on the “old girl”, he visited Rose’s flat to find her rigor mortis, several days dead from starvation. Rose passes in a way similar to Nanna, the Newfoundland dog who acted as the children’s nurse, before their abduction to Neverland:

She died of old age, and at the end she had been rather difficult to get on with; being very firmly convinced that no one knew how to look after children except herself.

McLaren and Westwood’s creative energies sought an outlet in public display. But until 1972, when they leased the shop at 430 The King’s Road, they were a theatrical spectacle in search of an audience. The King’s Road during the sixties and seventies was London’s fashion strip, and the fact that McLaren and Westwood had got a toehold on it, albeit at the crook in the road that signified the end of the fashionable section, was nonetheless an extraordinary coup. This shopfront would deliver the couple a permanent space in which to display their art and their eccentricities and allow them to make their performance a kind of street theatre; their doorway onto The King’s Road meant that The King’s Road had to accept them. Even before the formation of the Sex Pistols, the role of the fashion

boutique at ‘430’ as a magnet, drawing in the young and disaffected, should not be understated.

‘430’ underwent constant name changes and refits. First there were the exclusive Teddy boy styles of ‘Let It Rock’, followed by an ill-fated, satellite t-shirt stall at the Wembley Stadium, ‘Vive Le Rock’ (a 1972 show at which, among others, Billy Fury made a final brief comeback). When Malcolm had had enough of the Teddy Boy scene – and with the deliberate intention of alienating and sending the Teds away – he transformed the shop into ‘Too Fast To Live, Too Young to Die’. But by early 1974, the stock that had sustained the shop through its past incarnations began to dry up and Malcolm was bored.595 He didn’t want to do anything retro, he wanted something new.596 The shop was transformed into ‘SEX’: which sold bondage gear and S&M inspired fashion.597 Later, ‘430’ became ‘Seditionaries’, specialising in the pirate and new romantic fashions of the early eighties. It is still under Westwood’s lease today (although she now lives and works in Milan) as ‘World’s End’.

7.2.2 Recruiting the Artful Dodgers/Sex Pistols
As we have seen from the magical childhood lived in nanna’s attic, to the creation of a utopia for his six-year-old peers, to his escape from school into fashion in his teenage years, Malcolm sought to extend his childhood by another escape, this time to art school. At art school he found an outlet for his creativity through fashion. Malcolm’s escapism had been set in place long before he met any of the kids who would become the Sex Pistols. All of Malcolm’s ‘gang’ of lost boys (except John Lydon, who had to be sought out and found) gravitated to ‘430’. Far from it being a coldly calculated act of exploitation by McLaren, the band who became the Sex Pistols, was already in existence. It was Steve Jones – the regular shoplifter at ‘430’ – who, upon hearing Malcolm’s tales of once-upon-a-time-having-managed The New York Dolls, pestered McLaren until he

596 Ibid.
597 Ibid. We will see the same behaviour directed at punks when Malcolm McLaren will deliberately make the movie The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle to anger and alienate them and intended to create a violent riot in the cinema.
finally acquiesced to manage Jones’s group, The Swankers. Since then, every member of the Sex Pistols has accused McLaren of mismanagement, but the reality is that McLaren was not really cut out to be a manager. He may have fantasised about being another Parnes or Epstein, but McLaren had too many other irons in the fire to devote himself exclusively to his teenage gang. Because he was accused of embezzling the band’s money it is often forgotten that he did financially subsidise the band in the beginning. Malcolm initially paid out for rehearsal space and later set his boys up in a studio in Denmark Street which became a home for the homeless Jones and others. Certainly, for McLaren, Denmark Street got them off his back, out of sight and out of mind. It was the boys’ pestering that finally led McLaren to find them gigs to play. But Malcolm’s management was only ever half-hearted until the Grundy incident changed everything: suddenly Malcolm was expected to behave like a real manager, whatever that meant. After Grundy, what had been moving at the pace of a goods train became a rocket. Malcolm’s complete commitment to the Sex Pistols’ project was now demanded over all others. The experience didn’t promise to be pleasant and he was already dealing with some nasty, hostile little boys who openly disliked each other and to a greater or lesser degree him. On the eve of the American tour, Malcolm looked into himself to find those forgotten elements that made the Sex Pistols’ story worth his time, effort and creative energies.

7.2.3 Malcolm’s manifesto

Malcolm’s manifesto was a piece of ‘found’ art screen-printed onto a length of silk and describing Malcolm’s vision of his Lost Boys, the Sex Pistols in a London that has given way to the riot of the mob. Produced on the eve of the tour as they prepared to fly off to conquer the United States, intended to consolidate all things English and Sex Pistols, Malcolm’s silk-screen print would later be shrunk and photocopied onto two A4 sheets of paper, folded in half and slipped inside the Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols album. The original had a photocopy of the George Cruikshank pen illustration of Oliver Twist’s introduction to Fagin. This illustration’s original subtitle had been

598 The original silk is kept by the Victoria and Albert Museum.
replaced by McLaren’s own ‘manifesto’. With a style that suggested British illustrator Ralph Steadman’s distinctive scratch nib ink stylisation – in this case captured by McLaren with a paintbrush dipped in ink – McLaren created another world for his punks to inhabit.

“They are Dickensian” the manifesto begins, in direct reference to McLaren’s own childhood. In the manifesto, McLaren focuses on the inhabitants of this “gas-lit” Dickensian world of his own imagination, describing the lads in the Sex Pistols as “urchins who with ragged clothes and pock-marked faces roam the streets of foggy gas-lit London”. By urchin, McLaren is telling us that the Sex Pistols are children, but like the Artful Dodger, they are also wizened. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (NSOED) defines the ‘urchin’ as referring to either a sea urchin or a hedgehog. It can also mean a goblin or an elf and could also mean Cupid. There is something of Robin Goodfellow or Puck in these older meanings. But the way we know it best is as a mischievous young boy or girl, “especially one poorly or raggedly dressed” or a grown brat, but it can also be attached to “a physically deformed person; a hunchback”. McLaren’s urchins are indeed puckish, mischievous, and hunchbacked in Rotten’s performances, but also here inhabiting McLaren’s Dickensian attic play world of fog and gaslight. And just what do these delinquent children get up to? Well they go “pillaging”: an unusual word to choose and one that suggests the aftermath of war or battle. The NSOED suggests “the act of plundering or sacking a city, building etc.” and “looting” and “extortion”. Looting aside, the manifesto’s subject is reminiscent of Graham Greene’s short story of London teenagers in their systematic and applied destruction of an abandoned London house in ‘The Destructors’, already considered in Chapter 3.

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600 Ibid.
604 Ibid.
605 Ibid.
What begins as arson, general mayhem and gang behaviour – “Setting fire to buildings” – descends another rung into the transgressive and fetishistic: “Beating up old people with gold chains” and “Fucking the rich up the arse”. McLaren’s urchins and their riot are given room to move: “Causing havoc everywhere they go”. In his imagination there are many incarnations of these groups or gangs existing in an environment blasted by fire: “Some of these ragamuffin gangs jump on tables amidst the charred debris …”. And here McLaren mixes his eras of Medieval London, Gaslight London and twentieth century electrified London in a curiously jarring juxtaposition, with his ragamuffins holding “burning torches” aloft and playing rock ‘n’ roll to an appreciative audience of urchins and ragamuffins. This same image will later appear in the Gordon Riots sequence that opens *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*. Next the audience are transformed by the spectacle into sheer abandon as “the frenzied, pissing pogoing mob” that Malcolm describes as, “screaming with delight” and “shouting and spitting ‘anarchy’ ”.

Larry Parnes had created a “stable of stars”; Malcolm and the manager of The Clash, Bernie Rhodes, intended to create a stable of punk bands, the sheer mass of which would force the music industry to sign and promote them: “One of these gangs”, writes Malcolm, “call themselves the Sex Pistols”. McLaren then makes another historical bid

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607 Ibid.
608 Ibid.
609 Ibid.
610 Ibid.
611 Ibid.
612 While pogo sticks were jumping sticks invented in the 1950s, with a spring where your feet stood, the ‘pogo’ refers to the dance that Sid Vicious as a fan at crowded Sex Pistols’ gigs ‘invented’ by hopping up and down on the same spot to see over the heads of the audience. Interviewed by Julien Temple in Hyde Park in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, Sid tells us he invented the dance as an aggressive bounce that he could use to knock other audience members sprawling, especially those of the Bromley contingent.
614 Ibid.
615 Ibid.
for a connection between what is occurring in London in 1978 and the Gordon Riots that occurred on the very same London street stage almost two hundred years earlier in 1780: “This true and dirty tale has been continuing throughout 200 years of teenage anarchy and so in 1978 there still remains the Sex Pistols.”616 By ‘true and dirty’ McLaren means ‘sordid’ but he is evoking the sensationalist traditions of Grub Street and the broadsheet of the eighteenth century. McLaren the amateur crowd theorist sees a series of incarnations of the members of the Sex Pistols, recurring over two hundred years and spreading teenage rebellion and anarchy. McLaren states that this rebellious energy “is not just an Elvis thing”.617 By this McLaren means that the dark youthful energies attributed to fifties rock ‘n’ roll and especially to Elvis – what McLaren sees as teenage rebellion, revolt and anarchy – were older and, in a London context, dated back at least two hundred years to the Gordon Riots, and were probably much older and darker again in their origins. As the amateur crowd theorist, McLaren can see his Sex Pistols in a direct line, from the idle apprentice of Hogarth illustrations, or the pickpockets of Dickens’s Oliver Twist, or even as the rebellious Irish Catholic in Lydon and the fiery Jacobite in McLaren himself.

McLaren makes a claim for the mode of their rebellion being “active extremism”. In the crowd theory of the French Marxist socio-historian, George Rude, the transition of the passive crowd to the active mob is to be seen at the point when the crowd opts for the use of ‘direct action’ or aggressive behaviour to make their socially related statement or protest. This might be to break into the house and throw out all the possessions of an authority figure, to break open a gaol and release the prisoners, and so forth.618 So why do the Sex Pistols choose their ‘active extremism’? Rhetorically, McLaren tells us that it leads to “what counts”619 and what counts he says, is to “jump out of the twentieth

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616 The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle with its opening scenes re-enacting the Gordon Riots of 1780 was released on the two hundredth anniversary of the riots in 1980.


century as fast as you possibly can”.

Why? – McLaren claims it is “in order to create an environment that you can truthfully run wild in”. By coupling ‘truthfully’ to running wild, McLaren is linking the ethical value ‘truthfulness’ to uninhibited amorality.

This manifesto is signed off by one ‘Oliver Twist’, which is curious, because it suggests McLaren is trying to play all the roles, even those roles he attributes to the boys in the Sex Pistols. McLaren has clearly seen the comparison between himself and Fagin as he has referred to the Sex Pistols as his ‘little artful dodgers’, but he seems to identify with the naïve Oliver who has fallen in among child thieves and criminals. Given the violent and destructive behaviour of his teenage charges, it seems he might well have.

7.3 THE GREAT ROCK ‘N’ ROLL SWINDLE

The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle, released in 1980; coinciding with the two hundredth anniversary of the Gordon Riots, started to germinate in McLaren’s head three years earlier, as Sophie Richmond notes in her diary entry for 25 January 1977.

All of Malcolm’s ideas for this movie had had a long gestation period, with some dating back to his early student documentary Oxford Street, begun in 1970; others he had been obsessed with his whole life.

The making of the film that would ultimately become The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle was a debacle right from the start. It developed in a series of stops and starts, in fragmentation and dead ends; sometimes its name changed and one script had no name. The punk movie began its life under the title Rock Around the Contract and even went into an aborted period of production as Who Killed Bambi? There is supposed to have been an early screenplay by Graham Chapman of Monty Python fame and another by Johnny Speight, both rejected by McLaren.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Sophie Richmond’s diary is reproduced in Fred and Judy Vermorel, Sex Pistols, Omnibus, London 2006, 25 January 1977 entry appears on p. 56.


Writer and creator of the Alf Garnet character and Till Death Us Do Part.
7.3.1 Who Killed Bambi? and other false starts

The original aim of the movie was to promote the Pistols, a band that had an audience unable to see them perform because they were banned from playing anywhere. By the time the film was being made as The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle, this aim had been transformed by Malcolm McLaren into an anti-punk anti-movie which, just as his transformation of 430 The King’s Road from ‘Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die’ into ‘SEX’ had been intended to insult and alienate Teddy Boy clientele, would also insult and alienate the fans of the Sex Pistols and punk, and was intended to cause a riot wherever it played.

There is certainly something to be said for McLaren’s blague, which here could be described as a wilful, obstinate and perverse insistence upon making a feature film about a rock band that had already split up, and whose lead singer refused to have any contact with him or appear in the film. The ultimate revenge was that McLaren used all the Sex Pistols’ earnings to fund this film which, minus its band, now starred Malcolm McLaren as the Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindler.

Out of such necessity Rock Around the Contract or Who Killed Bambi? became a smarter, cleverer bricolage of cinema, with its use of documentary, of 16mm and Super 8 formats, of cartoon, of Malcolm’s ten lessons of punk (discussed below), staged pieces, humorous skits and stupid pranks as well as a postmodern nod to a film within a film. Its influences were many, and notable among them, the pervasive influence of Monty Python’s Life of Brian (1979), especially in the incorporation of the cinema foyer with its promotional product tie-ins. It was a style that even Jean-Luc Godard – whose innovative use of the ‘jump cut’ in A Bout de Souffle rewrote the rules of cinema in 1958 – claimed would revolutionise cinema.\(^{625}\)

Who Killed Bambi? went into production in 1977 and was to be directed by the American, exploitation filmmaker, Russ Meyer. With Faster Pussycat Kill! Kill! (1966), Meyer had gained enough credibility for Hollywood to seek him out to direct a sequel to the cult novel The Valley of the Dolls as filmed in 1967. Warner Bros knew they needed a filmmaker who could reach the youth demographic, that they admitted they had lost touch with. Like Beyond The Valley of the Dolls, Who Killed Bambi? was scripted by Pulitzer Prize-winning film critic Roger Ebert, of the Chicago Sun-Times.

Russ Meyer shot two scenes for Who Killed Bambi? before production stopped. With only two scenes in the can, Meyer and Ebert returned to LA as McLaren had failed to secure the film’s finances, in particular, Meyer’s weekly rates. For Meyer it was the new Hollywood term “pay or play”. He and Ebert walked off the project and returned to LA. In their absence, Julien Temple – then a student at the National Film School in London, who had been employed by McLaren as the Sex Pistols’ film archivist – would now be required as McLaren’s amanuensis, writing down Malcolm’s ideas though not into pages of script: that honour would come after another duo of screenwriters had been hired and fired.

Dickensian themes and imagery were a constant factor throughout both Ebert’s drafts and those that Temple penned, reflecting McLaren’s obsessions and fantasies. In combination with John Savage’s footnote in England’s Dreaming – that the only LP that Malcolm McLaren owned was the soundtrack to the film of the stage musical Oliver! – Craig Bromberg reveals that the sets used in the film Oliver! were to be used for Who

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627 “In the old studio system days a director could be replaced in an hour, but this was the freelance 1970s, and the agencies had manoeuvred a canny stipulation called ‘pay or play’ into the standard talent contract. It meant that once a buyer and talent signed a contract, the buyer [Malcolm McLaren] was obliged to pay the talent’s full fee, whether the talent [Meyer and Ebert] at the buyer’s pleasure performed or not. Talent could be fired for malfeasance or wrongful behaviour, but if the firing was caused by a personality issue, ‘creative differences’ as the trade papers termed it, the buyer [Malcolm McLaren] paid the full penalty.” See Marc Norman, What Happens Next: A History of American Screenwriting, Harmony Books, New York 2007: p. 354.
Killed Bambi? These were, Bromberg reports, “gloriously mossy” after ten year’s storage in a damp warehouse.630 The correlation between the two films is readily apparent when the finished poster artwork for *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle* is compared to that of *Oliver!*

One of the two scenes that Meyer and Ebert left behind featured Sting, the singer songwriter of The Police, as the lead singer of a gay, all-boy band called the Fabulous Blowaves, with two of his cronies picking up the unsuspecting Sex Pistols’ drummer Paul Cook.631 The second scene shot by Meyer depicted the slaying of one of the Queen’s deer by a sinister pop icon. This ageing, hippy rock star went under the initials of M.J. which stood for Mick Jagger, who, as far as Malcolm McLaren was concerned, was primarily responsible for hijacking rock ’n’ roll, watering it down, exploiting it and taking it out of the hands of the kids.632 For obvious legal reasons the initials would be changed, and they became B.J., evoking another member of The Rolling Stones, Brian Jones, who was deceased and thus could not be defamed. The killing of the aristocracy’s deer is an act attributed to a wide number of British heroes from Robin Hood to Shakespeare.633 The myth concerns the injustice of the have and have nots. In the legend, there is a wealthy and well-fed peer of the realm, who raises game to hunt and kill for sport, while the local peasants starve. By law, the poaching of the peer’s game was a crime punishable by death. In the case of Robin Hood it is the incident that turns Robin from a common peasant to an outlaw living in Sherwood Forest. And the injustice of the crime keeps Robin just: he robs from the rich to give to the poor. Given that the myth is attributed to outlaw heroes, it seems to indicate McLaren’s confused thinking that he would confer

631 The Fabulous Blowaves scene has been incorporated into Julien Temple’s *The Filth and the Fury*. Two of these actors would appear in Temple’s *Absolute Beginners* (1986), one as the fabulous Hoplite.
rebel status on *Who Killed Bambi?*’s arch nemesis, the rock ‘n’ roll sell-out, Mick Jagger.  

By the time *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle* was completed, the meaning that McLaren had intended for the Bambi trope had been spun again. As it was being edited, due to exigencies beyond his control, McLaren had made himself the arch nemesis of rock ‘n’ roll in the film. In this amended narrative, it was McLaren who murdered all that rock ’n’ roll stood for; only he did it for our own good. Like Nietzsche and the godless universe, McLaren knew that declaring rock ’n’ roll dead was going to be a brutal truth that most people would find very hard to swallow.

The scene as it stands is still amusing. A little girl – dressed in a costume that is derived from both Walt Disney’s *Snow White* character, as well as from Heidi – stands on her cottage doorstep. The little girl now looks down in a pantomime gesture: at her feet is a slain baby doe with an arrow in its flank. The little girl calls out, “Mother, come quickly, look they’ve killed Bambi!” There is a cut to a large, open topped car of the sort favoured by Nazi generals and African dictators parked in a country lane. Standing in the back is Malcolm McLaren, who holds a crossbow and is dressed in a charcoal uniform evoking the Fuhrer. With a cheerful wave from Malcolm, the chauffeured vehicle takes off to the tune of “Who Killed Bambi?” The question ‘Who Killed Bambi?’ is never satisfactorily answered, and it could also be argued that, as a trope, it is left unrealised by McLaren. Certainly, Bambi is yet another motherless albeit anthropomorphised child, as we have already seen, much favoured by Malcolm. However, the phrase itself came from a tabloid newspaper headline that covered the outraged story of burglars who had

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634 Jagger’s ‘outlaw’ status was exploited on film in *Ned Kelly* (1970), Australia’s own version of the Robin Hood legend, where Jagger played the eponymous hero.

635 In the BBC cult comedy series, *The Young Ones* (1985), it is revealed that Bambi never died. We are told that Bambi was a former record producer who became rather too fond of cocaine. Bambi, now detoxed, works as a TV producer for *University Challenge*.

636 McLaren and Westwood had already appropriated the Snow White cartoon character into the SEX clothing range. McLaren and Westwood had come across pornographic versions of Snow White engaging in sex acts with the seven dwarves. The cartoon style was Disney’s and Westwood and McLaren screen-printed the images onto t-shirts.
viciously kicked a poodle named Bambi to death. The question of ‘Who killed Bambi?’ becomes a kind of riff upon which McLaren is able to introduce and restart his narrative. The murder of Bambi symbolises the merciless exploitation of kids and rock ‘n’ roll by aging, jaded and cynical rock stars backed by big record companies. Mick Jagger was McLaren’s bete noir who represented all that had gone wrong with rock ‘n’ roll: he was, in McLaren’s eyes, a has-been who, after perverting the rebellious teenage energies of rock, now selfishly exploited both the kids and rock ‘n’ roll itself.

There would be another rejected storyline, set in a dead-end Alsatia, this time by the Hollywood team of writers, Danny Opatoshu and director Jonathan Kaplan. They supplied an untitled, eleven-page bare bones treatment, an abridged version of which is provided by Bromberg:

This time the untitled picture was to begin with a commercial for Swinging [sic] England that would dissolve into shots of the Sex Pistols hanging out in “Dead End,” a dismal London district of broken-down buildings and raggedly dressed children, incongruously visited by a red double-decker bus full of tourists. … Rod Bollocks, “a hippie pop superstar” returning home from tax exile only to find his home being squatted by Sid and burgled by Jones and Cook. When Rod protests to “Derek,” chief executive of his record company, Derek resolves to sign rather than chastise the Sex Pistols, but the band tell him to fuck off: They’d rather make their money their own way.

This film treatment concludes with:

… that night Her Majesty’s government is due to unveil a statue honouring the Sex Pistols in the newly dedicated Pistol Park. At this, the Sex Pistols commandeer the tourists’ double-decker

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637 In Walt Disney’s Bambi (1946), it is Bambi’s mother who is killed by a hunter and not Bambi, the baby doe.


639 London swung, not England.


bus, and as the end credits roll ‘Anarchy in the UK’ blares from the soundtrack … the film closes with the Sex Pistols spraying submachine-gun fire, grenades and explosives into the midst of the Pistol Park ceremony. 642

This was Lindsay Anderson’s *If ...* (1968), meets the Beatles’ *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967) and where it deviated from these precedents it was far from original.

7.3.2 The anti-rock musical movie

It could be said that the rock movie is the thing you do when the band is finished, and has creatively exhausted itself. The rock movie is a way of reaching audiences while the band hibernates and convalesces, or it is a kind of death mask and becomes a document of past events. As a document, the rock movie is preserved in aspic, a kind of containment of the last sparks of a fad and its *mileu*. For the producer, whose money is on the line, the idea is that the excitement, the danger, the essence of that anarchic, chaotic thing that is the live performance, will be captured on celluloid. For the producer, such containment is attractive because this means that they own a repeatable, reproduceable and therefore infinitely exploitable piece of the phenomenon that was the band. Before *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* and indeed to this day nobody other than Malcolm McLaren has ever attempted to make a movie-vehicle for a band that had already split up. And of course this begs the question: why would you and, further, why would anyone else be convinced to invest money, time or interest in such an undertaking, let alone an audience go to see it?

The answer may actually be sheer bloody-mindedness. What McLaren describes as “his style and above all, his attitude” 643 saw this pretentious talker and teller of tall tales graduate from naïve and petty conman to outright embezzler. In *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* he will accuse himself of being both.

642 Ibid: p. 163.

In his feud with John Lydon, *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* played several roles. First and foremost it was an attack on John Lydon, which was significantly toned down by the time of its release to avoid libel cases. At another level, the film was a teenage call to arms with the opening sequence depicting the Gordon Riots on its two hundredth anniversary: a celebration of anarchy chaos and riot. And on yet another level, the ten lessons we see enacted on screen in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* were Malcolm McLaren’s thesis, his argument, his assay, his deposition intended to prove his outright ownership of the London punk phenomenon and above all, the intellectual property of the now defunct Sex Pistols. In other words, *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* was Malcolm’s attempt at an intellectual patent for punk. What was at stake was the right to copy, reproduce and exclusively own punk, the residuals, the documents as well as the very memory of the former Sex Pistols. The exclusive right to copy meant exactly that, to exclude all others who might be able to exploit punk, from the band members to its fans.

### 7.3.3 Swindling the swindler

Yet the film’s troubles continued after production and well into the editing process with further squabbling over the Sex Pistols’ brand in the courts. On 7 February 1979, Justice Browne-Wilkinson heard the case “J. Lydon and others versus Glitterbest/Matrixbest”. The ‘others’ in attendance were drummer Paul Cook and guitarist Steve Jones and did not include either of the band’s former bass players, Glen Matlock or Sid Vicious. As Phil Strongman points out in *Pretty Vacant*, Sid had died of a heroin overdose in New York and was being cremated that very day.\(^{644}\) None of his fellow band members were in attendance at the funeral.

The screenplay of *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* was submitted as evidence. Malcolm’s svengali-like brags, of having puppeteered his teenage charges to swindle three record companies and smash the Establishment, were taken very literally by the judge.\(^{645}\) On 8 February, Justice Browne-Wilkinson “delivered his verdict, taking control

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\(^{645}\) Like Justice Browne-Wilkinson, the general public critically accepted this mythical version of events at face value. Later it became known as McLaren’s version of events. Only after the publication of John Lydon’s autobiography *Rotten* (1993) did a contrary version of events begin to enter popular
of the Sex Pistols away from Malcolm and placing it into the hands of court receivers Spicer and Pegler”. The outcome of this court case meant that The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle was seized as assets, and that John Lydon was free to use his stage name Johnny Rotten as well as the brand name without a band, the Sex Pistols. After further legal battles between Julien Temple and Malcolm McLaren The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle was credited as having been written and directed by Julien Temple. This was a moral victory for Temple who had ‘slaved’ as McLaren’s “assistant” for several years, doing everything McLaren could not, which included directing, producing, filming, screenwriting and editing. Paradoxically, the Glitterbest decision was unfair; while justly rewarding Temple’s contribution, it nonetheless denies the genius of McLaren’s vision. My intention is to discuss this vision – using McLaren’s ten lessons and the Gordon Riots of The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle.

7.3.4 Ten lessons or how to cook up a rock ‘n’ roll swindle

THE GORDON RIOTS

By the time The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle was released in 1980, the Sex Pistols had had their time upon the stage. Lydon had found and declared himself, and he had shone. Now McLaren saw his own chance to declare himself a great performer and artist. But while Johnny Rotten had been a rock star, Malcolm McLaren was about to become a movie star and mogul.

In the opening credit sequence, Helen Wellington-Lloyd rolls cubes showing the punk trademark design ‘ransom note’ cut-out letters, and also spelling out the film’s title, The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle. Breaking with the newspaper punk look, the fonts are technicolour and have been sourced from glossy magazines. Then on The King’s Road, consciousness, but it took Temple’s documentary The Filth and the Fury (2000) to discredit the myth for the general public. Quoted from Jon Savage, England’s Dreaming, Faber, London 1993: p. 532.


647 In one of many abusive outbursts during the fraught editing process, McLaren quite literally told Temple that he was McLaren’s slave. Craig Bromberg, The Wicked Ways of Malcolm McLaren, Perennial, New York 1989: p. 190.
the steel door of number 430 opens and a man in a rubber bondage suit steps onto the pavement. He wears an air-filled rubber mask and proceeds in sinister cockneyfied sibilants (evoking the voice of Fagin), to tell us that we may be familiar with one of his many inventions, “the punk rock”.

As described in the opening of Chapter 3, in the Gordon Riots scenes, which follow this and open The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle, McLaren mixes his eras of torchlit, gas-lit and twentieth century electrified London in a jarring juxtaposition of frenzied street urchins holding burning torches aloft, playing rock ‘n’ roll to an appreciative audience of drunken ragamuffins.

The anarchic spirit of the English crowd, the London mob, the cockney shyster, the London commune and the merry olde England of taverns, brothels, Prince Hal and Falstaff, were all resuscitated by the Sex Pistols. Such entities had all been quietly put to bed during the days of Empire, when the model sons of England were seen as its rulers and administrators. During an interview by the film critic Chris Salewicz, Julien Temple said: “I think punk came out of this strange culture of Britain that had been repressed through the Victorian times”. And then on the 2005 DVD release, Temple narrates:

… Malcolm I think saw them very much in a Dickensian way … I liked to think of them as Chaucerian really, you know when you read the ‘Miller’s Tale’ and you see the musicians who just get pissed all the time and fart and throw up and take the piss out of the church and so on. To me the Sex Pistols were in a long line of rebel poet singers. The Gordon Riots were one station in a long journey of when the mob took over the asylum. It could be the Peasant’s Revolt, it could be the Levellers or the Ranters but the Gordon Riots were wonderful because they were in London and for seven days the mob just

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649 This filmed interview is an ‘extra’ that accompanies the 2005 DVD release of The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle.
controlled the city and let the lions out of the tower – so there were lions and zebras in the streets. [We] just wanted to set the film up with this goes way back [and it is] not [just] an Elvis Presley thing. 650

Without a conventional narrative to carry it and made up of so many elements – ‘historical’ re-enactment, ‘found’ footage, documentary, television, animation, comedic sketches and others – and cobbled together from so many mediums and formats, The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle and its makers were entirely dependent on finding some form of artificial structure to carry it.

The arc that McLaren and Temple settled on is, in fact twofold: first, there is the drama and detective plot of the gumshoe Steve Jones in pursuit of McLaren the embezzler (and the missing Sex Pistols’ monies) and second, the conceit of the Sex Pistols story as a get-rich-quick scheme – a swindle – and one that is served up as ten easy lessons. These lessons purported not only to demonstrate but to factually document the ease with which McLaren in a masterplan had hoodwinked everybody: the record companies, the media, his own staff at Glitterbest, his teenage charges the Sex Pistols and even Ronald ‘Ronnie’ Biggs, the Great Train Robber. These two devices, intended to contain all of the disparate threads of the Sex Pistols’ story – partially dictated by the existing accumulated footage – would inevitably come back to haunt McLaren and with good reason: these lessons can be seen as an extension of McLaren’s persona.

LESSON ONE: how to manufacture your group
Auditions are conducted for a replacement for the Sex Pistols’ lead singer. A line of longhaired boys, one after the other, sing lyrics written by Vivienne Westwood.651 One of the boys wears a fairly accurate latex mask of Lydon’s visage.652 The opening stanza re-

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650 Commentary accompanying 2005 DVD release of The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle.
651 The inspired improvisations supplied by one of the auditionees Tenpole Tudor gained him a song writing credit.
652 On the commentary accompanying The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle DVD, Julien Temple rather disingenuously declares that this was a life mask taken directly from John Lydon’s face. The mask is good but it is sculptured and definitely not a life mask. Temple is aristocratically vague about how this so-called life mask could possibly have been accomplished, given the fact that Lydon would have nothing to do with
establishes the popular punk tropes: “People said we couldn’t play/They called us foulmouthed yobs/But the only notes that really count/Are the ones that come in wads”. While stanza five is overtly critical of and directed at John Lydon: “I just wanna play with MY BAND/Are you good enough for me/Hiya boys I’m the chosen one/Can’t you fucking see”.

LESSON TWO: establish the name Sex Pistols
In a Victorian home, Helen Wellington-Lloyd clomps down the staircase into the front room where Malcolm McLaren lies naked in a clawfoot bath with shrunken genitals exposed. (A visual gag punning on Never Mind the Bollocks.) The room is decked out as a conservatory with the Victorian paraphernalia of ferns and a naked pre-pubescent girl. It is unclear whether this was the same little girl who plays Bambi’s keeper.

This young girl with flowing blonde hair, in jump cuts, is transformed into the image of one of the Bromley contingent; Soo ‘Catwoman’ Lucas. Malcolm’s visual sensibility places her against a Victorian Chinese screen with the twin faces of cherubic boys painted upon it.

The scene is meant to evoke the role of Mick Jagger in the David Cammel/Nic Roeg film Performance of 1970. This is an important intertextual reference: Performance is the story of a vicious gangster who takes refuge in a large Victorian house occupied by a reclusive rock star, played by Mick Jagger. The two characters are alter egos; one could even describe them as doppelgangers because the film concludes with the rock star having stolen the physical identity of the gangster. Malcolm’s reference would seem to be about his legal relationship with John Lydon, whom Malcolm was refusing the right to use the stage name, Johnny Rotten. Malcolm claimed to have invented it and therefore held copyright over it. It also extends the allegory Malcolm is at pains to present of the production, let alone stoop to have his face cast in alginate and plaster, something which seems to have escaped the garrulous Temple.

But this is not the real Soo Lucas as Joel McIver, author of The Making of The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle asserts. Soo Lucas only appears in the film in found footage. This is presumably because she was a friend of John Lydon’s and chose not to be involved in a production that set out to denigrate him.
himself as Svengali, puppeteer, and cabbalistic golem maker, who moulded men from clay.

Inside a limousine, in a scene reminiscent of those shots from Borgia Ginz’s Rolls Royce in Jarman’s Jubilee, we see the punkette based on Soo ‘Catwoman’ Lucas being chauffeured by the Sex Pistols roadie Boogie. She is on her way to a punk nightclub as the next scene reveals.

Temple has filmed the performance of ‘Anarchy in the UK’ on Tony Wilson’s So It Goes directly from the television. Here he intercuts the Sex Pistols’ television performance with shots taken in a punk venue, with punks dancing. Malcolm finds moments when Rotten isn’t choking the microphone to deliver hypnotic suggestions:

Forget about music and concentrate on creating generation gaps. Call all hippies boring old farts and set [sic] light to them. Terrorise, threaten and insult your own useless generation. 654

It is unclear whether Malcolm is exhorting his own generation of baby boomers or the second wave baby boomers of the Sex Pistols’ generation or anyone watching this, whatever their age. While this is certainly a voice over, in cinematic terms its intention is ambiguous. The question is whether this voice over is to be understood as diegetic or non-diegetic, that is, is this a voice over addressed to either the protégé, Helen Wellington-Lloyd (who is being tutored in the ten lessons of punk), or intended as a kind of hypnotic statement for the cinema audience or an internal monologue, like a soliloquy, upon which we the audience eavesdrop, and which in diegetic terms is intended only for Malcolm ears. However, in a change of register, as if making a mental note to himself or his protégé, McLaren relishes the power to be gained by novelty:

Suddenly you’ve become a novel idea and you’ve got people wanting to join in. You’ve gained credibility from nothing. You’re the talk of the town. Develop this as a story you can sell. 655

654 The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle.
655 Ibid.
The milieu having been established, Temple turns to the ‘McGuffin’ that will run throughout the next hour and a half, the pursuit of the Sex Pistols’ money. Filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock employed the term to describe the device that kept the narrative on track but which is otherwise irrelevant. Temple settles for the Sex Pistols’ guitarist, Steve Jones, dressed in the garb of a private detective, in pursuit of Malcolm McLaren, who has swindled the Sex Pistols of all their money. Jones breaks the glass door of McLaren’s office at Glitterbest and opens the safe. He finds a loaf of sweetbread but no money. The irony, intended or not, is that all of the band’s profit was going into the making of this film: Malcolm even had a new company for the film’s production, Matrixbest, so the smashing of the Glitterbest glass was no financial loss.

LESSON THREE: *how to sell the swindle*

Derek Jarman’s Super 8 footage, shot at Andrew Logan’s Alternative Miss World party on Valentine’s Day 1976 has been ‘blown’ to 35mm and screens. The film shifts to Highgate Village and to a nineteenth-century gothic folly near Highgate Cemetery named the Cloisters. We can hear the voice of a young woman singing from Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Pirates of Penzance*, accompanied by piano. Steve Jones peers through a window. Continuing his technique for matching shots from different filmstocks, or shot either at different locations or different times, Temple gives us the reverse from Jones’s perspective and we hear the audio of Jones’s question dubbed in: “Who the fuck are you?” We are now inside the rooms of Tona de Brett who is telling us that she once gave singing lessons to John Lydon. Passed a copy of the *Never Mind the Bollocks* songbook, she leafs through the pages and declares that she does not recognise any of the material from that singing lesson. She tells us that Lydon could not reproduce the same note twice or match the key. In a piece of unstaged flattery, Tona de Brett tells us that, unlike John Lydon, his ‘erstwhile’ manager Malcolm McLaren had an excellent musical ear.  

We next find ourselves in Highgate Cemetery at night where Malcolm, accompanied by Helen Wellington-Lloyd, is pasting up Sex Pistols’ posters on the

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nineteenth-century brick tombs. Malcolm is dressed in the tartan bondage pants, jacket and t-shirt that proclaims ‘Cash From Chaos’. Unable to resist the opportunity to show off his hitherto unacknowledged talents, Malcolm sings the Max Bygrave tune ‘You Need Hands’ replete with orchestration and tap dancing.

LESSON FOUR: *don’t play, don’t give the game away*
In a dramatisation of supposedly real events, we see a television in a lounge room. A working-class man seats himself opposite with a plate of dinner. No child is present. The television screen has “Censored by Thames Television” across it, while audio from the events that transpired on 1 December 1977, when the Sex Pistols went live to air with Bill Grundy, can clearly be heard.

As Steve Jones tells Grundy that he’s “a dirty rotter … a dirty fucking rotter”, the lorry driver John Holmes (played by an actor) swears, springs out of his seat and puts his hobnail boots into his television. In an ironic twist, the Sex Pistols’ virtual home invasion incited career lorry driver, John Holmes to turn mob and smash his own luxury possessions – his brand new colour TV!

The depiction here is a re-enactment of the much-mythologised incident, but I’m not convinced that it really happened. Throughout the punk texts that now span thirty years, there has never been a follow-up interview with this man or his son. Nonetheless, the idea that a working-class driver could be outraged by the potty mouth of teenage punks that he hears on telly is too good to be let go by either critics of the Sex Pistols or their fans or, so it seems, McLaren.

This was the moment when punk achieved infinite notoriety, the Sex Pistols broke through from a cultist gang to a popular phenomenon upon which you had to have an opinion. It was the moment at which the Sex Pistols came closest to inciting and inspiring something that might have resembled the Gordon Riots. It was generationally divisive; some of the kids got it, but the majority were horrified. In his autobiography *I Was A Teenage Sex Pistol*, Glen Matlock relates how he lost friends over his involvement in the
incident. Now back in the Glitterbest offices, McLaren and Sophie Richmond concoct fake letters of complaint against the Sex Pistols to be posted off to the tabloids and music presses. One letter describing the fans of the Sex Pistols states: “I doubt they’ve got an O level between them.”

The frame is filled with a large bus driving through streets on a wet night. In Caerphilly in Wales, local Christians are holding a vigil outside the Castle Cinema. One of the protesters informs us that if one of her kids was inside that place she’d go right in and drag them out. Meanwhile, inside the hall, the Sex Pistols sneer about not being able to play. Their one consolation, Steve Jones says, is that they are inside where it is warm and the protesters are outside in the cold.

LESSON FIVE: steal as much money from the record company of your choice

In a self-contained film clip, we see Sex Pistols’ drummer Paul Cook sleeping fitfully in a cot. Outside his window is Malcolm McLaren dressed as Santa Claus. By Cook’s tossing and turning we are led to believe that he is having a nightmare: that nightmare is McLaren. This scene may or may not hark back to Malcolm’s part in the King Mob Situationist prank played in Selfridges in Oxford Street during Christmas 1968. A group of art students, all dressed as Santa Claus, entered Selfridges and began pulling toys off the racks and giving them to children. As the children tried to leave the store they were apprehended by the store’s security. A leaflet was also being distributed ‘It Was Meant To Be Great But It’s Awful: confessions of S. Claus’ that attacked the consumerism and commercialisation of Christmas.

As documented by Greil Marcus, Malcolm claims he was present at Selfridges on the day but only as an observer and that he fled before he could be arrested. Whether Malcolm was there or not has been contested by other writers. Nonetheless, I think it is

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658 Although performed by King Mob in a Selfridge’s store, the prank was copied from the stunt initiated by the Motherfuckers in New York’s Macey’s. McLaren’s claimed involvement in the King Mob incident is quoted in Jon Savage, England’s Dreaming, Faber, London 1992: p. 34.
safe to say that the commercialised figure of Santa Claus is another of McLaren’s public enemies.

To bridge the narrative where film footage, either found or ‘re-enacted’ is not available, Temple turns to animated sequences. Here we see the Sex Pistols at the offices of EMI after their signing. The cartoon characters trash the offices: Paul Cook throws the gold records commemorating individual recording artists’ sales off the wall; Sid, who has kicked the toilet to pieces, hops across the carpet, bleeding; Jones is shagging a secretary in a cubicle and Rotten spray-paints a swastika on the wall.

This time in live action, the cynical Steve Jones, still in pursuit of McLaren, enters a record company office party. After being described as a walking abortion and a walking dildo by a woman with wriggling live ants latexed to her face, Jones takes a commemorative gold record down from the wall, drops his pants, lifts his coat-tails and makes pained expressions. In the audio commentary to the DVD, Temple admits that the ants are his, a film student’s homage to Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali’s *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). The words that the woman is speaking are from Valerie Solanos’s manifesto for SCUM, which had already been used by McLaren and Westwood to decorate the walls of 430 The King’s Road.

Malcolm McLaren walks into a nightclub entrance; he addresses the bouncer, telling him to keep the entry exclusive. Inside the nightclub, a band called the Black Arabs is performing a declawed disco medley of Sex Pistols’ numbers. The Black Arabs are all West Indian and wear togas and the armour of Roman centurions. Malcolm swigs on a beer bottle and tosses it at the band so that it smashes on their armour.  

A limousine draws up in front of Buckingham Palace and the Sex Pistols tumble out. Steve Jones has just punched Lydon in the nose and it looks as though he might be about to cry. The boys sign their contracts.

LESSON SIX: *how to become the world’s number one tourist attraction*

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*659* Managed by Bernie Rhodes, the group’s name The Black Arabs was purportedly intended to offend London Arabs who, it was alleged, were racist toward London’s black West Indians. Julien Temple on the audio commentary of *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle.*
On 6 June 1977, the Sex Pistols took a boat out on the Thames. Lydon and Vicious are already alarmed by the stunt. In the documentary footage Lydon says he feels trapped and Vicious – anxious, edgy, his teeth chattering – says he’s going below deck. The band plays ‘God Save the Queen’ before the Houses of Parliament. Soon the river police are upon them and Malcolm is arrested.

We are told by voice over that in Jubilee week there was no number two single because the charts were censored from naming ‘God Save the Queen’. Over a bowl of cereal, Malcolm marvels:

*It was amazing. You couldn’t see this group play. You couldn’t hear them on the radio. And if you wanted to buy the record – it was impossible. But yet this group had become the world’s greatest tourist attraction. And was fast becoming England’s public enemy number one.*

An animated sequence follows where a fearful John Lydon leaves a pub at closing time and walks down a street then into a lane. First, a vicious dog barks and snaps at him, then a flashlight shines in his face. Lydon is bailed up by three yobs, and one of them with the torch shining under his face asks, “God Save the Queen, eh John!?” Lydon is set upon and knifed. He falls to the ground.

The Sex Pistols perform ‘Pretty Vacant’ with Lydon’s trademark drawl on ‘vacant’ so it is pronounced as ‘vague-cunt’. Despite the obvious obscenity ‘Pretty Vacant’ was considered harmless and received airplay.

LESSON SEVEN: *cultivate hatred, it’s your greatest asset*

Sid Vicious has his own film clip. He gets up off a bed in a pair of leopard skin jocks with a chain and padlock around his neck. There is a cut away to Nancy Spungen in bed, who obviously has a puffy and very recently broken nose. To the music, Vicious swaggers around the room, in which a motorcycle is parked. He pulls a beer out of the

660  *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle.*

661  In Julien Temple’s *The Filth and the Fury* (2000), John Lydon describes these days of the Jubilee as “if you were a werewolf”.
fridge and smashes the bottle on the hub of the motorcycle. Like a tense swimmer about to plunge into icy water, Vicious pauses before taking the shattered bottle and rubbing its shards against his chest to make himself bleed.

Steve Jones is still pursuing Malcolm and this time he is investigating a brothel called The Cambridge Rapist Hotel. It resembles Linda Ashby’s bondage and discipline business. Inside a cage is a man at a desk. He is a record executive who has been caged for paedophilia. The actor is Johnny Shannon and his role in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* is another homage to Donald Cammel and Nic Roeg’s *Performance* in which Shannon played a heavy. Jones reduces the record executive to tears and exits. (Shannon was hired because of his resemblance to the managing director of A&M records, Al Greene.) Off the corridor, in various rooms, various perversities are in full swing. In one room, Debbie Juvenile beats an elderly man with the back of an electric guitar. (She does not seem to understand staged fighting and the man is in obvious pain). In another room a topless woman angler draws on a fishing rod while another elderly man pretends to be a fish in a bath. Jones roughs up the maid and then opens another door and enters a darkened room, where a bikini-clad Japanese girl lies on a bed of plastic and neon lights. Jones and the girl sing “I’m just a lonely boy” and “I’m a lonely girl” to each other and there’s a stylised scene of lovemaking. The sex is very fake. The screenplay juxtaposes Jones’s goading of a paedophile, with his immediate need for meaningless sexual gratification. Steve Jones was sexually molested as a child and it is on this trauma that he has since blamed his teenage kleptomania, his sex addiction and his decline into heroin abuse after the Sex Pistols.

Outside, Paul Cook pulls up in a large American car and we see the soft top begin to open. Back in the Cambridge Rapist Hotel, the Japanese girl flicks the security switch. A bondage-masked security guard with an Alsatian on a short chain stands over Jones and the Japanese girl. The dog’s barking has been replaced with words telling Jones that

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662 Curiously, the installation of a 1950s American motorcycle inside a flat like a piece of furniture was also seen in the girl’s HQ in Derek Jarman’s *Jubilee.*

663 “… I was constantly looking for anything to fuck. I was molested [as a child] …”, Steve Jones quoted in *Rotten*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1994: p. 91.

664 Steve Jones interviewed in *The Filth and the Fury.*
Malcolm has been spotted and is about to escape by train from Marylebone Station. Jones jumps out of a window and lands in the car seat beside Cook.

Sid Vicious, astride the motorcycle from his digs, rides through London streets without a helmet singing the song by Eddie Cochran, ‘C’mon Everybody’. On Marylebone Station, Malcolm McLaren clambers aboard a departing carriage. He tells Helen Wellington-Lloyd: “We were now a legend” (this event is another curious film homage, this time to David Lean’s *Brief Encounter* [1945]). With Helen standing forlorn on the platform, the train pulls away at increasing speed. Jones and Paul Cook appear running alongside the departing train but they are far too late.

**LESSON EIGHT: how to diversify your business**

Inside a carriage on a British Rail train we see a man in a hero shirt. This is B.J. the anti-rock star of McLaren’s imagination. He is handsome, large and though heterosexual, still rather fey. There is something of Elvis’s jumpsuit fashion. He applies black lipstick.

B.J. steps into a first-class private carriage and tells the train guard that he is not to be disturbed. The door slips open and the punkette we saw transformed into a copy of Soo ‘Cat Woman’ Lucas enters and strangles B.J. to death. She stuffs the dictaphone into his open mouth. If this was the same pre-punkette who witnessed the slaying of the baby doe that gave rise to the question, ‘Who killed Bambi?’ this would make sense as a retributive killing.

We see the train pull up at a station, presumably Bromley, because the punkette is now dressed in the schoolboy uniform of Richmal Crompton’s character from the *Just William* series of books. The reference would seem to be to the Bromley contingent, as the William books were all set in suburban Bromley. Malcolm and the punkette escape in a car. Steve Jones boards the train. Behind a closed door he can hear Malcolm’s voice. Jones pulls the door open to find the dead B.J. with a dictaphone tape recorder stuffed down his throat and still playing Malcolm’s tape, as if the dead B.J. were parroting McLaren’s own words.

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Richmal Crompton created William, an unctuously belligerent boy, whose mischievous adventures took place in Edwardian-era Bromley.
LESSON NINE: taking civilisation to the barbarians – the USA

The American tour is a shambles. With hindsight we know from the various accounts that McLaren was busy dividing and conquering. (For example, Sid, whom Lydon managed to keep clean of smack, spent one afternoon in New York with McLaren and returned stoned). In documentary footage shot by Warner Bros, the audience is seriously aggressive at a concert in Texas. A full can of beer is thrown, striking Sid in the face so that his nose explodes in blood. He continues to mime. Sid taunts the audience and calls them “cowboy faggots.” One man mocks Vicious, who responds by smashing the man over the head with his bass guitar before launching himself off the stage and into the audience to fight his taunter.

In the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco, John Lydon crouches on the stage. He tells the audience “You’ll get one song and one song only because I’m a lazy bastard.” The band strikes up and Lydon intones “No fun, it’s no fun.” Still repeating the phrase ‘No Fun’, we can see that his eyes are full of tears and his nose full of snot. Lydon stands up and says to the audience, “Ever get the feeling you’ve been cheated?” Lydon exits the stage. It is perhaps ironic that the final line of the Ebert and Meyer’s screenplay for Who Killed Bambi? was to end with Johnny Rotten breaking the fourth wall and addressing the cinema audience directly by asking, “Did yer ever have the feeling yer being watched?”

Back in England at Hindley airstrip, McLaren has called a press conference in a vandalised air control tower. This choice of location is also wordplay upon the name of the convicted child murderer and punk icon, Myra Hindley, already discussed in Chapter 6. An American voice demands of him, how much money has the band made? McLaren tells him they’ve made £695,000. McLaren then tells a French journalist that a member of

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666 The song is Iggy and the Stooges’ ‘No Fun’ but is incorrectly attributed to the Ramones in Joel McIver’s The Making of The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle.
668 In his commentary to the DVD of The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle, Julien Temple claims that Hindley airstrip was chosen because it was the site from which the Battle of Britain was fought in 1940. This appears to be wishful thinking as Hindley airstrip is not listed.
the band has gone over to the other side and is what the French would call, a collaborator.\textsuperscript{669} The sound of a nearby aircraft means that McLaren must shout over its roar. He tells the gathered press that this swindle he has pulled off is what he has dreamed of ever since he was ten years old. When McLaren was ten Elvis Presley went into the army. For McLaren that was the day that the anarchy, the sexual energy that ‘Elvis the Pelvis’ created died, and was co-opted, declawed and commercialised as a product sanctioned and thereby controlled by the state. McLaren yells over the aircraft’s noise: “Who Killed Bambi?”

LESSON TEN: \textit{Who killed Bambi?}
Like Monty Python’s \textit{The Life of Brian}, screened a year earlier, \textit{The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle} turns to the self-reflexivity of scenes set in a cinema with \textit{The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle} screening in its auditorium. In the cinema foyer, Tenpole Tudor, the bug-eyed dementoid from the auditions for a new Sex Pistol singer plays a ticket seller. Tudor

\textsuperscript{669} For all that this a cynical call upon the abundance of British patriotism to be called upon with regard to the 1941-2 battle for the skies over Britain, the reference is really an intertextual film reference, but it concerns \textit{Casablanca} (Curtiz, 1942), rather than the blockbuster, \textit{The Battle of Britain} (Hamilton, 1969). McLaren is making another extraordinarily convoluted reference that regards the final sequence of \textit{Casablanca} and the issue of its hero’s collaboration, if not with the Nazis, then with the puppet Vichy government. In \textit{Casablanca}’s famous final sequence, out on the airdrome tarmac, the cynical anti-hero, Rick Blaine (Bogart) successfully aids and abets the escape of his former lover, Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman), who is escaping with her lover, the crusading freedom fighter, Victor Laszlo.

In an unexpected selfless reflex, Rick shoots the Nazi major, Strasser (Conrad Veidt) dead who before he can stop Ilsa and Victor and then Rick makes a compact with the Vichy policeman, Louis (Claude Rains) to cover their part in his murder up. The famous line: “Louis, I think this could be the start of a beautiful friendship” signals that both Rick and Louis will go and join the Free French in the good fight against Hitler and the Nazis. Historically, the scene resonated because it pre-empted the bombing of Pearl Harbour and America’s entry into the war.

In McLaren’s thesis as regards \textit{The Great Rock’n’Roll Swindle}, the Nazis are the record companies, Lydon has gone over to the Nazis as a collaborator and McLaren has been left to fight the good fight against the record companies. In his mind, McLaren is simultaneously the embodiment of the crusading freedom fighter, Victor Laszlo and the cynical realist and anti-hero, Rick Blaine.
sings ‘Who Killed Bambi?’ while Jones steals anything not nailed to the counter and then takes himself into the cinema and finds a seat.

On the cinema screen we see Jones and Paul Cook filmed in Brazil meeting up with the real Ronald Biggs, the infamous train robber escapee. The lads all get on well and are seen walking along the beach with an actor in a Nazi general’s uniform – ‘Martin Bormann’ – who is, of course, a fan of the Sex Pistols.

The film has completely lost its way.

Back in the cinema auditorium Jones has introduced himself to a girl in the audience (a cameo for the porn star Mary Millington) and she gets down on her hands and knees to fellate him. Intermission cards advertising Anarkee-Ora, a Rotten Bar and a Vicious Burger give a brief comic respite before introducing the film’s final reel. Sid Vicious is in Paris near the Latin Quarter: the scene of the Paris riots of 1968. He wears a swastika t-shirt. Sid goes into a patisserie and buys a cream bun. He leaves pursued by a staff member who asks him to sign her white coat. A woman, probably meant to be a French prostitute, says bonjour and invites Sid to talk. Sid approaches her and slams the cream bun into her face. Sid now buys a pistol.

In the cinema, the elderly woman usherette played by the character actor, Irene Handl, tells Tenpole Tudor, “we’ve got one of thems Sex Pistols carrying on in [the auditorium].” The elderly usherette shines a torch on the naked Millington who tries to cover herself. Now comes the sequence that like Jarman’s ‘Rule Britannia’ film clip with Jordan, is perhaps the film’s saving grace. To a full string section accompaniment, Sid Vicious, dressed in a white dinner suit, swaggers down a lit staircase on a stage in an Art Deco cinema in Paris, singing ‘My Way’, the signature show song of Frank Sinatra. He improvises a few lines of childhood guilt “I killed a cat”. In the cinema audience is Sid’s

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670 Biggs lived quietly in Camberwell, Victoria, Australia, before escaping to Rio de Janeiro after a tip-off from a sympathetic (but corrupt) Melbourne cop.

671 Mary Millington, real name Mary Ruth Quilter, committed suicide shortly after this on 19 August 1979.

672 In another curious parallel with Jarman’s Jubilee, ‘Non Je Ne Regrette Rien’ (sung by Hermine Demoraine as she stripped on a tightrope, holding an umbrella), was to have been Sid Vicious’s swansong. See Phil Strongman, Pretty Vacant, Orion, London 2007: pp. 235–6.
mother Anne Beverly playing herself. As the song comes to an end, Sid draws out a pistol and shoots his mother dead along with other audience members. Here was Malcolm’s hatred of mothers being enacted again. Ironically, Anne Beverley would supply her son with the heroin with which he overdosed: she took her own life by overdose in 1996.

In the same theatre Steve Jones’s clothed torso appears holding up two tablets engraved with McLaren’s ten lessons. The camera pulls back to reveal he is, from the waist down, ‘bollock’ naked. In a landmark case, the British censor insisted that the film include reference to Sid Vicious’ incarceration for the murder of Nancy and his own suicidal overdose and death from heroin. A series of newspaper front page banner headlines on Nancy’s murder and Sid’s heroin overdose follow. It is an appropriate, if chilling, end to the punk ride.

The end-title cartoon begins, and the Sex Pistols sing ‘Friggin’ in the Riggin’. In the animation we see an eighteenth-century British galleon riding the waves. Malcolm McLaren is the captain. He makes John Lydon walk the plank and Lydon is promptly pursued by a shark labelled ‘Virgin’ (after the record company). Paul Cook has been strapped to the bowsprit. Sid Vicious, Bowie knife clenched between his gritted teeth, leaps overboard as Steve Jones is thumping his guitar in the rigging. The ship goes down and McLaren salutes as it disappears beneath the waves. In another curious synchronicity, The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle, like Jarman’s Jubilee, ends on black with the audio carrying the haunting sounds of lapping waves and seagulls’ cries. The sea, according to Canetti, is the Englishman’s national crowd symbol:

The Englishman sees himself as a captain on board a ship with a small group of people, the sea around and beneath him. He is almost alone; as captain he is in many ways isolated even from his crew.

And the sea, like the raging fire, is yet another recurring symbol for the London crowd as well as for the violent energies of a surging London mob. According to Canetti’s catalogue of the nation’s crowd symbols, for the Germans it is the army, symbolised as a marching forest; for the French it is their Revolution; for the Swiss, the sacredness of

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their mountains; for the Spanish, the matador in an intimate dance with the bull; for the Jews, the Exodus from Egypt; but for the English it is the sea, to be ruled over by a captain and his crew. With the release of *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* in 1980, the British Empire under Elizabeth I and the sails of its navy was now under the reign of Elizabeth II no more. So what should replace the formerly cohesive national symbol of Britain’s dominion over the sea but a frigate crewed by a mutinous crew (an unruly mob), and requiring the harshest of rule.

### 7.4 WHAT HAD MALCOLM LEARNED?

These ten lessons were intended to smash the record establishment wide open, but in the proliferation of amateur bands and punk bands, and in the vacuum that followed the fall out and aftermath of punk, they would eventually be co-opted and used by the Establishment. This is not so incredible because McLaren’s lessons were, after all, the well-worn model of the pop recording establishment; they just hadn’t been so savagely exposed and parodied before.

In McLaren’s favour his (mis)management of the Sex Pistols at a specific time and place had succeeded in creating a perfect storm. The Sex Pistols had, through (un)happy circumstance, successfully risen upon a wave of increasingly synergised media. Everybody who had any establishment role in the making/promoting/use of pop culture – TV, radio and newspapers – hated them. This publicity, worse than notoriety and closer to infamy, hadn’t been achieved through spending oodles of money on marketing to smooth the waves. In fact, Malcolm had simply taken the ancient avenue of the snake oil salesman and exploited good, old-fashioned carnival showmanship. Malcolm knew a story, could spot a photo opportunity, knew how to put out a press release, but also knew how to fake a letter of complaint to the editor’s page about the disgusting punk phenomenon. Under such a tabloid thrashing, Malcolm certainly wasn’t

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676 Although Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan believed in the death penalty, their respective leaderships in the 1980s would not be remembered as thanatocracies, but for the economic terrorism they waged against their workers.
always cool, calm and collected; he made some very bad decisions, left band members out in the cold, and allowed them to bear the public’s anger in knifings and beatings. But even after the furore that followed the Grundy incident, with their deny nothing attitude, somehow the Sex Pistols and their management team always managed to spin the story their way. If the Sex Pistols have a legacy, it is as brilliant doctors of spin. This is perhaps the answer to the question Who killed Bambi? The swindle did.

7.5 RECEPTION

Reminiscent of the screenings of Andy Warhol’s epic non-event movies Sleep (1963) and Empire (1964), the reception of The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle regularly created a riot at the venue at which it screened. Julien Temple relates:

In Paris, we had the premiere at some huge old art deco theatre and they [the audience] got into the projection booth and ripped the projector bolts out, so that the film was flying all over the ceiling. In Hamburg during Sid’s ‘My Way’ they sprayed lighter fuel all over the screen and set fire to it. In London, a kid who was the spitting image of Sid – white dinner jacket, motorbike boots and talcum powder – jumped out with a gun underneath the screen and started firing blanks at the audience.

Malcolm McLaren was successfully exporting the chaos and anarchy of the London mob to the world.

If The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle has a legacy, it has been the many and ongoing refutations of Malcolm McLaren’s powerful piece of myth making. The myth has led to an industry of Sex Pistols’ autobiographies refuting ‘Malcolm’s version of events’ as well as by other band associates and insiders, ironically including The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle

677 “Malcolm said it right from the start: The press will just make it up anyway, so just go with it. I could see that would be true. And lo and behold, it was. Deny nothing.” John Lydon quoted in Rotten, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1993: p. 132.

678 See Jonas Mekas’s account of his disastrous screening of Sleep in Kevin MacDonald and Mark Cousins (eds), Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary, Faber, 1996: p. 219.

Swindle’s credited writer and director, Julien Temple. For the next twenty years The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle would be the public record. Not until John Lydon’s autobiography Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs would a concerted effort be made to undo the powerful tropes set in place by this myth. But it would be twenty years before Julien Temple would film the documentary The Filth and the Fury and the individual band members could finally air their opinions on the events mythologised by McLaren in The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle.

In the next and final chapter, we will consider punk’s legacy as well as – through the commentary of Lipstick Traces author, Greil Marcus – revisit and re-examine the Sex Pistols’ legacy resulting from their final concert at the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco on 14 January 1978.
Chapter 8: Punk’s Legacy

But punk is not my taste. 680

On 14 January 1978, the Sex Pistols’ lead singer John Lydon quit the band. In my concluding chapter I consider the cultural legacy of punk and the new milieu of Margaret Thatcher’s England in the wake of the Sex Pistols break-up.

With all members of the former Sex Pistols and their management, vehement about distancing themselves from the band, the past and each other, a clear line was drawn under the Sex Pistols, if not under punk. In the wake of the Sex Pistols came a raft of new punk bands making the same racket, wearing the same garb, snarling and spitting, eager to fill the void. But it was one of the punk converts, made at the Manchester Lesser Free Trade Hall on 4 June 1976, who was to take the punk aesthetic and punk instrumentation to forge a new, more musical sound. This was Manchester’s Warsaw, who became Joy Division.

While the other members of the Sex Pistols struggled to reinvent themselves and cast off their punk habits, John Lydon, having lost the copyright to his stage persona Johnny Rotten, reinvented himself so successfully as John Lydon and PiL that he set a new benchmark for popular music in the eighties.681

Meanwhile, the social conditions of the mid-seventies that had enraged the London youth, priming them for punk’s message, worsened. The lurch the Labour government had made to the right under Prime Minister James Callaghan would accelerate under the monetarist policies of the new Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher, elected on 3 May 1979.


681 Legally assured of his copyright over the name Johnny Rotten and the band’s name the Sex Pistols, this would allow the band to reform and perform in 2002.
The eruption of punk with its penchant for fashionable violence in the midst of Britain’s economic decline and London’s urban decay, would lead the screenwriter Nigel Kneale to pen *The Quatermass Conclusion* (1979), the final, fourth instalment in his television series about the rocket scientist Professor Bernard Quatermass. Foreseeing the grim dystopia Tory rule would create and a final oil shock, Kneale drew on his past imaginative investigation of the London mob to dissect and catalogue its physical ephemera: youth, pheromones, noise, gathering density and the electrical discharge that occurs in arenas, leaving only ashes in their wake.

The final Sex Pistols’ concert took place in the United States, at San Francisco’s Winterland Ballroom on 14 January 1978. Among those present was the musicologist and academic Greil Marcus, who would spend the next decade attempting to exorcise the effect of the experience, which he would liken to that of viewing Kneale’s *Quatermass and the Pit*, in the small hours of the night on American television. Marcus’s work with its careful working through of the influences of Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* and International Situationism would come to be inescapable in any interpretation of the Sex Pistols and London punk in the nineties.  

8.1 POST PISTOLS

With the resignation of John Lydon from the Sex Pistols and Sid Vicious in hospital from a drug overdose, the band was reduced to Steve Jones and Paul Cook. This situation did not prevent Malcolm McLaren from doggedly pursuing his film interests, as he now whisked Jones and Cook with all-round-filmmaker Julien Temple to Rio De Janeiro to

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meet the working class (anti)hero Ronald Biggs, who like the Sex Pistols was, for tabloid newspapers, among their number one villains.

Meanwhile John Lydon, deserted and penniless in San Francisco, put a call through to Virgin records and was bailed out by Virgin’s owner, Richard Branson. Branson hired Lydon and punk rock filmmaker Don Letts to fly to Jamaica to scout dub reggae talent for Branson’s Virgin label. During this time McLaren attempted to get film footage of John Lydon at his Jamaican hotel. McLaren hoped this footage would allow him to claim Lydon’s appearance in The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle, however Lydon successfully evaded the camera.683

Sid Vicious would recover and rejoin Nancy Spungen in England. Sid appeared in scenes for The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle including his, and arguably the Sex Pistols’ swansong ‘My Way’, before breaking with McLaren. Sid and Nancy moved to New York for two reasons: with Nancy as Sid’s new manager, the pair felt that New York would further Sid’s solo career; and with Nancy as Sid’s dealer, New York brought them into the orbit of Nancy’s heroin contacts. After the break-up of the Sex Pistols, Steve Jones would also become a heroin addict.684 And for the tabloid moralists, heroin addiction was the inevitable fate that the Sex Pistols (and therefore punk and all punks) brought upon themselves. But Paul Cook and John Lydon never dabbled and Jones would eventually kick his habit.685

8.1.1 Post Sex Pistols: where to draw the line

This chapter concerns punk’s legacy, but in order to recognise that legacy we require an end point at which to begin. Such an end point might be found in Lydon’s resignation

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683 The Sex Pistols’ former roadie, Boogie Tiberi, was sent to Jamaica by McLaren to undertake the task. Boogie was caught hiding in the bushes of Lydon’s hotel and was tossed into the hotel swimming pool. See Phil Strongman, Metal Box, Helter Skelter, London 2007: p. 38.


685 “Me and John had nothing to do with the heroin ...”, Don Letts quoted in Phil Strongman, Metal Box, Helter Skelter, London 2007: p. 53. Steve Jones mentions breaking his heroin addiction in The Filth and the Fury. None of the works on punk rock used for this thesis associate Paul Cook with any drug other than lager.
from the band, Nancy’s murder or Sid’s death: but none of these are the definitive end of the Sex Pistols. The Sex Pistols’ narrative is littered with false endings and impromptu encores. As I stated in Chapter 2, I have taken the expulsion or withdrawal of Glen Matlock and his substitution by Sid Vicious as the conclusion of the Sex Pistols in its initial form and as a creative entity. I argued that as he taught the others to play their instruments, and wrote the music for Lydon’s lyrics, Matlock’s “disappearance” concluded the Sex Pistols’ period of creativity. Beyond this point the band merely existed in repetition: their songs, their act and their style. With the setting of the Sex Pistols’ style – improvisation turned to antics – it became possible for people to emulate them. As their greatest fan, Sid Vicious showed that by watching John Lydon, he had learned how to copy and extend Lydon’s behaviour and attitude. Sid was such a good mimic that he briefly outshone and even eclipsed his mentor. The ‘Bromley contingent’, like Sid, was inspired by the Sex Pistols to go punk; this inspiration marks them as London punk’s second wave.

Although Matlock’s expulsion from the group ended the Sex Pistols’ brief period of creativity, it by no means concludes the Sex Pistols’ narrative per se: there are strong grounds to suggest this occurred at many later instances. These include the band’s performance aboard the Elizabeth during the Queen’s Jubilee (and the subsequent police raid and arrest of Malcolm McLaren); or the Sex Pistols’ last happy performance in England on the eve of the disastrous American tour, performing a Christmas Day benefit gig in Huddersfield for striking firemen and their families; or Johnny Rotten’s self-implosion and exit from the band at the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco. There are also Steve Jones and Paul Cook’s stunt with Ronald Biggs to consider, Nancy Spungen’s murder, Sid’s fatal overdose, Lydon’s new band PiL, or the band’s bonding in a courtroom against their unscrupulous manager, winning back the rights to their own names and to the songs they had written and performed. Beyond these events, the end of the Sex Pistols’ narrative could be marked by the release of The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll

Sid did contribute the lyrics to ‘Belsen Was a Gas’ but I have argued that as the Sex Pistols’ greatest fan, Sid represented a second wave within 1977 punk.
Swindle, their subsequent reformation and live performances in 1996 and 2002 and their sneering induction into the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame in 2006. These instances are all integral to the Sex Pistols’ ongoing narrative but they are of little importance to my argument. So how then to define the end of punk and thereby declare punk’s legacy?

One person who drew a clear line under his role in the Sex Pistols was Glen Matlock; however, in his efforts to cast off Malcolm McLaren and everything he had endured under McLaren’s (mis)management, it was John Lydon who drew a firmer, more clearly discernible line between the Sex Pistols, punk, his stage persona Johnny Rotten and his new post-Pistols self, as John Lydon, vocalist for an unnamed – and maybe never to be named – anti-punk, anti-music band.

8.1.2 The public image

Upon his return from Jamaica to his home in Gunter Grove off The King’s Road, John Lydon put together a new musical outfit that became, if not the defining band of post punk, then the musical sound that defined post punk.

After much indecision by Lydon and speculation by the music press, the group consisting of Keith Levene on bass, Jah Wobble on guitar, Jim Walker on drums and Lydon on vocals was announced as Public Image Limited (PiL). The name derived from Muriel Spark’s 1968 novel The Public Image, but there is no evidence that Lydon or any other band member actually read the book. As the frontman for the Sex Pistols and their public image Lydon had experienced firsthand the gulf between what the music industry wants the public to believe about rock stars and the reality as Lydon had

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687 After barely eight months Jim Walker was replaced by Dave Humphrey; 1979 would see a further three changes of drummers. Humphrey lasted a month followed by Karl Burns who lasted a few weeks until the relative stability of Mark Atkins. Drummers would prove a major casualty in the group’s line-up and to date there have been ten drummers. See the list of band members in Phil Strongman, Metal Box, Helter Skelter, London 2007: pp. 175–6.


689 Simon Reynolds makes a claim that Lydon read Spark’s The Public Image but without documentation it would appear to be an assumption on Reynolds’ part. Simon Reynolds, Rip It Up And Start Again, Faber, London 2005: p. 9.
experienced it.\textsuperscript{690} The issue of public image was also pertinent to Lydon who had learnt from his time in the public spotlight just how awful it was to be owned by the public. All of these concerns fed into Public Image Limited’s idea of itself. PiL would not pander to the public’s idea of what they should or should not do; it would be about playing music for the band members’ own pleasure and if the public liked it, well that would be a bonus.\textsuperscript{691} Like the Sex Pistols, promoted as a band who couldn’t play their instruments, PiL’s initial promotional material would present the group members as the antithesis of an establishment rock band. In communiqués with the music press, Lydon, Levene and Wobble condemned the spectacle of rock and described themselves as anti-rock, anti-audience and anti-music business. What this quite meant wasn’t clear because the band was yet to perform outside the walls of Lydon’s home in Gunter Grove. The band even claimed that it was modelling its business affairs on that of the corporate world and that each band member took an equal share of profits.\textsuperscript{692} However, as Phil Strongman has recorded in \textit{Metal Box}, the moment that Lydon’s lawyer appeared on the scene, all of these utopian fantasies were rudely concluded.\textsuperscript{693}

In October 1978, PiL released their first single. Lydon would discover that he might have washed his hands of his punk persona, Johnny Rotten, the Sex Pistols and punk, but the Sex Pistols’ fan base hadn’t finished with him. And it’s true, Lydon hadn’t completely got the Sex Pistols and McLaren out of his system. Their first single, ‘Public Image’, with its lyrics like “you never listened to a word that I said”,\textsuperscript{694} the incantation

\textsuperscript{690} “When I was slashed there was a problem a the hospital and they wouldn’t treat me. Malcolm wouldn’t even organize a cab to take us anywhere.” See John Lydon in Rotten, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1994: p. 196. “He couldn’t care less about you … [mimicking McLaren] ‘Go away I’m busy scandalizing you in the press!’” See Lydon quoted in Jon Savage, \textit{England’s Dreaming}, Faber, London 1992: p. 366

\textsuperscript{691} Phil Strongman, \textit{Metal Box}, Helter Skelter, London 2007.

\textsuperscript{692} “Everything’s to be shared equally, we produce equally, we write equally and share the money equally.” See Lydon quoted in Phil Strongman, \textit{Metal Box}, Helter Skelter, London 2007: p. 51.

\textsuperscript{693} Ibid: p. 66.

\textsuperscript{694} The single ‘Public Image’ was released 13 October 1978.
“two sides to every story” and Lydon’s declaration that Lydon’s public image belonged to Lydon, it’s arguably a critique of McLaren.

Lydon may have wanted to move on but the winding up of the Sex Pistols dragged on into early 1979. The combination of finishing *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, Sid’s death and the impending court case John Lydon v. Glitterbest had led Malcolm McLaren to the edge of a nervous breakdown. However, for McLaren worse was still to come. Believing he had Paul Cook and Steve Jones on side, McLaren and his lawyer Jeremy Fisher came to the court proceedings poorly prepared. Cook and Jones, who had remained friends with McLaren since the end of the American tour, testified against him after hearing evidence of how McLaren had fed their earnings and their subsidiaries exclusively into making *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*. With Cook and Jones’s evidence turned against McLaren, the judge found firmly in Lydon’s favour, which in turn favoured Cook, Jones, Matlock and the estate of Sid Vicious. *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* was seized as assets and McLaren fled to Paris.

8.1.3 Post punk: 1978 to 1984

Being post Sex Pistols was certainly not post punk. The Manchester spin-off punk band, the Buzzcocks and the London punk band, The Clash were finding greater popular success. Across the Atlantic, the American punk scene was far from dead. The Ramones and Talking Heads, two groups that had gathered at CBGBs in 1975 alongside Patti Smith, the New York Dolls and Television, now went on to chart singles and international fame, as Blondie did in 1978.

In the wake of punk, the Establishment – record companies, agents, the radio, chain record stores – re-established its stranglehold on what the public was allowed to see and hear. One could argue that in the aftermath of punk nothing new and exciting happened in the music that the majority listened to. The music video had arrived and there followed an era of the manufactured pop group. Traits such as big hair and video

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695 Ibid.
friendly faces, were coupled with the new sound of the synthesiser produced, Bananarama, Duran Duran, Human League, Kajagoogoo, Oingo Boingo, the Thompson Twins and Wham. Punk left a legacy of young people in revolt against being force-fed popular culture. This drove more people to follow the punk DIY ethic, not just to form bands but to set up alternative studios to record these alternative bands, create alternative avenues to press the disks or copy cassettes, design and print their packaging, distribute and sell them, while off-shore, pirate radio stations played this music and small, live music venues gave these bands a place to play.

Although he is too young to have experienced the Sex Pistols and punk, British music journalist Simon Reynolds has repudiated this notion of stagnation in his *Rip It Up and Start Again – Postpunk 1978–1984* (2005). Reynolds argues that alongside the pop of Michael Jackson, Donna Summer, U2 and Madonna, between 1978 and 1984, there was a proliferation of alternative music labels putting out and distributing alternative music; for example, regional acts like The Fall and Cabaret Voltaire. Unlike the second wave of 1977 punk, both these bands had been inspired by the DIY ethic of the Sex Pistols, but were not derivative of the Sex Pistols’ look or sound.

But Reynolds also argues that the most influential post punk sound was that of a little known Manchester outfit, named cheerily after the Nazi work camp brothels, Joy Division. Tony Wilson, presenter of the Manchester television program *So It Goes* commented:

> Obviously one gives credit to Joy Division for creating post punk. Because in the end all punk could say was ‘fuck you’. Sooner or later someone was gonna need to use punk instrumentation and punk attitude to express more complex emotions. And that was what Joy Division did.

Tony Wilson having declared Joy Division the decisive break with the old style and the induction of the new age then turns to Lydon’s PiL:

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I think that PiL began to express more complex music without going pompous and the rest of it. To me it was very musical, it was very noisy but had real melody there, all the way through. 700

So into this post punk vacuum, two bands boldly go: Joy Division building on punk’s instrumentation while PiL, says Wilson, was the new music of post punk because they had taken the template of music, ripped it up and started making their unique sound from scratch.

Although John Lydon derided the mohawked and leather jacketed punks, and refused to play Sex Pistols’ songs with PiL, the punk scene would not die. And punk was about to be moved in a new direction. Although punk was a white movement, these white punks began to identify more and more with a black scene and black music. The Clash, like John Lydon, loved reggae and dub and Richard Branson’s Virgin label were (thanks to Lydon and Don Letts) sourcing it out of Jamaica and distributing it. As early as 1977, The Clash had initiated punk’s strong anti-racist stance and new punk groups formed under this banner. By 1980, The Clash had mellowed into just another rock band and were increasingly sidelined as old school by younger, harder and more politically savvy punk groups. One such group was Crass. 701 Formed in 1977, Crass released their first EP in 1978 and lasted until 1984. 702 Crass’s music was just another medium in their bricolage of multimedia and political causes. Crass saw punk as a vehicle not just for a cause like anti-racism or even a raft of causes like feminism, pacifism and animal rights, but instead as creating a whole culture of refusal. If this sounds like a radical commune it was, and Crass were forerunners of the hybrid hippy-punks or peace-punks. The political was personal and Crass professed anarchism as a responsible way of life. This meant they were proactive and lived what they preached: they squatted and helped others set up squats, they composted and grew their own food, they proselytised, and used techniques

700 Ibid.
like graffiti and stencilling to jam or subvert the transmission of advertising and the dominant popular culture.\textsuperscript{703}

In America, inspired by the Sex Pistols rather than the New York punk scene that came out of the East Coast at CBGBs, a West Coast punk sound appeared. For want of a better name, the groups were initially labelled as new wave, but this distinctive punk sound came to be known as Hardcore. Hardcore had elements of barn dancing and surf guitar. Hardcore bands included Black Flag, Circle Jerks and The Dead Kennedys. Through their records and touring, the hardcore sound came to Britain through a Scottish band, The Exploited.\textsuperscript{704} The Exploited took the West Coast sound and accelerated it even further. The Exploited’s sound in turn gave way to Thrash and after 1987, into a hybrid of hardcore with heavy metal which came to be described as thrash metal.

Whereas America’s Hardcore artists like the Dead Kennedys and Black Flag had a sense of humour, albeit sardonic (as exemplified by the Kennedy’s single ‘Holiday in Cambodia’), the second wave of British punk bands – many of which were formed in 1978 but rose to popular attention in 1982 – had lyrics like those of The Mob. On the one hand, The Mob seemed to reflect dissatisfaction with Thatcherite Britain while on the other hand, their lyrics might have just been intended to be outright gloom and doom. These lyrics abounded with themes of alienation, unemployment, marginalisation, self-annihilation, gradual apocalypse and nuclear Armageddon. In ‘No Doves Fly Here’ they sang “playgrounds are empty and the children limbless corpses”\textsuperscript{705} or, in ‘I Hear You Laughing’, they heard “the silence of a kid’s suicide”\textsuperscript{706} and saw “people dying in the blood and the dust/And the gunshots of vicious murderous lust”.\textsuperscript{707}

\textsuperscript{703} One such example of their successful culture jamming concerned a fabricated phone call between Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in which Thatcher admits responsibility for the sinking of the Belgrano and the loss of a hundreds of lives in order to protect another ship, the Invincible from the Exocet missiles because onboard that vessel was the royal, Prince Andrew. The tabloid press gobbled it up. See Penny Rimbaud, \textit{Shibboleth}, AK Press, Edinburgh, 1998: pp. 251-4.


\textsuperscript{705} ‘No Doves Fly Here’ appears on The Mob, \textit{May Inspire Revolutionary Acts}, (2007) CD.

\textsuperscript{706} Ibid.

Punk was far from dead and the phenomenon that was punk music went on to have second and third waves in the USA\textsuperscript{708} and the UK, as well as in other countries including Australia.\textsuperscript{709}

8.1.4 Punk’s legacy in Thatcher’s England

Punk was an extreme reaction to events that had overtaken England in the mid-seventies. The fifties’ idealism of the welfare state with its optimism – full employment and public spending on education, housing and health – faced radical reappraisal. Born at the beginning of the postwar prosperity overseen by the experiment in British socialism, punks felt disenfranchised by the ideological swing to the right by both Labour and Conservative policies. Punks who were unemployed and on the dole, as a result of policies to reduce inflation found themselves demonised and scapegoated by the media as scroungers.\textsuperscript{710}

It can be argued that punk’s extreme revolt against authority and the Establishment was later paralleled by the equally reactionary Establishment stance of the Conservative Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher espoused a reactive and parsimonious set of Victorian upper and middle-class values that dismissed the ‘nannying’ ways of the classic welfare state.\textsuperscript{711}


\textsuperscript{711} “It is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour and life is a reciprocal business and people have got the entitlements too much in mind without the obligations...” Interview for Woman's Own ("no such thing as society") with journalist Douglas Keay (September 23, 1987), ‘Aids, education and the year 2000!’, \textit{Margaret Thatcher Foundation}: http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=106689. Accessed 28.05.08.
As filmmaker Julien Temple has pointed out (see opening quote, Chapter 7), Malcolm McLaren saw the Sex Pistols as an older anarchic energy, something with its roots in the medieval commune and coming to its hiatus in Georgian London before being repressed upon the streets by the coming of the Victorian era and relegated to the relatively safety of the novels of Charles Dickens. As I have recounted in Chapter 4, the savage satire and the anarchic and chaotic energies of the Georgian era along with its mobs, were quietly suppressed, moved on, or their traditional site of riotous carnival like that of Bartholomew Fair, curtailed under Queen Victoria. So too, the savage satire of the Sex Pistols and the anarchic and chaotic energies of the punks were to be penalised by Thatcher who instigated a return to Victorian values campaign. Like Malcolm McLaren, Margaret Thatcher “was grateful to have been brought up by a Victorian grandmother”.

However unlike McLaren’s idyllic and imaginative childhood at the knee of Nanna Isaacs, Thatcher learned a different set of Victorian values that she used to justify her assault on the welfare state. As she recalled in a radio interview with Peter Allen on the Independent Radio News programme The Decision Makers, Thatcher’s grandmother taught “you”

… to work jolly hard, you were taught to improve yourself, you were taught self-reliance, you were taught to live within your income, you were taught that cleanliness was next to godliness. You were taught self-respect, you were taught to give a hand to your neighbour, you were taught tremendous pride in your country, you were taught to be a good member of your community. All these things are Victorian values.

If not actually the antithesis of punk then this litany doesn’t fall far short. As Margaret Thatcher told London Weekend Television’s interviewer for Weekend Worlds in 1983, Victorian values “were the values when our country became great”. When asked in the

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713 Ibid.
714 Thatcher quoted from the transcript at the Margaret Thatcher Foundation: http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=105087.
House of Commons whether by Victorian values, Thatcher envisaged the absence of a National Health Service, the absence of old-age pensions, the workhouse, or a long series of colonial wars, she replied: “What I favour is acceptance of personal responsibility, freedom of choice and a British Empire that took both freedom and the rule of law to countries that would never have known it otherwise”.  

The daughter of a Grantham grocer, Thatcher lived in Flood Street, off The King’s Road, during the mid-to late seventies, and she surely saw her share of punk fashion as well as violent clashes between Teddy Boys and punks. On 4 May 1979 she moved out of Chelsea and into 10 Downing Street. Anti-socialist and anti-unions, Thatcher was delighted when the Russian press dubbed her the ‘Iron Lady’ after she attacked the Soviet Union in a speech in Kensington Town Hall in 1976. As her monetarist economic policies caused unemployment figures first to double then triple, she famously declared, “the Lady’s not for turning”. Max Decharne summarised what the kids of punk inherited under Thatcher:

It had been a punk cliché in 1977 to sing about being on the dole, but that was the golden age compared to what followed in the early 1980s, and by 1981 unemployment in the UK stood at 13.3 per cent, the highest in Western Europe. Inflation was running at 20 per cent, and eventually the number of unemployed rose to 3 million, which was double the 1977 figure, and the sharpest rise since the days of the 1930s depression.

Accessed 20.04.08.

715 Thatcher quoted from Margaret Thatcher Foundation:
Accessed: 20.04.08.

716 Margaret Thatcher Foundation. Speech at Kensington Town Hall, 19 January 1976:
Accessed: 30.06.08.

717 Margaret Thatcher Foundation. Speech to Conservative Party Conference, 10 October 1980:
Accessed: 03.05.08.

8.1.5 The mob and the crowd under Thatcher

Although Thatcher distanced herself from the thuggery of the National Front she was far from a champion of the migrant population. Under her leadership, racial tensions went on simmering. On 11 April 1981, sparked by the undue harassment of a black youth by a predominantly white police force, the black neighbourhood of Brixton erupted in mob rioting. The London mob’s inventive use of milk bottles as missiles, first seen in the 1958 Notting Hill Race Riots, now discovered a new negative capability – that of the petrol bomb. Shops and houses were torched and, reminiscent of the Gordon Riots, firemen were prevented from putting out the fires.\(^{719}\) As in earlier riots, the mob believed that the destruction of these properties was called for and sanctified by the action taken by the mob. The rioting in Brixton would last only one terrible day and night but riots occurred with similar root causes in Handsworth, Southall, Toxteth and Moss Side.

With the tabloids on side and Thatcher in power, a new conservative British nationalism had arrived. On 29 July, Prince Charles and Diana were wed in a televised ceremony in St Paul’s Cathedral and the images bounced by satellite all around the world. The anti-monarchical fervour stirred up by the Sex Pistols’ version of ‘God Save the Queen’ just four years earlier – which in turn had raised pro-monarchical gangs to set upon Lydon and Cook – was now erased from public memory by the spectacle of pomp and pageantry. The London crowd loved it and England and its grand heritage seemed the centre of the world again.

That British nationalism inspired by the royal wedding turned to jingoism in 1982 when the Argentinian dictator General Leopoldo Galtieri invaded British overseas territory off the coast of Argentina known as the Falkland Islands. Never to be declared a war, and euphemistically described as a conflict, Thatcher sent a naval task force to

\(^{719}\) “We were not permitted to play the engine.” Fireman, Abraham Longbottom quoted in ‘ABRAHAM DANSON, breaking the peace: riot, 28 Jun, 1780’ from The Proceedings of the Old Bailey records:
http://hri.shef.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey/results.jsp?words.mob&format=and&type=&range=&year=bhiaat. Accessed: 3.40 pm on 31/01/05.
reclaim the islands. With only two options, unemployment or the opportunity to join the army, Britain’s unemployed youth swelled the ranks of the armed forces.

Having had two years to severely curtail the legal rights and powers of the trade unions, Thatcher now went head-to-head with the leader of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Scargill, in the 1984–85 miner’s strike. On 30 May 1984, Thatcher likened the strikers and strike action to that of the mob:

You saw the scenes that went on in television last night. I must tell you that what we have got is an attempt to substitute the rule of the mob for the rule of law, and it must not succeed. It must not succeed.  

With the full co-operation of the State and allegedly its secret services, Thatcher would win her battle against Scargill and the striking miners. This would break the union movement and lead to the full-scale closures of coalmines, steelworks and the docks.

In this age of despair, Derek Jarman’s turned his despairing rage into The Last of England, a companion piece to Jubilee that was released in 1987. Having dispensed with the clumsy narrative form that had been the vehicle for the abstract ideas of Jubilee, The Last of England is more filmic essay than documentary. It is both a critique of Thatcher’s England and a personal apocalypse because that year Jarman was diagnosed with HIV.

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721 On 6 April 1978, Mr Rees, then Home Secretary defined “subversion” by which the Home Office monitors subversive groups as “those which threaten the safety or well being of the State, and which are intended to undermine or overthrow parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means”. In 1993, five Labour MPs accused the head of MI5, Stella Rimington of insinuating an agent, Roger Windsor, into the National Union of Miners (NUM) to destabilise and sabotage the union. It is also alleged that MI5 undertook phone tapping, bugging the homes of union officials, as well as restaurants and hotels they frequented. MI5 also infiltrated the pickets during the strikes and two of these police officers were exposed.

That same year, Julien Temple’s first studio film *Absolute Beginners* was made for Goldcrest Films and released. Temple’s contemporary experience of unscrupulous talent managers, punk, the explosion of new black music like reggae and dub, the rise of the National Front and the Brixton and Toxteth race riots curiously and uncannily seemed to dovetail with a novel written nearly thirty years earlier by Colin MacInnes. *Absolute Beginners* tells the story of the advent of the ‘teenager’ and the Teen Age in 1958 and climaxes with the Notting Hill Race Riots that same year.

8.1.6 **Hard drugs, despair, apathy**

In the late seventies and early eighties in the squats and on the street, the drug of choice was heroin. It swamped the London punk scene and with the increased sharing of needles spread blood diseases like hepatitis and AIDS. In his *The Last of England*, Derek Jarman hints darkly at his own infection as the result of his affair with a young punk intravenous drug user. This post punk period has been addressed in the literature of the Glaswegian writer, Irvine Welsh, especially his most widely read novel *Trainspotting* published in 1993. Both the heroin and the extreme violence, like that of British soccer hooligans, is chronicled by Welsh. He concludes that the best thing that ever happened to Britain was the rave scene that emanated out of the Hacienda nightclub and was accompanied by, and culturally inseparable from, the appearance of the illegal drug MDMA, with the street name ‘ecstasy’. Like heroin, MDMA was classified as a class A drug, however, as its name suggests, the ingestion of this pill, powder or liquid, not only made people feel better than great, it also made even the most hardened criminals feel loved and become loving. It is no accident that Manchester became known affectionately as Madchester.

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723 Following in the wake of the box office failures of the big budget *Revolution* in 1985 and *The Mission* in 1986, *Absolute Beginners* was unfairly burdened with either resurrecting the English film industry or putting the nails in its coffin. Not a bad film, though not a great a film, *Absolute Beginners* is unfairly remembered as having sunk Goldcrest and the dreams of a self-supporting British cinema.

724 MDMA (methyleneedioxy methamphetamine).

during the ecstasy period. But far from being sociopathic, this was a happy, escapist madness populated by dancing ravers. Welsh associates ecstasy with easing the post-traumatic stress syndrome of those working-class communities, and millions of kids who were told they were both obsolete and worthless in the face of Thatcher’s harsh policy reforms associated with economic rationalism throughout the eighties.

8.2 NIGEL KNEALE AND THE LONDON MOB

Under Thatcher, the elderly would also be made to feel their uselessness and shame as a drain on public resources, as the Conservatives implemented their fiscal policies of privatising, outsourcing and rationalising. The television writer, Nigel Kneale – himself a member of this ageing population – would use his role as a storyteller to both speak up for the confused and frightened elderly who feared the escalating violence on their streets and attempt to make some sort of sense of it, even if it was as science fiction.

In his 1958 teleplay *Quatermass and the Pit*, Nigel Kneale had already imaginingly tackled the Notting Hill Race Riots that had occurred just a few months earlier that year. In *Quatermass and the Pit* Kneale had wondered out aloud how the mob was raised. He fretted at its abject hatred of the other or the alien. Kneale also considered how the running mob’s violent energies were channelled along particular paths of destruction by London’s narrow streets. Now, in the wake of punk, the mid-seventies offered Kneale another era in which to imaginatively explore an alien energy that raised the mob and, more importantly to this thesis, to analyse the elements that constituted the London mob. In a new instalment in the *Quatermass* series, Kneale created a simulacrum of the London mob revealing that he had never stopped wondering and worrying about them.

Written and filmed in 1978 and screened in April 1979, the final instalment in his *Quatermass* tetralogy also known as *The Quatermass Conclusion* opens thus:
In that last quarter of the twentieth century the whole world seemed to sicken. Civilised institutions, whether old or new, fell. It was as if some primal disorder was reasserting itself. And men asked themselves, why should this be?  

Without a strong central government to maintain order, Kneale’s “primal disorder reasserting itself” was the anarchy and chaos of the mob taking over the urbis. Thus, the collapse of civilised institutions and the failure of the state to provide peace and the defence of each and every one of its people had heralded the fall of civilisation and the anarchy of every man for himself.

This return to primal disorder suggests a reading of the sixteenth-century work of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth, Ecclesiasticall and Civil* first published in 1651. Hobbes’s *Leviathan* was written during the English Civil War, when the Parliamentarian’s General Cromwell challenged the monarch’s claim to absolute power and England dissolved into chaos. *Leviathan* was Hobbes’s treatise upon the idea that England was a shared or common wealth. Hobbes’s idea of such a Commonwealth is famously envisioned on the book’s frontispiece by the image of a giant man, an absolute monarch, wearing the crown of the ruler, bearing a sword for the people’s defence and sceptre for the enforcement of law and order. But this absolute monarch is in turn made up of many smaller men or people who populate the Commonwealth. In *Leviathan* Hobbes proposed a social contract between all members of this Commonwealth, a social contract as levelling as a poll tax that included every man in a contract with the State. While the people owed their fealty to the monarch, the monarch in turn owed the people their peace and defence. Hobbes’s social contract was a way to establish philosophical bedrock upon which legitimate governments could be established and illegitimate ones overthrown.

Reflecting upon the English Civil War and civil war in general, Hobbes tried to take the anarchy and chaos he saw around him, what he described as “*bellum omnium

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726 The Quatermass Conclusion (1979).
727 If this seems a speculative assertion, *The Quatermass Conclusion* (1979) was not the first time that Kneale has turned to Thomas Hobbes; in *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958), the very site of the pit of the title, is in its various spellings a reference to Hobbes, as Hobbs End tube station and Hobs Lane.
“contra omnes” or the ‘warre of all against all’, and make general rules or philosophy from his experience. Such a ‘war of all against all’ could only be averted by a mutual obligation or social contract between a powerful central government and its people.

While it had been taken for granted that the people owed their allegiance to the protection of their monarch for their peace, stability and defence, Hobbes now argued that in turn, the monarch owed a mutual obligation to the people. This was the first time that anyone had dared articulate that the people were owed something by their monarch. Further, suggested Hobbes, if this contract was transgressed – and the monarch failed to defend the people or deliver them peace – then the people’s obligation to the monarch became null and void.

In such circumstances, where the monarch abandons his contract, Hobbes described the people as having been returned to a primal state: one that predates that of ruler and ruled, a primal state of chaos and anarchy. In just such primal conditions the world as it was known now sickens and dies and civilised institutions, whether old or new, have nothing to uphold them, and as Hobbes foresaw, it becomes a “war of all against all”. The gravity of such societal breakdown is the reason that “breaking the king’s peace” was a kind of treason and while the charged were not beheaded, they still paid with their lives on the tree at Tyburn.

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728 “I show in the first place that the state of men without civil society (which state may be called the state of nature) is nothing but a war of all against all; and that in that war, all have a right to all things.” Thomas Hobbes, ‘Preface’, De Cive, text available online at: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/De_Cive/Authors_Preface. Accessed 02.07.08.

729 In the records of the Old Bailey Proceedings in the aftermath of the Gordon Riots of June 1780, the gravity of the rioters’ offence is described in the charges brought against them: “breaking the king’s peace”. At first this charge may seem frivolous, but far from simply irritating the king with some festive or undue noise, these individuals have actually challenged the bedrock of the Commonwealth. Not only have these rioters ignored their duty to go about peaceably and without threat to their fellow citizens, but by breaking the King’s peace, they have challenged not only their role in the contract of mutual obligation but their crime is twofold because their charge also reflects an attack upon the social contract that is the bedrock of the Commonwealth: the king’s mutual obligation to deliver peace and defend all citizens.
The world of *The Quatermass Conclusion* teeters on this precipice. In graffiti daubed across the city’s walls the people call for the murder of the monarch, while the former civilised institution of the Wembley sports stadium has become like a coliseum killing ground. Kneale would tackle the failure of the social contract between State and people, as well as the factors that make violent and murderous gangs; he would puzzle over that primal switch that could turn a passive crowd to a murderous mob, not only in London but around the globe, as well as attempt a critical analysis and empirical catalogue of the elements that are symptomatic of a mob.

### 8.2.1 Quatermass and punk

The age of Aquarius had passed, the hippies were obsolete, the times had changed when the American music writer Greil Marcus attended the Sex Pistols’ final concert at the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco on 14 January 1978. Writes Marcus in his *Lipstick Traces*, “I can compare the sensation this performance produced only to *Five Million Years to Earth*, a film made in England in 1967 under the title *Quatermass and the Pit*”.\(^730\) That feeling was one of overwhelming, unending desolation in the aftermath of the fantastic.

That was how I felt when Johnny Rotten sang ‘Anarchy in the UK’, ‘Bodies’, ‘No Feelings’, ‘No Fun’. When he finished that last number, his last performance as a member of the Sex Pistols, when he threw it all back on the crowd – which was to him, no more than a representation of a representation, five thousand living symbols of Scott McKenzie’s 1967 Love Generation hit, ‘San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in your Hair),’ symbols of mindlessly benevolent hippies who knew nothing of negation – when he said leaving the stage, carefully gathering up any objects of value, “Ever get the feeling you’ve been cheated?”, that was how I felt.\(^731\)

Marcus would take almost 450 pages in an attempt to exorcise this uncanny experience akin to the terrible aftermath of a British sci-fi/gothic horror film he once viewed in the early hours of the morning. *Five Million Years to Earth* was the 1967 US release title of

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\(^731\) Ibid.
the Hammer House of Horror cinematic remake of the teleplay *Quatermass and the Pit* that first aired in episodes on BBC television from late December 1958 to late January 1959. *Quatermass and the Pit* was the third instalment in the story of the British rocket scientist, Professor Bernard Quatermass. As Marcus succinctly puts it:

> The time and place is Swinging London, where the reconstruction of a subway station has revealed a large, oblong, metal object: a spaceship as any moviegoer could tell the cops and bureaucrats who can’t. Near the object are the fossilized remains of apemen; within are the perfectly preserved corpses of human-sized insects.  

The insect creatures are Martians and the apemen are the missing link between human beings and their divergence from other primates. Five million years ago the Martian species began to destroy itself through a pathological and genetically encoded will to genocide and self-destruction. Martian scientists were sent in ships to earth to locate a suitable host with which the Martian DNA (Deoxyribonucleic acid) might be spliced and the two species hybridised. They select the Australopithecines, whose physical traits, when combined with the Martian’s advanced cognitive powers and their will to bloodlust, will ensure Homo sapien’s ascendance and the Martian DNA’s survival.

> The disturbance in the subway station calls up the dormant Martian presence. The spaceship begins to vibrate, and the energy released by the vibrations creates a vacuum. The vacuum sucks up sleeping genes, which create a repulsive, beckoning image: a glowing, horned devil, overshadowing London; the Martian antichrist.

With their horned heads, the Martian insects have become the abhorred ‘other’ for the human species, horns being attributed to satyrs and the Devil. These allusions have even left their name on the Martian spaceship’s crash site as Hob’s Lane, meaning the Devil’s Haunt. Over the past five million years the Martian genes shared by all human beings have fallen dormant, but the vibrations from the spaceship and the devilish image

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732 Ibid: p 85. The BBC teleplay broadcast makes the then plausible suggestion that the large metal object is a Second World War German V2 or experimental rocket dropped during the Blitz.

733 Ibid.
reawakens them in the London crowd. And with the horned Martian devil’s head hovering like a pall of smoke above the spaceship crash site in Hob’s Lane, the allusion to the illustration for the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* is now overt (even if that representation of a shared or common wealth has become a commonly shared genetic pool of ape and Martian devils).\(^734\) On the London streets race memories are recalled among the crowd: half of the people recall genocidal bloodlust and the other half recall their genocidal victimisation. The humans with the newly awakened Martian genes become a mob, smashing everything and everyone in their path who carry fewer of the Martian genes than they do.

Marcus tells us that in reviewing the Winterland concert for an unnamed magazine, he would write nothing of his thoughts and true feelings and that “days later, it seemed unreal.” Marcus had in fact repressed those feelings for good reason because Marcus later remembers his feelings at the Sex Pistols’ concert thus:

> Walking the aisles of Winterland as the Sex Pistols played, I felt a confidence and a lust that were altogether new. Thirty-two years had not taught me what I learned that night: when you’re pushed, push back; when a shove negates your existence, negate the shove. I felt distant from nothing, superior to nothing. I also felt a crazy malevolence, a wish to smash people to the ground, and my eyes went to the ground, where I saw small children (what sort of parents would bring little kids to a place like this, I wondered thinking of my own home), and thought of smashing them.\(^735\)

It is not clear whether there is a connection between Marcus’s “crazy malevolence” as it is associated with smashing small children and with smashing his own home. Though some such similar “crazy malevolence” possessed lorry driver, John Holmes who in shock was incited to a one-man riot, smashing his new TV in his own living room in protest after his failed to protect his son’s sensibilities from the Sex Pistols’ swearing and belligerence.

What Marcus learns, he tells us, is that when he is pushed, he realises he must push back, to assert himself or be lost in the sea of the crowd. When his existence is

\(^734\) The allusion doesn’t escape Marcus, Ibid: p. 87.

\(^735\) Ibid: p. 90.
negated by a shove, he realises that to assert his existence he must shove back. Marcus tells us that he feels distant from nothing. But what does this mean? Does he mean that nothing was beyond his reach? Because he adds that everything was on a common level, that he had been levelled, as had everyone around him, to where he felt superior to nothing. But there is also an alien feeling that Marcus doesn’t know whether to embrace or not. It’s something crazy, something that might be purely mischievous fun but also something that might yet control him, something that he describes as a malevolence, something under whose influence he might commit acts that belong to somebody else, somebody evil.

To think of an adult male smashing a child is indeed shocking but to have had the impulse oneself is doubly disturbing. But something was being awakened in Marcus that he has only been able to compare to some sort of alien chrysalis that had been in him all along, but which he had been completely unaware of. Elias Canetti would have recognised Marcus’s experience and accounted for it a little more rigorously:

> In the crowd the individual feels that he is transcending the limits of his own person. He has a sense of relief, for the distances are removed which used to throw him back on himself and shut him in. With the lifting of these burdens of distance he feels free; his freedom is the crossing of these boundaries. He wants what is happening to him to happen to others too; and he expects it to happen to them.  

Canetti tells us that under these conditions, “an earthen pot irritates him, for it is all boundaries. The closed doors of a house irritate him. Rites and ceremonies, anything that preserves distances, threaten him and seem unbearable”. The exhilaration that Marcus feels is an intoxication and, like the intoxication of alcohol, with its false promise that a state of drunken joy might be maintained by continued intake, the spectator intoxicated by the joy of being in and of the crowd, also rightly fears the irrational onset of violence (he might smash a child). Like the London mob, that were compelled to break into, torch

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737 Ibid.
and demolish the jails of London, “to the crowd in its nakedness everything seems a Bastille”.\textsuperscript{738}

Returning to \textit{Quatermass and the Pit}, in the film’s climactic resolution, one man, Dr Mathew Roney who has less of the Martian DNA climbs a crane and giving up his life, plunges the crane into the hideous manifestation. As Marcus writes:

\begin{quote}
The image is pure phylogenetic energy; guiding a steel crane into it, Quatermass’ comrade negates the image with mass – a neat Einsteinian twist.\textsuperscript{739}
\end{quote}

In a long, silent shot, the movie ends – and because there is no freeze frame, no automatic irony, the movie doesn’t seem to end at all. Quatermass and his assistant are seen in the wreckage of London; he leans on a ruined wall. Everything he has seen, [sic] but the shot – it goes on and on – doesn’t last long enough for his assistant’s eyes to focus.\textsuperscript{740}

For Marcus there is only abject horror in the aftermath of these extraordinary feelings of power that he has encountered at a rock concert; an experience he can only equate to a horror sci-fi film.

Among the American audiences Marcus’s confused feelings would also be felt by others. As Marcus described, when you’re pushed, push back, these feelings became channelled into various punk dances of American origin such as Slamdancing – where two people slam into each other – or into crowd surfing, stage diving and moshing. Here was the answer: the hurling of an individual’s human mass into the maelstrom that was the crowd. Marcus like others before him was experiencing oneness with an active crowd, one that hovers on the edge of turning mob. Later in \textit{Lipstick Traces} he suggests:

\begin{quote}
Johnny Rotten appears as a mouthpiece; I prefer to think of him as a medium. As he stood on stage, opened his mouth, and fixed his eyes on the crowd, various people who had never met, some who had
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{738} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{740} Ibid: p. 88.
met but who had never been properly introduced, some who had never heard of some of the others, as
Johnny Rotten had heard of almost none of them, began to talk to each other, and the noise they made
was what one heard. 741

To my mind, that noise evokes barriers falling away. That cacophony is the noise that
other punk commentators, Marcus included, have compared to the sound of breaking
glass.742 Elias Canetti has told us that the mob loves the sound of breaking “window
panes, mirrors, pictures and crockery”,743 because this “crashing of glass”744 is the
“robust sounds of fresh life”,745 “promising reinforcements”746 and “a happy omen for
deeds to come”.747 Johnny Rotten has become a smashed vessel leaking voices like
shards of glass. This description is Marcus’s falling back on all the ages of resistance and
refusal. A multitude of voices have been summoned and examined throughout his thesis.
They include King Mob, two rock ‘n’ roll bands the Motherfuckers and the MC5, as well
as the Black Panthers, the Situationists, Surrealists, Dada and a host of seditionaries,
erhetics, ranters and seekers after alternative communities in the medieval period. All of
these people can be described, using Elias Canetti’s categorisation, as refusal crowds.
Greil Marcus’s experience among the crowd attending the Sex Pistols’ final concert is
remarkably similar to Elias Canetti’s own experience of the active crowd: “A hundred
pages would not suffice to describe what I saw. Since then, I have known precisely that I
need not read a single word about what happened during the storming of the Bastille. I
became part of the crowd [etc.]”.748 In Marcus’ description, Johnny Rotten has become
some sort of mob spokesman, saying all things to all people. Like Kneale’s Martian Anti-

742 The band’s sound engineer, Dave Goodman quoted in Jon Savage’s England’s Dreaming, Faber,
London 1993: p. 206 and Robert Garnet in his essay ‘Too Low To Be Low; Art Pop and the Sex Pistols’ in
744 Ibid.
745 Ibid.
746 Ibid.
747 Ibid.
Christ, Lydon, by professing anarchy for the UK, has become similar to an anti-Hobbesian Commonwealth. Within the commonwealth of the crowd becoming, or become mob, individuals are empowered and elevated and cast off their mutual obligation to the State. In the anarchy and chaos of this primal disorder the mob is now free to break the king’s peace until a total authority is restored.

And just what sentiments did Marcus hear spill forth from the self-declared Anti-christ and anarchist, Johnny Rotten? Marcus tells us:

An unknown tradition of old pronouncements, poems, and events, a secret history of ancient wishes and defeats, came to bear on Johnny Rotten’s voice – and because this tradition lacked both cultural sanction and political legitimacy, because this history was comprised of only unfinished, unsatisfied stories, it carried tremendous force. 749

For this West Coast American, this was a ‘unknown tradition’ because it belonged to the London mob. These poems, old pronouncements, ancient wishes and, above all, defeats, represent the xenophobia and disappointments of the London mob endured over hundreds of years and stored in ballads, broadsheets, cockney phrase, fable and accent, in culture, literature and in London types amongst the London crowd. Through Johnny Rotten’s mob call, America was hearing a Londoner’s calling up of archetypal memories of the London mob. For Marcus, a first wave baby boomer and now an academic, who had come of age with the hippies, and who was also a West Coast American not engendered with the culture of the London crowd, this clarion call was a demonic scramble of incomplete signifiers.

8.3 LIPSTICK TRACES: A SECRET HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Lipstick Traces is about much more than Greil Marcus’ visceral response to the Sex Pistols’ Winterland debacle. The subtitle, A Secret History of the Twentieth Century, announces his grand intention, which is to identify the hidden links and archetypal antecedents of the punk phenomenon, from the Sex Pistols to punk in general.

8.3.1 Displacing International Situationism

It is not necessary in my thesis to tackle Marcus’s considerable research into Dada, the Lettrist movement, the International Situationists or its followers, nor his historical research into those figures revered by the International Situationist (IS). Instead, I will tackle Marcus’s assertion that the Sex Pistols, their lyrics for ‘Anarchy in the UK’ and Malcolm McLaren’s template for their management, were derived directly from Situationist theory and follows a chain of influence back to Guy Debord. Marcus admits that his conflation of ‘Anarchy in the UK’ is based on a hunch:

I was drawn to [Guy Debord’s homily on the ephemeral, his theory of situations “without a future”] as I had been drawn to the noise of punk. 750

Although this sounds like a confabulation, Marcus wasn’t alone in this belief, and others had – and even after Lipstick Traces have continued to – champion such a connection both in works on the Sex Pistols, and among writers, thinkers and talkers on the International Situationists. For example, as early as 1978, Fred and Judy Vermorel, had made just such an explicit link in the micro-essay ‘FROM SITUATIONISM TO PUNK’. 751 And Situationist researchers have picked up on the imagery of Situationism in the graphics associated with the Sex Pistols, like the safety pin through her majesty’s lips 752 and phrases like ‘No Future’, ‘The Politics of Boredom’ and ‘A Cheap Holiday in Someone Else’s Misery’. 753

750 Ibid: p. 447
753 The original Paris, May ’68 graffiti targeted Club Med as a cheap holiday in someone else’s misery. It is noteworthy that the contemporary French writer Michel Houellebecq utilises just such IS slogans as themes to drive the narratives of his controversial novels Atomised (1998) and Platform (2001).
For Marcus these images and slogans are a clear demonstration of the six degrees of separation that he has set out to demonstrate as existing between the lyrical content of ‘Anarchy in the UK’ and the theories of Guy Debord. One of those units of separation is the Sex Pistols’ in-house graphic designer at Glitterbest, Jamie Reid. The Sex Pistols’ graphic presentation is Reid’s. The lurid neon pink, yellow and black of ‘Never Mind the Bollocks’, the image of her majesty with the safety pin, the use of IS slogans like ‘Cheap Holiday’ and the photocopied Sex Pistols’ ransom note cut-up newspaper graphics are all attributed to him.\(^\text{754}\)

So, in Marcus’s favour, it is a demonstrable fact that Reid can be connected with Situationist ideas and not just in the simple plagiarism of images and slogans. Marcus shows that in 1974, Reid was the graphic designer of Christopher Gray’s collection of Situationist writings *Leaving the Twentieth Century*. Gray had proclaimed himself a member of the English chapter of the *Situationist’s Internationale* until Debord personally ex-communicated him. And again in Marcus’s favour, it is also a fact that Reid and his partner Sophie Richmond were politically active, and that their politics were radical, anarchistic and simpatico with Debord’s subversive brand of anti-bourgeois Marxism.\(^\text{755}\)

However any attempt to portray the Sex Pistols as a political tool with which to take on the State is a highly dubious one. Sophie Richmond records in her diary on Monday, 29 November 1976:

Malcolm was very clear, talking to Jamie last night, as to what he is about and it sounded o.k. to me, with some reservations obviously. He is clear anyway as to the political limitations of running a rock ‘n’ roll band. If they sell out, take the money, and run he said. But while there is a feeling going, and however obliquely, the band, like The Stones, Who, are feeding rebellious stances, making kids question to a degree I think.\(^\text{756}\)


\(^\text{755}\) A critique of the suburb of Croydon and in keeping with the IS idea of architecture as repression, *Suburban Press* was published between 1970 and 1974. Ibid: p. 44.

Richmond concludes this diary entry with her concerns that such a rebellious stance, in London at that time without clear political rhetoric underscoring it left the Sex Pistols, open to co-option by either extremes of left and right.

This discussion of politics and how to use the Sex Pistols, ostensibly a rock ‘n’ roll band, to political ends could be considered timely. Exactly two days later, on the 1 December 1976, the Sex Pistols made their notorious appearance live-to-air with Bill Grundy. Suddenly the Sex Pistols were figureheads and nothing in the Glitterbest offices, or for the Sex Pistols, would be the same again. For a brief moment the Sex Pistols escaped all censorship to speak out as they wished. While this might be considered a remarkable political stratagem, the event was a purely (un)happy accident. It should also be noted that they didn’t use this opportunity to chant IS slogans or call for revolution but instead to swear their heads off. And Richmond’s diary entry is hardly the stuff to fuel International Situationist conspiracy theories. When Richmond wrote her diary entry, the Sex Pistols had been in existence for almost a year. At the time of her writing, Richmond and Reid had been McLaren’s employees at Glitterbest for two months. Their discussion as recorded by Richmond hardly demonstrates McLaren formulating a masterplan to utilise the theory of International Situationism to smash the capitalist State by exposing contemporary rock ‘n’ roll to be a mesmerising spectacle puppeteered by the State to distract its citizenry from rioting.

Marcus demonstrates that Malcolm McLaren, Reid, Richmond and Vivienne Westwood were all friends but I think Marcus overstates Reid’s relationship to McLaren when he describes Reid as McLaren’s partner. Reid may have been McLaren’s friend and Glitterbest’s in-house graphic designer but McLaren’s partner – business partner, co-conspiracist and lover – was Vivienne Westwood. Having overstated the relationship with Reid, Marcus also overstates McLaren’s awe of Situationism, as Marcus himself writes:

Asked about International Situationism as documented in John Gray’s *Leaving the 20th Century*, McLaren had this to say: ‘The good thing about it was all those slogans you can take up without being party to a movement’. 758

Malcolm’s answer betrays his limited comprehension of the International Situationists and Situationism. They’re just good slogans, he says, he doesn’t even name-check Debord. To McLaren these slogans have with the passage of time become decontextualised. He likes their force but also their ambiguity because it leaves him tied to neither left nor right. McLaren grasps these “slogans” as found objects. And this is a McLaren trope. We have already seen that much of the fashion to be bought at ‘430’ began as the conversion of discarded, old or retro ready-mades: these slogans, like those former fashions, are found objects that McLaren can play around with, adjust, add to and subtract from, and put into new contexts and make them mean new, old or other things.

McLaren had been messing around with Situationist slogans since at least 1975. One of these slogans to be used and reused by McLaren demanded of its reader, “What Are the Politics of Boredom?” McLaren had used the slogan in his brief, disastrous fortnight as the manager of The New York Dolls. In a banner that appeared behind the band, McLaren had asked their audience the question rhetorically, “What are the politics of boredom?” and then, in typically oblique McLaren manner, answered “Better red than dead.” McLaren reasoned that Americans hated communism and communists more than they hated paedophiles, rapists, murderers and Nazism. Here again, McLaren was making his trademark noise intended as always to confuse, frustrate and annoy passersby. 759

But most importantly, McLaren says the really good thing about those slogans is that you can use them without declaring your political affiliations. This isn’t the voice of a radical convert to the politics of Situationism. Situationism is simply ‘it’: “The good thing about it [my italics] was all those slogans you can take up without being party to a movement.”

758 Originally reported in *Slash*, a Los Angeles-based punk ‘zine (May 1978), and quoted in Marcus. Ibid: p. 30.
759 In Alex Cox’s film *Sid & Nancy* (1986), Sid Vicious’s swastika t-shirt is replaced by a hammer and sickle t-shirt, exclusively for American cinema audiences.
That slogan, “What Are the Politics of Boredom” got under McLaren’s skin and it would reappear back in London a year later and in conjunction with the Sex Pistols. Given the milieu of economic recession in which the State saw that it made greater economic sense to pay people money not to work, McLaren and Reid intuited that the dole, that is, money for nothing, came with a guilty conscience both for the recipient and for the State that delivered it. Marcus suggests that Reid and McLaren saw “mass unemployment in a welfare state as a new kind of leisure, and that this kind of leisure was the bad conscience of a new kind of boredom …”. Marcus is saying that paid unemployment makes real the dream of an unlimited leisure time, however, such unlimited leisure quickly becomes purposeless leading to boredom, and this in turn creates bad conscience and reconfigures dream as nightmare. What then were the politics of boredom?

8.3.2 Rock ‘n’ roll is dead: go start a band

London punk and the Sex Pistols were an attempt to recapture the anxiety and excitement that McLaren had experienced when he first heard rock ‘n’ roll sometime in 1957. And this was the nexus that McLaren sought: rock ‘n’ roll, teenagers (with money to spend), fashion and sex, the nexus that would equal cash flow at 430 The King’s Road. But Marcus insists that McLaren’s ends were political, that he saw himself in a long line of seditionaries whose role it was … to do what, precisely? Marcus cops out. He tells us that this is “the drift of secret history, a history that remains secret even to those who make it, especially to those who make it”.

Turning unemployment into “a new kind of leisure” is a fascinating idea. But in my readings I haven’t come across either Jamie Reid or Malcolm McLaren discussing the Sex Pistols in those terms. The closest they get is to tell kids to go start a band if you

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761 At morning assembly, a schoolteacher played Jerry Lee Lewis’s ‘Great Balls of Fire’. It is noteworthy, that McLaren is struck not by the new sound of rock ‘n’ roll but the spectacle: “I’d never seen anything like it before, I thought my head was gonna come off,” says McLaren in Craig Bromberg, The Wicked Ways of Malcolm McLaren, Perennial, New York, 1989: p. 9.
want to combat boredom. When Marcus tells us that “having satisfied the needs of the body, capitalism as spectacle turned to the desires of the soul”, he is talking Situationist ideas, not the *raison d’etre* of the Sex Pistols. I think Marcus is closer to the point when he suggests that McLaren and Reid toyed with Situationist ideas as suggested in Situationist graffiti and images.

Marcus’s “serpentine fact” becomes a serpentine argument about an urban myth that has little to do with proving the six degrees of separation between ‘Anarchy in the UK’ and Guy Debord. Marcus had to acknowledge that his research had failed to uncover a “single serpentine fact” linking ‘Anarchy in the UK’ with the guiding hand of Debord:

Looking at the connections, others had made and taken for granted (check a fact, it wasn’t there), I found myself caught up in something that was less a matter of cultural genealogy, of tracing a line between pieces of a found story, than of *making it up* [my italics].

Marcus proceeded to ‘make up’ the cultural lineage, claiming that the Sex Pistols’ lyrics not only riff upon the same subject matter as Guy Debord and the International Situationists (the IS), but also that the “social critique” contained in the lyrics of ‘Anarchy in the UK’ was the same as that of the IS. Marcus then made the astonishing claim that this social critique is “a spiritual mystery” passed down through history since as far back as 1164, and that its reappearance in the mid-seventies is an uncanny product of the zeitgeist.

If, as Plato said, “necessity is the mother of all invention”, Marcus is now concerned with discovering the desire or necessity that created this myth. “So I began to poke around, and the more I found the less I knew. All sorts of people had made these

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766 Plato, *The Republic*. 

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connections, but no one had made anything of them”.767 In the initial stages of his research, Marcus decided that he was going to be the one to pull this “secret history” all together, “a secret history” because it was not yet on the historical record, though shared by many, and accepted as being factually based on the supposed reliability of sources.

Although Marcus doesn’t make this point, he has discovered that the necessity for the legend has dictated both the seeking after and even fabrication of the pieces. He concludes that the storytellers have been guilty, not of recalling this secret history, but of “making it up”.768 The secret history of the twentieth century that Lipstick Traces sets out to put on the historical record once and for all is a “Chinese whisper”769 where the remade, twisted and turned result is more important than the initial phrase.

This is interesting: the desire or necessity for this story has been so great that all those who have handled it have progressed it and added their own touch. If this were to be Marcus’s launching point for Lipstick Traces – that he wanted to know why this made-up “story” was so important to its participants that they would maintain it, embellish it, shore it up in places where it was weakened by the intrusion of truth or fact – then this would seem an honourable position to have taken upon the material. However, Marcus takes a bad turn, when he sees himself as having to become another of this story’s contributors. He writes, “This story, if it is a story, doesn’t tell itself …”770 and subsequently he decides that he too will have to make it up.

When Marcus tells us that he opts to print the myth: “once I’d glimpsed its outlines, I wanted to shape the story”,771 Marcus has become a novelist, and no longer a practising musicologist, contemporary cultural critic or cultural historian. Marcus says he wants to do this with the postmodern flourish of using a levelling subjectivity, where no individual shard is privileged over another “so that every fragment, every voice, would speak in

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768 Ibid: p. 22.
769 “Chinese whispers, a game in which a message is distorted by being passed around in a whisper.” New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: p. 388.
judgement of every other”. Marcus is prepared to undertake this even if he cannot substantiate any link between any of these shards except that they were found within the parameters of the story’s outline. Marcus second guesses his reader’s misgivings – they are his misgivings too – when he states: “even if the people behind each voice had never heard of the others”, and now driven by bravado, he says: “Especially if they hadn’t …” and then with hubris, “especially if, in ‘Anarchy in the UK’, a twenty-year-old called Johnny Rotten had rephrased a social critique generated by people who, as far as he knew, had never been born”. And so Lipstick Traces, a book that set out to reveal a secret history of the twentieth century that became a work of fiction, metamorphoses yet again into the genealogy of a social critique that, Marcus asserts, extends as far back as the twelfth century.

This refusal to be constrained by ‘facts’ will come back to haunt Marcus and he will find himself reneging on his refusal to prove verifiable connections. For example, his assumption that “surely” Jamie Reid had given Johnny Rotten a copy of the book Reid had designed, Leaving the Twentieth Century, to read; suddenly becomes a fact. And there follows another deduction, that surely Johnny Rotten eagerly read, consumed and appropriated these ideas, and regurgitated them in the lyrics of ‘Anarchy in the UK’, rather than leave it to sit on his bedside table.

Unable to prove his assertions Marcus relies on conjecture based on the slimmest of evidence to assert his genealogy. “From one perspective”, Marcus tells us, and this perspective is obviously his own, “the line is easy to draw”. In one of his examples he leaps from the Lettrist International’s (LI) 1953 graffiti ‘Never Work’ which, he states, “reappeared as May ’68 graffiti” and then “was rewritten in 1977 for the Sex Pistols’ I这么说：

772 Ibid.
773 Ibid.
774 Ibid.
777 Ibid.
778 Ibid.
‘Seventeen’: ‘We don’t work/I just feed/That’s all I need’.” For Marcus this ‘genealogy’ linking manifestos about work is undeniable. “But that connection” Marcus continues “– a one-line LI manifesto, as featured in one-time Situationist Christopher Gray’s Leaving the Twentieth Century: The Incomplete Works of the Situationist International had passed down by Gray’s friend Malcolm McLaren and Jamie Reid to Johnny Rotten – is tradition as arithmetic”.

“Tradition as arithmetic”, is also described as “simultaneity”, though Marcus will argue that it is “specious” “to root motives in mere coincidence of names”. This does not stop him linking John Lydon with the fifteenth-century heretic called John of Leyden, with the blithe comment – “serendipity is where you find it”. Marcus is, as the saying goes, having his cake and eating it.

In Lipstick Traces, Marcus’s logic and his methodology have opened him up for criticism. Alongside John Lydon, Marcus’s most strident critic is the British psychogeographer and writer on punk rock’s genres, Stewart Home. Home doesn’t pull any punches. As well as insulting Marcus, Home accuses Marcus of plagiarism, free association, and a failure to grasp the definition of punk culture in its “shifting parameters and lack of a fixed point of origin”. But for all Home’s vitriol, Marcus’s work, even when it is confused, wrongheaded, irrational and illogical, still holds its place in the public imagination. To this point nobody has undertaken the daunting task of

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779 Ibid.
780 Ibid.
781 Ibid.
782 Ibid: p. 93
783 Ibid.
784 Ibid.
786 Ibid: p. 3.
787 Ibid.
788 Ibid.
interpreting Marcus’s theories and then followed this with the equally exhaustive task of critiquing them.

Marcus concludes that in his quixotic travels in the arenas of the Sex Pistols and Situationism, he has found a tale

… composed of incomplete sentences, voices cut off or falling silent, tired repetitions pressing on in search of novelties, a tale of recapitulations staged again and again in different theatres – a map made altogether of dead ends, where the only movement possible was not progress, not construction, but ricochet and surprise.789

The reader who has noted an echo of the overreaching Macbeth in Marcus’s concluding words, should not be surprised when I point out that Marcus’s “single serpentine fact”790 was “full of sound and fury” and ultimately “signifying nothing”.791 What remains significant – and for which Sex Pistols’ researchers will remain indebted – is Marcus’s recording of his extraordinary, conflicting internal experience of the Sex Pistols’ final concert in San Francisco on 14 January 1978. Marcus does have insights into punk and the Sex Pistols and, importantly, his epiphany at the Winterland Ballroom – although mis-interpreted by him – provides compelling evidence for the alternative social and cultural influence of the London mob.

8.4 GOOD NIGHT

In this thesis, I have set about cataloguing and exploring the cultural signifiers that drove the key progenitors of London punk – Lydon, McLaren, Westwood, the Sex Pistols – and the punk tropes that have filtered down to us, thirty years later. I have considered the books and films about punk, especially those dominant secondary works that have stripped the ephemera away to reveal the underlying narrative of London punk. I have attempted to critically engage with the detritus of the Sex Pistols, London punk and the

791 Ibid.
cultural artefacts that were transcribed, recorded, transmitted and are still available for examination today. Like Simon Reynolds, I was far too young and too geographically distanced to make any claim to have experienced the Sex Pistols and London punk first-hand. Unlike many of my peers, I never at any time in my teen years associated myself with punk. I did however have Hardcore punk friends, some who were mad for the American Hardcore scene and derided the Sex Pistols, while on the contrary, another friend was a Sex Pistols, Bromley contingent and PiL enthusiast. These people were into a punk scene as it played itself out in Melbourne in the mid-eighties. The Melbourne punk scene received its new lease of life from the grassroots meetings, marches and rallies of the early to mid-eighties anti-nuclear movement that brought young people together through the association known as Young People for Nuclear Disarmament (YPND). I am as indebted to these peers for shaping my understanding of punk as I am to the authors of punk.

Using the artefacts that remain after the punk fire has gone, this thesis has examined the punk texts that have been passed onto another generation and which now form the corpus of literature on the subject. A significant part of my study has been to gather these texts and subject them to rigorous analysis in order to challenge the claims of some, but also to outline the parameters for continuing research and deeper analytical and critical approaches to texts generated by and around the Sex Pistols as a uniquely London phenomenon. In particular, I have sought to examine the invention and performance of London punk, how it was created, from and with what, and how it ‘tried on’ various influences, especially those of the eighteenth century mob. I could not ignore the fact that John Lydon and Malcolm McLaren agreed on one thing and one thing only, that there was an explicit link, between the eighteenth-century London mob and the Sex Pistols and punk. While acknowledging the contribution and centrality of Greil Marcus’s *Lipstick Traces*, I nonetheless refute his support for Malcolm McLaren’s assertion that the Sex Pistols were a manufactured Situationist prank straight out of Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* and nothing more. Instead, based on the texts available, I have been persuaded by John Lydon’s assertion that McLaren did not invent Johnny Rotten, that the latter was an improvisation of tropes peculiar to John Lydon. Lydon therefore was
inherently punk and punk was personified by his creation, Johnny Rotten. I have also singled out Derek Jarman’s sinister interpretation of punk in *Jubilee*, rejected by punk’s inner sanctum, especially by Westwood and McLaren. Nonetheless, despite Jarman’s bizarre exposition, *Jubilee* dealt with powerful tropes that continue to be associated with punk.

I agree with John Lydon, that he created Johnny Rotten but I also hold to the belief that if Malcolm McLaren hadn’t taken him up in audition, in front of the jukebox on the shopfloor at ‘430’; if the other band members hadn’t played along by handing him the old showerhead with which to mime ‘Eighteen’ in to, John Lydon would not be known to us as the musician and progenitor of punk today. And while the past thirty years have calmed and matured the adult John Lydon, the antics, grotesqueries, gallows humour, venomous satire and cutting wit, gathered and stitched into his stage act as Johnny Rotten, continue to inspire new-millennium musicians, comedians, performers, visual artists, writers, graphic novelists, game designers, filmmakers and actors,  

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792 Writer/director of *The Dark Knight* (2008), Chris Nolan has told reporters that Heath Ledger’s performance as the Joker was inspired by Johnny Rotten, and that the Joker’s cronies were based on *A Clockwork Orange’s* droogs. Michael Keaton’s performance in the title role of *Beetlejuice* (Tim Burton, 1988) and the resemblance in the makeup design, has also been suggested as an influence.
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NB: I include this title against my better judgement, as I regard this title quite simply as diabolical and the very worst sort of grubstreet hack work tossed off to cash in on the icon of Sid Vicious, however, I must defer to Roger Sabin, who includes “Paytress (2004)” amongst his required reading on punk.
Jefferson.


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