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## **'Put on Your Boots and Harrington!': The ordinariness of 1970s UK punk dress**

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### **Abstract**

In 2013, the Metropolitan Museum hosted an exhibition of punk-inspired fashion entitled *Punk: Chaos to Couture*. The exhibition emphasized the 'spectacular' elements of the subculture, reflecting a narrative that dominates accounts of punk dress, whereby it is presented as a site of art school creativity and disjuncture with the past. This is an important aspect of punk dress, but photos of bands and audiences reveal that there was much more to British punk style in the 1970s than what was being sold on London's King's Road. Heeding calls to trouble the boundary between the spectacular and the ordinary in subculture studies, this article looks at the ordinariness of 1970s British punk dress, arguing that we should understand punk dress in terms of mass-market commodities, not just customization and designer fashion. Many of these commodities were worn by the skinheads who preceded punk, and this article explores this subcultural continuity by focusing on the role of the Dr. Marten boot and the Harrington jacket in first- and second-wave British punk dress. It does so through discussion of the Cockney Rejects, the 1979 BBC television dramatization of the Sham 69 album *That's Life* and the Undertones.

### **Keywords**

Cockney Rejects

men's fashion

punk

skinhead

subculture

Undertones

## **Introduction**

In 2013, New York's storied Metropolitan Museum hosted an exhibition entitled *Punk: Chaos to Couture*. Organized by the museum's Costume Institute, it approached punk through the lens of fashion, using garments to document punk's impact on fashion from the 1970s to the present day. As would be the case with the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of punk celebrations in Britain, this institutionalization of 'punk nostalgia' (McLoone 2004) raised a few eyebrows. The Met's annual gala, a famous fundraising event known for attracting celebrities and the wealthy, was punk-themed that year. Celebrities, including Madonna and Sienna Miller, showed up in punk-inspired clothes and their outfits were well documented in the society pages and the fashion press. The exhibition itself was sponsored by luxury fashion retailer Moda Operandi and the lifestyle magazine publishing house Conde Nast (Anon. 2013). None of this is particularly punk rock, but this article is not concerned with such a banal and facile critique.

One could dedicate considerable attention to discussing how the exhibition constituted what 1970s subcultural theorists termed 'recuperation' (Clarke 1976a), but

that has been going on since Zandra Rhodes' 1977 'conceptual chic' collection (De La Haye and Dingwall 1996). Rather, I am drawing attention to this exhibition to highlight how the continued emphasis on the creative and spectacular elements of punk dress reflects a too-narrow popular memory of the style. The *Chaos to Couture* exhibition was a British curator's interpretation of a British form of punk, and while it was exhibited in the United States, the international reputation of the Metropolitan Museum, the widespread coverage of the exhibition online and the publication of the exhibition catalogue meant that it had a global impact. Discussing punk dress in the United Kingdom between 1976 (the year in which the first Damned single was released) and 1980 (the year in which the Exploited released their first single, heralding the codification of the spikes and leather look), this article begins with a critique of how first- and second-wave UK punk style has most commonly been approached, arguing that we need to dispense with the focus on spectacular elements of the style and pay more attention to the pedestrian, street-level looks of the era. It then offers an alternative view of punk dress that troubles the binary between the ordinary and the spectacular in subculture studies, arguing for the inclusion of mass-market fashion commodities within the canon of punk style. It does so by focusing on the role of two items more commonly associated with skinheads, the Harrington jacket and the Dr. Marten boot, highlighting the continuities between skinhead and punk style.

### **'I'm So Bored with' Vivienne Westwood**

*Chaos to Couture* was mainly focused on the work of Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood. While it purported to document the influence of punk on fashion, it could more accurately be described as an exhibition about the influence of the Kings Road boutique

Seditionaries on fashion. Seditionaries began as a store selling Teddy Boy clothes called Let It Rock, before its transformation into SEX and then Seditionaries (Gorman 2006).

Seditionaries' ripped-and-torn aesthetic, purposefully offensive graphic T-shirts, integration of bondage clothing into fashion, use of tartan and leather, embellishment with zips, safety pins and spikes, all helped define the punk aesthetic (Bolton 2013). When the Met traced the influence of punk fashion, it was with respect to these popularly understood signifiers of 'punk style'. For example, its 'DIY: Hardware' gallery demonstrated how punk influenced high fashion by displaying garments that made use of spikes and safety pins.

All of the exhibition's galleries were prefaced with the prefix 'DIY', which was somewhat of a misnomer as the garments featured were not DIY at all; they were all made by fashion designers, not the individuals who wore them. The absence of true DIY clothing was a massive oversight. Autobiographical and historical accounts of punk tell us that few could afford to shop at Seditionaries, and first-wave punks often customized their own clothing instead (Burton 2017; Cartledge 1999; Muggleton 2000). In the first wave of punk this meant doing one's own Clash-style paint splashes, writing on school blazers, attaching safety pins, adding one's own zips and so forth.

#### >> Fig.01 Blitzkrieg Bop

Such customization was in keeping with the classic punk aesthetic documented in the exhibition, but nonetheless absent. This aesthetic was to coalesce in the more codified punk uniform of the 1980s, with its ripped clothing, studs, patches and hand-painted jackets (Polhemus 2010; Traber 2008). This oversight brought to mind the ten 'sins' that cultural studies scholar Zach Furness attributes to people without punk backgrounds writing about punk, namely, sins six and seven:

6. An almost obsessive fascination with the Sex Pistols and Malcolm McLaren

7. An obsessive fascination with the Sex Pistols and Malcolm McLaren. (2012: 13)

This is no longer an issue in punk studies, as the very existence of this journal is testament to, but it remains an issue in popular understandings of punk dress. Such was the Met's devotion to Seditonaries that *Chaos to Couture* featured a mock-up of the 1970s boutique. Seditonaries is, undeniably, an important part of the story, but its importance is typically over-stated at the expense of many other aspects of punk style. In his clothing memoir *The Way We Wore* (2005), the broadcaster and popular cultural commentator Robert Elms has gone as far as to claim that punk was, at heart, a couture movement started by a fashion designer. This is the dominant account of punk that fashion students are most likely to encounter on a critical and contextual studies course.

There was much more to UK punk style than Seditonaries, with customization, as well as mass-market commercialization, playing an important role in punk dress. Although genuinely DIY garments were absent from *Chaos to Couture* in favour of designer pieces, curator Andrew Bolton's introduction to the exhibition's catalogue acknowledges that

[...] the visual history of punk reveals a strikingly diverse range of stylistic identities. Coexisting with (and sometimes incorporating) the fashion produced by McLaren and Westwood was a wide array of 'street level' punk looks that Cartledge describes as comprising 'old narrow suits with narrow lapels, straight-leg trousers, dresses and shirts (small or no collar) from jumble sales and charity shops, plastic sandals,

homemade T-shirts and stenciled slogans, combat fatigues and mohair jumpers.’ These ‘street level’ punk looks tended to be forged within an arena of various do-it-yourself experiments. In fact, what unites or connects the disparate punk fashions produced between the mid-to-late seventies is a fiercely independent spirit of customization. Armed with youthful amateurism, punks took cultural production into their own hands, fashioning looks that were distinctive, innovative, and revolutionary. More than ‘No Future,’ do-it-yourself became the battle cry of punks not only in England but the world over [...] (2013: 13)

Bolton cites media scholar Frank Cartledge (1999), whose account of his own experience of punk style in 1970s Sheffield demonstrates the importance of commodification for the dissemination of punk style outside of London. He argues that ‘punk as cultural production was a crossover between media representations of punk fashion, the commercial clothing available and the “Do It Yourself”, jumble sale, “make and mend” philosophy’ (Cartledge 1999: 12–13). Images of bands and audiences within both punk media and mainstream media provided templates, leading to the dissemination of styles from London outwards. But style choices were based on what was available locally or by mail order through ads in music papers such as *Melody Maker* and *Sounds*.

Vintage dealer, subcultural clothing collector and film costumer Roger Burton’s account of punk style in his recent book *Rebel Threads* shows that what Cartledge describes above in the North of England was also happening in the centre of punk style, London:

Kids wearing elements of Punk-style clothing were first spotted at gigs of bands like the Sex Pistols and the Damned in early 1976, and although Sex and Seditious may have been the catalysts of the style, DIY was the order of the day, and pretty soon ripped clothes decorated with safety pins, badges and chains became more common. Other, less intimidating London shops, such as Boy, Smutz and Fifth Column, were quick to open up, selling Punk-style clothing, and all had a keen following. In some ways they actually had the edge over Seditious because their stock of ex-army jackets and trousers, which had been dyed black and had zips, studs, safety pins and rips applied, was a lot cheaper and more accessible. (2017: 302)

It is the role of commodification and cheap, readily available clothing commodities in both Burton and Cartledge's account that is most interesting to us here. While it is clear that DIY and customization were important elements of punk style, so too was shopping for vintage items, army surplus and pre-made subcultural commodities, a phenomenon that has been found in analyses of the consumption practices of other subcultures including Goth, Heavy Metal and Mod (Brown 2009a; Hodkinson 2002; Weiner 2013). Writer and artist Stewart Home has demonstrated the central role of commercialism within punk music, highlighting the importance of novelty songs, cash-ins, 1960s-rehashes, pub rock bandwagon jumpers and subculture revivalists

Now that we have acknowledged the crucial role of customization and commercially available, mass-produced clothing in punk style, we are ready to arrive at a fuller understanding of 1970s UK punk dress. But we are still discussing a recognizably punk



aesthetic associated with the 'spectacular' aspects of the subculture. We have yet to account for the fact that when one looks at photographs of UK punk audiences and bands from the mid-to-late 1970s, it is immediately clear that there was more to punk style than the novel, attention-grabbing aesthetic of spectacular punk dress. For example, perusing through record sleeves or the expansive canon of photo-heavy punk coffee-table books (cf. Colegrave and Sullivan 2004; Echenberg and Perry 1996; George-Warren 2007; Ridgers 2016), one finds long hair, trench coats, blazers (Fig.02), trainers, flares and all sorts of non-canonical garments (Fig.03). In contrast to the in-your-face spectacular punk look, the bands and audiences at punk shows often looked no different than any other group of 1970s British gig-goers. The Fall, on their 1978 Step Forward single 'It's the New Thing' (Fig.04), and obscure London punk band Blunt Instrument's 'No Excuse' single (Fig.05) also provide good examples of a high-street, ordinary look. As media scholar Andy Medhurst (1999) demonstrates through examination of his own biography, not everyone who was involved with punk was visibly recognizable as such (Medhurst recounts wearing flares to a Vibrators gig).

Yet even the more nuanced understandings of punk style remain focused on the limited set of signifiers that have become codified as punk. While costume scholar Monica Sklar's work (2012) acknowledges the stylistic influence of New York punk style and documents the bifurcation of punk into other styles such as hardcore and emo, she mainly approaches punk dress in terms of the slogan text, tartan, zips, customization, safety pins and so forth that are associated with the spectacular punk aesthetic. Even members of the punk subculture who eschew a visibly punk look tend to see punk in terms of this 'confrontational' style (Sklar and DeLong 2012). This was how Sklar's interview

participants, interviewed at the start of this decade in the Midwestern United States, described punk style, as did David Muggleton's (2000) British punk informants fifteen-odd years earlier.

### **'Kids, Like Me and You'?**

The emphasis on spectacular punk, be it DIY or store-bought, is reflective of a more general tendency within subculture studies to focus on the spectacular at the expense of the ordinary. As anthropologists Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward (2012), and fashion scholars Cheryl Buckley and Hazel Clark (2012) point out, there has until recently been a tendency in fashion studies to emphasize the spectacular at the expense of the everyday. This was Gary Clarke's main argument in his influential 1982 paper 'Defending ski jumpers', which was one of the first significant critiques of the canonical subculture research carried out at Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1970s. The ski jumper, although briefly adopted in Casual (Hewitt 2002) and Mod Revival subcultures (Russell 2012), was a marker of ordinariness at the time in which Clarke was writing. It was not radical or subversive, as the more widely read CCCS scholars liked their subcultures to be, but banal and mass-market. The CCCS had focused on spectacular youth at the expense of everyday youth culture. Clarke sought to defend the ski jumper because the ordinary kids who wore them had been maligned as manipulated dupes, whereas subculture members were treated as heroes for their supposedly subversive re-ordering of the meaning of clothing commodities.

Clarke encouraged subculture studies to branch out beyond the spectacular, and, indeed there are some canonical examples of this (Corrigan 1979; Jenkins 1983; Willis

1977). However, when it comes to punk, the subculture continues to be positioned against the everyday and normal. Sociologist Paul Hodkinson (2015) has argued that we need to move beyond the binary between the spectacular and the ordinary. He has in mind the ways in which spectacular subcultures involve everyday, ordinary activities. But we can also heed this call by looking at how spectacular subcultures can also be understood as ordinary. By that I mean diffuse, widespread, populist and visually unremarkable. In the case of punk, this means looking at relatively ordinary clothes worn by punks that trouble the ordinary/spectacular binary. It should be acknowledged that while up until now I have been discussing both men and women's punk dress, I will from this point onwards be focusing on male dress. While a male focus has, historically, been one of the problems with subculture research (Brill 2008; LeBlanc 2001; McRobbie 1980), this reflects my own research interest in male dress, a subject accorded less attention than female dress within fashion studies (Edwards 2011). It also reflects historical gender imbalances in punk, which was often male-dominated, particularly in the more masculinist sub-genres discussed in this article (Worley 2017).

### **'Put on Your Boots and Harrington'**

So, what else constitutes punk style then? I would suggest that alongside Seditonaries, DIY and the commercially available punk clothing termed 'commodity punk', we include the vestigial remains of skinhead style such as Dr. Marten boots (Fig.06), Harringtons, denim jackets, MA-1 flight jackets, fly-fronted single-breasted rain coats (Fig.07) and monkey jackets, along with post-skinhead mass market 1970s British youth fashion items such as trainers and snorkel parkas. These ordinary, mass-produced high-street fashion

commodities were worn widely within the punk scene. They were adopted by subculture members, but not made specifically for them. The Dr. Marten boot is now fairly well established as commodity punk; it was part of the punk look codified in the 1980s and is sold by a brand that trades on its subcultural pedigree (Roach 2003). But Dr. Martens were originally a very ordinary clothing item, having been first marketed as older ladies' orthopaedic gardening shoes. They were then sold as work boots, which led to them being worn by the original skinheads as well as the suedeheads, smoothies and boot boys who came next in the evolution of the subculture, but they continued to be worn by ordinary people, including policemen.

The Harrington is a cropped 'blouson-style jacket that comes in a variety of colours and is easily identifiable by its tartan lining (Fig.08). Its collar extends outwards and can be worn either up or down (Sims 2011). The Harrington was originally manufactured by the Manchester clothier Baracuta and known as a G9. It was an upscale item designed for gentleman to golf in, hence its short length and blouson shape. As an expensive British import, the Harrington jacket became part of what was known in the United States as the 'Ivy Look' – a style that originated in elite American prep schools and universities but became mass fashion there. The Ivy Look developed a cult following in the United Kingdom amongst mods and one of the few places they could purchase American clothes in 1960s London was the Ivy Shop in Richmond, Southwest London. The Ivy Shop's proprietor John Simons is said to have bestowed the jacket its name in one of his shop displays, naming the jacket after the fictional character Rodney Harrington, who wore a G9 jacket on the 1960s US television drama *Peyton Place* (1964-1969). The jacket caught on with the original skinheads, although they were much more likely to wear copies purchased from market

stalls or high-street stores such as Millets (Ferguson 1982; Hewitt 2002; Marsh and Gaul 2010; Routledge 2013; Sims 2011). Whereas the expensive Baracuta G9s had a Frasier tartan lining, the knock-offs usually had a Stewart tartan lining. It is the cheap, mass-market version that is most frequently seen in photographs of 1960s skinheads and the subcultures that followed (Marshall 1969). In the 1972 comedy film *Please Sir!*, Brinsley Forde, later of reggae band Aswad, wears a navy Harrington in his role as a young skinhead (Fig.09 & Fig.10).

The Harrington jacket is less well known than the leather motorcycle jacket (Fig.11) as a punk jacket, although it is seen frequently in photos of UK punk bands and punk audiences from the second-wave onwards. For example, a collection of Syd Shelton's work for the Rock Against Racism (RAR) magazine *Temporary Hoarding* includes a photo of two RAR fans in which the young man wears a Harrington jacket (2015). Shelton is known for documenting 2-Tone, but this photograph is from 1978, a year before the release of the first Specials single, the first release on the label. The individuals in the photograph are punk fans, not rude boy revivalists. Looking at photographs of bands provides us insights into wider trends within punk dress because punk blurred the boundary between audience and performer (Home 1995). Paul Weller of The Jam, Paul Cook of the Sex Pistols, Andy Blade of Eater, Malcolm Owen of The Ruts (Fig.12) and Hugo Burnham of the Gang of Four have all been photographed wearing Harrington jackets, as have members of lesser-known bands the Mirrors and the Members (Colegrave and Sullivan 2004; Echenberg and Perry 1996; George-Warren 2007; Shelton 2015). The Clash even had red Harringtons printed with Clash insignia for their road crew (Green and Barker 2003). This is, admittedly, a diverse list of bands encompassing a four-year span of UK punk and it should be

acknowledged that Harringtons were mostly worn by the revivalist skinheads, mods and rude boys who emerged during punk's second wave, but these are all punk bands that I am discussing. Moreover, unlike the original youth subcultures of the 1960s, the 1970s revival subcultures were organized around bands, and bands such as the Jam were punks first, mods second (Worley 2017).

The Harrington was immortalized in the Cockney Rejects song 'Oi, Oi, Oi', which exhorted the listener to 'Put on your boots and Harrington, and kick down that fucking wall'. The song appeared on the 1980 Sounds compilation *Oi! The Album*, an album dedicated to profiling the 'new punk' of the era. While the Cockney Rejects set the template for the Oi! genre, they predated it, and were not a skinhead band. Harringtons were worn widely by revival Oi! skinheads, but this article is concerned with the period before Oi!. Music journalist Garry Bushell, who compiled the album and managed the Cockney Rejects, has stated:

The Rejects' first following wasn't largely skinhead; in fact, at first skins didn't really like them. The Rejects' crew came from football and consisted largely of West Ham chaps attracted by [former Sham 69 roadie] Vince [Riordan]'s involvement, and disillusioned Sham and Menace fans. (Pennant 2002: 98)

The Cockney Rejects (Fig.13), with their pared-down style of Harringtons, MA-1 flight jackets, denim jackets, t-shirts, jeans and Dr. Marten boots, came out of a 'street punk' scene associated with bands such as Cock Sparrer, Sham 69 (Fig.14), Menace and the

Angelic Upstarts. These bands played an aggressive, stripped-down form of punk that was explicitly working-class and tied to football culture (Worley 2013).

Music journalist Jon Savage (1991) has identified two main strands within punk: the 'arties' and the 'social realists'. This was the Social Realist camp to which he referred. It was, as historian Matthew Worley puts it, 'punk-as-social-commentary' (2017: 8). These bands placed a heavy emphasis on reflecting the (imagined) street reality of their fans. Sham 69 were one of the originators of this musical style, releasing their first EP on Step Forward records in 1977. They were at the forefront of UK punk's second wave, and their followers were associated with the nascent skinhead revival. Fanzine writer Tom Vague recounts 'In 78 I went to Chelsea v Everton after going to Seditonaries, and the Rock Against Racism Carnival in Hackney, in Sham army mode: black Dr. Martens boots, combat trousers and black Harrington jacket' (2013: 11). This intersection of football, Seditonaries and Sham 69 illustrates how the Sham Army was not a skinhead subculture distinct from punk; it was very much part of it. Sham 69 sung about 'kids like me and *you*' (1978, emphasis added), and the Cockney Rejects' 'Oi, Oi, Oi' follows this tradition with references to 'we' and 'us' throughout. For example: 'They all try to ignore *us*, but *we* won't let 'em win' (1980, emphasis added). As their singer Jeff 'Stinky' Turner was only 15 when the band started, he really did represent the kids on the street (Turner 2010). The reference to 'your boots and Harrington' is significant because it marks Turner out as ordinary, as someone who dresses in a similar way to his listeners. Although he was most often photographed in an MA-1 jacket, he clearly understood the Harrington as emblematic of 'punk-as-social-commentary', telling *Sounds* in 1980 'We stand for punk as bootboy music. Harringtons, boots, straights, that's what we're all about' (quoted in Worley 2017: 102).

'Punk-as-social-commentary' reached its zenith in Sham 69's social realist rock opera *That's Life*, which follows the narrative conventions of the British social realist or 'kitchen sink' drama, and clearly takes inspiration from the Who rock opera/film *Quadrophenia* (Lovell, 1980). The album was dramatized in the 1979 *Arena* television drama *Tell Us the Truth*, in which the protagonist is played by Grant Fleming. Fleming was the bassist in the Kidz Next Door, a punky powerpop band managed by Jimmy Pursey in which Jimmy Pursey's little brother Robbie Pursey was the vocalist. Sham were known for their skinhead following, but the character that Fleming plays is not a skinhead and he is meant to represent a typical Sham fan – an 'ordinary' kid. Throughout the dramatization, Fleming wears a red Harrington (Fig.15) with a Fred Perry polo shirt, turned-up jeans and monkey boots. Fleming was a 'face' in the early days of mod revival (Bushell 1979). He was also involved in the same Football crowd (the Inter City Firm) as the Cockney Rejects, and the television film is seen as a snapshot of that era (Pennant 2002). This intersection of overlapping subcultural identities – mod, punk and casual – is typical of the late 1970s London punk scene. It also reflects the intersection of subcultural affiliations signified by the Harrington jacket. Link records founder and Inter City Firm member Lol Pryor recounts the rise of the Harrington jacket within East London punk fashion in his description of a Canning Town Cock Sparrer gig that took place at the Bridge House in 1978 or 1979:

There were only about 200 people there but the atmosphere they generated was electric. It was around the time everybody was moving away from punk fashion with its pins and mohicans into Harringtons, green bomb jackets and going back to a



boot boy look. Everyone was turning up in Doc Martens and Fred Perry shirts.

(Pennant 2002: 101–02)

In his autobiography, Cockney Rejects singer Jeff Turner describes a gig at the same venue in 1979, remembering a similar stylistic turn:

There was a real range of youth cult styles in that audience as well, from soulboys to suedeheads, as well as terrace geezers. If you'd looked closely you'd have seen ex-skinheads, Mods and Glory Boys [followers of mod revival band the Secret Affair] with grown-out crops, tonic jackets, Sta-Prest, Levis and Harringtons. A real amalgamation. They were boys from North London, South London, Essex and Kent. They were mostly smart and hard as fuck. (2010: 79)

### **'I wanna wanna be a male model'**

It is easy to think of the Dr. Marten boot and the Harrington jacket as simply representing the 'hard' East London street aesthetic of Jon Savage's social realists. But this is confounded by the indelible associations of both garments with Northern Irish punk pop band the Undertones. The Undertones are remembered for playing pure pop that ignored the political situation in Northern Ireland in favour of songs about girls and Subbuteo (McLoone 2004; Worley 2017). The Undertones' style was defined by Dr. Martens (Dr. Marten boot featured prominently on Undertones badges) (Fig.16) and Harrington jackets (there are photos of the band in which multiple members sport Harringtons), and denim jackets, v-neck jumpers, straight-legged, cropped jeans and snorkel parkas (Fig.17 &

**Fig.18).** Snorkel parkas are a type of nylon hooded coat modelled after the US Air Force's N-3B parka and associated with both British childhood and football match fashion of the 1970s (Hewitt 2002; Routledge 2013). Undertones bassist Michael Bradley's recent autobiography provides a valuable first-hand account of how their look came about. Bradley recounts how they 'had Wrangler jackets – never Levis – as that was the uniform of Derry in 1977. Dr. Martens was what we aspired to. Boots, not shoes' (2016: 47). He explains that their look was modelled after local 'boys who wore Wrangler jeans. Wide, parallel and ending a few inches above Dr. Marten boots. "Skinners" in the local parlance'. Bradley goes on to explain that 'Derry Cool' involved straight-leg jeans 'Lord Anthony Snorkels' (2016: 48). In contrast to the Undertones' 'nice boy' aesthetic, Bradley describes their Derry-style leaders as boys who were 'not violent, but who could look after themselves in a scrap' (2016: 48).

What becomes clear from reading Bradley's account is that the Undertones were not simply lagging behind the punk fashion trend because of their remote location in relation to established centres of the punk subculture. Commodity punk was available to them even in Derry, and Bradley writes

We did resist the temptation to go for the more obvious punk rock accessories which were available by post in return for a bundle of postal orders. Bondage trousers and coats of many zippers were never going to appeal to us. (2016: 48)

He goes on to write 'We were punk rockers, I think that's established, but we were also very far removed from the world of the Roxy Club, *Sniffin' Glue* fanzine or Malcolm McLaren's "Sex" shop' (2016: 49). The Undertones look was not curated; they just wore their normal clothes. Bradley (2016: 119) writes 'we just did what we did without any discussion'. As with the Cockney Rejects and Grant Fleming's character in the *That's Life* dramatization, the Harringtons, boots and snorkels connoted ordinariness. Discussing the shoot for the cover of their first LP, he writes that their ethos was

Not dressing up but not dressing down, either. We still held to the punk ethos that didn't originate in Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's shop in King's Road. It was OK for the Sex Pistols to wear the T-shirts and the bondage trousers but if they were first there was no point in mimicking them two years later. Neither was it an option to wear slogans painted on our snorkels. The Clash had done that. (2016: 120)

The working-class rhetoric of the Cockney Rejects made it clear that the social realists were drawing a line between themselves and the arties. The Undertones were much less explicit, but as we see in the quote above, their ordinary look – enacted in boots, Harringtons and other mass-market clothes – was part of a conscious disavowal of the spectacular forms of punk dress.

### **'Where Have all the Boot Boys Gone'?**

What the skimmers, Wrangler jackets, snorkel parkas and other items worn by the Undertones have in common with boots and Harringtons is that they were readily available fashion commodities that fit within the continuity of 'boot boy' fashions that had evolved out of skinhead. If not for their haircuts (some spikey, some shaggy) the Undertones could be mistaken for a skinhead band. Cultural studies scholar Dick Hebdige's widely read writing on punk described how punk drew on the subcultures that had come before. Teddy Boys' brothel creepers, mods' skinny ties, skinheads' Dr. Marten boots, rockers' leather jackets, all got thrown into the mix. Hebdige conceptualized this as *bricolage*, explaining

The subcultural bricoleur, like the 'author' of a surrealist collage, typically 'juxtaposes two apparently incompatible realities [...] Punk exemplifies most clearly the subcultural uses of these anarchic modes. It too attempted through "perturbation and deformation" to disrupt and reorganize meaning'. (1979: 106)

To Hebdige, this was a re-ordering of subcultural signifiers. We would understand this now as a postmodern playing with sign and signifiers (Polhemus 2010), an example of *historicity* and *pastiche* (Jameson 1991). Indeed, this is how punk is often understood within curatorial and scholarly thinking. In an example of Hebdige-inspired thinking, Thomas P. Campbell, Director and CEO of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, stated in the *Chaos to Couture* press release that 'Punk's signature mixing of references was fuelled by artistic developments such as Dada and postmodernism' (Metropolitan Museum of Art 2013). This may be true, but there are some simpler explanations as well. SEX had begun as a Teddy Boy shop, and vintage dealers played a big role in supplying early punk shops such

as SEX and Acme Attractions (Burton 2017; Gorman 2006). Thus older subcultural commodities were already part of the repertoire of punk retailing. As Cartledge (1999) notes, there was a 'jumble sale' approach to punk that worked with what was available from subculture-friendly shops. Punk, for all its rhetoric about 'year zero', was both musically and aesthetically heavily indebted to the past (Home 1995; Savage 1991).

This continuity with the past can also be found in the subcultural biographies of many punks. One of the last large-scale UK youth subculture before punk was skinhead. Skinhead is often discussed as a spectacular subculture, a working-class protest laden with meaning (Clarke 1976b; Hebdige 1979), but like punk, it was also quite ordinary and everyday. Discussions of skinhead often become obscured by the racial politics of the punk-era revival, with the striking photographs of this politically-charged era (Knight 1982; Ridgers 2014; Watson 1994) and cinematic representations such as Alan Clarke's *Made in Britain* (1982a) and Mike Leigh's *Meantime* (1983) dominating popular memory. But for all the moral panic about skinhead violence (Cohen 1980) and analysis of its meaning (Brake 1974; Clarke 1976b; Hebdige 1979), the first wave of skinhead was a *fashion* movement taken up by thousands of young people in the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and even, through emigration, Australia (Ferguson 1982; Taylor 2010). Skinhead was discussed regularly in newspapers, not just as youth menace but as fashion trend. Skinhead fashion was featured in glossy full-colour pictorial spreads in the *Sunday Times Supplement* and the teenybopper magazine *Mirabelle* (Burton 2017). Skinheads also featured in comedic films *The Breaking of Bumbo* (Sinclair, 1970) and *Please Sir!*. The pioneers of the subculture may have been an elite group who shopped for expensive Ivy League shirts imported from America, but companies such as Ben Sherman and Brutus made their money by mass-

producing cheap knock-offs for the market stall and high street (Hewitt 2002; Hewitt and Rawlings 2004; Rowland 2006). In the late 1960s and the early 1970s skinheads were everywhere – they even appeared in comic books and pulp novels (Osgerby 2012).

The point of the above is that skinhead was a mass youth culture that existed from the late 60s well into the 1970s, and many punks had themselves taken part in some permutation of the subculture, or been exposed to it through siblings or even just through popular culture. If we look at some key figures in UK punk we find that the Sex Pistols' Johnny Rotten, the Jam's Paul Weller, the Roxy club's DJ Don Letts, the Clash's Paul Simonon, Motörhead's Phil Taylor, the Killjoys/Dexys Midnight Runners' Kevin Rowland and Adam Ant all passed through the subculture (Ant 2007; Hewitt 2002; Milligan 2011; Rotten and Perry 2014; Rowland 2006; *The Story of Skinhead with Don Letts* 2016; Topping 2004). Paul Weller and Rick Butler of the Jam often looked decidedly suedehead, Slaughter and the Dogs asked 'Where have all the boot boys gone?' (1977) and the singer of the Leyton Buzzards reminisced about their skinhead days wearing a 'Buttoned-down shirt with a window-pane check' and dancing to reggae 'beneath the plastic palm trees' at the Tottenham Locarno (1979). Punk evolved out of a number of music scenes, but a major influence was glam rock, which was itself rooted in the skinhead subculture, with bands such as Slade, the Jook and Bilbo Baggins wearing skinhead or post-skinhead styles (Alva n.d.; Brown 2009b; Reynolds 2016; Turner 2013). Even pub rock – another key forerunner of punk – has connections to the style. Ian Dury, first of Kilburn and the High Roads, then later of Ian Dury and the Blockheads, recounts dressing in a skinhead style of 'Tuf boots, rolled-up jeans and nice macs' while at Art College (Birch 2000: 138). In 1973, Nick Lowe, who would go on to produce the first British Punk album *Damned Damned Damned* and

have a successful career as a New Wave/power pop artist, decided to break with the country-rock look of his pub rock band Brinsley Schwartz and appeared on BBC2's *Old Grey Whistle Test* in a very skinhead-looking large check gingham button-down shirt and spikey Boot Boy haircut (Birch 2000).

Lol Pryor's description of the Cock Sparrer audience 'going *back* to a boot boy look' (Pennant 2002: 102, italics added) demonstrates how there was a great deal of fluidity between the original iterations of skinhead and the punk-related subcultures that followed. As critics of the CCCS approach to subcultures have noted, subcultures were (and are) much more fluid than was originally theorized. They are not static groups with definitive beginnings and endings. Rather, individuals pass through subcultures and the subcultures themselves evolve over time (Clarke 1982b; Laughey 2006; Osgerby 2012; Waters 1981). In research carried out at comprehensive school in Keighley, Yorkshire, in 1972, sociomusicologist Simon Frith (1979: 42) found that his research respondents did not throw themselves whole-heartedly into any one subculture. Some of the responses included the following:

I have assorted friends – some hairies, some crombie boys and girls<sup>i</sup>, I can sit and listen to both sorts of music and don't mind either [...]

I'm in between a skinhead and a hippie. I wear 'mod' clothes but I listen to both kinds of music [...]

I wear skinhead clothes, but I don't just like that type of music [...]

Paul Willis, who conducted extensive ethnographic research into youth culture, has noted that 'While only a small minority of young people adopted the complete uniform of youth subcultures, large numbers drew on selective elements of the styles, creating their own meanings and uses from them' (1990: 87). Punks such as Malcolm Owen or Paul Cook in their Harrington jackets and boots were similarly drawing on skinhead style without themselves being skinheads.

## **Conclusion**

In this article I have used discussion of Dr. Marten boots, Harrington jackets and other ordinary high-street fashion items to open up notions of punk style beyond the spectacular elements of punk dress. Along the way, we have seen how intertwined punk was with skinhead. I have argued that skinhead style was itself much more ordinary than is usually thought. It is understandable that the more spectacular elements of punk style, whether they be couture or DIY, are the ones enshrined in popular memory. This was the form of punk fashion adopted in major metropolitan centres, by members of a group that was to an extent heterogenous in class origin and often, as sociomusicologists Simon Frith and Howard Horne (1987) have shown, products of the British art school system (Frith and Howard 1987). Spectacular punk was the aesthetic of Savage's arties. What we know about the links between further education and upward mobility, alongside the sheer volume of TV shows, radio programmes, museum exhibitions and scholarly work on punk, suggests that the arties were more likely than the social realists to go on to positions in the arts, the academy and the cultural industries. It is no surprise, then, that *Chaos to Couture* memorialized punk style in artie terms. More research on punk dress is needed, so that we



can become less reliant on the artie narratives. If looking at punk dress, visual research methods could be used to look at what bands and audiences actually wore in the late 1970s. Oral history would take us beyond the recollections of those who are articulated, educated, famous or successful enough to have their memories captured in print and taken as the final word on punk dress. Qualitative content analysis could be used to see what kind of subcultural commodities were sold in music weekly ads. Finally, the design historian's toolkit could be deployed to learn about how garments such as the Harrington jacket ended up on market stalls and mail-order ads.

I have focused most of my attention on the Harrington jacket in this article because it was so common in first- and second-wave UK punk dress, and yet so absent from academic and curatorial discussions of punk style. It is a jacket that is today perhaps more associated with mod, rude boy/2-tone and skinheads than punk, but these revivalist subcultures all trace their origins back to punk's second wave. Following a luxury re-brand, the Baracuta version now retails for £295 and is sold on the merits of its association with classic American style rather than youth subcultures, but the mass-market version can still be purchased for £20 from market stalls across the United Kingdom. It can also be found cheaply on the digital marketplace, eBay. After being adopted by the various revival subcultures of the 1970s, the Harrington continues to be worn by contemporary manifestations of these subcultures both within and outside the United Kingdom. It was also worn by Brit Poppers in the 1990s and then by British indie kids in the aughts. It is an item of nostalgia for ex-subculture members and a subcultural signifier for current ones, but remains a cheap, practical and ordinary jacket worn by non-subculturalists.

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<sup>i</sup> An early 70s permutation of skinhead.