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Jeremy TRANMER

Rock Against Racism, Punk and Post-Punk

Rock Against Racism (RAR) was created at the end of 1976, and it soon became closely linked to the nascent punk movement. In the eyes of many activists, journalists and historians, the close relationship between the two was symbolised by the "Carnival Against the Nazis" held in London in April 1978, at which Jimmy Pursey of Sham 69 performed the song "White Riot" with the Clash. However, their vision of a homogeneous, highly politicised punk movement is problematic. It glosses over the complex nature of the relationship between punk and RAR and ignores changes within punk, particularly the appearance of post-punk, and their possible implications for RAR. In fact, punk bands supported RAR for a variety of reasons, while the emergence of post-punk had a number of practical consequences for RAR.

Le mouvement « Rock Against Racism » (RAR) fut créé à la fin de l'année 1976, et rapidement il s'associa au mouvement punk naissant. Aux yeux de beaucoup de militants, journalistes et historiens, la relation étroite entre les deux fut symbolisée par le « Carnival Against the Nazis », organisé à Londres en avril 1978, lors duquel Jimmy Pursey du groupe Sham 69 interpréta « White Riot » avec les Clash. Cependant, leur vision d'un mouvement punk homogène et fortement politisé pose problème. En effet, elle dissimule la nature complexe de la relation entre le punk et RAR. De plus, elle ne rend pas compte des changements intervenus au sein du punk, en particulier de l'apparition du post-punk et de ses éventuelles implications pour RAR. En réalité, des groupes punk soutenaient RAR pour de nombreuses raisons, tandis que l'émergence du post-punk ne fut pas sans conséquences pour RAR.

The paths of contemporary popular music and organised politics had first crossed in Great Britain at the end of the 1960s. The revolutionary left had tried to harness the rebellious energy of the Rolling Stones and had engaged in public debate with John Lennon of the Beatles. The latter was even seen at a demonstration brandishing a copy of the International Marxist Group's newspaper *Red Mole*. The most ground-breaking example of collaboration between activists and musicians in the 1970s was without a doubt Rock Against Racism (RAR), which was created in direct response to racism in the music industry and in society as a whole. During 1977, it was increasingly associated with the burgeoning

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punk scene as local concerts featuring punk and reggae bands took place throughout the country. This close association appeared to be cemented in April 1978 when RAR jointly organised a national concert in London, with the newly-formed Anti-Nazi League. The Carnival Against the Nazis featured punk groups such as the Clash and X-Ray Spex. For many, the highlight of the day was the sight of the Clash singing "White Riot" along with Jimmy Pursey of the punk band Sham 69. It will be argued that this has frequently been presented by activists, journalists and academics as the symbol of a close, harmonious relationship between music and politics in the late 1970s—a homogeneous punk movement was prepared to make a stand against racism out of political conviction and to collaborate actively with anti-racist activists. However, this vision partially obscures and simplifies the complex nature of punk and of its relationship with RAR. Moreover, it pays little attention to changes within punk, particularly the emergence of post-punk at the end of the 1970s, and their possible impact on RAR. This article will suggest that there was nothing inevitable about the link between punk and the anti-racist movement and that the bands who supported RAR did so for a variety of reasons. It will also examine the appearance of post-punk and the elements of continuity and change in its interactions with RAR in comparison with punk. It will make use of primary sources produced by RAR and its supporters between 1976 and 1981, such as *Temporary Hoarding*, *Socialist Worker*, and the *New Musical Express*, as well as accounts of RAR written by former members and historians.

Since several accounts of the birth and early evolution of RAR exist (Widgery; Goodyer; Huddle and Saunders; Renton), only a relatively brief presentation will be provided here. The immediate trigger for the creation of RAR was the support expressed for the Conservative politician Enoch Powell by Eric Clapton during a concert in Birmingham in August 1976 and his use of racist language. This came shortly after David Bowie had stated that the United Kingdom needed a fascist dictator and coincided with the use of the swastika by some punks to shock their elders. Although these events concerned the field of popular music, they took place against a backdrop of economic and social problems, as well as growing support for the National Front (NF) and an increasing number of racist attacks (Goodyer 10-11). Some on the left believed that the extreme right could attract disorientated young people and become a significant political force for the first time since the 1930s. Following Clapton's outburst, a letter of protest was sent to the weekly *New Musical Express* by a group of left-wing activists including Red Saunders and Roger Huddle who also had an interest in popular music and culture (Renton 32). Most were members or sympathisers of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). The authors of the letter advocated the creation of a new movement to fight against racism in the music industry and among young people. The overwhelming response to the letter encouraged them to put on a concert under the banner of RAR in a pub in East London (an area where the NF had a

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strong presence). The main attraction was the blues singer Carol Grimes. In January 1977, the founding conference of RAR took place. It saw itself as a decentralised, grassroots movement and encouraged its supporters to organise local concerts. RAR soon came to identify with trends within punk and to emphasise the importance of staging punk bands.

British punk had emerged in 1976 with the Sex Pistols (Savage). They began performing live, released the single "Anarchy in the UK" and developed a cult following. They became a household name in December 1976 when they swore profusely during their first appearance on TV, leading to outraged headlines in the tabloid press the following day. Although they found it increasingly difficult to find venues that would welcome them, they were in the headlines again in 1977. The single "God Save the Queen" was recorded to coincide with Queen Elisabeth's Silver Jubilee. Despite being banned from radio and television, the song was the second best-selling single the week of the official celebrations. Fans began to adopt the short, spiky hair and ripped clothes favoured by the members of the Sex Pistols, and some were inspired to create their own bands. The main alternative pole of attraction to the Sex Pistols within punk was provided by the Clash, who rejected their nihilism and adopted an openly left-wing stance. Furthermore, they embraced the emerging "Do It Yourself" (DIY) culture, which encouraged young people to become active and to take control of their lives.

Members of RAR took a close interest in the Clash (Tranmer 2014). The first edition of the movement's regular publication *Temporary Hoarding* contained a poster of the band and the lyrics to their first single "White Riot."[1] RAR concert organisers soon decided to include punk and reggae bands on the same bill and encouraged them to jam together as a finale. The presence of white and black groups sharing the bill and the stage symbolised racial unity. This idea was applied locally and nationally. In 1978, two national Carnivals Against the Nazis were held in London. The first featured the Tom Robinson Band, X-Ray Spex, Steel Pulse and Patrick Fitzgerald and attracted 80,000 people, while the second involved Aswad, Sham 69, Misty in Roots as well as Elvis Costello and the Attractions and was attended by 100,000 people. The success of the carnivals, which received major coverage in the influential weekly music press, led to a surge in activity. RAR groups appeared throughout the country and put on concerts with local bands. Regional carnivals were also held. The following year, RAR organised a Militant Entertainment tour of constituencies where it appeared that the NF could achieve a high score in the general election (Lynskey 391). The tour included 22 dates and 33 bands, including Stiff Little Fingers, Exodus, Mekons, the Leyton Buzzards, the Cimarons, and the Angelic Upstarts.

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1. *Temporary Hoarding* is a prime example of the impact of punk on RAR, resembling a fanzine rather than an orthodox political publication and using the graphics which were favoured by punk bands and their fans.

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The fall in support for the NF and the election of Margaret Thatcher led to the questioning of the future direction of RAR. Internal divisions appeared over the movement's priorities, contributing to the lack of a clear direction (Rachel 212-27). Some activists hoped to create a record label, while others preferred to concentrate on grassroots activities. A *RAR Greatest Hits* album was released but could not hide the sense of paralysis taking over the movement.[2] This coincided with changes in the national music scene. Punk appeared to have run out of steam and splintered into several tendencies including post-punk, and a new generation of multi-racial, ska-influenced bands appeared. One of these, the Specials, headlined RAR's last major event before disbanding—the 1981 carnival in Leeds.

During the five years of its existence, RAR was thus involved in a variety of activities. However, many of the accounts of its history concentrate heavily on the first Carnival Against the Nazis and suggest that the relationship between RAR and punk was relatively straightforward. This can be seen in their treatment of the Clash and the band's singer Joe Strummer. For the historian Dominic Sandbrook, "[t]he most celebrated event […] came in April 1978, when RAR organised a demonstration against racism in Trafalgar Square, a march to Victoria Park and then a concert" (Sandbrook 588). According to Simon Frith and John Street, "RAR's most memorable events were the big London marches and concerts" (Frith and Street 69). In his book of interviews with participants in RAR and in other attempts to bring music and politics together in the 1970s and 1980s, Daniel Rachel devotes a long section to the Carnival (Rachel 129-49). In the only book-length history of British anti-racism and anti-fascism in the 1970s, Dave Renton includes a chapter on RAR which is centred mainly on the Carnival (Renton 115-35). David Widgery, a leading figure in RAR, dwelled on it in his book about RAR (Widgery 82-90). It also received a considerable amount of attention in the press when a carnival was held to celebrate its thirtieth anniversary in 2008 (Manzoor; Naylor, Mulgan, Brown and Cripps).

Many accounts also single out the role of Strummer and the Clash, who appear to embody the involvement of punk bands in RAR and their positive contribution to it. For RAR activists, the Clash played a crucial role. Syd Shelton has mentioned the excitement and enthusiasm generated by the Clash during their performance (Fox), while Red Saunders has written that "[t]he sheer energy level of the Clash was awesome" (Saunders). Revealingly, when writing about the lineup at the Carnival, Roger Huddle mentioned the Clash before the other bands, even though they were not the headlining act (Huddle 2004). For Renton, the presence

2. The album contained tracks by Stiff Little Fingers, the Piranhas, Barry Ford Band, the Mekons, X-Ray Spex, Matumbi, the Cimarons, Elvis Costello and the Attractions, the Members, Steel Pulse, Carol Grimes Band, Gang of Four, Aswad, and the Tom Robinson Band.

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of the Clash at the carnival gave RAR "real credibility" in the eyes of many young people (Renton 35). Other accounts of the Carnival simply stress the fact that punk bands played an important role in it (Lynskey 387); this is confirmed by most authors of work on RAR, such as Ian Goodyer or Matthew Worley, according to whom "punk and RAR developed something of a symbiotic relationship" (Worley 2017).

Clearly, the first Carnival Against the Nazis was a highly significant event. It was part of the largest protest against the extreme right held in London since the 1930s and was the first time that popular music had been used in the United Kingdom on such a large scale to convey a political message. It radically changed the fortunes of RAR, giving the movement a large amount of publicity and attracting new activists, and had a transformative effect on some of those who were present, including the film-maker Gurinder Chada (Huddle and Saunders 43-45) and the singer song-writer Billy Bragg (Bragg 192-9). Nevertheless, the accounts mentioned above are problematic for three reasons. Firstly, by concentrating on the first Carnival Against the Nazis, they adopt a top-down approach to the movement's history centered on the punk "stars" who lent their support to it. This is to the detriment of the activities of grassroots RAR organisations and the local bands that played for them. This is unfortunate as the grassroots locals were an interesting example of the impact of the DIY ethos of punk on a significant number of young people and contributed to the spreading of punk beyond London and into provincial Britain (Savage 484). The Carnival was not representative of RAR's activities since the vast majority of concerts were local affairs, and draws attention away from other innovative aspects of RAR such as the Militant Entertainment tour, the first time musicians had intervened collectively to try to influence the outcome of a general election. A rather skewed vision of RAR's activities and significance is thus often put forward. Secondly, the emphasis on punk tends to marginalise the significance of reggae and reggae bands, even though RAR concerts were their first introduction to black music for some punk fans. Although references are made to the Clash's interest in reggae, there have been no in-depth studies of the role of reggae bands in the history and development of RAR. Finally, they downplay or ignore the problems that existed between punk and RAR and that had to be overcome. This is partly because many works on RAR choose to concentrate on what its interest in punk reveals about the movement's vision of appropriate music for a left-wing anti-racist organisation (Frith and Street 67-80).

The relations between RAR and punk shall now be examined in more detail. Although the participation of the Clash in the first Carnival Against the Nazis appeared to be the symbol of a close relationship, it was in fact fraught with difficulties (Tranmer 2014). Bernie Rhodes, the manager of the Clash, was sceptical about the event and was opposed to his band's taking part in it. Consequently, negotiations with the Carnival's organisers dragged on, and it was only revealed that the Clash would be

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performing a week before the event, meaning that their name was not present in the material produced to publicise it. The entourage of the Clash was also involved in the making of the film *Rude Boy* (which was directed by Michael White and released in 1980) and had decided that images of the group's performance would be included. Amid confusing scenes, cameramen were present on the stage, as was the main protagonist of the film. The latter even grabbed the microphone and encouraged the crowd to demand that the Clash be allowed to play for longer. Before the Carnival, the Clash had argued with the organisers of the event, believing that they should be headlining the Carnival despite the fact that the Tom Robinson Band had been more commercially successful and had already participated in several RAR concerts. After their performance, the Clash bickered both with members of the Tom Robinson Band, accusing them of lowering the sound when they played so that they could not be heard properly by all their fans, and with the organisers, believing that they should have been given more time to perform. There is thus evidence that there was a significant amount of tension between the Clash and RAR.[3]

This is indicative of broader problems that existed between punk and RAR. Although punk presented itself as being fundamentally different from all musical genres which had preceded it, it was not immune to habitual problems which exist between bands. The rivalry between the Clash and the Tom Robinson Band mentioned above clearly attests to conflicts between bands due to ambitions, conflicting egos and the competitive nature of the music industry. Members of punk bands, as well as their fans, were often only teenagers (Stewart 24), creating a difference in age and experience with many political activists. As a result of their young age, most punks had little experience of life and relatively limited formal or informal education. Roger Huddle and Red Saunders were both parents of young children at the time of the first Carnival Against the Nazis. Age was not the only difference punks and activists. Even activists who had left school early, attended classes about history, current affairs, and theoretical issues provided by their respective organisations and were encouraged to read. British left-wing movements have a long history of stressing the importance of educating members in order to allow them to fulfil their potential as citizens and become efficient activists. This contrasted with a certain anti-intellectualism that was present in punk and was expressed, for example, by the Sex Pistols in the song "Pretty Vacant."

For many involved in RAR, punk was seen as being of interest because of its rebellious and its anti-establishment tendencies, the prevalence of political and social commentary in the lyrics of songs and the fact that it was a dynamic movement that had attracted a significant number of

3. It should be noted, however, that this did not stop the Clash from performing at a benefit concert organised by RAR the following year.

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young working-class fans (Street 1986, 56-62). However, as Worley has written, punk was inherently neither on the left or the right and resisted attempts to lay claim to it by both (Worley 2012, 333-54). The left-wing force which had attempted to align itself most closely with punk was the Socialist Workers Party. From 1976 onwards, its weekly newspaper frequently published positive articles and letters about punk (Huddle December 1976; Bushell; Fountain), with some contributors seeing punk as a challenge to capitalism (McGuinness and McGuinness). The paper even published an extract from an interview with Johnny Rotten which had originally been published in *Temporary Hoarding* (Rotten and Widgery). The SWP made overtures to the Clash, but Joe Strummer responded in no uncertain terms: "The Socialist Workers Party, you know, they keep coming up to us and saying 'Come on, join us'—but they can fuck off, the wankers, that's just dogma. I don't want no dogma" (Farrar). A small minority of punk bands were receptive to the extreme right and openly identified with it. These included the Dentists and the Ventz (both of whom were based in Leeds, where the NF was relatively strong and tried to appeal to young people using music and producing a fanzine entitled *Punk Front*). The NF tried to create its own alternative to RAR, which it named Rock Against Communism. Yet it met with little success.[4]

Some bands were hostile to racism but not in agreement with aspects of RAR's politics and strategies. For example, RAR was opposed to allowing far-right activists and sympathisers to attend concerts as they could attempt to disrupt them by chanting provocative slogans and giving Nazi salutes. When this occurred, RAR organisers were not averse to calling on battle-hardened militant anti-fascists to try to expel them physically from the venue, resulting in violent altercations. The anarchist group Crass played one concert for RAR, but since they were pacifists they were opposed to the use of violence by militant anti-fascists (and criticised RAR as a middle-class movement that had little impact on working-class politics [Kennedy]).[5] Vi Subversa of Poison Girls was also critical of RAR's attempts to prevent far-right activists and sympathisers from attending concerts, believing that it prevented bands from engaging with ideological opponents and trying to win them over: "That set up a very bad vibe between us and Rock Against Racism because we

4. The extent of punk's interest in politics in general can be questioned. Basing his conclusions on content analysis of the first five punk albums (*Damned, Damned Damned* by the Damned, *IV Ratus Norvegicus* by the Stranglers, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols* by the Sex Pistols, *Pure Mania* by the Vibrators and the above-mentioned album by the Clash) Dave Laing has observed that one of the specificities of punk in comparison to mainstream genres at the time was the prevalence of political commentary (Laing 69-102). Nevertheless, his statistics are potentially misleading since the Clash's first album contains much more social and political commentary than the other four. It is thus possible that political comment was limited to a relatively small number of groups.
5. In the 1980s, Crass were to play an important role in protests against nuclear weapons, opposition to the Falklands War and support for striking miners (Cross).

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had an open-door policy. We thought it was healthier to talk through these things rather than getting into polarizing with banning people" (Rachel 101). Others such as Sham 69 were ambiguous concerning the extreme right. Members of the band's entourage were sympathetic to the NF, as was a significant section of their fan base. Pursey was reluctant to criticise far-right elements among his fans out of loyalty and in the hope that they could be persuaded to change their views. Commercial considerations may have also played a role since fans expressed their support by buying records and tickets for concerts. Some bands such as the Stranglers simply refused to play for a political organisation of any sort (Marko), while Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols condemned racism but was critical of left-wingers who tried to use punk as a political tool (Worley 2014, 43). Punk was thus far from homogenous regarding anti-racism and encompassed a broad range of political opinions and attitudes to organised politics. A significant number of punk bands did not play at RAR concerts. And the members of those that did were not political activists. They did not have a coherent world view, were not necessarily disciplined and altruistic and were not prepared to put the interests of RAR before those of their band.

The above difficulties were partially overcome in a number of ways. Bands such as the Enchanters believed in anti-racism and were more than happy to work with RAR (Huddle and Saunders 168). The Ruts did not see RAR as a political organisation but a continuation of their everyday lives since they had black friends (Huddle and Saunders 168). Other bands were prepared to sink their differences with RAR because they were worried about the consequences of the economic and political conditions in the United Kingdom. The Conservative Party, which had been in power from 1970 to 1974, and the governing Labour Party appeared not to be able to solve the country's economic problems such as high levels of inflation and unemployment. The NF benefited from this situation, achieving high scores in local elections and by-elections throughout the 1970s (although the British election system prevented its candidates from being elected). During NF demonstrations, violent clashes frequently occurred with anti-fascist protestors. The general theme of crisis, which was present in society as a whole, permeated punk (Laing 69-102). A sense of foreboding was present in songs by the Clash such as "London's Burning" and "English Civil War" and "Babylon Burning" by the Ruts. It was even more explicit in songs by the Tom Robinson Band. As a gay activist, Robinson was acutely aware of the danger that the NF and other reactionary forces posed not just to ethnic minorities but also to other sections of the population. In "Winter of '79," he portrayed a United Kingdom riven by social and political violence, while "Better Decide Which Side You're On" encouraged young people to make a fundamental decision and side with the left. In this difficult context, many bands chose their side and expressed solidarity with anti-racism by playing at RAR concerts. The fact that both punks and militant

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anti-racists were vilified by the tabloid press may also have contributed to bringing them together. Punk had been the subject of a number of moral panics in the press; for example, following the Sex Pistols' use of strong language on live television in 1976 and the release of "God Save the Queen" the following year, both Labour and Conservative local councils had banned punk concerts (Cloonan 174-80). Anti-fascists had been heavily criticised after they fought with the police to prevent an NF demonstration in Lewisham in 1977 (Renton 69; Copsey 129). Punks and anti-fascists were thus two minority groups which were under a great deal of pressure from the media and the general public in the mid to late 1970s.

RAR was also able to offer something in exchange for a band's participation in concerts. Although it did not pay bands to perform, it did pay their expenses for local, regional and national concerts (Huddle and Saunders 63). Bands may not have earned money, but their commitment to RAR did not entail them losing money. RAR concerts were also an opportunity for new bands to gain valuable experience of playing in front of an audience and to increase their number of fans. Moreover, bands were able to gain free publicity. Posters for concerts were usually put up in towns and cities beforehand, and concerts were sometimes advertised in the weekly music press. The latter also published reviews of concerts, as did local newspapers. Playing at a RAR concert thus had potential advantages for a band's career, which may have been a determining factor for some bands and were important factors even for those who most actively supported RAR (Rachel 60). Bands thus performed for RAR for a number of reasons ranging from conviction to opportunism. For the first two years of its existence, at least, RAR encouraged bands to play, but did not make other demands of them. The vast majority of bands did not make political statements between songs, for example, and were not asked to do so (Rachel 189). It was assumed by the organisers that the presence of banners with anti-racist slogans and RAR literature was sufficient for the audience to be made aware of the movement's ideas and values.

Finally, relations between punk and RAR were also aided by the singularities of leading figures in the movement such as Roger Huddle, Red Saunders and Dave Widgery. Huddle was a former Mod whose belief in the emancipatory potential of rock preceded the creation of RAR (Huddle April 1976). Dave Widgery was a doctor who had been involved in the counterculture of the late 1960s, writing for the underground newspaper *OZ*, and who had a long-standing love for music. Red Saunders was also interested in popular culture and was an active member of a theatre company. Although Huddle and Widgery were members of the Socialist Workers Party, their backgrounds and interests set them apart. Widgery admitted that he was "never a terribly orthodox" party member. It is revealing that it was Red Saunders's personal intervention that persuaded the members of the Clash to participate in the first Carnival Against the

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Nazis (Saunders 2003). Other leading members of RAR including Kate Webb (often known as "Irate Kate") were also in favour of rejecting the "authoritarian politics and dogmatic leftism" of much of the traditional left (Rachel 32). A pragmatic, open approach was also adopted by RAR locals in places such as Hull, where, although SWP members had initiated the local group, they had not sought to dominate it and had worked productively with community activists and others.[6]

The relationship between punk and RAR was thus not particularly smooth. Potential obstacles had to be overcome and mutually beneficial compromises found. Ignoring such realities underestimates the serious work involved in creating and maintaining RAR as a successful movement. By 1978, punk had begun to evolve and fragment. This was recognised by the music press which contained references to the appearance of "New Musick," which was influenced by punk but moving away from the simple sound of the Sex Pistols, the early Clash, and the Damned. Retrospectively, this trend was named "post-punk." However, the very existence of post-punk has remained controversial. In the first major work on it, Simon Reynolds notes that from 1977 "punk's fragile unity between working class kids and arty, middle class bohemians began to fracture" (Reynolds xvii). The former developed Oi!, or street punk, while the latter was "the vanguard that came to be known as 'post-punk', who saw 1977 not as a return to raw rock'n'roll but the chance to make a break with tradition, and defined punk as an imperative to constant change." As examples, he mentions Public Image Limited, Johnny Rotten's band after the demise of the Sex Pistols, Joy Division and Scritti Politti, "who dedicated themselves to fulfilling punk's uncompleted musical revolution, and explored new sonic possibilities." Reynolds's vision of class differences within punk is rather simplistic and open to criticism, being based mainly on debates in the music press in the late 1970s. However, he is correct to emphasise the importance of musical innovation and experimentation for post-punk bands. Interestingly, Reynolds states that post-punk broke with punk's approach to politics, which was based on "raw rage," "agit prop protest" and "tell-it-like-it-is denunciation" (Reynolds xxii). He adds that,

> [w]hen it came to politics in the conventionally understood sense—the world of demonstrations, grass-roots activism, organized struggle—post-punk was more ambivalent. Art students and autodidacts alike tended to prize individuality. As bohemian nonconformists, they were usually made uncomfortable by calls to solidarity or toeing the party line. They saw the plain-speaking demagoguery of overtly politized groups like the Tom Robinson Band and Crass as far too literal and non-aesthetic, and regarded their soapbox sermonizing as either condescending or a pointless exercise in preaching to the converted. (Reynolds xiii)

6. Phone interview with Hull RAR member Richard Lees, 26 January 2017.

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Consequently, although post-punk bands participated in anti-racist concerts,

> they were wary of both RAR and its sister organization, the Anti Nazi League, suspecting them of being thinly disguised fronts for the militant, left-wing Socialist Workers Party (who valued music purely as a tool for radicalizing and mobilizing youth). (Reynolds xiii)

Post-punk was thus different from punk in the way it expressed political ideas and engaged with political organisations. However, the only examples Reynolds gives regarding disenchantment with RAR are the Fall (Reynolds 178-179) and Alan Horne, the founder of the Scottish independent label Postcard Records (Reynolds 346).

In his work on post-punk, David Wilkinson has observed "[a] focus on formal innovation and economic independence as key defining elements of post-punk" (Wilkinson 52). It channeled the DIY spirit of punk into creating numerous independent labels in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although he notices that post-punk continued to develop themes first articulated by punk, Wilkinson links the politics of post-punk to the libertarian left that had temporarily flourished outside the Labour Party in the 1970s: "In line with a libertarian left focus on qualitatively different definitions of freedom and pleasure, anti-consumerist critique was a particularly common topic" broached by bands (Wilkinson 62). Despite mentioning that Mark Perry of the group Alternative TV was suspicious of RAR because of its links with the SWP, Wilkinson chooses "to discuss RAR only incidentally, given the substantial amount of existing material on it" (Wilkinson 62). There are consequently very few references to it.

Other specialists have downplayed the specificities of post-punk, emphasising the elements of continuity among punk-influenced genres and sub-genres. Worley examines the emergence of a trend within the "'art' side of punk," which stressed the significance of musical experimentation and the creation of independent labels as "a means of resisting cultural and economic hegemony" (Worley 2017, 8-9). It was informed by Marxism and feminism and sought to expose the mechanisms on which power relations were based. However, Worley stresses the continuity between punk and its various off-shoots in four different areas: "a stated opposition to a perceived status quo (cultural, social or political)," "a disregard for symbols of authority and established hierarchies," "claims to provide a voice for the marginalised or disaffected," and "an emphasis on self-sufficiency and overcoming obstacles that prevent access, expression or autonomy" (Worley 10-11). By adopting a broad vision of punk and subsuming post-punk within it, Worley is unable to look at possible differing and changing attitudes to politics and political commitment among musicians. He gives examples of musicians identifying with punk in one way or another who became involved in RAR and simply mentions that there was occasionally tension in the relationship between them. Alex Ogg has also questioned the pertinence of the term

"post-punk" since it was very rarely used in the late 1970s. He points out that "[c]ontemporaneously—and even though each had a complicated narrative engagement with the term—Wire, The Slits, The Fall, ATV, etc were consumed as punk" (Ogg). In other words, bands which are now considered to be an integral part of post-punk were generally seen as punk at the time because of the musical and/or philosophical link existing between them and the founding fathers of British punk, the Sex Pistols and the Clash.

This is an interesting point that has a certain relevance for the study of RAR. It is noticeable that RAR's magazine *Temporary Hoarding* did not use the term "post-punk" and did not differentiate between the various trends within punk. Furthermore, no such distinction was made by David Widgery in his book about RAR or by the numerous members or sympathisers of RAR interviewed in Daniel Rachel's and Roger Huddle and Red Saunders's recent books. This would appear to confirm that RAR saw post-punk as simply the continuation of punk. Nevertheless, whether one sees post-punk as a genre in its own right or a mere sub-genre of punk, it did have a number of distinct characteristics, some of which pertain to politics, and bands were clearly trying to distance themselves from punk as it had existed in 1976 and 1977. It is therefore important to examine the words and actions of post-punk bands involved in RAR in order to see to what extent they were different from other bands that were influenced by punk.

Reynolds's assertion that post-punk bands maintained a certain distance from organised politics can be questioned. Members of Scritti Politti belonged to the Communist Party of Great Britain (although they were linked to the less orthodox wing of the party). The Au Pairs, the Slits, the Pop Group, the Raincoats, and Essential Logic all performed at the 1980 Beat the Blues Festival, which marked the fiftieth anniversary of the communist daily newspaper, the *Morning Star*. Many post-punk bands played at various RAR concerts throughout the country. The case of Leeds is particularly interesting and instructive. Over a period of eighteen months between 1978 and 1979, the local RAR club put on a concert every Friday evening (Manzoor). Concerts featured, among others, Leeds-based post-punk bands who were known to be on the left, such as Gang of Four, Delta 5, and the Mekons. Members of Delta 5 were even beaten up by sympathisers of the extreme right-wing British Movement because of their beliefs (Marcus 156). Like other post-punk bands including the Au Pairs and the Raincoats, they also played at benefit concerts for Rock Against Sexism, which was created at the very end of the decade. Andy Gill of Gang of Four, who played regularly for the Leeds RAR club and became friends with its organisers (Interwoven Histories 1:28), has admitted that his band was "most defined by the issues involved in Rock Against Racism." However, he added that,

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> we were never promoting a party political point of view. It was about trying to describe the reality around us in a truthful way. It was never straightforward sloganeering like the Clash, who almost had a stance by association. Gang of Four was more cerebral about it. (Rachel 207)

According to Jon Langford of the Mekons, the existence of the RAR club in Leeds allowed members of local post-punk bands to meet and perform with each other (Huddle and Saunders 140). By providing a space for post-punk to flourish, RAR played a role in its development in Leeds and to a certain extent nationally since the groups were relatively well known, featuring regularly in the music press and having a national following.

Post-punk bands were just as likely to play at RAR gigs as punk groups, and according to Andy Gill of Gang of Four, they refused to make political statements while they were on stage (Rachel 183). They also played with reggae bands when this was possible.[7] However, their political activities were not limited to anti-racism and encompassed anti-sexism, and they attempted to express their ideas in a less simplistic way than groups such as the Clash. Nevertheless, some songs were equally direct. In the song "It's Obvious," the Au Pairs advocate equal rights and opportunities for men and women. The chorus is a simple, direct sentence—"You're equal but different"—which is repeated several times. Post-punk bands kept a certain distance from RAR as an organisation (despite sometimes being on friendly terms with RAR activists, as the leading figure in the Leeds RAR club has stated), but so did punk bands. Few punk bands were involved in RAR in an organisational sense and their political commitment was limited to performing at concerts (and being interviewed by *Temporary Hoarding* for the better-known). According to Lucy Whitman (who under the name Lucy Toothpaste was a member of the editorial committee of *Temporary Hoarding*), "[p]unks didn't want to be associated with an organized movement, whether it was political or feminism, because they found that to be too constraining" (Rachel 85). To a certain extent, the reluctance of musicians to become more active was hardly surprising as their schedules were not conducive to sustained political activism. Professional musicians are engaged in touring, recording, and promotional activities, all of which are time-consuming and entail being away from home on a regular basis. One of the few musicians linked to punk to have been more heavily involved in RAR was Tom Robinson, who had previous experience of activism since he had taken part in gay rights activities. Robinson also insisted on the cover of his band's 1978 album *Power in the Darkness* containing information about RAR, broadening the repertoire of contention available to musicians. Nevertheless,

7. This was not always possible for demographic reasons. In Hull, for example, the ethnic minority population was very small, meaning that there was a dearth of reggae bands, although black people (including Roland Gift who later became a household name with the Fine Young Cannibals) played in non-reggae bands. Phone interview with Hull RAR member Richard Lees, 26 January 2017.

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ordinary fans of punk and post-punk bands were active in local RAR groups in large numbers.[8]

It would therefore appear that despite the specificities of post-punk, its attitude to RAR was little different to that of punk. However, it is possible that RAR's attitude to bands may have changed over time. For Worley, "[t]here grew a sense by which RAR pressured bands into taking definite political positions" (Worley 2017, 149). It was no longer enough for bands to simply perform at RAR concerts as they were summoned by writers in *Temporary Hoarding* to make explicitly anti-racist declarations. Savage has referred to a similar trend. He suggests that after the first Carnival Against the Nazis RAR became more dogmatic, issuing "absolute fiats" and demanding unconditional support for its political positions (Savage 484). It is difficult to determine the extent to which RAR's attitudes to bands in general changed. However, it did attempt to exert pressure on bands which had a considerable number of far right sympathisers among their fans. As mentioned above, the most notable example were Sham 69 led by Jimmy Pursey. Roger Huddle has spoken of the "battle for Jimmy Pursey" between RAR and the extreme right (Beckett 450). Leading figures in RAR and members of the reggae band Misty in Roots went as far as to visit Pursey's mother in an attempt "to woo [him] to RAR" (Rachel 53). Pursey and his band also came under criticism for their ambiguities from RAR members and sympathisers in *Temporary Hoarding*, *New Musical Express* and *Socialist Worker* (Worley 2017, 306). This mixture of persuasion and criticism led Pursey to modify his stance. As a result, Sham 69 played at a RAR concert with Misty in Roots in February 1978, although there was widespread fighting at it. Pursey sang with the Clash at the first Carnival Against the Nazis and spoke at the second, declaring his support for RAR. Nevertheless, far right fans continued to disrupt concerts, and the band was forced to stop performing live, their last concert lasting only twenty minutes before it was called off as right-wing skinheads invaded the stage.

Pursey and Sham 69 had a symbolic importance for RAR and therefore came under much more public and private pressure than other bands, although the Specials and Madness were also criticised for not taking measures against extreme right elements among their fans (Worley 306). Furthermore, disputes with and over Sham 69 took place at a time when RAR believed that the country was increasingly polarised and that its mounting economic, social and political problems could allow the NF to make a breakthrough at the coming general election. It would thus appear that RAR's attitude to bands in general, whether they be punk or post-punk, did not radically change. However, it did try to have an influence on a small number of prominent bands with an openly racist

8. Phone interview with Hull RAR member Richard Lees, 26 January 2017.

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following. This may have reinforced the reticence that some punk and post-punk bands may have felt towards RAR.

It is, however, noticeable that there was a shift within RAR concerning sexism. RAR's opposition to sexism within music and society as a whole had been implicit but became increasingly explicit. One significant example of this is the interview with Adam Ant in the Summer 1978 edition of *Temporary Hoarding*. Lucy Toothpaste does not simply question him about references to Nazi Germany in his songs but also asks him about his stereotypical presentation of women (Toothpaste). In an interview with the Au Pairs published in 1980 Lucy Toothpaste and Irate Kate dwell on the band's approach to gender and sexuality (Toothpaste and Kate). RAR also began to check bands' attitudes regarding sexism before hiring them for gigs (Rachel, 84). The growing importance of feminism within RAR led some members to create Rock Against Sexism (RAS), which published its own bulletin *Drastic Measures* from 1979 to 1981 and organised concerts and workshops. However, it has been suggested that RAS's approach to how bands dressed and to the lyrics of their songs was seen by some as "more prescriptive than liberating" (Worley 186). Some male members of bands may have felt uneasy about or threatened by the growing interest in sexism expressed by women involved in RAR and RAS.

RAR, punk and post-punk were complex phenomena, as was the relationship between them. The connection between RAR and many punk bands had to be actively created in 1977 as there was nothing to suggest that they would necessarily gravitate towards each other. The unstable political, economic and social situation contributed to making possible an alliance which was beneficial to all concerned. The emergence of post-punk did not lead to a major change in anti-racists' interactions with groups, although RAR's increasingly interventionist stance concerning Sham 69 no doubt worried some musicians. Although RAR ceased to exist in 1981, its influence continued to be felt throughout the 1980s as musicians who had played for RAR, including Tom Robinson, Elvis Costello and members of the Specials, became involved in activities against the Thatcher governments. However, due to the changing musical and political context, movements such as Red Wedge were unable to replicate RAR's ability to bring together representatives of different musical genres and to mobilise large numbers of young people.

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