1.3. "God Save the Queen". Media coverage of the punk music in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s.

Martin Husak[1]

Abstract
The article analyses the press coverage of Sex Pistols from May to December 1977after the release of their single 'God save the Queen' using the comparison of broadsheets and tabloids as represented by The Times and The Daily Mail articles. The examination of newspaper approach to Sex Pistols helps to reveal 'meaning making' figures as were intentionally used by journalists in order to shape ideological and aesthetical framework of punk music within the capitalist marketplace.

Keywords: Sex Pistols, God Save the Queen, punk, media coverage, hegemony.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is, in large part, to explore the media's approach to alternative music culture in capitalist society, focussing on the example of the media's portrayal of the Sex Pistols after the May 1977 release of their single 'God save the Queen' through content analysis of British newspapers.

As far as the field of culture is always a site of ideological struggle, (Hull in Samuel, 1981) then the media is a terrain that reflects and then reinforces its echoes. Media helps to maintain social reproduction of dominant ideology as an arbiter of both ideological and cultural significance (Frith, 1983). Sex Pistols are a case in point, showing the transferability of alternative music into commercialized and mainstream genres, and thus are a suitable example to clarify the role of media representation in Western capitalist democracy in this process.

The politics of punk

In terms of music, punk came along as an energetic and aggressive reaction against the middle-class meanderings of progressive rock. However, it was particularly seen as a specific response to the social and political context in the UK from 1976 to 1977, one which mirrored politics of dissatisfaction with the contemporary social and economic situation, including high youth unemployment, racism and industrial unrest (Shuker, 2012). Apart from the advanced typification of punk modes of music or lyrics, which is largely discussed elsewhere, (Laing 1988, Marcus 1992) punk is specifically defined as a musical style with a closely associated youth subculture, belonging to the specific sort of broader alternative culture movement opposed to the existing social order. Generally it stemmed from the genuine role of youth art in the British cultural context, using defiance as a constitutive element of art expression (Burgess, 1977). Therefore, rock music subgenres including punk are gradually fed into a British sense of cultural history and 'Britishness' as Burgess, for instance, confirms: "All the angry young men of the Fifties are now pillars of society, trying to behave like that irascible clubman Evelyn Waugh, who was hungry for a knighthood. The Beatles began as a rough collective provincial voice, demanding that remote Liverpool be taken seriously in patrician London. They smoothed themselves out, became not merely respectable but highbrow, were received by Her Majesty and admitted to the Order of the British Empire." (ibid.).

In subcultural analysis punk is seen as a response to the breakup of parental culture, while the role of youths is supposed to be active in the construction of a meaning which was usually the opposite to that of the parental generation. Such conflicts have often brought about moral panic in society, opportunistically supported by media campaigns drawing their attention more to youth subcultures than to the music itself. Another subcultural point of view is put forward by Chambers who claims that punk "suggested and enlarged the spaces for subversive cultural

[1] Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. Email: martin.husak@email.cz

'play' through their music and stylistic commitment", (Chambers, 1985, p. 185) which is easily accessible for all punk musicians and fans through 'do-it-yourself' practices as David Byrne confirms: "Punk wasn't a musical style, or at least it shouldn't have been (...) It was more a kind of 'do it yourself' – anyone can do it attitude. If you can only play two notes on the guitar, you can figure out a way to make a song out of that." (David Byrne quoted in Bennett, 2001, p. 60). Such a position refers to the proclaimed amateurism of punk as one of its main narratives which helped to distinguish it from mainstream popular music and to create its own audience or fandom.

Characterising the coverage of punk

The advent of punk music in 1976 is viewed as the second turning point for both the British music scene and music journalism as well (Jones, 2002). While in its formative period (1964-1969) its popularity and sales figures were not decisive factors leading to critical acclaim, the newest trend in music criticism was inevitably intertwined with commercial and mass media issues (ibid). The latter is, then, a significant determinant when we are analysing the main features of punk media coverage in the late 1970s. In Shuker's opinion such a tendency nullifies any residual sense of antagonism towards the industry, as they realised that they have a common interest in maintaining audience's attention (Shuker, 2012). Chart positions were consequently the most important factor in determining news value of music journalism as appeared in newspaper, that lacked any attempts to capture qualitative aspects of music. This kind of simplistic media publicity therefore influences commercial success, and it simultaneously guarantees a profit for music industry as a whole.

In early 1976 the music press suffered from a lack of incentives within the music industry, which was at the time intentionally static and tedious (Savage, 2011). In the 1976 annual reviews of cultural news, broadsheet newspapers such as The Times, considered punk music as a typified example of 'silly season' (Hill, 1976). An initial ambiguous attitude of the worldwide music industry to new bands with an abrasive sociocultural noise, skewing more towards televised pop stars like ABBA, has quickly changed as more the new audience for punk music grew. Suddenly both broadsheet newspapers and tabloid press began to consider punk a newsworthy topic. Punk was, though, more heavily featured in articles published in tabloids than in broadsheets, as is illustrated in chart 1 comparing The Times' and The Daily Mail's coverage of punk.

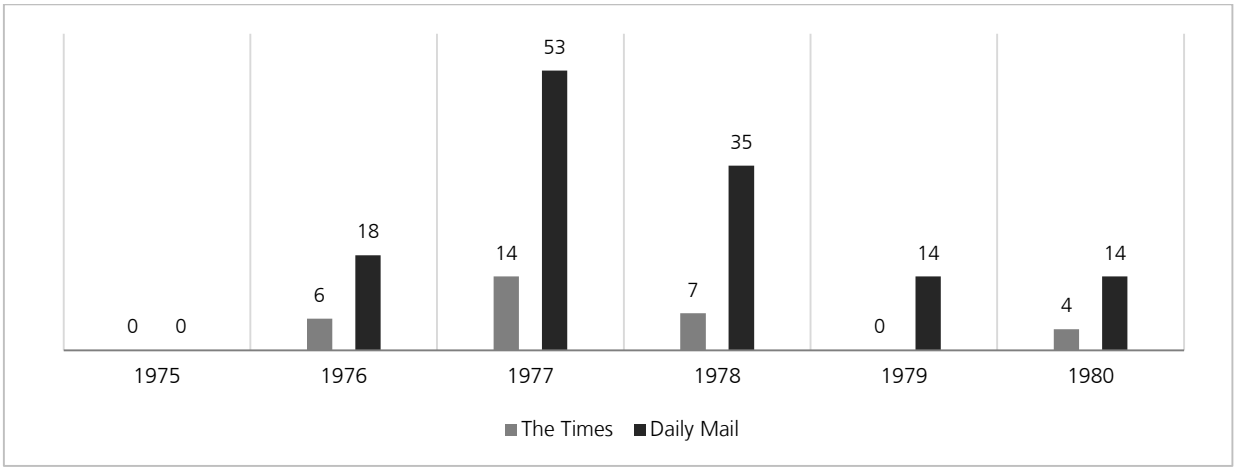

Figure 1 – Articles about "Sex Pistols"

Note: The chart shows a number of articles about Sex Pistols at The Times and Daily Mail from 1975 to 1980 across a wide range of sections (News, Business pages, Review columns or pictures with comments). Only classified advertising and Top Ten Charts are dismissed. The findings were based on a keyword search through articles wherein the term 'Sex Pistols' has meaningfully appeared.

Overall, punk coverage displays several common features differing in the extent and the frequency in which they were used in the broadsheet or tabloid press. Our attention is drawn to three main characteristics of the British press' coverage of punk – Moral Panic, Aesthetics and Manipulation – as they were exhibited by The Times and The

Daily Mail. Tabloid press is generally known for its sensationalized coverage based on moral panic figures accompanied by outrageous headlines, as can be represented by the Daily Mail. One of the first articles about punk music in the Daily Mail deals with punk music thusly: "It's the sickest, seediest step in a rock world that thought it had seen it all (...) Their music is fast, aggressive, angry. The lyrics appeal to depressed, deprived white teenagers and are directed against the rich and powerful (...) The main objection to Punk bands is that they are more concerned with imagery and sex than music" (Daily Mail Reporter, 1976, p. 2). The shocking overtones are reinforced by this article when its author describes a punk audience as "the army of faithful fans dancing to songs of hate and death" (ibid.). The Daily Mail often ascribed to punk music a corrupting impact on society using simplistic and meaningful imagery, for example: "If pop is the modern opium of the masses – and of course it is – then Punk Rock is raw heroin." (Usher, 1976, p. 6). Plenty of articles in Daily Mail have mentioned punk only in association with such 'moral panic' topics as alcohol, drugs or pornography. This approach is outlined in the lead paragraph of the article 'When profits rule…' which refers to punk in terms of a doomsday scenario: "Society today has within it a violent and destructive streak. It is obvious to all who read the headlines or listen to a news broadcast. Three schoolboys rape a girl of 14 and show no remorse. They are drunk and pornographic magazines are found in the home of the ringleader. A woman is attacked in a telephone box; her cries for help are ignored. An attractive, intelligent, wealthy girl dies a drug addict after injecting herself." (Watkins, 1977, p. 16-17).

A degree of alarm is, however, also represented in The Times' articles. Moral panic related to the advent of punk has regularly emerged in the articles of The Times. In an article titled 'Shared madness' Paul Theroux drew direct parallel between US mass murderer Charles Manson and punk music, which he allegedly followed while murdering his victims. In another article from The Times the author emphasised the shocking and revolutionary potential of punk with the example of the associated fashion, comparing it to the strange fashions of the French Revolution developed amongst young Parisians (Church, 1976).

Aesthetically, punk is described by The Times as "an angry aesthetic of negativity, bred in the dole queues and nurtured by a hatred for the musical establishment" (ibid.). The Times viewed punk as a pop triviality and a sensationalist music genre with no valuable aesthetical impact, as is stated in Jewel's article in The Times: "Punk rock inhibits understanding. In part it is the record industry's own fault; some labels tend not to miss opportunities to publicize the bizarre or the shocking in their catalogues" (Jewell, 1977, p. IV). In terms of aesthetical reviews, tabloid journalist lacked any kind of specialist background. If not, they confined it to superficial statements, as shown in the Daily Mail's article about punk rock drummer Paul Cook's musical performance: "I wouldn't mind if he played tunes, but it's just bang, bang, bang." (Rees, 1976, p. 15). As such, they tended to deliver rather sensationalized and alarmist reports on punk's attendant features including behaviour, style, clothing and language. In fact, they completely ignored punk as music. As part of their editorial policy tabloids used very simplistic and blinkered messages in which they conceived of punk only in terms of vague slogans like 'Outrage' and 'Shock', or they used collocations in which they semiotically referred to negative overtones of punk as 'controversial music' ("News in Brief", 1976), a 'new cult' (Partington, 1977) or 'nasty and loutish pop groups' (Butt, 1976)

Manipulated information in both the broadsheet and tabloid press referred to punk's emergence in order to challenge its influence on its audience. The press has often alleged that punk is a marketing product which "can be sold over and over again as long as the package changes"(Usher, 1976, p. 6). In this sense popular music is generally considering a sphere of 'grubby and greedy' people who care only for profit-making (Watkins, 1977). According to Watkins, popular music is responsible for Destructive Society, described as 'an ugly face of the Seventies' (ibid.). Tabloids generally tended also to portray punk as a threat to generational coexistence. Generational struggles are described in Daily Mail as follows: "Adults are shocked, angry, disgusted – therefore Punk Rock must have something to offer – the immature, who see their elders as oppressors or clowns, or a frustrating mixture of both (...) The young want their own kingdom. They want a club, a secret society, and its rules and uniform must not be borrowed from parents or even from elder brothers and sisters." (Usher, 1976, p. 6). Punk as manipulator is further highlighted by a selection of the most controversial reader's opinions in the reader's forum. Towards the end of 1976 the forums served as a unanimous voice to raise general resentment toward punk. A significant example is from the Daily Mail, which published the opinion of Madelaine Righelato, who expressed a deep disgust seeing or listening to these 'morons' (Righelato, 1976). The Times, in another example, published a poll conducted by London´s pop station Capital Radio amongst its listeners about the most remarkable items of the 1970s. Apart from Jubilee coins and stamps, respondents mentioned a tape by 'monstrous' group the Sex Pistols about the Queen. The author commented as follows: "I bet PHS [Printing House Square] readers could have come

up with a more imaginative choice." (PHS. "The Times Diary" 1977, p. 16). Sometimes there were exaggerated links to punk which do not make sense at all. In an article titled "Why I'll never teach again!" the author describes how teachers lost control over pupils at school because of their rising misbehaviour which allegedly stemmed from the bad influence of punk and its media publicity (Wood, 1976). In 1976 tabloids unanimously rejected the importance of punk, making ironic remarks about it. The Daily Mail, for instance, mocked punk in the article "Punk rock's big flop": "Carol singers outnumbered punk rock fans by two to one when the controversial group Sex Pistols played their latest concert date." ("Punk rock's big flop", 1976, p. 3).

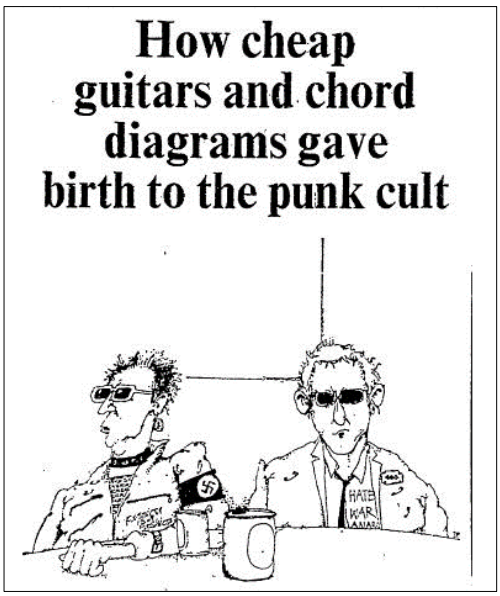

Figure 2 – Stereotyped picture of punkers published by The Times on July in 1977
Source: Partington, 1977, p. 12

All these ideological overtones embodied in news agendas or in formal writing about punk have apparently emerged in order to transform arbitrary values about culture into a systematic process of restriction. Such an inaccurate model of censorship is suggested by O´Higgins who distinguish six different forms of censorship: self, social, legal, extralegal, voluntary and subterranean (O'Higgins, 1972). The media's attitude toward punk musicians is encapsulated by Savage who claims that punk musicians were initially seen to be "at best inconvenienced, at worst infected, by bodily waste." (Savage, 2011, p. 373). According to Les Back, punk was "a kind of symbolic treason, a sacrilege that served on the images of nationhood, the Queen, the Union Jack, even Parliament itself." (Les Back, 2002, p. 2.4). As a result, media hysteria often accompanied by politician's statements[2], has not only raised a negative awareness of punk amongst a mainstream audience, but it has had also negative impact on institutional cultural policies. For instance, many local authorities launched new regulations or bans on live performances by bands like Sex Pistols in the local council halls. This kind of moral regulation often turned into direct censorship practices aimed at all features of punk including its music, audience, publicity etc. The call for tougher repression of punk even stemmed from the media themselves, as it is advocated in Ronald Butt´s article "The grubby face of mass punk promotion" in The Times. He criticised what he saw as the insufficient response of the media to the emergence of punk, which was irresponsibly promoted by record industry and media business. He put the blame for violence, vulgarity, and psychical and psychological threats to public on punk and he found causality between punk and its: "The record companies, television, the owners of halls can, if they like, make the kind of rubbish that is not viable without their promotion, sink like a stone. And the press can help by not providing the 'puffs' that even some hostile criticism, with blown-up photography, can give" (Butt 1976, p. 14). At the same

[2] The Conservative Shadow Minister for Education condemned punk as "a symptom of the way society is declining" and both the Independent Television Companies' Association and the Association of Independent Radio Contractors banned its advertisements. In Thompson, 2000, p. 609.

time, the pressure was continuously placed on punk audience whilst the music itself was overlooked, as Frith confirms: "There is no doubt the local authorities stopped them [punk audiences], cause they thought they might be the source of trouble or fights or whatever it might be."(Frith interview, 2014). The behaviour of punk fans was repeatedly brought to the forefront by news reporters, especially from tabloid press such as the Daily Mail: "At a service station on the M4 the youngsters went into the toilets and reappeared in outrageous gear – with chains through their noses and razor-blades hanging from their ears. Then they sprayed beer around inside the bus." ("Now the axe or Pauline", 1976, p. 3).

All regulations against punk music stemmed from ideologically and economically based concerns rather than from state directed censorships measures. Actually, the government was aware of censorship practises aimed against punk given that is generally a matter of taste. The Tory Member of Parliament for Tynemouth, for example, said: "I hope shops will refuse to handle [a punk] record. You cannot ban it legally, because it is a matter of taste"(Willis, 1977, p. 3). That is why there are no examples of state music policy or direct governmental intervention in the history of British popular music in terms of cultural policy. The main reason, though, is that the means of production was out of the scope of state control and there were no requirements for musicians to be licensed. In terms of economic policy the role of the state is more apparent as it supported the commercial record industry in order to generate state income, and media campaigns helped in both cases – either they condemn it, as when punk music first appeared, or they promote it when punk music has been well established in society by the end of 1970s.

Characterising the coverage of Sex Pistols

> *"Leading the cult is the group Sex Pistols - a bizarre band preaching the new rock religion of violence and anarchy."* (Daily Mail Reporter 1976, p. 2)

According to Frith the media performance of the Sex Pistols was just as important as their music (Frith interview, 2014). Likewise, Savage claims that the media and punk have created an inseparable relationship, wherein the media was encoded in the heart of punk's graphics, songs, clothes and attitudes, but the media's earlier approach to the genre went in the opposite direction, focussing on "the shock and the filth". The central problem of the Sex Pistols' initial attitude towards the media remains unresolved despite attempts to answer the question posed, for example, by Savage: 'How do you becoming part of what you are protesting against? And if everything exists in the media and you reject it, how do you exist?' (Savage, 2011, Introduction) As a result, the media and the Sex Pistols were forced to mirror each other, leading to a fascination both exciting and terrifying in audiences and setting the tone for future decades, as McLaren confirms: 'The media was our helper and our lover and that in effect was the Sex Pistols' success'. (McLaren in Savage, 2011, p. 166)

The publicity that encapsulated Sex Pistols appearances worked both ways. For example, the regular reports from the first Sex Pistols tour across the United States in spring 1976 quickly unveiled stories about alleged violent acts committed by their members, and this resulted in doors closing in their faces: they were banned from the Marquee and The Nashville (Savage, 2011, p. 172). However, the media backlash towards the Sex Pistols accelerated after their appearance with Bill Grundy on the *Today* television program aired 1 December 1976 (Jones, 2002). Sex Pistols members were interviewed by Grundy and they cursed several times. The following day massive unanimous media opposition appeared on a nationwide scale, even though Bill Grundy´s show was primarily a London phenomenon. Tabloids and the broadsheet press did not differ from each other in rejecting such behaviour for breaking the normal codes of daytime programming, and they ardently highlighted "an avalanche of viewer's complaints" (Daily Mail Reporter, 1976, p. 1). Both types of newspaper became more vigorous in their campaign against punk, even advocating the use of censorship measures if they consider it necessary. The negative attitudes toward punk music were maintained at political level, especially by conservative politicians. Their representatives often raised the issue of punk performances in the media and blamed the Independent Broadcasting Authority for its insufficient response to punk's 'disgraceful performance', referring to the Sex Pistols TV appearance. For example, Tory MPs insisted on much stricter measures that might be taken to avoid such controversial TV performances ("The one word that angered two MPs." 1976). There are therefore no doubts about the politicization of popular music in the case of punk, given the example of the Sex Pistols and their condemnation in newspaper articles. As a result Sex Pistols live performances were cancelled by local culture authorities on a large scale, whilst the media was frequently in defiance against punk. The pressure from the press even led to the band being dropped from EMI in

January 1977, and this was itself opportunistically reported on. The Daily Mail, for instance, wrote about the 'subjugation' of the Sex Pistols ("Another pay-off for punk untouchables", 1977). EMI itself commented on it in a statement published in The Times: "EMI feels it is unable to promote this group's record in view of the adverse publicity generated over the past two months, although recent press reports of the behaviour of the Sex Pistols appear to have been exaggerated" ("EMI ends 'punk rock' group contract", 1977, p. 2). But what prompted this decision? It was a series of articles in tabloids that focused on revealing the private lives of the EMI employees who were responsible for signing the contract with the Sex Pistols. This was an attempt to scandalize the issue and to impose unilaterally negative overtones on EMI's cooperation with punk. Malcolm Stuart, journalist from the Daily Mail, revealed the private life of the managing director of EMI Records, Mr Leslie Hill, mentioning his alleged bad grades, bad taste in music and his residence in a posh part of the city (Stuart, 1976). The second climax of media hostility towards punk arrived in 1977 with the release of the Sex Pistols' "God Save the Queen" single.

Characterising the coverage of 'God Save The Queen'

The case of God Save The Queen exactly illustrates how songs could be situated in terms of a combination of their formal musical properties, genre, and social context (Shuker, 2012). The Sex Pistols released the single on 27 May during Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee in 1977, so it was exactly timed to make the greatest impact. Unsurprisingly, it attracted broad media publicity. The media uniformly reported about the fantastical elements of the Jubilee celebration, and the Royal Family were mediatised to the extent that they were at that time a living soap opera (Les Back, 2002). What seemed terrifying about the Jubilee was, according to Savage, its sheer unanimity. Any dissenting voice was shut out. ´God save the Queen´ was the only serious anti-Jubilee protest, the only call for those who didn´t agree with the Jubilee because they didn´t like the Queen. "What was so great about ´God save the Queen´ was that it was confident, clear, and unapologetic – so much so that it gave a voice to everybody who hated the Jubilee, and there were many more of them than would ever be officially acknowledged." (Savage, 2011, p. 353). Likewise James Reid, the Sex Pistols' graphic artist for the record, retrospectively viewed the single as probably the last public protest against the monarchy (Reid in Savage, 1987).

The media coverage of the Sex Pistols single is called by Savage as Jubilee hype that brought about a sense of disillusion with contradictory effects. On the one hand it has raised political and social tensions towards monarchic institutions and on the other hand it has undoubtedly reinforced a media alliance with the governmental line, using propagandistic methods of mediatisation to address the punk discourse in an opportunistic way, as is shown by Labour MP Marcus Lipton's statement in the *Daily Mirror*: "If pop music is going to be used to destroy our established institutions, then it ought to be destroyed first." (quoted in Savage 1991, p. 365). Another example of an opportunistic alliance between the media and political power is given by Savage in relation to the Daily Mirror's regular headlines about the month's dole figures, unreasonably using a link to Johnny Rotten, who is depicted as a subversive phantasm (Savage, 2011). Except from verbal media condemnation of punk music, particularly in the tabloid press, there was also physical damage, as is remarked by Les Back about Jamie Reid who suffered a beating that left him with a broken nose and a broken leg (Les Back, 2002) or by Savage about John Lydon being attacked with razors and a machete by a gang chanting (Savage, 1991).

The single 'God save the Queen' was subjected to censorship and banning. The key example is the decision of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) not to allow it to be broadcasted, however some radio stations were trying to take legal advice, such as Capital Radio, one of London's independent stations, which described this measure as "an unprecedented difficulty" with the IBA over the interpretation of the Independent Television Act, 1973 (Borrell and Gosling 1977). The album *Never Mind the Bollocks* containing the ´God save the Queen´ single was banned immediately after its release on October 1977 by shops like Boots, Woolworths and W.H. Smith. The advance orders nevertheless sent it straight into the charts at number one. Thus it was evident that the restrictive cultural and media policy had counterproductive effects on audience' attitudes toward punk music, as was expressed by Stephen Ridgewell in the reader's forum: "I was delighted to read that ageing MP Marcus Lipton and ageing disc jockey Tony Blackburn are both offended by the Sex Pistols single 'God Save the Queen'. The fact that both the establishment and pop music's old guard hate punk rock can only increase my love of this music." (Ridgewell, 1977, p. 24).

The Jubilee fortnights framed by the Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen' meant the climax of their career, which subsequently declined (Savage, 2011). The sales of the 'God Save the Queen' over the jubilee week were over 200

000 copies (Les Back, 2002). Their chart success had definitively, if nothing else made the Sex Pistols a pop group, although despite their initial resentment towards the mainstream.

Summary

This article considers how punk was approached in UK in the late of 1970s, focussing on the example of Sex Pistols' single 'God Save the Queen' and its newspaper portrayal in The Times and The Daily Mail articles. Following the dynamic emergence of punk, its media publicity spread widely and quickly. Banned from venues, punk was dependent on media exposure to gain broader audiences. Actually punk and the press were made for each other. Punk increased the market for writing on rock, and it generated a new breed of critics specialized in punk, as they were recruited by music outlets at that time (Jones, 2002).

This analysis helped to clarify punk's relationship with the media and cultural policy in a Western capitalist democracy as it is maintained by the alliance of state, economics and media empowerment. The way it was used in the construction of a moral panic was subjected to examination through the analysis of media representation based on a wide range of 'meaning making' figures (e.g. sensationalism, manipulations, denunciations etc.). In this view, the media reinforce dichotomies between authentic and commercial, alternative and mainstream, good and bad etc. in the process of culture mediation, wherein both ideological and aesthetical discourses are constructed and reproduced as 'commonsensical' in media interpretations.

The role of the media in a capitalist system lies in their attempts to meaningfully address the tastes and trends amongst the audience in accordance with the commercial forces of the market. The reason is that everyone benefits. Given the example of punk and its media portrayal in both the broadsheet and tabloid press, everybody knows their own role in the 'commodification game'. Journalists, especially from the tabloid press, tend to act as moral defenders of what is being threatened, occupied more with punk's non-musical features than with proper music reviewing, whilst readers appreciate being protected in their private life. Punk bands tend to ostentatiously shock and provoke in terms of their music, style and language for their own sake. The more sensationalist reports about punk were published, the more attention is consequently to punk. The more a controversial reputation is cultivated around a punk band the more records this band will sell. Last but not least, the alleged struggles help to the music genre itself to maintain its identity and desired media image. The Sex Pistols affair with 'God Save the Queen' is the case in point, revealing the nexus between social, cultural, economic and political relations in punk music.

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