

Cover Sheet

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What's so great exhibition?

I have chosen to place my exhibition inside the building used for the Great Exhibition and call it “the what's so great exhibition”; I am drawn to the building as it was made of glass. The mood of the nation and the Disillusionment in a section of subculture in 1977 will be juxtaposed against the mood and pride of the nation during the exhibition in 1851.



Fig. 1: The Great Exhibition-Stained Glass Wall.



Fig. 2: Waiting for the Queen.

The great exhibition of 1851 was the vision and creation of Prince Albert, Henry Cole and Joseph Paxton. There was opposition to the plans as elm trees would need to be cut down on the proposed site at Hyde Park but instead the plans were changed to encapsulate them (see figure 2).

This was the perfect time to have the greatest exhibition of its type the world had ever seen (De Mare, 1972) because in 1851 Queen Victoria was very popular and the “mob violence of the ‘dangerous classes’ was no longer greatly feared by those who were well-heeled” (De Mare, 1972, no page number). Employment was easy to find and this wave of prosperity made the early 1850’s the most prosperous of the century.

In stark contrast to this comes the late 1970’s and the cultural movement of Punk. Set in a time of mass unemployment, inflation and wages going down, the winter of discontent brought about mass strike action from low paid workers. On top of all that it was the queen's jubilee celebrations (Libcom.org, 2007).



Fig. 3: What's so great t-shirts.

As you walk through the doors into my curated space, on the left is a stall giving away 'what's so great exhibition' T-shirt's (see fig. 3) for the visitor to cut up and rebuild using safety pins, studs and off cuts of different coloured and textured materials supplied by the arts table, where you can also make your own posters, collages or whatever inspires you. I wanted to create an exhibition which helps rethink spectatorship, to engage the public as co-curators in their exhibition experience (Obrist, 2015). I have chosen to create this to signify the DIY aesthetic of punk culture. In the 1910's the art movement Dadaism (Marcel Duchamp) started 'ready made's' where an object is altered or combined with another object to create a piece of art. This can be seen in the self-made clothing in Punk or as Vivienne Westwood called it 'confrontational dressing', where tampons, razor blades, toilet chains and safety pins were used along with cheap fabrics such as PVC, lurex, mock leopard print and plastic (Hebdidge, 1988). Punks wanted to put themselves outside of society, even by what they chose to call themselves. 'Punk' used to mean prostitute in the 1500's but had evolved by the 1970's to become synonymous with "ruffian" or "hoodlum" (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

John Berger argues that

all publicity (advertising images) works upon anxiety. The sum of everything is money, to get money is to overcome anxiety. Alternatively, the anxiety on which publicity plays is the fear that having nothing you will be nothing (Berger, 2008, p.143).

Berger also says “publicity speaks in the future tense and yet achievement of this future is endlessly deferred” (Berger, 2008, p.146). It can be argued that punk subcultures working classes shrugged this off in style by purposefully showing they had nothing and wearing their clothing made of cheap cast-off items, as a badge of belonging. Also, as a culture who adopted the slogan “no future” from a lyric of The Sex Pistols “God Save The Queen” (fig.4) the advertisements of the future were obsolete as they were a culture outside of consumerism.

Vivienne Westwood's T-shirt's



Fig. 4: Examples on 'No Future' Slogan on the era

As you proceed around the exhibition you will see a Vivienne Westwood t-shirt display (fig. 5) comprising of various late 70's prints. I have chosen these T-shirt's as I feel they signify what punk

imagery was about, to offend and shock. Using Peirce's theory of semiotics, the denotation is two cowboys stood closely talking to each other with one tying the others neckerchief. They are both naked apart from boots, hats, wrist cuff, jackets and neckerchief. One has a belt and holster with a dildo in it, is smoking and wearing sunglasses. All the items of attire are an index linking the icons to being traditional cowboys. Western movies were the most popular genre of Hollywood film from the early 20th century until the late 60's (Miller, 2016). They were hugely popular and the cowboys in the films were symbols even myths of the ideal masculinity of the time; strong, self-reliant, straight, independent, gun toting men. What Westwood has achieved here is by using these masculine idolised icons and changing some of the index items such as the gun holster holding a dildo and their bare penises nearly touching, the symbol has now completely changed from masculine to gay. This has enabled Westwood to annoy a mass demographic of people with this ideology, by stripping away all those masculine connotations.

Roland Barthes explained that the "emission and the reception of the message lie within the field of sociology" (Barthes, 1977, p.15). The picture itself has "structural autonomy" but our cultural backgrounds allow the viewer to interpret the connotations with either a sense of humour or deep offence or anywhere in-between. Barthes (1977) goes on to state that the creator of the image (Barthes refers to the photographs here but I feel his words are still valid) can lean the

connotation of the signified to either aesthetic or ideological by knowing the culture within society. Barthes states that the picture has two messages; firstly, is the analogon itself and secondly the connoted message which is the way society conveys what it thinks of it. I think Barthes explains perfectly why Punk is so shocking; people were easily shocked in the 70's because these boundaries had never been pushed in this way before.



Fig. 5: Westwood t-shirt collection

Jamie Reid wall and album covers

As the viewer continues around the exhibition, on the wall is displayed the artwork of Jamie Reid. Reid is an artist and anarchist with connections to the situationists who helped define the ambience of the Punk era by creating the lettering typeface of newspapers ripped up and placed together to create the worry inducing image of ransom notes (fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Jamie Reid artwork wall inside my exhibition

Album covers wall

Punk album covers and posters were another way to use images to evoke strong responses, and they cover the next wall in the exhibition. The album cover I wish to draw attention to is the photo of the hands on the top left (see figure 7 & 8).

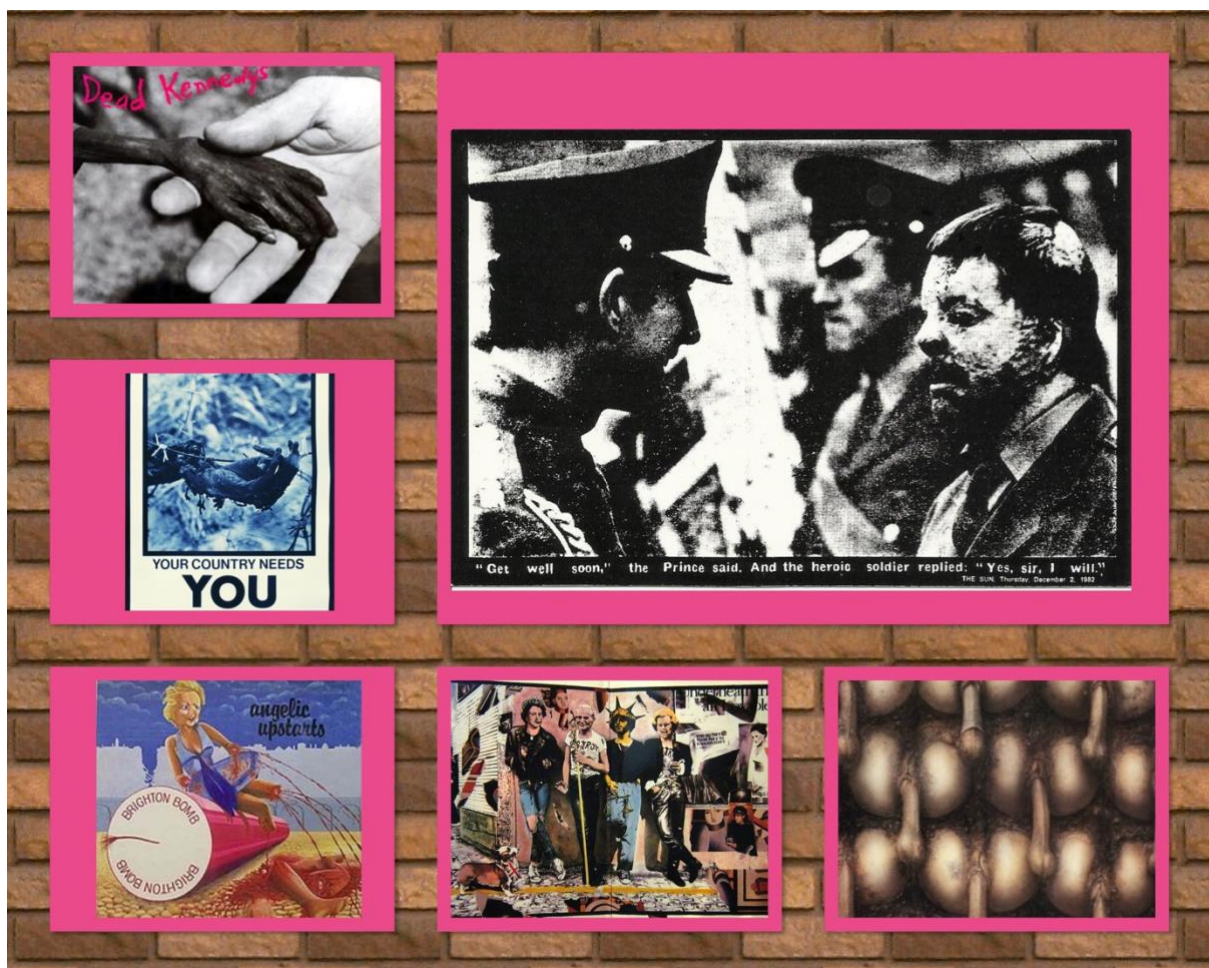


Fig. 7: Assortment of album covers and posters on my wall

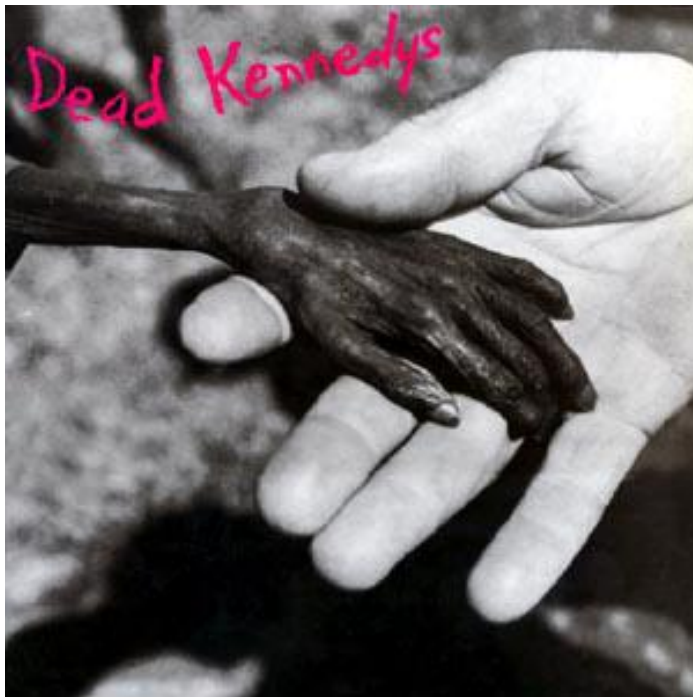


Fig. 8: 'Plastic Surgery Disasters' album cover

In 1982 the Dead Kennedy's released their album 'plastic surgery disasters' and used a photograph taken by Mike Wells in April 1980 in Uganda where they were struck by a famine so severe that 60% of children lost their lives. The photograph shows a missionary holding hands with a Ugandan boy. Wells took the photo for a magazine to show the extent of starvation but after 5 months of them still not publishing it he decided to enter it into a competition which gave it the exposure to rise to be one of the most iconic photos ever taken (Wordpress.com, April 2021).



Fig. 9: The Sunday Times Magazine, June 1971.

Berger brings attention to the ease in which images of humanitarian disasters and people in dire need of help can be placed directly next to pampering products for the affluent masses reading the magazine (fig. 9). He also goes on to say that in 1972 the advertisers weekly decided to use less brash images of humanitarian disasters in their glossy advertisement dense magazines; instead they opted for less brash images in black and white. He points out that it's not the "moral shock of the contrast that needs emphasising" but it is rather "what such a contrast reveals about the nature of publicity" (Berger, 2008, p.153). Just a few years before this album was released the media were trying to tone down images to be less shocking and morally less compelling for the readers of the images and then the dead Kennedy's released this image with the title plastic surgery disasters. It really holds a mirror up to western culture and is political and cultural satire on a grand scale.

Conclusion

I have chosen all of my exhibits (see fig.10) based on the "Image" and how we perceive them, I find this subject hugely interesting. I love that the same image can mean different things to different people and can cause offence, shock, camaraderie, humour or deep upset dependent on your cultural background, affiliations, region, age and

many more. I think Punk epitomises the image, evokes deep reactions and makes you think about what your reactions say about you.

I feel that Punk attitude lives on today in at least four ways– 1. An attitude to oppose the perceived status quo (social, political or cultural). 2. A disregard for established hierarchies and for symbols of authority. 3. Claims to provide a voice for disaffected or marginalised. 4. To emphasise one's self-sufficiency and beat obstacles that stop access, autonomy or expression (Worley, 2017). All of these 4 points have been in the news lately as great swathes of people have taken to the streets in reaction to the Covid lockdown. The Great exhibition reflected the pride of the nation and by juxtaposing this with Punk and the upheaval caused, this exhibition makes a social commentary on the importance of the masses and society. This is especially important now due to the upheaval caused by Covid and the resentment many feel making this exhibition, very relevant in contemporary society.

I sincerely hope you have enjoyed my exhibition.



Fig. 10: My Exhibition

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