Paul Rambali discussed some of the motives behind the Punk movement, regarding it as the attempt of a generation of cynical/idealistic youth to respond to the confiscation of power and the decline of the face of passive consumerism, to take back control over their own lives. (Rambali, assistant editor of The Face, is one who lived to tell the tale.)

There was much experiment, with these ideas and others. Punk was at its height, providing a strand of ideological and aesthetic influence that was surprising in its compatibility with other fibres of mixed origin, and easily woven into the changing fabric of Brody style. There was no bowing to external expectations, and little heed taken of received wisdom as to ‘what sells’. The Face was a magazine run more or less democratically, and ‘for ourselves above all’—they’re leftie, they say, even to do readership surveys, lest they should be influenced by market pressure, there, no doubt, lies the secret of success. During a time of generally increasing commercialism, Brody was given a relatively free hand to do what he liked, and what he liked was to experiment, to ‘play’. ‘Seventies punk’ he says was ‘about absolute statement, not about party lines. We’re not less service, but we’re accepting our ephemeralism. A magazine design, after all, is around for a month, then it’s gone.’

Amazingly, perhaps, it worked. The magazine has met with — or rather generated—resounding success. With a circulation now of some 95,000 spread over 20-odd countries it is widely read, and widely imitated in art and advertising circles alike. Of this is one of the dangers and, for a magazine which wants to encourage people to think for themselves, one of the ironies. No magazine, no voice, however rebellious, can stay on the fringes forever and be heard. Fringe events are too easily dismissed, dealt with. To kick effectively you must kick from the inside; in order to improvise you must first know the rules you intend to break. But it has become almost traditional for capitalism to simply swallow its enemies. One by one the subversive voices from the street—the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Mary Quant, Private Eye—are absorbed and rendered harmless: the rebellions of the ’60s forming the compliant consumption mechanism of the ’70s, as indeed the subversion of the ’70s (fanzines, for example) was bought out by the System to become the music mafia of the ’80s.

And now, says Brody, the media machine, ever avid for new blood, has evolved even more mechanisms for anticipating the rebellions before they happen—in other, so to speak—to as to be ready and waiting with cameras at the birth. Theoretically, of course, such efforts should be self-defeating, pre-empting the very uprisings on which they feed. But then theoretically, as Brody points out, ‘there should be more voices out there by now, rebelling against us, challenging us. Where are they? Perhaps they are there, fighting to be heard. But the real challenge, the likes of Brody and The Face, is how they meet the future. As Brody admits even The Face is the angry young thing it was, and whether, confronted by the dual temptations of commercialism and complacency, even they can continue kicking, questioning, saying what they think must remain to be seen.

An ordinary young man sat on a bus. His Burton suit was patched with safety pins. Laboriously inserted row upon row upon row, his jacket was important and impressive. Chains of safety pins, he wore, each pin having a separate hole bored for it, seem to be growing in chunks. He had Vaseline down his nose.

This was in 1976, late in the unusually hot summer, but his appearance would be no less exceptional today. With the flag and the insulin injection, a little glass that had got up off the table to walk from the museum.

He was the first expression of anything punk that I had seen outside, that is, of school playgrounds, faggrounds and amusement parks, and dancehall queues. These were places conceived to fun and pleasure, pressed up, repudiated, and, being of much social and political elements. They had a strong mood of smug emergence and a garish atmosphere in which fantastic roles were played by boys with earnings and girls with no names.

Within about nine months, Her Majesty’s 1976 Jubilee celebrations would provide an ideal backdrop for a sinister set of archetypal carnival. The ringleaders were art school dropouts. They had been around, at least, they chance to put down their blankets and tie the tights. They had the Queen’s head, wased from a pound note, on the fronts of books. Through her nose they inserted a gru-gru. From fagshots throughout the country. Because roids wouldn’t play it in the proclaimed her a moron.

What had they done to deserve this? It would be a few years yet before the facade of Great Britain really began to crumble. The number of long-time emigrants unregistered under 25’s reached 3.5 million and riots broke out. Yet some people foresaw this and embraced it. I want a new nation in unison with The Queen. Their legs were bound at the knees by hounds and their teeth were set, raked from the archetypal American ‘punk’ look, trendy adored by James Reid’s blackmail-lettering designs. No Future was their slogan.

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