**Punk ‘zines – ‘symbols of defiance’ from the print to the digital age.**

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In this chapter we explore the development of punk fanzines from the late 1970s to the present, exploring the role of these music fan-produced publications in giving meaning to the experience of a music community. This discussion of the punk fanzine’s longitudinal existence allows us to investigate the variety of ways that the fanzines and webzines make sense of punk as music, a set of political ideas and as a subcultural scene. In particular we want to trace the way that fanzines have operated as a medium of communication for punk fans and activists, as part of the visual bricolage of punk’s semiosis, and as a sign of authenticity amongst online punk culture in the twenty-first century.

We argue that fanzines became one of punk’s many ‘symbols of defiance’, not just in the way that they visually and verbally represented punk’s DIY ethos and activism, but also in the way they embodied the labour of ‘fan-eds’ as organic intellectuals[[1]](#endnote-1) undertaking ideological work in which discourses of defiance and opposition are constructed, signified and reinforced. While other studies have often pointed to the importance of the communicative or symbolic functions of fanzines, and the role of editor/activists is occasionally alluded to, there has been too little emphasis on the way that the ‘zine authors take on leadership roles.

Additionally, we are interested in the way that fanzines, and the symbolic value of the fanzine, have changed over time. We start with a discussion about the way that punk ‘zines have been understood in broader analyses of punk culture in the last forty years. However, we also want to focus on two particular instances of the punk ‘zine; two moments in which the specific meanings of specific fanzines can be explored in a little greater detail than those offered in the grander narratives of the punk fanzine.

In the first moment, a case study of one early 1980s anarcho-punk fanzine we examine the way that such publications operated at the intersection of political activism and DIY music criticism, constructing idealised notions of music, politics and community against which the actual activity within local punk scenes were judged. Anarcho-punk, as a sub-genre and a scene, provides a particularly useful way to think through the role of fanzines because it has a pivotal place within punk politics and music culture. Self-proclaiming themselves as the true and original voice of punk, a range of artists allied themselves to more self-consciously political positions associated with different strands of anarchist thought, and pursued a DIY music ethos and a commitment to different forms of direct action[[2]](#endnote-2). We suggest that through the 1980s anarcho punk fanzines established a sort of evolving ‘guide’ or manifesto to the cultural and political ideologies that were emerging within the developing British-anarcho punk subcultural scene. It is likely that, for many, those fanzines ordered the way in which as readers (or even contributors) moved from an enthusiasm for punk as a music to a more politically and ideologically motivated participation, inspired and informed by the lyrical content of punk records. Triggs, for instance, see this as inevitable[[3]](#endnote-3).

The second moment that we examine is thirty years later when the idea of the punk ‘zine is used in websites with a focus on punk from the 70s or 80s, or music or artists that continue its ethos and/or sound. Given the strong emphasis within literature on the internet, its potential as a democratic space, and the role of web sites and blogs as exemplars of DIY communications culture, it would be easy to assume that the practices and associations of the printed fanzine have more recently simply migrated online. By evaluating the continuities and discontinuities between the two moments of fanzine production, and the degree to which they articulate the ideology and identities of anarcho-punks, we argue that more often it is the symbolism and visual rhetoric of earlier print fanzines that predominates. While many internet advocates saw the early world-wide-web as a space for the sort of decentred political and cultural activism that had characterised 1980s anarcho-punk, there is little evidence that online fanzines continue to organise and order an engaged music culture.

In what follows, then, we move through three key areas of analysis. Firstly, we interrogate some of the key studies of punk fanzines in order to try and contextualise their role and importance within punk music culture, especially in the late 1970s. Secondly, we focus on one example of a British regional anarcho-punk fanzine and the way that it constructed anarcho-punk as a music, politics and most importantly a community and movement. Specifically we seek to understand how the ‘zine author produced a publication, a sense of regional activity and a discourse of anarcho-punk authenticity. Finally, we look to more recent online uses of the idea of a punk webzine, and evaluate the degree to which the visual, verbal and editorial practices of earlier print fanzines are reproduced in internet publishing. This raises interesting questions about the globalization and commodification of the ideas and symbols of punk that were originally made in British regional culture.

**Fanzines in punk music culture**

Fanzines have long been seen as representing the underground or independent sector, or to provide an alternative to mainstream publishing, as the communities that develop around fanzines both produced and consumed this vernacular journalism. The term had its origins in realms outside music, most notably in science fiction fandom where fan-produced magazines were used to communicate between enthusiasts from the early twentieth century[[4]](#endnote-4). Fanzines are ascribed a key place in punk culture. It is widely assumed that when punk emerged, fanzines soon became one of the main means through which the new subculture represented and constructed punk musical style and ethos, and they embodied the developing cultural practices of the new DIY culture in the way that they were produced and distributed. *Sniffin' Glue* is widely seen as the first punk ‘zine in 1976[[5]](#endnote-5). It took its title from the lyrics of a Ramones’ song that inspired its creator’s enthusiasm, reproducing the full lyrics in SG1. The full title of this first issue – *Sniffin’ Glue: and other rock’n’roll habits* – indicated the intentionally anti-social stance of the editorial content, but also the place of the journal in a moment of celebrating rock’s earlier, rawer, approach to making-making. The titles of the fanzines that followed in its wake – *Bombsite*, *Burnt Offering*, *Chainsaw*, *Communication Blur*, *Jamming*, *Love and Molotov Cocktails*, *Ripped & Torn*, *To Hell With Poverty,* and *Vague* – signal clearly the way they positioned themselves in the emerging oppositional punk culture.

For Hebdige, the fanzines represented an ‘alternative critical space’, were ‘immediately and cheaply produced from the limited resources at hand’, and characterised by swear words, typing errors and misspellings: ‘a paper produced in indecent haste, of memos from the frontline’[[6]](#endnote-6). *Sniffin' Glue* 1 shouted its intended readership ‘FOR PUNKS’ while SG represented its commitment to DIY music culture in its now famous declaration ‘Here's one chord, here's two more, now form your own band’. Laing suggests there were over 50 British punk fanzines being produced in 1977-8[[7]](#endnote-7) and so strong was the link between the fanzines and the emerging music culture that looking back from the mid-1980s the editor of US fanzine *Hippycore* declared ‘Zines are Punk’[[8]](#endnote-8).

There is certainly an emphasis in existing literature on the way that fanzines have operated as a medium of communication and propagation and an interest in the way that such publications blur the line between producers, fans and activists. For Conway and Crowther ‘what really distinguishes fanzines from magazines is that much of the content is submitted by amateur writers amongst the fanzine readership, with readers’ letters and discussion columns providing a crucial mechanism for interaction between readers’[[9]](#endnote-9), and for O'Hara punk fanzines remained the primary form of communication amongst punks into the twenty-first century, propagating the ideas which define ‘punk culture and philosophy’: anarchy, sex-related issues, environmental philosophies, and the politics of punk business[[10]](#endnote-10). Likewise, in her exploration of fanzine visual design Teal Triggs has asserted that that fanzines ‘provided a focal point and unifying vehicle for establishing and reinforcing shared values, philosophy and opinions’[[11]](#endnote-11), and in a later publication she declares that ‘as independent self-published publications, fanzines became vehicles of subcultural communication and played a fundamental role in the construction of punk identity and a political community’[[12]](#endnote-12).

Most interestingly, though, most analyses of punk ‘zines pay particular attention to the visual language of these publications and the way this symbolised punk. As we have noted, in Hebdige this is seen in terms of the same bricolage that characterised punk dress and music. Such studies usually point to the fact that earlier punk fanzines are characterised by their use of cut-and-paste, hand written and roughly typed narrative content, combined with a mixture of music and political ideology[[13]](#endnote-13). Triggs goes as far as suggesting *Sniffin’ Glue* represents a ‘graphic language of resistance’ and analyses in detail covers from *SG*, *Chainsaw* and *Ripped & Torn*, placing their aesthetics in the wider context of modernist art and design theory[[14]](#endnote-14). Hebdige connects the visual design of *SG*, and the wider deployment of graffiti and ransom note iconography, explicitly to the visual imagery of the Sex Pistols’ *God Save the Queen* record sleeve, T shirts and posters, but without reference to the controversy surrounding the major record company that produced it.

There is a tendency in the literature to produce a overly determining and fundamentally structuralist readings of punk, and in fanzines (as with other activities) visual design is seen as the primary language, culture an anthropological activity of display, and class as the primary definer of social agency.

This template is set by Hebdige’s 1979 analytical emphasis on ‘the meaning of style’, together with the broader sub-cultural approach from which it emerged. Triggs’ art college incorporation follows this line when she states that ‘punk arguably represented the politics of the working-class experience’ [[15]](#endnote-15), but she marshals only the citation of Hebdige and other antecedent subcultural studies as support, before drawing consistently on examples of appropriations of earlier design practices that do not obviously have any connection to working-class experience.

By contrast, Dave Laing’s broader reading of punk as discursive practice has been less often used as the basis for thinking through punk fanzines, even though it arguably offers a much wider context[[16]](#endnote-16). Placing the history of punk fanzines in a longer history of music politics and emphasising productive activity as much as symbolism he opens up a much wider context for understanding the role of such publications at different points in time. In particular, Laing notes the productive power of the very idea of ‘punk’, the DIY culture it utilised and celebrated, as well as those attempts by agents of the state to crudely control emergent punk practices. In discussing punk fanzines, Laing locates them in a longer history and wider set of practices of DIY culture which he connects to the early sci-fi fanzines, the tradition of economic independence from the music industry, Xerox record labels, and the idea of punk as a vernacular music[[17]](#endnote-17).

Likewise, for George McKay punk and its fanzines are less a rebirth of alternative values and more one of a number of stopping off places in a longer history of ‘cultures of resistance since the sixties[[18]](#endnote-18). Many of his interests in music as cultural politics, in community music and DIY culture, expressed in other publications are distilled in this cultural history[[19]](#endnote-19). In McKay’s history, unlike more traditional popular music histories, punk does not become completely incorporated into the mainstream of the popular music industry, but the importance of the punk critique is sustained through a more self-conscious politics through the anarcho-punk movement. British anarcho-punk emerged as a subcultural DIY musical scene during the late 1970’s taking some of the earlier punk rhetoric of anti-authority, anarchism and DIY culture and made them a central tenet of its scene. Activists encouraged people in the scene from all areas of Britain to directly link the vibrant music to an attempt to collectively construct a politicised culture that encompassed ideologies and philosophies of anarchist/pacifist politics, personal freedom, anti-capitalism, animal rights amongst many others. These positions were presented as a direct challenge to the politics of a ‘mass society’, the political economy of the record industry and the commodification of ‘mainstream’ punk. At the centre of this challenge was the commitment to the emergence of a ‘DIY’ music culture. Such ideologies were promoted by anarcho-punk bands such as Crass, Poison Girls, Flux of Pink Indians and Conflict, to name but a few[[20]](#endnote-20).

For their readers, anarcho-punk fanzines played a central role in disseminating and reinforcing these ideological positions, and in offering alternatives to the popular media’s representations of punk. Taking our approach from Laing’s more nuanced poststructuralist position, we argue that it is the low-tech cut-and-paste techniques of fanzines production, the effort involved in such production, and the clearly articulated positions of their editors, which constitute the central characteristics of punk fanzines. In doing so, we seek to move beyond the simpler notion that fanzines were simply channels of communication and their designs symbols of punk, to the idea that fanzines represent cultural work, and that their ‘fan-eds’ were key agents in defining what punk was or should be. It is, we contend, through this cultural work that the editors stake a claim for the necessary passion and commitment to warrant their status as an arbiter of taste, the authority amongst readers to assert specific ideological positions and the subcultural capital to allocate classifications of authenticity.

Our analytical approach to examining fanzines, therefore, emphasises the discursive practices of the ‘fan-eds’ just as much as the textual meanings, and repertoires of visual design and political philosophy they encoded. To grapple with this we have applied Norman Fairclough’s approach to deal with both the single moments of representation but also the broader orders of discourse[[21]](#endnote-21). In the former Fairclough suggests attention is paid to texts as representational forms which generate identifies and relationships as well as to the conventions and production practices of the creators, while in the latter he focuses on discursive practices of the community in which the single text is produced. Such a systematic approach can be demonstrated most clearly in two examples: firstly in 1980’s anarcho-punk print fanzines; and secondly with 2010’s punk webzines.

**Anarcho-punk fanzines as practices of cultural work**

It is useful to take the example of a single publication to see how this cultural work is realised and how particular discursive constructions are articulated. The punk to anarcho-punk fanzine *Acts of Defiance*, published in the North-East of England during the early 1980s, demonstrates this particularly well.

It is certainly clear that *Acts of Defiance* used the same ‘low-value production techniques’ that Triggs identifies as characteristic of the earlier fanzines: ‘photocopying and Letraset, employing the graphic elements including ransom note cut-outs, handwritten, stencilled, scrawled or typewritten texts, or collage images’. In terms of its design, then, the example of *Acts of Defiance* seems to support Triggs’ contention that these design characteristics ‘went some way to establish a set of commonly used principles and a way of creating a distinctive graphic language’. However, we would be more cautious about her claim that this language ‘ultimately mirrored the particular aesthetic of punk music’. Rather than symbolising punk, or representing a wider punk aesthetic, we would contend that it was the very activities of punk ‘zine producers which produced ‘punk’[[22]](#endnote-22).

This may seem like a small shift in emphasis, but it has important implications. Triggs’ argument seeks to privilege the history of design and modernist aesthetics above the important processes which were at work in fanzine production. In particular, using the example of *Acts of Defiance* we take issue with Triggs’ argument that this was a ‘language of graphic resistance steeped in the first instance in the ideology of punk and its anarchical spirit and in the second instance, that which emerged from their position in a continuous timeline of self-conscious Dadaist and Situationist International ‘art ’ practices’[[23]](#endnote-23). We do not want to suggest that there was not an emerging ‘ideology of punk’ with an associated ‘anarchical spirit’ nor that there are not obvious connections to Dadaism or Situationism, but that an analysis which moves from ‘how it looks’ to ‘what it means’ and then to ‘what caused it to mean that’, is mistaken. Instead, we need to examine what the editors were doing, with what practical and discursive resources, with what purposes. In this context the verbal language of the fanzines was as important as the visual language, and that both of these are discursive practices which produced important senses of what it was to be ‘a punk’, what role music, symbolism and scene had in this construction, and what role a ‘fan-ed’ had in such an activity. What is interesting about the later fanzines like *Acts of Defiance*, is that these very issues are central to the discourse of the editorial content itself.

There is a strong and consistent ideological and philosophical discourse apparent across the issues of *Acts of Defiance* which is anchored by the very title of the publication and its allusion to a form of activism and opposition which verges on political nihilism. It is also notable that *Acts of Defiance*, as a regional publication, also represents the localisation of punk within Britain in the late 1970s, at the very moment that the music was attracting a global audience and the politics of punk was connecting different internationalist trajectories of thought together. *Acts of Defiance* was one of many anarcho-punk fanzines that carried on the cut-and-paste aesthetic of the early fanzines but used them for a much more systematic articulation of a political position. In fact for one of the authors of this chapter (Grimes), at least, it was these editorial arguments that had a critical influence on his own political/ideological development, and engaged him an active participant in the early British anarcho-punk scene. The editorial content defined what it was to be a member of a scene that increasingly constructed a discourse of defiance, anarchism and anti-authoritarianism. These personal responses are also clearly articulated in the editorials of *Acts of Defiance,* which are centred around the idea that the fanzine is a site for identity-creation, ideological engagement, and action. In this study, therefore we wanted to view the editorial content as the inscription of certain forms of cultural work. As we have already suggested, we want to argue that it was not the iconography of punk ‘zines which carried their meaning, but the low-tech cut-and-paste techniques of production. By that we mean their style was a product of the way they were made just as much as an attempt to draw on existing ideas of DIY communication (the typewriter), anonymity (the cut-and-paste ransom note), and the highly personal response (handwriting and annotation). Far from being immediate, there was substantial effort involved in making a punk ‘zine, which no doubt accounted for the short life of most of them. They both required and exhibited substantial commitment and insider knowledge, and the editorial content was often peppered with clearly articulated justifications for this cultural labour.

So, for instance, in seeking to understand the way three single editorials in issues 5, 6 and 7 of *Acts of Defiance* function we need to examine the relationship constructed between the ‘fan-ed’ and ‘fan-reader’, and the relationship the text defined for the participants.

*AOD editorial issue 5*

Here it is then 1983, and things are as bad as they ever were same old boredm[*sic*] and apathy that’s all ways been around. Punk I thought was supposed to be about energy, life, originality (remember them?)... Even some of the so called anarcho-punks can’t find anything to do but sit around and moan about it, these (you) are the people who should be going out and doing things (other than getting pissed). Its much easier to say that its all the fault of the system-well maybe it is but you can still do a few things… Its all very well to moan and do nothing if things are boring then its up to you to get out and change them.

*AOD editorial issue 6*

Its funny isn’t it, how many people who have got anarchy signs all over themselves and claim to know what its all about-peace and love and all that isn’t it? And yet despite this how many act as if they actually meant it-not bloody many… People who claim to believe in anarchy but let us down on the most basic thing-trust… they say that anarchy begins with the individual but its still right, you always complain that your mistreated by ‘society’ but unless you fulfil peoples trust in you your going to remain isolated and unless you can learn to trust fully then we are going nowhere.

*AOD editorial issue 7*

Now its time to become more involved, to really get down to things seriously. So all you ‘punks’ out there who thought that you were helping the revolution by buying records on Crass label and spraying anarchy signs all over think again. There are loads of things really worth doing… you can always start with yourself (I said this in the last issue and probably the one before and I’ll keep saying it until someone listens). If you are going to go around calling yourself an anarchist then at least try and act like you mean it.

What comes through in the discourses of the editorial in the three printed fanzines is how strong and forcibly the identity of being a ‘punk’ is articulated. In particular, a distinction is made between those who use the signs of being a punk – critique of the status quo; sporting anarchy signs; and ‘buying records on Crass label’ – and those who take personal responsibility to act. These statements are part of an on-going critique of the local scene and the perceived apathy that is characteristic of its activities. Here the editors, through their seeming frustration and anger, are using the editorial to remind and reinforce what they think anarcho-punk is about and how it is down to individual responsibility to make it work as an ideological practice. The editors highlight/reinforce what they believe defines and constitutes anarcho-punk and anarcho punk identity in the editorial through the discourses of DIY ethics, anarchism and individual responsibility.

By issue 7, though, there is a discernible shift in the discourse of *Acts of Defiance*. There is a continuing variance between two strikingly different discourses. The first relates to professional practices of production and market success, while the second relates to the primary ideological function of an anarcho-punk fanzine. So, interestingly, the editorial talks about both improvements and success in increasing circulation in the past two issues. However, they also state their decision to cut down on the amount of music/gig/band reviews to include what they consider to be more important issues. There is certainly some uneasiness about the editors right to lead on ideological questions, to interpret the state of the scene, and maybe even to make editorial decisions. These conflicting discourses, are though, made more coherent by reference to an idealised anarcho-punk community:

Right then as you must have noticed this issue is a much improved version of AOD, we’ve also increased the circulation to 1,000 due to the success of the last couple of issues so we hope this issue is up to standard.

Since we first started doing this zine we’ve slowly cut down the number of bands we’ve interviewed and generally cut down on the music side of the zine, this is not due to the fact we don’t like music or the bands but we feel that there are plenty of other fanzines, magazines etc that cover music and hardly any that contain interesting, informative articles which we feel are far more important than pages and pades[*sic*] of the same band interviews and handouts. We’ve been accused, recently, of just preaching all the time, but a lot of the things we write about and say are important issues to us and we feel we must speak about them, so there!

The transition of *Acts of Defiance* construct can be seen emerging on page 4 of Acts of Defiance Issue 3. Previous issues of *Acts of Defiance* mostly focussed on gig and music reviews but by issue 3 the writers had started to investigate and debate the ideologies of anarcho-punk with a whole page dedicated to anarchism (the only page that carried any specific political ideology in that issue). By issue 5 more than half (thirteen pages) of the fanzine content) is given over to political/punk ideology covering animal rights/feminism/nuclear threat/police brutality/ and a critical view of state education.

These editorials are themselves a critique of Triggs’ notion that there is a useful ‘language of graphic resistance’ at the heart of punk, offering instead that such symbols allowed some participants to act as if they were punks without them taking the necessary ideological and activist positions that the editors assert are at the centre of being a ‘true’ punk. The authority of the editors to be able to define what is and isn’t punk, what the role of music and the scene is within punk, and how symbols should (and should not) operate, comes from their willingness to undertake the demanding work of producing the fanzine in the first place. Although in the late 1970s and early 1980s most of the benefits of the desk top publishing revolution had not yet arrived, it was possible to produce quite convincing facsimiles of professionally-designed publications. In fact our own experiences of producing publications would suggest that there was greater work involved in creating publications which looked and read like these punk fanzines. While aspiring professional designers may have utilised the look of such publications, and connected their aesthetic to the shock tactics of Dadaism and Situationism for most regionally-based punk ‘zine editors it was the act of cultural and political work in the verbal language which was centrally important.

Looking through other British anarcho-punk fanzines of that era – and we would include *Mucilage*, *Necrology*, *Harsh Reality*, *Allied Propaganda*, and *Guilty of What* as exemplars – similar constructs appear in the editorials of them all. Although we would not go as far as saying that there is a homogenous construction of the British anarcho-punk fanzine – there are different degrees of importance placed on some discourses in different fanzines – the issues of symbolism, identity and action are consistent.

It is through this editorial content, rather than the design, that the (shared) values, ideologies and philosophy of the British anarcho-punk movement are disseminated amongst the fanzine readership. And it is through this activity that the fanzine is constructed as a site for defining identity, ideology, defiance and opposition.

**Online fanzines**

Commentators and academics alike have often pointed to the potential of the internet to offer a communication and cultural space that greatly expands the sorts of ‘alternative critical space’, ‘crucial mechanism for interaction between readers’, and ‘unifying vehicle for establishing and reinforcing shared values, philosophy and opinions’ that is seen to characterise punk fanzines[[24]](#endnote-24). Given these arguments, it is not fanciful to suggest that we could see the punk fanzines of the 1970s and 1980s as prototypes for the cultural interactions that would take place in virtual space. Given this, and the continued vitality of a live a recorded punk scene, it would be easy to assume that the practices and meanings associated with the earlier printed fanzine have simply migrated online. However, as we will show, while there is evidence of an obvious attempt to reproduce the iconography of the print punk ‘zines in online sites, this is most often a superficial act of iconic signification, and there is a more diverse and complex range of practices and products than found in earlier print incarnations of the fanzine phenomenon.

Looking broadly at web sites and blogs that are listed in a Google search for punk fanzines, we can see a pattern emerging. Firstly, there is a considerable amount of heritage activity around earlier print punk and anarcho-punk ‘zines from the 1970s and 1980s. For instance, it is possible to examine scans of most, if not all, of the issues of all the fanzines cited in this chapter online, along with a whole host of other regional fanzines not mentioned. This, we suggest, is indicative of the reverence towards such music culture products held by many, and recognition of the importance of specific fanzines amongst many punk fans. Secondly, the term fanzine and fanzine iconography is widely used in, or associated with, websites or blogs that do not have the same production practices or cultural role as the earlier print fanzines. Most often this deployment of the term fanzine, or the use of fanzine iconography, is part of a mainly marketing or commercial aim. In some cases the web presence is there to support and sell as print-based fanzine, but more often it is used to market other forms of product associated with punk. These include recordings and other forms of merchandising. Finally, we should note that there is a considerable amount of online activity which was formally hosted within the printed pages of punk ‘zines, but which is less often listed against an online search for punk fanzines. This would include the editorial enthusiasm for certain bands, participant reviews or exchanges about a shared musical interest, or editorial positions on a whole range of which are explicitly linked to anarcho-punk philosophy. We would suggest that it is this activity which most closely matches the cultural practices and products of punk ‘zines, but it usually takes place without any reference to terms like fanzines or webzines, and without the deployment of any of the iconography of the 1970s and 80s print fanzines. It is also worth noting, that our observations are only built upon web platforms that most closely reproduce the idea of a fanzine publication: the web site or blog. There are, at first sight, even more Facebook pages linked to the term ‘punk fanzine’, and other social media platforms like Twitter contains an even greater range of fan activity around the contemporary punk and anarcho-punk music scenes.

To explore contemporary online activity associated with punk fanzines in a little more detail we examined three exemplar sites or blogs. We chose these in part because, on the basis of Google algorithms at least, they represent popular destinations for online users interested in punk and anarcho-punk fanzines, and in part because they show remarkably different approaches to continuing the traditions of the print fanzine. The sites we selected are also instructive in thinking through the themes of fanzine iconography and cultural practice we raised in the earlier discussions of first a second wave of pint punk ‘zines.

*Lights Go Out* is a blog built around a print fanzine and includes details about past issues of the publication, which at the time of writing had reached issue 19, an ecommerce backend to sell issues of the fanzine and associated merchandise, and some news and link pages. *No Front Teeth* is the web site for a record label of the same name which issues LP and 7 inch vinyl records broadly within the punk genre. At the time of our initial research in late 2011, Taped was a blog connected with the *Taped* D.I.Y label where free downloads to musical releases are available. Although its name, and much of the top-level terminology is drawn from the tape music sharing culture associated with punk in the 70s and 80s. By the time we came to study the site most of the recent posts were explanations for the declining activity at the site, and proposals for a site redesign. By the time we came to finalise this chapter for publication the site was no longer on line.

All three web sites / blogs made some reference to the iconography of the late 1970s and early 1980s print fanzine we have discussed so far. *Lights Go Out*, and *Taped* used banners which seemed to reference graffiti writing, while *No Front Teeth* clearly referenced ‘ransom note’ stylisation, used montage techniques, and typewriter and stencil-styled typefaces. *Taped* uses a type that resembles a dot-matrix printer, which did replace typewriters to generate copy in fanzines from the mid-1980s. All three, but especially *Lights Go Out*, use the layout structures and design elements of website and blog templates.

The ‘landing page’ for *Lights Go Out* (www.lightsgoout.co.uk) has a selection of drop down menus including sections on news reviews and interviews. One click through the news section reproduces press releases and lists bands and artists tour dates. The reviews and interviews section list the contents of the printed issues, where the reviews and interviews appear, and an opportunity to purchase the printed issues (though the drop down link to the shop shows a not found error). There is also an online exclusives section that has interviews and reviews that are not available in the printed version of *Lights Go Out*. The about section reveals that there is an editor, though no editorial, and has the profiles of regular contributors to the fanzine. On closer inspection of the content of the printed fanzine issues it seems to be a general music fanzine broadly about indie rock music with some emphasis on punk and pop-punk bands.

*No Front Teeth* (www.nofrontteeth.co.uk) was also identified when using ‘punk webzine’ on Google search. On its landing page header it refers to itself as ‘Punk Rock Records, Mailorder and Zine for Spastics’.  It employs some of the graphic style of earlier punk fanzines on its ‘landing page’ however this ‘webzine’ appears to be a shop front for a punk rock record label as there is no ‘zine’ content such as reviews, interviews or editorial. Its ‘news’ section is predominantly about forthcoming releases on their record label or other labels featuring members of *No Front Teeth*. This would suggest that they are also a punk band, however their Facebook profile points to the fact that *No Front Teeth* are a DIY punk rock record label where the people who run the label play in punk rock bands. The ‘label’ link on their landing page links to a shop where records /cd’s can be purchased via PayPal. Its Radio link and MySpace link are both inactive and the contact link hyperlinks to Outlook express email. The *No Front Teeth* ‘friends’ link leads to a set of hyperlinked banners for skateboarding, footwear and fashion companies.

*Taped* (www.taped.org.uk) was also listed when we set ‘punk webzine’ and ‘punk fanzine’ in our Google search. Under further investigation, they are perhaps the closest of the three to what we might associate with the editorial structure of earlier print punk fanzines. Here the homepage acts as a type of editorial as it describes the author’s account of where he is regarding the lack of recent content (15 months) and the restructuring of the site. Other pages on the site contain interviews, reviews and forthcoming gigs. There is also access to the *Taped* D.I.Y label where free downloads to musical releases are available. Much of the content appears to be based around focussed discussions about the local Dorset and South West England music scene though this is not restricted only to punk. This would suggest that the author of the fanzine lives in that area of the UK. Since first conducting this research, a more recent search indicates this particular webzine/fanzine has now ceased to exist.

It should be clear that *Lights Go Out* and *No Front Teeth* did not replicate any of the practices and constructs that appear in the print fanzines we analysed earlier in this chapter. In particular there did not seem to be any clear sense of a ‘fan-ed’, although they were often written in a style that suggested such an agent at work. In addition, there were none of the wider contributions from readers that characterised the earlier print publications. One could speculate that they made significant use of the term fanzine and iconic reference to the print ‘zine’ status as a promotional tool. There were certainly none of the discursive repertoires of punk identity, ideology, defiance and opposition that were prominent in print publications. Even though *Lights Go Out* presented itself as a UK fanzine about music, the focus was more broadly on a range of high energy forms of indie music rather than any clear punk scenes. Given that the reviews and interviews that made up the print fanzines were international in scope, it was hard to see what function the national tagline had. There are certainly echoes here of Chris Atton’s suggestion that the majority of e-zines are primarily interested in ‘product’ and the promotion of that product[[25]](#endnote-25). The content of *Taped*, however, seemed to draw close comparisons to some of the other discursive practices found in the print fanzines. There were interviews/reviews and discussions around a local scene. However, the explicit emphasis on identity, defiance and opposition found in *Acts of Defiance* and similar fanzines was wholly absent.

**Fanzine culture 1976 – 2013**

In this chapter we have aimed to consider and analyse the fanzine as a discursive practice. In doing so we have aimed to encompass the usual emphasis on fanzines as channels of communication and symbols of wider punk practices, but to ensure we recognise that it was the fanzine which was one of the key ways in which punk and anarcho-punk was made meaningful. We would argue, then, that simply focusing on the characteristic visual deign of the print fanzine limits our understanding of its cultural role and the position of its ‘fan-ed’ cultural agents. This important point also allows us to understand the extent to which webzines replicate the discursive practices of the print fanzine. Overall, while many web sites or blogs may include visual references to fanzines, and may even use the term in their titles or primary banners, they do not include the sorts of editorial organisation, the cultural practices or the discursive constructions of identity and opposition which characterised print fanzines. It is notable that many of these cultural practices and discursive constructions are immediately apparent in other online activity around punk, and around political activism associated with anarcho-punk. For this reason the disjuncture between print and web ‘zines cannot be seen as a clash between a contemporary punk rock as a music product and a 1970s/80s ideological punk.

That is not to ignore the obvious cultural caché that the terms fanzine and ‘zine, and the visual references, have for the owners of websites and blogs who want to attract audiences, especially if they want to engage with potential customers for punk records, print fanzines or merchandise. Nor do we make this point to undermine the clear heritage value that the older print fanzine have in representing and telling the story of punk’s history for all those who carefully archive scans of these publications. However, we should recognise that in both these cases this online activity tries to align recent cultural or commercial work with the subcultural capital of ‘fan-eds’ and the oppositional ideologies that have been historically associated with fanzines in popular culture.

More importantly, perhaps, we need to understand that it is not in their iconography and symbolism that the print fanzines were relevant and meaningful. Their visual design was an epiphenomenon of the discursive practices of the ‘fan editors’ who produced the fanzines in a manner which indexed their DIY nature and the investment of effort of the editors as agents. It is the low-tech cut-and-paste production of fanzines, the passion and effort involved in producing fanzines, which gave them their essence of authenticity. In particular this DIY practice is central to the ethos of anarcho-punk. The print publications also needed further effort in the physical act of selling and distributing fanzines at punk gigs, the face-to-face interaction that holds cultural value amongst punk’s subcultural groups.

One could speculate that perhaps there is a resistance amongst anarcho-punk and punk ‘zine producers to use the web as an alternative to the traditional physical form of the fanzine, perhaps because the cultural work involved does not provide the same sort of construction of authenticity. However, the issues are more complex than this. Firstly, as Liptrot has argued, many of the practices of the 1980s British anarcho-punk scene have over the last twenty years been absorbed into a wider contemporary DIY punk and hardcore punk scenes a cross the world. In these scenes the anarcho-punk DIY ethic is still prominent and the print fanzine remains one of the key means of ideological communication within the subculture[[26]](#endnote-26). Secondly, even a cursory investigation shows that the issues of identity, ideology, defiance and opposition are widespread on online message boards, blogs and in social media. Taking just two examples which explicitly links their current activity with the earlier history of punk, the anarcho-punk blog *oldpunksneverdie.com* and *anarchopunk.net* both demonstrate some of the language and format of the print fanzines associated with punk/anarcho-punk. Neither uses visual design, or a major emphasis on using terms like fanzine or ‘zine. The internet presents a wholly different set of potential communicative and practices, the cultural work it demands is very different, and it does not demand that its DIY status is signalled so strongly in its visual form.

1. We derive this term from Antonio Gramsci as intellectual leaders who emerge from a group, although we take it in terms wider than those discussed by Gramsci himself in Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (eds), *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. For authors who articulate or explore this idea see, for instance, C. O'Hara, *The philosophy of punk: more than noise* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1999), 92-3; I. Glasper, *The day the country died* (London: Cherry Red, 2006), 8 &104-9; G. McKay, *Senseless acts of beauty: cultures of resistance since the sixties* (London: Verso, 1996), 87; G. Berger, *The Story of Crass*. (London: Omnibus Press, 2006), 109-11. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. T. Triggs, ‘Scissors and glue: punk fanzines and the creation of a DIY aesthetic’, *Journal of Design History* 19:1 (2006), 69-83, p. 70. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. S. Moskowitz, ‘The origins of science fiction fandom: a reconstruction’, *Foundation* 48 (1990), 5-25. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. D. Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 111; D. Laing, *One chord wonders: power and meaning in punk rock* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), p. 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Hebdige, Subculture: the meaning of style, p.111 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Laing, One chord wonders: power and meaning in punk rock p. 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. quoted in P. Rutherford, *Fanzine Culture* (Oldham: Springhead Books,1995), p. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. S. Conway and D. Crowther, ‘Virtual Networking Pre- and Post-Cyberspace: An Assessment of the Implications for Social Cohesion’, *Journal of Management Research* 1:1 (2002), p. 1-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. O'Hara, The philosophy of punk, p. 62-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. T. Triggs, ‘Generation terrorists: fanzines and communication’, in T. Triggs (ed), *Communicating design : essays in visual communication* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1995), p. 34. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Triggs, ‘Scissors and glue: punk fanzines and the creation of a DIY aesthetic’ p. 70. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. see, for instance, P. Stoneman, *Fanzines: Their Production, Culture and Future*, (University of Stirling: MPhil dissertation, 2001); Triggs, ‘Scissors and glue’. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Triggs, ‘Scissors and glue’ p. 72. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Triggs, ‘Scissors and glue’ p. 73. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Laing, One chord wonders. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Laing, *One chord wonders*, p. 15-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. McKay, Senseless acts of beauty. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. (see, for instance, G. McKay, ‘DIY culture: notes towards an intro.’, in G. McKay *DIY culture: party & protest in Nineties Britain* (London: Verso, 1998); P. Moser and G. McKay *Community music: a handbook* (Lyme Regis: Russell House, 2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. I. Glasper, The day the country died. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. N. Fairclough, *Media discourse* (London: Arnold, 1995) [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. All quotes Triggs, ‘Scissors and glue’, p. 76. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Triggs, ‘Scissors and glue’, p. 74. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Hebdige, *Subculture;* Conway and Crowther, ‘Virtual Networking Pre- and Post-Cyberspace’; Triggs, ‘Scissors and glue’ respectively. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. C. Atton, *Alternative Media* (London: Sage, 2002), p. 70. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. M. Liptrot, Beyond the lifespan of a scab: the longevity of DIY punk in Britain (University of Bolton: PhD thesis, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)