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**A research project exploring selected post-punk  
influences and their relevance to my contemporary  
compositional work.**

**Paul Christopher Williams**

**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of MA by research**

**The University of Huddersfield**

**September 2010**

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## Introduction

This thesis forms part of my research degree, and is presented together with an audio CD containing roughly forty minutes of original music written and produced by myself. These two parts will make up the whole of my research masters project. The aims of this project are to research, analyse and present within an academic context, selected personal influences stemming from the music, attitude, philosophy and style of the post punk period 1978-1985, and to determine how these influences still transmit through to my own contemporary compositions, included with this research project. The post punk period was a highly creatively active time in popular music, and the 'DIY' attitude inherent in post punk bands, labels and other artistic developers was as culturally important and influential as the music itself. I will research both the personally relevant music and the attitude from this period and if it still relates to my own contemporary compositions. I will also hope to discern if the actual process of carrying out this research has had a direct influence on any newly composed pieces submitted. This research will analyse and explore some of the important artists from this period; those who initially shaped and influenced my initial approaches to making music. Some of the music I will reference for this thesis has not been re-visited by me for many years, so by this emphasis on re-listening and re-evaluating the past, I hope to re-connect to the original inspirations and influences that shaped my introduction as an active participant in music creating rather than as a passive listener. Therefore I will attempt to re-connect to the present by re-connecting with the past.

## Queen or the Stranglers? My Post Punk

In 1976 when The Sex Pistols were playing their influential gigs, which included Manchester's Lesser Free Trade Hall I was aged 14. The Clash would play Liverpool's Eric's in early 1977. By 1979 the post punk movement defined by Simon Reynolds as 'spirit, innovation and a non defined style of music'<sup>1</sup> was in full flow. John Lydon, now with his band Public Image Limited, was already two experimental reggae inspired albums away from the chaotic Sex Pistols. Lydon's Capitol radio interview as far back as 1977 had incongruously revealed an eclectic taste which included progressive rock,<sup>2</sup> thus self dissolving his 'Rotten' persona and some of the mythology of punk as 'year zero' and 'all that came before as the anti-thesis of punk.'<sup>3</sup> Although where I lived at the time (Blackpool) the myth lived longer: In 1978 my local independent record shop refused to sell me Queen's single 'Spread Your Wings' (1978) and The Stranglers single 'Nice and Sleazy' (1978) at the same time. The seller explained that a true punk wouldn't buy Queen! A clear division between punk as represented to me by The Stranglers, and Queen as established rock (and a clear contradiction with Lydon's admitted appreciation of non-punk music) not noticed before had been created in my young mind.

In late 1970s UK, access to alternative music that we now take for granted was limited, and I would have most likely been listening to Queen, Abba, Slik, 10cc, The Carpenters and ELO. I tuned in nightly (when the signal was strong enough) to the influential pop music based Radio Luxembourg,<sup>4</sup> viewing BBC's Top of the Pops, or listening to what was selected on the jukebox in the pub we lived above: it could be argued

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1 Jesse Thorn, 'Interview with Simon Reynolds', *Sounds of Young America*, (April 2006) [www.maximumfun.org/blog/2006/04/\\_podcast-rip-it-up-and-start-again.html](http://www.maximumfun.org/blog/2006/04/_podcast-rip-it-up-and-start-again.html), (December 2009).

2 Simon Reynolds, *Rip it up and Start Again: Post Punk 1978-84* (London 2006) 4.

3 Sean Albiez, 'Know History!: John Lydon, Cultural Capital and the Prog/Punk Dialectic', *Popular Music*, 22/ 3 (Oct., 2003), 357-374.

4 Radio Luxembourg's popularity had actually helped to create a youth orientated radio one in 1967, From, Michael Brocken, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool's Popular Music Scenes, 1930s 1970s*, (Aldershot 2010), 219.

that I was naively at the receiving end of Adorno's view that popular music was part of a 'culture industry assembly line'.<sup>5</sup>

Since 1978 I had increasingly been listening to an alternative, the John Peel show, which had began to broadcast records distributed by punk influenced smaller independent labels. Peel's 1976 festive 50 top five featured Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and Free,<sup>6</sup> and although he featured a Queen session<sup>7</sup> within days of the release of the Sex Pistols album *Never Mind the Bollocks* (1977), by the end of 1979 he had abandoned the old and embraced the new: his top five was now taken up by The Clash, The Sex Pistols, The Jam and two Joy Division songs.<sup>8</sup> Peel would become an important outlet for post punk music and would be my primary introduction to a range of music I very much doubt I would have heard from any other source at that time. His eclectic and non-commercial output also challenged Adorno's view that radio no longer needed to present itself as art.<sup>9</sup>

My step from passive listener to active participant was encouraged after witnessing the band Section 25 perform at Bispham Community hall Blackpool in 1979, where they were supported by post school age punk band Chainz.<sup>10</sup> This was my first experience of a live punk influenced band, and although the performance was curtailed after three songs the disjointed performance producing a 'deceptively doomy, powerful stripped down, bass driven, dissonant, post punk'<sup>11</sup> had an effect on me. Within days I had purchased a bass guitar, within weeks I had discovered other like minded amateurs. Roland Barthes argues in his essay 'Musica Practica', that:

'the professional...whose training remains esoteric for the public... [esoteric here could be perceived as the high level of musicianship, multi tracked arrangements

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5 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cummings, (New York 1972). 163.

6 John Peel, 'Festive 50s', BBC Radio one, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/johnpeel/festive50s>, (April 2010).

7 John Peel, Sessions, [www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/johnpeel/sessions/1970s/1977/Oct28queen](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/johnpeel/sessions/1970s/1977/Oct28queen) (April 2010)

8 Peel, *Op.cit*

9 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment As Mass Deception' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford 2002), 95.

10 BBC, 'Tributes to Blackpool music legend Larry Cassidy', (5 March 2010), [http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/lancashire/hi/people\\_and\\_places/music/newsid](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/lancashire/hi/people_and_places/music/newsid), (May 2010).

11 John Robb, 'Larry Cassidy/Section25 RIP', (February 2010), <http://johnrobb77.wordpress.com/larry-cassidysection-25-rip>, (May 2010).

and costly production demonstrated by band's such Queen] does not offer that style of the perfect amateur, it is the amateur who gives us the desire to *make* that music.'<sup>12</sup>

Deciphering the seemingly complex and musically esoteric - out of reach arrangements of Queen, Abba or Yes did not incite me to actually to participate in making music, while the amateurish, accessible immediacy of Section 25 and much of John Peel's post punk output somehow set off that desire to *make* music. I had at that time made some distinction between the professional and the amateur, and which one would consciously influence my introduction to music making.

## **Influences - Analysis**

This section will analyse a selection of artists and styles from the post punk period that I would regard as personally inspirational at the time. Additional artists I would regard as influential from around this period include: Public Image LTD, The Cure, Gang of Four, The Clash, Buzzcocks, Wah!, ABC, Crass, Talking Heads and The Smiths.

I do acknowledge that when included words do form an important contribution to the overall sound, meaning and context of a piece of music, especially within popular music, and some of the above would be more influential in that respect. However, for the purposes of this project, I will analyse vocals as part of the overall texture rather than concentrate on specific lyrical meaning.

### **Echo and the Bunnymen**

The band started in Liverpool in 1978 out of a punk/post punk movement which evolved mainly from the club Eric's. Echo and the Bunnymen's overall sound was influenced by the Velvet Underground, and according to self taught guitarist Will Sergeant

12 Roland Barthes, 'Musica Practica', *Image-Music-text*, trans. Stephen Heath, (London 1977), 150.

by 'the more interesting end of punk, stuff like Pere Ubu, Television and Suicide.'<sup>13</sup> The Doors, the work of producer Brian Eno (Sergeant wanted Eno to produce Echo and the Bunnymen before U2 used him), and experimental band The Residents would also influence the band.<sup>14</sup> They would perform live with and become influenced by Joy Division then New Order, similarities with which can be heard in the songs 'All My Colours' (1981) and sequencer driven 'Never Stop' (1983) .

The guitar sound created by Sergeant does have similarities to the Velvet Underground, such as on their track 'Venus in Furs' (1967) while also being heavily influenced by Tom Verlaine from Television with his close mic'ed delay and reverb sound.<sup>15</sup> Sergeant also acknowledges some Beatles Indian period influence,<sup>16</sup> and his interpretation of this is the one string drone effect as on the 12 string guitar break from the single 'The Killing Moon' (1984).

Singer Ian McCulloch's vocal style was inspired by David Bowie,<sup>17</sup> Leonard Cohen, Jaques Brel, Jim Morrison and Frank Sinatra,<sup>18</sup> and he did not necessarily subscribe to the punk doctrine of not needing to understand musical craft:

'I didn't really subscribe to the punk ethos that you didn't have to know how to play that well. I mean, you did if you were gonna be any good. Even punk should be played well. The people who couldn't play punk well were shit, that's the bottom line. If you were gonna make any impact you had to write an 'Anarchy In The UK' or a 'White Riot', not a Slaughter & The Dogs song.'<sup>19</sup>

McCulloch is obviously referring to his interpretation of The Sex Pistols 'Anarchy in the UK' and The Clash's 'White Riot' as displaying a similarly raw but superior and more sophisticated approach to their composition than Slaughter and the Dogs. This musical

13 Interview with Echo and the Bunnymen with Terry Staunton, 'Ocean Refrain: Echo and the Bunnymen', *Record Collector*, (October 2005), <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=8469>, (April 2010).

14 Interview with Echo and The Bunnymen with Tony Fletcher, 'Playing the Game', *Spin magazine*, 4/1, (April 1988). 66-68.

15 Chris Adams, *Turquoise Days: The Weird World of Echo and the Bunnymen*, (New York, 2002), 33.

16 Michael Molenda, 'Interview with Will Sergeant', (March 2010), <http://www.guitarplayer.com/article/will-sergeant>, (June 2010).

17 Chris Adams, *Op. Cit.* 6.

18 Mick Middles, *Ian McCulloch King of Cool*, (London 2000), 131.

19 Interview with Echo and the Bunnymen with Terry Staunton, 'Ocean Refrain: Echo and the Bunnymen', *Record Collector*, (October 2005), <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=8469>, (April 2010).

ambition of McCulloch's is demonstrated via the band's development from the early scratchy minimalist arrangements of their first album *Crocodiles* (1980), to the producer Ian Broudie inspired cello and strings on *Porcupine* (1983), which would in turn influence the orchestral ambition of their *Ocean Rain* album (1984).<sup>20</sup>

While the dynamics of *Crocodiles* created a sparse aesthetic (sometimes there is only bass and drums between the vocals and sparingly played guitar), the production on the *Ocean Rain* album attempted to fill the spaces with orchestral riffs. The electric guitar on *Ocean Rain* is interesting in the way it is at times attempting to experimentally emulate the orchestral string riffs and textures, such as on tracks 'Seven Seas' and 'Silver'. Sergeant was 'trying to emulate the pizzicato violins in an orchestra...working out little bits.'<sup>21</sup> The drums are hit with brushes, which although still used with as much velocity, ultimately produce a dampened, softer sound than sticks. The bass technique consists mainly of short repeated notes based around one chord with the root note rhythmically connected to the bass drum as on the verses of 'Seven Seas' and 'My Kingdom'. The bass sits further back in the overall mix, so fitting with the overall smoother aesthetic. The *Ocean Rain* album explores greater use of reverb and delay effects thus creating a wider, deeper sound, and it's emphasis on strings produces seemingly more complex arrangements, superior (and arguably more professional) musicianship and smoother production than previous albums. This move from raw basic minimalist music to wide orchestral sounds confirms the early post-punk musical aspirations cited by McCulloch above.

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<sup>20</sup> Mick Middles, *Op. cit.* 103

<sup>21</sup> Michael Molenda, 'Interview with Will Sergeant', (March 2010), <http://www.guitarplayer.com/article/will-sergeant>, (June 2010).

## Electronic pop

The post-punk period also provided alternatives to the guitar band: electronic pop music. By the early to mid 1970s, experimental 'Krautrock'<sup>22</sup> bands such as Faust and Tangerine Dream were already producing experimental music with large synthesisers. In October 1975 Kraftwerk played Liverpool. In the audience was Andy McCluskey who would be inspired to create Liverpool electronic band Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD). OMD would also admit to influences such as Joy Division's album *Closer* (1980) and Roxy Music.<sup>23</sup> OMD's Andy McCluskey also states that they (OMD) and others had somehow 'distilled the Glamour of 70s Glam rock with electronic experimentation.'<sup>24</sup>

The punk ethos had also carried through to synth pop, and as the synth hardware became cheaper (and smaller), the anyone can play it doctrine and the DIY attitude was adopted by the electro pop producers. Daniel Miller who signed and also co-produced Depeche Mode's recorded output, maintained that playing a synth was actually easier than playing a guitar as you 'only needed one finger.'<sup>25</sup> Punk made it possible to participate in music making without any training as confirmed by Phil Oakey from The Human League:

'Until punk came along, you had to be Keith Emerson, if you wanted to be in a band you would have had to have learnt your instrument for at least eight or nine years before you would dare come out and play it...the inspiration of the Damned and the Clash said get up and do it.'<sup>26</sup>

Synth pop evolved from 'a love of electronic music, cheap synths, and the inspiration of punk' Daniel Miller would argue.<sup>27</sup> The ease of drawing out sounds from the newly available synths was the attraction to many involved in the post punk synth pop scene.

Depeche Mode's early songs such as 'Just Can't Get Enough' and 'New life' from

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22 A mildly patronising term coined by the British music press in the early 1970s to describe the new wave of experimental bands emanating from Germany in the late 1960s. Source, David Buckley, 'Krautrock'. *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Accessed 14 May 2010).

23 Paul Morley, Interview with OMD, 'Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark: Men of Mystery and Imagination', *NME*, (December 1980), <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=11285>, (6 July 2010).

24 Ben Whalley, *Dir., Synth Britannia*, Interview with Andy McCluskey, BBC 4, (2009).

25 Ben Whalley, *Dir., Synth Britannia*, Interview with Daniel Miller, BBC 4, (2009).

26 Ben Whalley, *Dir., Synth Britannia*, Interview with Phil Oakey, BBC 4, (2009).

27 Bill Bruce, 'Daniel Miller and his home studio', *Sound on Sound*, (December 1998) <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/dec98/articles/daniel.624.htm>, (12 May 2010)

the album *Speak and Spell* (1981) are very bright sounding, melodic and simple in structure with 'neat synth hooks'.<sup>28</sup> The songs are arranged over basic drum machine rhythms and over this are laid vocal harmony overdubs, NME journalist Paul Morley described their music at the time as 'intensely sweet pop'.<sup>29</sup> The keyboard sounds are monophonic mainly staccato arpeggios and riffs, with sounds manipulated via basic modulation, oscillator, VFA, filter, and LFO combinations. The band around that time used the cheapest available synths: Moog Prodigy/Moog Source and a Yamaha CS5.<sup>30</sup> Principle songwriter Vince Clark (who maintained that you actually needed two fingers to play synth-pop)<sup>31</sup> was inspired into producing synth music by listening to OMD, early Human League and Fad Gadget.<sup>32</sup> Singer David Gahan states that the attitude of The Clash and other punk bands ignited his participation in music making,<sup>33</sup> and all the fledgling band members were listening to Roxy Music, David Bowie, Iggy Pop and Kraftwerk.<sup>34</sup> Vince Clarke would depart Depeche Mode after the first album, and Martin Gore would take over the main songwriting duties. Lyrics would also start to reflect Gore's ideological awakening and by the third album *Construction Time Again* (1983) the songs would explore experimental techniques such as manipulating 'found sounds'<sup>35</sup> via Synclavier samplers.<sup>36</sup> On the next album *Some Great Reward* (1984) they were amplifying then recording synth and drum sounds through guitar amps to add distortion to the sound. Depeche Mode's sonic palette would develop in parallel with technological advances in music production during the 1980s, and although they would remain

28 Bill Bruce, 'Daniel Miller and his home studio', *Sound on Sound*, (December 1998) <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/dec98/articles/daniel.624.htm>, (12 May 2010)

29 Jonathan Miller, *Stripped: Depeche Mode*, (London 2003), 80.

30 Interview with Alan Wilder, source, Bill Bruce, 'Recoil: Alan Wilder', *Sound On Sound*, (January 1998), <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/jan98/articles/alanwilder.htm>, (June 2010).

31 Jonathan Miller, *Op.cit.* 16

32 Ben Whalley, *Dir., Synth Britannia*, Interview with Vince Clark, BBC 4, (2009).

33 Jonathan Miller, *Op. cit.* 33-34.

34 Ben Whalley, *Dir., Synth Britannia*, BBC 4, (2009).

35 Depeche Mode were at the time sampling natural sounds, such as running water or creaking doors, and electronically recreating them. Source, Johnny Black, 'Depeche Mode: Are These Men Really Miserable?' *Smash Hits*, (March 1984), <http://www.rocksofbackpages.com/article.html? ArticleID=10955>, (May 2010).

36 Synclavier was the first direct to disk recordable sampler, monophonic and very expensive at £37,000 in 1983, Source, Giles, Dawson, 'Machines Alive With the Sound of Music', *New Scientist*, (4 August 1983), 333.

commercially successful, they did continue to explore electronic sound manipulation.

The Human League originated in Sheffield in 1977, and cited influences such as Kraftwerk, Wendy Carlos (composer of *A Clockwork Orange* soundtrack),<sup>37</sup> Giorgio Moroder's electronic dance music, Funkadelic, and dystopian science fiction writer J.G. Ballard;<sup>38</sup> and according to writer Simon Reynolds they aligned themselves with the commercial dance pop of Abba and Chic.<sup>39</sup> An influence from the sequenced synth sounds on the Moroder/Donna Summer track 'I Feel Love' (1977) can be heard on an early Human League song 'Empire State Human' (1979). The Human League's Martin Ware was also inspired by punk's anyone can do it attitude but ultimately saw the music as 'old - fashioned'.<sup>40</sup>

The Human League's first release through Bob Last's Fast product label (the label roster would also include Gang of Four and The Mekons) was the Funkadelic<sup>41</sup> inspired bass synth driven 'Being Boiled' (1978). Bob Last, would describe the bass as like a 'mutant Bootsy Collins riff'.<sup>42</sup> The track is also notable for the fact that apart from vocals the only musical notes played are from the bass synth, the rest of the sound consisting of various sequencers and LFO effects giving it a unique experimental pop/funk sound. The band moved to Virgin Records and various members left to form the band Heaven 17, whilst two new female singers joined and teamed up with producer Martin Rushent (who had previously worked with Shirley Bassey, The Stranglers, Buzzcocks, and on Pete Shelley's solo electro/acoustic album *Homosapien* (1981) ), to produce the album *Dare* (1981).

Rushent placed a lot of importance on the bass drum and snare sound as a

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37 Stanley Kubrick, dir., *A Clockwork Orange*, Wendy Carlos, comp. (1974).

38 Ben Whalley, *Dir., Synth Britannia*, Interview with Phil Oakey, BBC 4, (2009).

39 Simon Reynolds, *Op.cit.* 163.

40 Ben Whalley, *Dir., Synth Britannia*, Interview with Martin Ware, BBC 4, (2009).

41 Funkadelic and Parliament (essentially the same band) were influential American 70s funk artists, Source, Rob Bowman, 'Clinton, George.' *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Accessed 18 Aug 2010).

42 Bootsy Collins was Funkadelic's bass player, Source, Reynolds, *Op.cit.* 163.

foundation,<sup>43</sup> so *Dare's* production sound was based around the newly available programmable Linn Drum, LM-1<sup>44</sup> and early sequencing hardware such as the Roland Micro composer.<sup>45</sup> The result was an album mixing heavy drum machine sounds with prominent bass melodies, intricately sequenced, with hook filled pop songs. The lyrics reject the punk sloganeering essentialism of The Clash and the dystopian Ballard inspired leanings of Numan; they were 'positive and wholesome'.<sup>46</sup> Simon Reynolds describes the Human League as 'Abba with synths'.<sup>47</sup> This analysis is confirmed by the close similarity between the two bands dramatic musical set piece song arrangements, girl/boy vocals, and strong emphasis on the bass and rhythm tracks. The theatrical style of vocal intro on The Human League's 'Darkness' has similarities to Abba's 'The Winner Takes it All' (1980), whilst The Human League's girl/boy vocal arrangement on 'Don't You Want Me', is a feature of many Abba songs.

The Human League, Depeche Mode and other post punk synth dependent artists began using the cheaper easy to play synthesiser, and punk's 'anyone can play it' ethos as way in to *making* music, or as Barthes 'perfect amateurs'. However, within a short time span they were themselves to become part of an 'esoteric' group of expensive Synclavier, Linn drum and cutting edge sequencer users, thus producing music which was sonically beyond the reach of the amateur.

## Joy Division/New Order

Joy Division (later to become New Order), originated in Manchester in 1976 after members Peter Hook (bass), Bernard Sumner (guitar) and Singer Ian Curtis witnessed the

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43 Tom Flint, 'Martin Rushent: From punk to Electro', *Sound on Sound*, (February 2007), <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/feb07/articles/martinrushent.htm> (June 2010).

44 Linn LM-1 drum was the first real sampled sound drum machine, very sophisticated and expensive at that time retailing at \$5,500 in 1980, source, David, McNamee, 'Hey what's that sound', *The Guardian online*, (June 2009), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2009/jun/22/linn-oberheim-drum-machines>, (March 2010).

45 The Roland Micro composer was early analogue programmable sequencer, used also used by Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream. Source, Chris Carter, 'Happy Birthday MC', *Sound On Sound*, (March, 1997), [http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/1997\\_articles/mar97/rolandmc8.html](http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/1997_articles/mar97/rolandmc8.html), (June 2010).

46 Simon Reynolds *Op.cit.* 333.

47 Simon Reynolds *Op. cit.* 333.

Sex Pistols play at the Lesser Free Trade Hall. Drummer Stephen Morris joined shortly after. Joy Division had styled their own post punk music making in to a level of raw unstructured originality. 'In the Joy Division days, we weren't aware of such things as your typical verse-chorus-verse-bridge-chorus arrangement, we ended up with some really good songs because we were naive to all of that.'<sup>48</sup> This 'naivety' created looping arrangement effects within which the bass and drums would create a repeating motif, allowing guitar riffs and vocal to build up an intense dynamic. The electric guitars would avoid string bending guitar solos, concentrating on simple riffs. The distinctive bass sound originally evolved from Peter Hook having to play high up the neck to be heard at practice, Hook would also add effects such as distortion, heavy chorus and short delay. 'A happy accident like that gave us our sound.'<sup>49</sup> Hook has denied any influences apart from Paul Simonon inspiring him to wear the bass low (Simonon was himself influenced to do this by the Ramones).<sup>50</sup> Sumner would cite an eclectic mix of Led Zeppelin and Ennio Morricone amongst his influences.<sup>51</sup> Curtis was inspired lyrically by J.G Ballard, William Burroughs,<sup>52</sup> and by performers David Bowie, Iggy Pop and Lou Reed.<sup>53</sup> Ian Curtis said he writes the lyrics to an imaginary film 'not to convey a message, but to arouse strange feelings.'<sup>54</sup> The abstract literate lyrics and low vocal register with a sometimes almost robotic delivery occasionally rising to a scream from Curtis does manage to create a fourth unique instrument.

Joy Division's ambient recorded sound could be attributed to the mix of an idiosyncratic 'drum obsessed'<sup>55</sup> producer Martin Hannett and the band's amateurish

48 Bill Murphy, Interview with New Order, 'Manchester United', *Electronic Musician*, (1 May 2005), [http://emusician.com/remixmag/artists\\_interviews/musicians/remix\\_manchester\\_united/](http://emusician.com/remixmag/artists_interviews/musicians/remix_manchester_united/), (23 April 2010).

49 Interview with Bernard Sumner in, Grant Gee, dir., *Joy Division*, Hudson Productions (2007)

50 Jim Greer, 'Everything's *Gone Black*, Interview with Peter Hook', *Spin Magazine* 6/4 (July 1990), 92

51 Adrienne Day, 'The Records That Changed My Life, Bernard Sumner', *Spin Magazine*, 21/7, (July 2005), 34.

52 Jon Savage, 'Joy Division:Someone Take These Dreams Away', *Mojo*, (July 1994), <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=3124> (August 2010)

53 Sean Albiez, 'Print the Truth Not the Legend, The Sex Pistols: Lesser Free Trade Hall', Manchester, June 4, 1976, in *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place and Time*, Ian Inglis, (Aldershot 2006), 92-105.

54 Mary Harron, 'Factory Records: Food For Thought', *Melody Maker*, (September 1979). <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=12992>, (August 2010).

55 David N. Howard, *Sonic Alchemy: Visionary Music Producers and their Maverick Recordings*, (Milwaukee 2004), 256.

naivety. Hannett had previously worked on the Buzzcocks 'Spiral Scratch' (1977),<sup>56</sup> and with other Factory label bands The Durutti Column, Section 25, A Certain Ratio and The Psychedelic Furs.<sup>57</sup> Hannett's production on Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures* album (1989) sounds as if he had recorded bass, drum, guitar and vocals from four separate un-connected sources, loosely held together by his AMS digital delay.<sup>58</sup> All four sections of music are up-front at once in the mix, with effects at the edges - 'everything seemed to belong in it's own space, but not quite connecting somehow',<sup>59</sup> said Paul Morley. Curtis's vocals are placed in a hard walled room ambient reverb and delay effects, which help to convey the mood of the delivery and lyrics. The next Album *Closer* (1980) added further abstract and lead synth sounds to the mix which emphasised the ambience.

The death of Ian Curtis would force Bernard Sumner to take on lead vocals and the band was re-named 'New Order'. Sumner was uncomfortable with singing, 'I'm no singer. To be a singer you must really feel you have a message to put across in words, and I don't, I don't want to tell you anything.'<sup>60</sup> This would be reflected in Sumner's lyrics which would often seem just to rhyme for texture, rather than actually create any internal meaning. New Order's first album *Movement* (1981) was again produced by Hannett in much the same style as Joy Division. Sumner at first attempts to copy Curtis's delivery style and his obscure lyrics are enveloped in effects (Sumner would eventually develop his own singing style). Songs on *Movement* such as 'Doubts Even Here' with Hook on vocals, and 'Chosen Time' would carry the same Joy Division looped arrangement and production: simple bass, hard drum, overdriven and effected guitars with a reverb and delay generated ambience.

The next album *Power Corruption and Lies* (1983) would be produced by the band

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56 British Punk's first Independent and self financed release, released in 1977, Responsible for Rough Trade becoming a distributor, from Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming*, (London, 1991), 297.

57 David N. Howard, *Sonic Alchemy: Visionary Music Producers and their Maverick Recordings*, (Milwaukee 2004), 259.

58 AMS Introduced the world's first microprocessor controlled digital delay line full bandwidth, 15-bit, Source, Neve, 'The Art of Sound', <http://www.ams-neve.com/about-us/History/The80s/80s.aspx>, (15 January 2010).

59 Grant Gee, dir., *Joy Division*, Interview with Paul Morley, Hudson Productions, (2007).

60 Stuart Maconie, 'New Order: Smile', *Q Magazine*, (1993), <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=16510>, (6 June 2010).

themselves and contain a more substantial mix of electronics, guitars and acoustic drums. and the songwriting style would follow a similar format. Songs 'The Age of Consent' and 'Leave Me Alone' begin with a high pitched lead bass riff which is repeated consistently throughout the song. The drums provide a repetitive rhythm, while the remainder of the songs textures comprising vocals, simple guitar riffs and keyboards are arranged around this rhythm bed. Another song 'Your Silent Face' uses melodic sequenced staccato synth riffs and a heavily voiced synth pad sound (emulating strings) as a main feature, based around a standard (for New Order) simple two chord C to F Major progression. This songs basic structure is expanded with simple guitar riffs and Hook's (by this time signature) lead bass riffs. The singles Temptation (1982) and 12" single 'Blue Monday' (1983) would mix in more drum machine and sequenced bass parts. New Order became influenced by New York disco music, and worked with producer Arthur Baker on the dance influenced 'Confusion' (1983) and 'Thieves Like Us' (1984). New Order would continue to use and exploit electronica mixed with guitars and drums, Bernard Sumner arguing that 'there's no difference between electronic and non-electronic instruments.'<sup>61</sup>New Order would regard the mastering of sequencers, samplers and drum machines as an integral part of expanding their musical knowledge, with drummer (and programmer) Stephen Morris stating that they were becoming more musical via communication with machines.<sup>62</sup> Although the band's creativity and influence would progress with the latest and most expensive technology, their attitude towards non-electronic instruments, displayed on a live BBC transmission, Rock Around the Clock in 1984 gave away a still active disregard for professionalism: guitars are played out of key, out of tune and vocals are sung off pitch. Interestingly Sumner admits that 'professionals would have played note perfect',<sup>63</sup> thereby

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61 Bill Black, 'New Order: TVOD', *Sounds*, (September 1984), <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=8716>, (6 June 2010).

62 Adam Sweeting, 'New Order: Shaming The Nation', *Melody Maker*, (January 1986), <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=6472>, (24 March 2010).

63 Bill Black, 'New Order: TVOD', *Sounds*, (September 1984), <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=8716>, (6 June 2010).

admitting eight years after their formation he still considered New Order as amateurs.

It is also worth noting here that New Order's creative development and amateur approach to the music business could also be attributed to the fact that they were signed to the independent Factory records, whose ethos was based around a no advance 50/50 split after costs deal. The 50/50 deal was viewed as an 'antithesis to the advance system favoured by the majors',<sup>64</sup> therefore arguably leaving the artists free to experiment musically, unhindered by 'direct'<sup>65</sup> connection to the established 'culture industry' and its financial and commercial pressures. This non-contract ethos was originally influenced by Rough Trade Records and also adopted by other labels such as Mute.<sup>66</sup> It could be argued that the very existence of these type of deals provided the platform for a continued experimentation. Rough Trade's Geoff Travis confirms this by stating that the 50/50 split created the 'psychological conditions for musicians to do their best work.'<sup>67</sup>

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64 Mick Middles, *From Joy Division to New Order, The True Story of Anthony H Wilson and Factory Records*, (London 2002), 110.

65 Although the labels were mainly distributed by Rough Trade and remained largely independent, they would have had to have some contact with other established distribution, marketing, performance and promotional contacts at various stages – without which they could not have operated successfully.

66 Simon Reynolds *Op.cit.* 105.

67 Geoff Travis quoted in Simon Reynolds *Op. cit.* 105.

## Personal compositions

### CD Track List

All tracks unmastered.

All The Kings Are Crying (Highrise, We Own the Days)	2010	6.14
Pushing Daisies to the Sky	2009	3.51
Succinctly	2010	3.57
Nice Try	2009	3.51
Can't You Stop It?	2009	3.27
Prisoner	2010	4.00
Clap Our Hands	2009	4.00
Don't Turn it Down	2010	3.35
Suffocated	2010	7.01

## Personal Contemporary Compositions and DIY

All instrumentation and production on the tracks forming part of this project are performed by myself, admittedly for reasons of control. Only the vocals on 'All The kings' and 'Can't You Stop It?' - which were recorded remotely,<sup>68</sup> then sent directly through to my Macbook Pro desktop, feature collaboration. I have preferred composing solo ever since I synchronised an eight track quarter inch reel to reel Teac to an Atari 1040 running Creator,<sup>69</sup> and began composing solo unhindered by band politics. However, I do plan to collaborate in the future, as my research has revealed to me that collaboration does allow a certain creativity by distilling ideas and influences, and, how else would I perform these songs truly live?

For Brian Eno, the recording studio is where 'composition takes place',<sup>70</sup> and today this studio has shrunk down to my lap-top containing multi-track software sequencers, samplers, sophisticated software instruments, and a multitude of effects options. With these relatively inexpensive tools music can be recorded, manipulated and composed without the need for expensive studios or outboard equipment. This is truly DIY, allowing the amateur to 'make' music at a possible level (depending on skill) comparable with the 'professional'. A connection between this ever accessible and affordable contemporary DIY production, and its democratising capabilities could be made to British punk's brief breaking of the recording industry's esoteric hold on expensive record production, started by the Buzzcock's self financed and self released 'Spiral Scratch EP' (1977). This record was quickly, and cheaply recorded then released by the band themselves, and as with punk music itself this DIY release opened up the possibilities of recording and releasing material to many other artists and labels. The initial discouragement of punk music by

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68 The vocal were performed and recorded 3000 miles away, then emailed to me.

69 C-Lab Creator software was a midi sequencer released for the Atari computer in 1987.

70 Virgil Moorefield, *The Producer as Composer: Shaping the Sounds of Popular Music*, (London 2005), 54.

newspapers, record companies, politicians and the general public resulted in an 'underground production network.'<sup>71</sup> Suddenly artists and labels could release low budget recorded underproduced material, while record buyers 'accepted this multitude of small label recordings without questioning their technical quality.'<sup>72</sup>

Regardless of skill levels (though skill levels can be increased quickly if you own the tools), access to affordable high quality production equipment today does make it possible to write, perform, record and release music for consumption within hours if I wish to do so, therefore blurring the distinction between 'amateur' and 'professional'.<sup>73</sup>

## Composition Commentaries

As I began this research degree, I realised I had developed a 'fixed' way of producing music, searching mainly for a hummable melody, or 'singable' music',<sup>74</sup> therefore my compositions would mostly rely on verse/chorus style arrangements as an aesthetic goal; not much thought (or time) for too much experimentation.

I have re-listened to and have been re-influenced by the electric guitars of Will Sergeant, Bernard Sumner and Peter Hook's - 'bass as lead' - which have influenced my guitar technique. For example: I've never felt the need to study long guitar solo work when short riffs with minimal string bending were always sufficient. This post punk backlash against indulgent displays of virtuosity was also adopted by post punk band Gang of Four, who went even further with their ban on 'jamming'.<sup>75</sup> I have also re-connected to and re-discovered a sonic excitement (and personal enjoyment) by adding more guitar amp gain and distortion effects than I had previously allowed. The simple arpeggio guitar riffs on

71 Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming*, (London, 1991), xv.

72 H. Stith Bennett, 'Notation and Identity in Contemporary Popular Music,' *Popular Music, Producers and Markets*, 3 (1983), 215-234.

73 Although for this project I have mixed myself and not mastered the tracks, I would usually prefer to have my music mixed and mastered from another (more skilled) source other than myself, preferably a dedicated mix and master engineer.

74 Definition of a 'hummable' melody as something which is also 'singable', From, Gino Stefani, 'Melody: A Popular Perspective', *Popular Music*, 6/1, (Jan 1987), 21-35.

75 Simon Reynolds, *Op. cit.* 113.

'We Own the Days', 'Nice Try', 'All the Kings', and the distorted and chorused - bass as lead - melodies on 'Succinctly' and 'Pushing Daisies to the Sky' do reflect these continuing and renewed influences. The track 'Suffocated', consciously exhibits a similarity to Hook's trebly exposed bass, Sergeant 's one string drone guitar riff, and a Sumner inspired simple overdriven barre chord technique as lead. Added gain on the amps and a heavily distorted discordant guitar riff near the end of 'Nice Try' add a jarring dynamic to the preceding gentler sound. I have also overlooked some slightly out of tune guitar overdubs on 'Succinctly', 'Suffocated' and 'Nice Try' for the sake of performance and immediacy: normal practice for me would obtain a perfect as possible harmonic tuning.

None of the compositions I am presenting here contain acoustic guitar, which I have used more frequently over the last few years. Although clean strummed acoustics were a feature of the personally inspirational *Ocean Rain* album, the exclusion of acoustics on my tracks is a conscious effort to involve, discover and experiment with electric sounds. The original strummed acoustic guitars recorded for 'Clap Our Hands' were replaced with electric, then experimented on with effects including distortion, vibrato and ring modulator which are found within Logic's guitar pedal plug-in.<sup>76</sup>

Before beginning this project I had also moved almost completely away from using synthesised keyboard sounds, and was routinely using un-processed (except for reverbs) orchestral samples, and, although *Ocean Rain* uses an orchestral string section, real strings are difficult to emulate without expert programming and expensive samples. I therefore felt that I should use this project to attempt to re-connect to my selected synthesised influences. I loaded up basic synthesised sounds when needed, and experimented with the filter, glide, modulation and VCA options. These effected synth sounds are used in 'We Own the Days', 'Pushing Daisies to the Sky' and 'Suffocated'.

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<sup>76</sup> Logic's guitar pedal has been used for all guitars parts on this project, and also some keyboard sounds. I found that the quickly changeable combinations and simplicity of the available effects can generate a certain spontaneity.

Sequenced quarter, eighth and 16th beat staccato rhythmic synth sounds are also a feature that I have re-discovered from electronic tracks produced by Rushent and New Order, which I then programmed in to 'Suffocated', 'Succinctly' and 'All the Kings'. I was also inspired by the bright immediate simple synth sounds of Depeche Mode, The Human League and New Order for 'Don't Turn it Down', in which the synth lead synth and bass melodies remain free from modulation effects, so as to highlight their simplicity. The 12 bar breakdown in 'Don't Turn it Down' contains just monophonic bass, lead and a vocoder vocal, also highlighting this approach. 'Suffocated' uses basic polyphonic synth sounds influenced by the productions of New Order and my electronic selections.

New Order's combination of electronic and acoustic sounds did encourage me to combine synth and real played bass whenever necessary, and for this project I felt that 'Suffocated' would work better with both. This track also features two simultaneous 'real' bass parts mixing together as the lows and levels on the intro electronic bass are auto equalised out during mix-down. 'Don't Turn it Down' also uses a mix of electronic bass on verse parts and real bass on the chorus parts, which helps to highlight the electronic and rock elements.

The importance placed on drums by Hannett and Rushent did influence how I produced my rhythm tracks. I spent much longer than I would have usually programming and honing the sound of my drums, experimenting with Bit Crusher distortion,<sup>77</sup> compression, EQ, small room reverbs, noise gates and micro delay, in an attempt to keep drum parts more to the front of a mix while also leaving sonic space for other instrumentation. The result of this approach to the drum production is most apparent on 'Suffocated', 'Succinctly', and 'All The Kings'. New Order, The Human League and Depeche Mode all had a dance influence running through their music, and this has also re-entered my own music highlighted by 'Suffocated' which produces 'danceable' rhythms

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<sup>77</sup> Bit Crusher is a Logic digital distortion effect, which can be used to add presence to drum sub-mixes.

through the use of looping rhythmic sequencers, simple repetitive drums and electronic staccato bass.

The experimental attitude of post punk electronic artists and their exploration of the studio as a compositional tool has also encouraged more personal experimentation. This includes (my own) reverse vocal samples on 'Highrise', 'Pushing Daisies to the Sky' and towards the climax of 'Suffocated', plus I have also experimented with multi-tracked (grouped), edited and pitch change effected vocals which feature in 'We Own the Days', 'Don't Turn it Down' and 'All The Kings'. A bounced down wav mix of 'Can't You Stop it?' was placed back in to the song, re-equalised to re-move the bass and low mid frequencies, then toggled slightly out of time, creating an abstract background ambiance, this replaced the melodic strings I originally had on the track. Although this experimentation was inspired more by my research re-exposing me to 'Musique Concrète'<sup>78</sup> than any specific post punk reference, it was intended as a sonic experiment to remove some of the 'expectedness' and offset the 'melodic' emphasis of the song.

Joy Division/New Order's dis-regard for 'traditional' arrangements is also apparent in five of my compositions: 'We Own The Days' and 'Highrise' are cyclic arrangements from which bass, looped drums, guitars, pads and vocals are auto faded in and out of the mix, 'Nice Try' and 'Can't You Stop it?', contain no recognisable chorus and 'Suffocated' was composed without any conscious thought for traditional arrangement by the use of visual editing in the arrange window, rather than relying only on listening.<sup>79</sup>

The vocals on 'All the Kings' and 'Can't You Stop It?' were performed by a singer Craig Kavanna - whose resemblance to any of my post punk influences would lean more towards Depeche Mode's early material and (purposely) lends these songs a more

<sup>78</sup> Strictly speaking, Musique Concrète is the manipulation of man-made or natural sounds, not necessary musical, but in this instance I regarded my recording as an inspiration from Musique Concrète after it was prepared for re-inclusion to my track. Source, 'Musique Concrète', *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, Ed. Michael Kennedy, (Accessed 21 Aug 2010).

<sup>79</sup> Obviously the cut and paste facility of Logic is somewhat different to a band working out or 'jamming' out an arrangement, but there is still a certain compositional 'spontaneity' to visually slicing up whole sections of audio and midi information, then quickly re-placing it around Logic's arrange window.

melodic edge. Vocals on the remaining tracks were performed by myself as a guide, and would ultimately be replaced by a more suitable candidate in the future (I do not consider my vocals to suit my own compositions). The vocals on 'Suffocated' are influenced by Hannett's room reverb and delay techniques creating an ambient effect which correlates with the sombre vocal timbre and delivery. The vocals on 'Succinctly' have been recorded quickly, with performance taking precedent over perfect pitch. An experiment with a vocoder effect was attempted on 'Highrise', and the 'hey you' parts in the verses of 'Don't Turn It Down' (which also features vocoder) were deemed sufficient; pre-research I would have attempted to flesh out the verses on this song with more vocals.

## Conclusion

Re-connecting with selected personal post punk influences and researching the genealogy of these influences has informed and widened my knowledge and appreciation of not only pre and post punk music, but of my own style, technique and approaches to composition. My research revealed that although many post punk artists were initially inspired to 'make' music by the attitude of The Sex Pistols, they had already been greatly influenced musically (and lyrically) by their favourite pre 'year zero' artists, which would, when distilled together with other band members create a unique blend, or chemistry. These artists were also heavily influenced by producers, who have in turn influenced myself: Echo and the Bunnymen would not have delivered the orchestral *Ocean Rain* without Ian Broudie's influence, Joy Division's recorded sound was arguably part Hannett's creation, Daniel Miller helped develop the young Depeche Mode, and Martin Rushent's programming and arrangement skills enabled The Human League's commercial success.

This research has confirmed that I continue to be influenced by the guitar sound and simple technique of Will Sergeant, Bernard Sumner and Peter Hook's bass as lead, although I had distanced myself from the immediacy of their raw sound. I have now re-connected to this sound. It has also been revealed to me that my pre-research compositions were if anything edging closer to Echo and the Bunnymen's orchestral sound (I have also been influenced by Ennio Morricone's orchestral work) while moving further away from the influence of early 80s electro pop music and the immediate simplicity, and potential complexities of synthesised sounds, which I have now re-connected to. Hannett and Rushent's emphasis on drum sounds has encouraged experimentation with rhythm tracks, and their relative position within my mixes.

Punk/post punk's DIY ethos is still apparent in my attitude towards music making, in fact even more so through my use of a laptop recording studio as the centre of my contemporary compositional work .

Echo and the Bunnymen, Depeche Mode, The Human League and Joy Division - New Order started out as 'amateurs' who then took full advantage of punk's opening up of the esoteric hold and mystique surrounding popular music participation. Adorno's 'constrained'<sup>80</sup> view that all popular music was a part of a 'culture industry'<sup>81</sup> was briefly challenged by these artists and labels who created a sub industry and ethos outside of established music business practice. My selected influences did eventually create their own esoteric environments (partly through possession of expensive cutting edge equipment), selling large amounts of records and becoming more competent in production, technique and attitude (except arguably the attitude of the 'amateurish' New Order). Therefore my selection's ambitions as shown by their development were not so aesthetically or ideologically different than the Abba, Queen, Yes or Bowie I was listening to at aged 14, or indeed any of John Peel's pre punk broadcasts. I must therefore have distilled 'all' of these influences - both the post punk 'amateur', and the pre-post punk 'professional' - into my own contemporary compositions, although the 'DIY' and 'anyone can do it' attitude of post punk certainly did directly influence me into actually 'making' music.

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80 Adorno's approach to music theory and in particular 'popular music' was constrained by his 'historical and social location'. Brian Longhurst, *Popular Music and Society* (Cambridge 2007), 10.

81 Brian Longhurst, *Ibid.*, 3.

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