“This Is Radio Clash”: First-Generation Punk as Radical Media Ecology and Communicational Noise

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter argues that in relation to dominant communication media such as newspapers, radio, and television, punk rock operated as a form of noise—less in the literal sense, since noisy forms of rock music were already well established, but in the sense of communicational noise, as an excess of the standard requirements for rock music communication. More than just “ineptness” in relation to professional recordings and instrumental prowess, punk was a short-circuiting of mainstream media channels operating both by an alternative production of media and the production of events unassimilable by the mass media, especially radio and television. The author argues that the first-generation punk band the Clash was as much a form of alternative world service radio, informing listeners about both local and global struggles for freedom and survival, as it was a musical band.

Keywords: the Clash, punk rock, London punk, media ecology, noise, psychogeography Joe Strummer, radio, radical media

Introduction

Multiple attempts have been made to characterize first-generation London punk rock, whether in early accounts in terms of subcultural style (Hebdige 1979), or as an

intervention into the recording industry (Laing 1985). More nuanced later accounts have noted punk's influence on cultural spheres as diverse as contemporary art, fashion, film, and popular music, as well as attempting to capture its cultural politics (see Sabin 1999). However, more can be said about punk as radical media—and not only because its proliferation was inseparable from a range of alternative media practices, from Xerox and (fan)zine production, to alternative radio, to DIY recording practices. More than this, punk was itself a form of media, operating less aesthetically than communicationally, as a way of channeling resistant energies to dominant forces and expressing both this domination and resistance via lyrics, artwork, texts, performances, fashion, and both print and audiovisual media. This chapter will examine these dynamics, focusing on the Clash, whose explicit presentation of themselves in media terms, especially as a form of pirate radio or "alternative world service," was only a more explicit expression of tendencies within punk more generally. The Clash can also be seen as a prime example of punk "selling out" in terms of signing early to a major record label, in this case CBS Records, and arguably becoming nothing more than a hardworking rock band before disintegrating altogether. Nevertheless, they maintained the aim of providing alternative modes of communication, such as engaging with a range of black musics, incorporating other media forms (especially radio), and presenting guerrilla struggles in the developing world, such as those of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, to audiences who may have had little idea where a country like Nicaragua even was.

This chapter will argue that in relation to dominant communication media such as newspapers, radio, and television, punk rock operated as a form of noise, though less in the literal sense, since noisy forms of rock music were already well established, but in the sense of communicational noise, as an excess of the standard requirements for rock music communication. More than just "ineptness" in relation to professional recordings and instrumental prowess (Hegarty 2007), punk was a short-circuiting of mainstream media channels operating both by an alternative production of media and the production of events unassimilable by the mass media, especially radio and television.

In order to do this, it is necessary to explain briefly what is meant here by the term "media ecology." First developed from the work of Marshall McLuhan by Neil Postman and others (see Postman 1987), media ecology was initially seen as an attempt to explain how human experience and society is increasingly shaped by technology and modes of information and communication. However, more recent formulations of media ecology by Matthew Fuller and others (see Fuller 2005) have taken a less anthropocentric but more dynamic approach, seeing in media ecologies potentially transformative assemblages of agents, practices, and technologies that are neither necessarily humanist nor technologically determinist. If ecology can be expanded beyond the strictly physical environment to also encompass social relations and phenomena of subjectivity, as Felix Guattari suggested in *The Three Ecologies* (2000), then media ecology is a way of grasping expressive media not merely as representations, or technically determined practices, but as constitutive of worlds that articulate subjectivities with technologies, social practices, and specific environments in ways that are every bit as dynamic as an organic ecosystem.

This approach is useful where it comes to understandings of punk for its ability to go beyond the limits of semiotic approaches to punk, strongly evident in Hebdige's study of subcultural style, and to some extent in Laing's book, while at the same time more generative of a theoretical understanding of punk than purely historical or journalistic approaches like those of Savage (1991) or Heylin (2008), or similar accounts of the Clash, in particular those of Grey (1995), Gilbert (2004), or Andersen and Heibutzki (2018). This approach will focus neither on the meaning or style of punk, nor on

narrating its development and the biographies of key individuals and groups, but rather on the material relationships between its constitutive elements—recorded music, live performances, pirate radio, posters, flyers, fanzines, and fashion, among others—with the idea that all of these elements taken together constitute a media ecology, in relation to the sociopolitical environment of late-1970s Britain and, more specifically, London. This is not to criticize these other accounts of punk, all of which have their merits and have informed the current scholarship on punk rock to this day. However, what this chapter will try to show is that punk was not only a phenomenon associated with specific modes of media production and circulation, but was itself a form of radical media, perhaps more so than a genre of music, which it has only become retroactively. To develop this idea, the focus will be mainly on the Clash's recorded music, and on relations with mainstream media and with the urban environment, while acknowledging that live performances, fashion, and album art were also essential components of the band's media ecology.

This approach will also mean taking a view of punk in proximity to contemporaneous social and political movements, such as Italian and German Autonomy movements, as I have argued elsewhere (Goddard 2018, 160–173). This is not to claim that punk was a similar political movement, or even any mutual influence, so much as a resonance based on shared practices such as squatting, the refusal of work, and the disturbance of dominant norms of both political organization and communication (see also Milburn 2001). There were also more local movements around squatting and against racism taking place, especially in West London since the mid-1960s, both of which had marked influences on punk, and especially on the Clash. Jon Savage writes about these scenes in *Goodbye to London* (Proll 2010), edited appropriately enough by former Red Army Faction member Astrid Proll who came to London to escape police attention in West German and immediately engaged with this squatting scene. According to Savage, "the whole area around Notting Hill, Gate, Ladbroke Grove, and Portobello Road … has been a seismograph of London life for much of the twentieth century" (Savage 2010, 16), citing phenomena from mid-1960s swinging London and *Performance* (Cammell and Roeg 1970) to the Angry Brigade, the Notting Hill Carnival, and, of course, the Clash themselves, alongside the local squatting scene that made many of these phenomena possible. In a sense, punk fit right into this sixties underground legacy and took it full circle, providing "a focus for a new generation who react against the sixties, even if they are continuing that work in a new guise" (Savage 2010, 16). For these reasons, this approach also sees UK (and especially London) punk as specific and markedly different from punk as it had developed earlier in the United States. As Roger Sabin has argued, "if we accept that one of the key defining elements of punk was an emphasis on class politics then it could only have begun in one time and one place—Britain in the late 1970s. … [T]he UK's economic recession can be seen as a catalyst … the quality of the experience in America was different, and much less politicised" (Sabin 1999, 3).

The Media Ecology of the Clash, Radio, and Punk Communication

Despite the above caveat about personal biographies, it is worth reiterating at this point that there were aspects of the background of members of the Clash that were quite distinct and fed into the nature of their musical activities and the subsequent modes of media communication they adopted. This has been chronicled extensively in several accounts of the band, including those of Gray and Gilbert, the latter giving the Clash's

three principal personae their own chapters, as well as devoting quite a few pages to their manager. Joe Strummer (born John Mellor) had an idiosyncratic background, which was both middle class and initially quite itinerant, as his father, who was born in India and only acquired British citizenship shortly before Strummer's birth, worked for the Foreign Office, and was posted to such places and Ankara, Cairo, and Mexico City (see Gilbert 2004, 6–8; Gray 1996, 88–91). While Strummer was eventually packed off to boarding school in Surrey at the age of nine, such a background was, on the one hand, embarrassingly middle class in the London punk milieu, but, on the other hand, also unusually international, arguably feeding into the subsequent lyrics of the Clash, which were considerably more internationalist than other punk bands, while still attuned to the specific environment of London and specifically the West London area comprising Maida Vale, Kilburn, Notting Hill, and especially Ladbroke Grove, the area in London that Strummer would wind up in after dropping out of art school.

This area was not only important for the punk scene of the 1970s, but had already been so for the radical counterculture of the 1960s, which is one of the reasons it contained a vibrant squatting and generally alternative scene, as epitomized by the Powis Square address of the character Turner, played by Mick Jagger in *Performance* (Cammell and Roeg 1970). Even more significantly for the subsequent development of the Clash, this part of London was also the home of the Notting Hill Carnival from 1965, the biggest event in the UK to celebrate black British and Caribbean diasporic culture and especially music, that would have a decisive influence on the Clash's early lyrical content and musical style, not only in "White Riot," but also songs like "1977" and "(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais."[1] This environment was inscribed in the name of his pre-Clash pub rock/rhythm and blues band the 101ers, which referred to the address of the Maida Vale squat where Strummer was living in 1976, from where he recruited the other band members of the 101ers.

Mick Jones and Paul Simonon had more working-class London origins, with connections with Ladbroke Grove, although the former grew up more in South London and the latter only spent part of his teenage years in the area, after an earlier childhood spent in Brixton. Famously, Jones's grandmother had a flat in Westbourne Park in a tower block overlooking the Westway, as reflected in the title of the Don Letts documentary, *From the Westway to the World* (2000), which nicely sums up both the local anchoring and global aspirations of the group imaginatively spanning from Ladbroke Grove to the farthest reaches of global rebel struggle. As Jon Savage put it in Ballardian "hyper-realist" terms in *England's Dreaming*:

From his grandmother's nineteenth-floor flat on the Warwick and Brindley estate, Clash guitarist Mick Jones had an eagle's eye view of a whole stretch of inner London: Harrow Road, North Kensington and Paddington, dominated by the elevated Westway, and blocks like the massive Trellick Tower that looms over the whole of Portobello Road and Ladbroke Grove. This was their stretch, marked, where the Westway passes over the Harrow Road by the grafitto THE CLASH, that remained there, fading slowly, for years after the group's vigorous life was over.

(Savage 1991, 233)

As for Simonon, he was often overlooked in interviews and early histories of the Clash and considered either as a pretty boy, reticent, or even a bit thick (see Gray 1996, 67). According to Viv Albertine, who was both going out with Jones and sharing her squat with Simonon at the time, "Paul is as handsome as a film star, like Paul Newman and James Dean rolled together, and he's nice to girls, not chauvinistic. He's a bit tongue-

tied and bashful but can afford to be, his looks do all the talking. It's Paul who comes up with the new band name, The Clash, from a newspaper headline" (Albertine 2014, 89). Not only was he responsible for the name the band adopted, but also their early look. This included the Jackson Pollock–style splattering of their clothes and the stenciled slogans taken from both their own and contemporary reggae lyrics, as seen on the cover of the "White Riot" single, and giving the band from the outset a militant and confrontational appearance. As Gilbert points out, whereas Mick Jones only went to art school in the disappointed hope of finding others to form a rock band with, Simonon was really drawn to being an artist, and in fact would continue his artistic activities beyond the career of the Clash (see Gilbert 2004, 48–54 ff.).

Into this mix, and indeed facilitating it in the first place, was the key role of their manager Bernie Rhodes. Rhodes was a long-term associate of Malcolm McLaren, with whom he shared a Jewish background and work in the rag trade, although his origins were less middle class, having grown up in an orphanage. Together with McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, he was the co-designer of the infamous "You're gonna wake up one morning and *know* what side of the bed you've been lying on," with its polarized list of "loves" and "hates," including many of the key themes that would be taken up in UK punk. This was, in Savage's words,

an accidental sequence so meticulous and complete that it holds in one small patch of cloth stands that would unravel over the next few years. The "hates" mainly comprise the dead culture of the time: pompous rockers, faded rebels, repressive institutions, "a passive audience." The "loves" include sex professionals, renegade artists, hard Rockers, IRA terrorists, working class heroes and, well hidden, the first printed mention of "Kutie Jones and his SEX PISTOLS."

(Savage 1991, 83–84)

Given Rhodes's often noted tendency toward left-wing rants, he is likely the author of a good portion of these lists, and certainly claimed later on to have been the one to put the Sex Pistols together, in the sense of "discovering" John Lydon and introducing him to McLaren, Steve Jones, and Paul Cook, even if McLaren subsequently rejected him having any involvement with managing the group. Certainly Gilbert supports this view of his significance, quoting Paul Simonon: "You can't overestimate Bernie's importance, he set up the whole punk scene, basically" (Simonon in Gilbert 2004, 78). In response to McLaren's dismissal, Rhodes decided to create his "own" punk band; approaching ex-members of the high-turnover proto-punk band London SS, including Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, and Keith Levene, the latter of whom would soon be ejected from the mix. Certainly, Rhodes was the one who hooked up Jones and Simonon with Joe Strummer, who was enjoying some modest success as singer of the 101ers, although the former later claimed to have already had their eye on him as the best front man around. Arguably, Rhodes can be seen as the creator of the Clash more so than McLaren as having created the Sex Pistols. One point on which almost everyone involved agrees is the pivotal role Rhodes played in getting the Clash to write songs about everyday issues that affected them, like unemployment and the urban environment, although from the beginning this extended beyond their immediate environment of West 11 and London to more global issues.

The classic example of this reorientation is the song "I'm So Bored with the USA," from the Clash's first album in 1977. This began life as a Mick Jones song about an ex-girlfriend ("I'm so bored with you"), which Strummer creatively misheard, giving the song an entirely new lyrical content: "Never mind the stars and stripes / Let's print the

Watergate Tapes." Not only did the song show an awareness of US imperialism, but also was critically engaged with US television culture, namechecking *Starsky and Hutch* and *Kojak*, as well as US detective series in general. Other early songs did, however, make specific references to West 11, such as "London's Burning" (1977): "I'm up and down the Westway, in and out the lights … I can't think of a better way to spend the night." As the local fanzine writer Tom Vague put it, "[this] is as close as you're going to get to authentic socio politico [*sic*] urban angst in a pop song outside of early Motown. It's obviously a Speed song as Strummer puts it 'We'd take amphetamines and storm around the bleak streets with nothing to do but watch the traffic. That's what 'London's Burning' is about'" (Vague, 1997, n.p.).[2] These associations of the Clash with the urban environment of London, W10 and 11, and more specifically the Westway have been explored by Conrad Brunström, who emphasizes the mythical and contradictory nature of the notion of speeding on the typically traffic-bound Westway: "Nuzzled under the Westway, an unusable arterial road (especially for a young, unemployed demographic), The Clash declare that the freedom of the open road—a frankly American cultural import—is both inescapable and impossible at the same time" (Brunström 2019, 163).

In addition to car headlights, tower blocks, amphetamines, and the Westway, a key referent in the song is again television, which in punk circles was synonymous with the boredom of contemporary urban experience, presented here as the new religion: "Everybody's sitting 'round watching television" (The Clash, "London's Burning"). This was to become prevalent throughout punk culture, influencing the names of bands (Television Personalities, Alternative TV, the Adverts), performers (TV Smith), and innumerable song lyrics. There is certainly no lack of television and advertising references in the Clash, especially in their third album, *London Calling*, in tracks like "Koka Kola" or "Lost in the Supermarket," although more in the sense of advertising and consumer culture. Even when talking about US imperialism, militarism, or rebellion, there is often a sense of the world as mediated via televisual imagery, as reflected often in their music videos. Songs like "Tommy Gun," with its focus on urban guerrillas, or the apocalyptic imagery of the track "London Calling" are mediated by the "Nine o'clock news" ("Tommy Gun," 1978) and media rumors that have to be confirmed via direct experience: "You know what they said / Well some of it was true" ("London Calling," 1979). However, this latter track contains another key media reference in its title and lyrical reference to being "at the top of the dial," namely to radio, which was an obsessive theme throughout the Clash's career to the extent that they can be usefully understood as constituting a form of pirate radio alternative world service, an idea the Strummer in particular was especially interested in. In fact, around 1980, this was actually considered a possible activity for the band in the *Combat Rock* period, even if it would remain only an imaginary one (see Gray 1996, 389–390).

In early Clash songs, commercial radio was an object of critique, as especially evident on the blistering single "Capital Radio One" (1977), which begins with a derisive reference to the "Dr. Goebbels Show," and continues to denounce the content of the eponymous radio station's programming: "They don't make the city beat / They make all the action stop," singling out the station's music manager, Aiden Day: "He picks all the hits to play / To keep you in your place all day." What is even more interesting in this song, however, is its awareness of the legacy of 1960s pirate radio and the gap left by its demise: "Now all the stations are silenced / 'Cause they ain't got a government license." This is a far more focused and cogent media critique than the Clash's not entirely consistent denouncing of US popular culture, and also points to the ways the band were positioning themselves as an alternative mode of radio. It would also be complemented by critical engagement with the music industry, including the highly self-

referential “Complete Control” (1977), one of several Clash tracks that critically references their own recording contract: “They said we’d be artistically free / When we signed that bit of paper” (taking the unusual step of using a single to criticize their own record label, CBS, for releasing “Remote Control” (1977) as a single against their wishes. Ironically enough, in 1999 Joe Strummer would become a radio DJ for the BBC World Service, playing an eclectic range of world musics, as featured extensively in the Julien Temple documentary *Joe Strummer: The Future Is Unwritten* (2007), but as several interviewees, such as Bono, indicate in the film, the Clash were already “an atlas,” an alternative world service alerting British youth not only to what was taking place in central London, but also in the Middle East or, famously, the revolution in Nicaragua, to which the Clash dedicated their fourth studio album.

Seeing the Clash in terms of radio makes sense of their extensive “pirating” of other musical styles, such as reggae and later jazz, blues, rockabilly, funk, and hip-hop, whether in the form of cover versions or their own synthetic versions of these different styles of largely black music. As opposed to the narrow horizons of commercial radio, the Clash had eclectic listening tastes and were expert in reinterpreting these styles for a punk audience—not merely speeding things up and draining their content of any virtuosity, as became typical for punk cover versions, but honing their essence and at times generating entirely new resonances, whether for Vince Taylor’s rockabilly “Brand New Cadillac” (1959), the upbeat rock and roll of the Bobby Fuller Four’s “I Fought the Law” (1966), or contemporary reggae tracks like Willie Williams’s “Armagideon Time” (1979) or Toots and the Maytals’ “Pressure Drop” (1969). The Clash were not content with creating a hybrid musical style between a variety of other musical forms and their own via cover versions, they wanted also to reinterpret these styles in original recordings, such as their own eccentric versions of jazz (“Jimmy Jazz,” 1979), soul and reggae (“Rudie Can’t Fail,” 1979) or hip-hop (“The Magnificent Seven,” 1980). However, it was one of their earlier singles’ appropriation of reggae that resulted in a truly exceptional piece of music that addressed the situation of black and white youth, informed by the experience of attending a reggae night at the Hammersmith Palais, in West London. This is done through the staging of a collision of the very musical styles referred to in the lyrics. Critical of the reggae on offer that night when there were “many black ears here to listen” [“(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais,” 1977], the song goes on to critique the posing of new punk bands with a clear dig at the Jam: “fighting for a good place under the lighting … Turning rebellion into money,”[3] Spiraling outward to both the need and impossibility of effective youth rebellion due to the imbalance of forces, the song returns to the Palais, with the singer just looking for fun like anyone else. This incredible journey through black and white musics and their shortcomings is conducted in a musical idiom that opens with anthemic rock chords that are then replaced with a reggae rhythm throughout most of the rest of the track, but the rock idiom makes a return in a short bridge lamenting the lack of “roots rock rebel.” Then, at the end of the track, there is a veritable hybridization of reggae, rock, and punk, with even some harmonica thrown in, embodying in a single track the eclectic musical styles that would later be explored on albums like *London Calling*. It is as if the band are proposing to tackle the social divisions of black and white youth by creating a musical amalgam adequate to both, and thereby constituting the “roots rock rebel” missing from that night at the Palais. The music critic Bill Wyman, who considers this song the finest one to be recorded by the band, describes it in the following terms: “The journey we’d been on was an extraordinary one—expectations challenged, dashed, and then trumped musically and thematically. That’s what the band did in their best songs, and that’s sort of what Strummer and Jones ended up doing with their band, which, for a time, blew a hole in the radio and were everything a rock band could be” (Wyman 2017, n.p.).

This brings us back to “London Calling,” that broadcast to the boys and girls of faraway towns, calling them “out of the cupboard” despite the apparently apocalyptic conditions. This is not only explicitly modeled on a radio broadcast—“This Is London Calling” was a station identification on BBC World Service, also used during World War II—but also suggests it is on a national if not international scale, calling on youth to follow the lead of London and resist dominant powers and, specifically, the “nuclear era” (“London Calling,” 1979). This would become the template for the Clash’s mode of addressing their increasingly global audience, especially on *Sandinista!*, where entire sides of the triple album are presented in the form of a radio broadcast, with Mikey Dread as resident DJ. This radio address would be reprised on their final album, *Combat Rock*, in the humorous track “Know Your Rights” (1982) opening with the lines “This is a Public Service Announcement / With guitars,” and arguably reaches an apotheosis in “Straight to Hell” (1982), which presents devastating scenes from Vietnam, England, and the United States of the after-effects of war, colonialism, and industrial decline in a form of poetic documentary reportage on the global dispossessed: “It could be anywhere / Most likely could be any frontier, any hemisphere.” But the equation of the Clash with radio was most directly and forcefully expressed in the earlier single “This Is Radio Clash.”

“This Is Radio Clash” exists in two nearly identically titled versions on each side of the original 7-inch release, both making reference to the use of radio during the Cuban revolution. On the B-side the track (here titled “Radio Clash”) begins with the lyrics “This is Radio Clash / Resuming all transmissions / Beaming from the mountaintop / Using aural ammunition,” and even more explicitly in the more well-known version form on the A-side: “This is Radio Clash from Pirate Satellite / Orbiting your living room, cashing in the bill of rights / Cuban army surplus or refusing all third lights.” This hip-hop-style track is at once an ode to the prevalent culture of beat boxes and ghetto blasters the group encountered in New York, and a fantasy of constituting a form of guerrilla radio, against militarism, napalm, and ghettoization, seducing its listeners with “audio ammunition.” While embodying one of the major paradoxes that pervades Clash lyrics (and, indeed, perhaps even the band’s name), namely couching anti-militarism in terms that are themselves militaristic, it perhaps provides the most complete vision of the Clash as pirate, guerrilla radio, taking on world issues from Vietnam and its aftermath to the nuclear umbrella, advocating a sound that “is brave and wants to be free”—perhaps the most direct articulation of the entire ethos of the Clash across the band’s extraordinary trajectory from “White Riot” to “Rock the Casbah.” In the music video for the song, this is presented as a veritable global pirate media ecology encompassing ghetto blasters combining radio and cassettes, satellite transmissions “interrupting all programmes,” seemingly on both radio and television, with New York graffiti and hip-hop breakdancing as a backdrop linking the Clash with black music culture in this new urban context (see Figure 1).

Click to view larger

Figure 1. The Clash imagined as global pirate radio in Clash on Broadway (Letts 2001), a previously unreleased film included as a DVD extra on Don Letts's documentary The Clash: Westway to the World.

The later track "Rock the Casbah" can be seen as a humorous companion broadcast to "Radio Clash," proposing a Middle East solution based on "that crazy casbah jive" that affects even the jet pilots who pick it up through the "cockpit radio blare" and start wailing to the infectious beat rather than dropping bombs. In a cruel irony, perhaps reflecting the ambivalence around militarism inherent in the Clash's rebel stance (especially evident in their preference for combat clothing as well as in their rebel lyrical themes), this infectious pop song would become the music of choice for US fighter pilots in the Gulf War, something that Joe Strummer found devastating. However, of more importance than this often-critiqued rebel stance was the Clash's explicit self-positioning as a source of noisy interference with dominant messages, which quickly dispensed with the need to be necessarily accompanied by noisy music in a conventional sense.[4] The Clash instead generated communicational noise, whether via the interference between previously distinct musical styles, or the use of music to resist and short-circuit dominant messages from capitalist consumerism and control to youth militarization and incipient fascism. Listeners were encouraged *not* to "hear the call up [and] act the way you were brought up" ("The Call-Up," 1980), or "start wearing blue and brown and working for the Clampdown" ("Clampdown," 1979). Instead, they were offered another call, a rebel call that welcomed the losers and dispossessed, from petty criminals in the West End ("The Card Cheat," "Jimmy Jazz," 1979) or Brixton ("Guns of Brixton"), to "ragged armies, fixin' bayonets to fight the other line" ("Spanish Bombs," 1979), to the panoply of the global dispossessed addressed in "Straight to Hell." As Wyman puts it in his account of the merits or otherwise of all 139 songs by the Clash in *Vulture*: "Strummer had an instinctive impulse to support whoever was being persecuted at any given time, even if the person deserved it" (Wyman 2018), and the Clash as a group can be seen as running media interference to short-circuit the operations of power and support the freedom of both individual and collective rebels through a "brave sound" that "wants to be free."

Conclusion: Punk as Communicational Noise

Too little attention has been paid to punk as a complex media phenomenon, crossing between recorded music, film, television, fashion, graphic arts, music journalism, flyers and posters, live performance, and records and cassettes, and produced out of and

through the confluence of these various technical media as a distinct and contagious media ecology that would ultimately have global effects. More specifically, out of this range of available media in a specific urban sociocultural environment, punk was able to construct an intense reflection of both the reigning dominant forces and the resistance to them via a rebellious range of mediated performances, from new modes of urban dress and behavior, to aggressive live performances, to the generation of a range of artifacts extending well beyond the music itself (films, posters, record covers, and homemade cassettes are only part of this extensive archive). In all of these arenas, punk, in relation to existing norms of rock music, operated very much in terms of noise, as has been argued here more explicitly in relation to the Clash. This is not only in the obvious sense of producing "noisy" music, since psychedelic rock and heavy metal before punk were both exemplars of noise, sometimes produced more effectively than in punk. Punk, however, was noisy in a communicational sense precisely for its failure to meet a set of what had become standard requirements for rock music communication; namely, technical proficiency and macho prowess over one's instrument, professional standards of recording and live performance, and appropriate behavior of fans and consumers. In all these levels of what Paul Hegarty (2007, 89–90) qualifies as punk's "ineptness," noise was generated in relation especially to the stadium virtuosity of progressive rock, leading him to affirm the Sex Pistols' *The Great Rock and Roll Swindle* despite, or rather because of, its obvious flaws and inauthenticity as a greater punk album than *Never Mind the Bollocks* (95–97).[5] This position flies in the face of writers like Savage, Laing, or Greil Marcus, who celebrate tracks from the latter, such as "Holidays in the Sun," as sophisticated works of punk rock originality and brilliance, as opposed to the lacklusterly performed bad cover versions of the former, expressly designed to promote McLaren's version of the Sex Pistols as his own fraudulent creation—a version of events John Lydon would only be able to correct through the formation of the decidedly post-punk Public Image Limited.

But punk noise was not limited to ineptness in relation to rock norms, nor the refusal to produce a quality product, even where it came to rebellion (something that bands like the Clash would certainly depart from). Rather, punk noise was a short-circuiting of mainstream media channels, both by producing punk's own forms of media and especially by presenting the mass media with messages and content it was unable to easily assimilate. The 1976 Bill Grundy "obscenity" live television interview with the Sex Pistols and its subsequent tabloid amplification is one example of this, but on a smaller scale so was the refusal of the Clash to go on *Top of the Pops*, leading their single "Bankrobber" to be presented in the form of interpretive dance, courtesy of the chart program's resident dance troupe Legs and Co. While this could be seen as one of Bernie Rhodes's pointless and counterproductive provocations, it also expressed a legitimate objection to faking a live performance via lip-syncing and a refusal to participate and perform as a commercial media standardized product. The Clash *did* appear in movies both during their existence (*The Punk Rock Movie* [Letts 1978]; *Rude Boy* [Hazan and Mingay 1980]) and in retrospective documentaries like *Westway to the World* (Letts 2000), and also made music videos. Many of these remixed materials from earlier films and music videos and tended to emphasize both the authenticity of live performances and their rebel image, often expressed via an at times outlandish sense of fashion and style. What is especially evident through these audiovisual representations of the band is an oppositional response to dominant media representations, often presented in the form of televisual collage, and the constitution of noise in relation to this media environment. This is especially evident in the "This Is Radio Clash" video, which makes use of much of the material Letts shot in New York for the unfinished film *Clash on Broadway* (Letts 2001).

At its best, punk was a disturbance to norms of both media communication and the music industry, by being popular enough to be in the charts while remaining unpresentable in terms of both radio airplay and televisual representation. At the same time it forced a reluctant music industry to engage with material that was directly critical of its practices, as in the Clash's "Complete Control" or the Sex Pistols' even more direct "EMI" (1977). In this sense, punk functioned not only as literal, musical noise, or the sociological, subcultural noise identified by cultural studies accounts like Hebdige's, but also as communicational, media noise, short-circuiting dominant modes of representation and opening spaces for alternative modes of expression.

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