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Scissors and Glue:: *Punk Fanzines and the Creation of a DIY Aesthetic*

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Abstract

The fanzine producer Chris Wheelchair (sic) remarked in the editorial of *Ruptured Ambitions* (1992) that his Plymouth-based fanzine is ‘all about helping promote the DIY punk/alternative/underground movement, which is, at present, extremely healthy in many areas, and certainly improving.’

From the early 1930s, fan magazines or 'fanzines' have been integral to the creation of a thriving communication network of underground culture, disseminating information and personal views to like-minded individuals on subjects from music and football to anti-capitalism and thrift store shopping. Yet, it remains within the subculture of punk music where the homemade, A4, stapled and photocopied fanzines of the late 1970s fostered the 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) production techniques of cut-n-paste letterforms, photocopied and collaged images, hand-scrawled and typewritten texts, to create a recognizable graphic design aesthetic. The employment of such techniques and technologies has had an impact on an overall idiosyncratic and distinctive visual style affiliated with punk fanzines. For fanzine producers, the DIY process critiques mass production through the very handmade quality it embraces, but also in the process of appropriating the images and words of mainstream media and popular culture. Arguably, the DIY approach reached its peak in the 1990s and still continues today, having been co-opted into the worlds of commercial mainstream lifestyle magazines and advertising which trade on its association with punk authenticity. The intent of this essay is to explore the development of a graphic language of resistance and to examine the way in which the very use of its DIY production methods reflected the promotion of politics and music of 1970s' punk and DIY underground activity. In addition, this piece will, through interviews with fanzine producers, attempt to recover from history an area of graphic design activity that has largely been ignored. This will be achieved by focusing on three punk fanzine titles that were initiated during the first wave of the punk period: Panache (Mick Mercer, 1976–1992), Chainsaw (Charlie Chainsaw, 1977–1985) and Ripped & Torn (Tony Drayton, 1976–1979). These examples will be measured against a discussion of Sniffin' Glue (Mark Perry, 1976–1977), which has been acknowledged by the punk community as the first punk DIY fanzine in Britain.

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