

Let's Make It Real:
Actualized Art With *Stations of the Cross*

Sadia Zaman

Carla Repice and Rachael Schwabe

The Lab for Teen Thinkers at the Bard Graduate Center

August 4, 2019

Largely considered to have lasted from 1974-1976, Punk was a gripping and relatively quick musical scene that had irreversible influence on the art, musical, and political activist world. The strong anti-authority, fiercely passionate ethos adopted by the Punk artists who carried the movement very rarely allowed for them to get away with not applying that “to the limit” spirit to every single aspect of their lifestyle. And so when musical groups made moves to develop a new record, they did not just stick to the one traditional auditory element; it was not thorough enough.¹ Fierce by nature, the artists created multidisciplinary works with multiple pieces meant to interact with each other to create a holistic experience fueled on intellect rather than just purely being an expansive musical scene. Such intentionality contradicts the archetype of The Punk Rocker, the crazed, drug-fueled street rat who spent all his time in underground music clubs, letting the world pass him by. The punk era held a deeply rooted belief that projects certainly could and should bleed out into more than one field as well as contain unorthodox elements within them regardless of what was traditional. That punk ideology that dictated what independence from the mainstream meant was almost scaled down to consider singular projects. What artifacts would be made outside of the auditory experience already anticipated from a musical group? Zines, flyers, posters folded up and added to the physical record were among methods of actualizing the experience the artist wanted to cultivate.²

The UK based Punk band *Crass* demonstrates this aggressively active role musicians had in their own ephemera, particularly in the band’s creation of the *Stations of the Crass* album. For their second album release in 1979, they decided on a folded up poster as an album insert

¹ Russ Bestley, “Design it Yourself? Punks Division of Labor,” *Cadernos de Arte e Antropologia* 5 (January 2017): 73.

² Bestley, “Division of Labor,” 72.

designed by band members Gee Vaucher and Penny Rimbaud.³ The record itself is a double 12” vinyl (Figure 1). As described on the wall text at the Museum of Art and Design, the poster consists of ink on paper, thereby making it ephemeral in nature. There were limited to no preventative measures taken to down the wear and tear already evident on the poster, which speaks to an overall lack of preciousness. Photographs of *Crass* concerts border the poster and its hyper imaginative contents. Human bodies, both clothed and nude, are somewhat messily cut and pasted to create surrealist, incomplete figures in the center stage in a photomontage style presentation. The image is jam packed with content. While listening to the album, the patron is meant to unfold and look over the poster, notice things, experience the multiple pieces working simultaneously to give off the very particular impression *Crass* designed (Figure 2).

The prevalent do-it-yourself attitude that punctuated the punk era and was used to vent frustrations about Big Production and the lack of charge artists had in traditional rock n’ roll is recognized in the unabashedly unfinished aesthetic adopted by *Crass*’ poster.⁴ Punk era music and art was not a purely passive activity. The accosting of personal and political beliefs by the artists was the name of the game, and the case was no different for *Crass*. Rather, they were among those who had spearheaded punk ideology, who were intimately involved not just auditory works but also in the visual material to develop a full, impactful experience to mirror the in-your-face attitude that makes punk recognizable.⁵

The relationship between physical artifacts and auditory experiences coming from musical groups demonstrates the iron fisted intent, the extra mile for the works that were created

³ Rebecca Binns, “Between the Human and the Animal: Gee Vaucher at Firstsite,” *The Quietus*, last modified January 2017, <https://thequietus.com/articles/21561-gee-vaucher-crass-introspective-firstsite-colchester-review>

⁴ Davy Reed, “Crass’ Penny Rimbaud is Still Resisting the Grip of Authority,” *Crack Magazine*, accessed July 23, 2019, <https://crackmagazine.net/article/long-reads/penny-rimbaud-freedom-fighting/>

⁵ Bestley, “Division of Labor,” 72.

in rebellion.⁶ On the ferocious political activism that often made itself known in the wake of many, many punk art projects, Andrew Blauvelt's curatorial assistant for the recent exhibition, *Too Fast to Live, Too Young to Die* at the Museum of Art and Design, Alida Jekabson believes that fury to have made itself known. She observed that "...for a lot of people, especially someone like David King who was working in the UK creating...the anti-Nazi League posters for Rock Against Racism, that [political activism] was absolutely a concern of theirs,"⁷ The nonnegotiable terms of agreement for punk art detailed this, the fact that to exist at all, irrelevant to its content, to be labelled as punk at all meant to smash your boot down authorities throat on day one. From there, the content of the project just built on that philosophy: "I'll do it myself, and you can't stop me!"

Unsurprisingly, *Stations of the Crass*' music is unapologetically furious and the album's lyrics are happily polluted with biting sarcasm pointed towards all the absurdities it can find. That faux honor found in the lyrics makes itself even more known in the humor of disfigured persons performing in the center. Lost political discourse, environmental vegetarianism, racial syntax, the lyrics are a bombardment of *Crass* at every angle, and not unlike the poster where their concert photos come at you from every angle.⁸ It is all just *so much*. A first look at the busy poster as it is being unfolded while someone hits play and the first song of the album, "Mother Earth" starts with a speaking voice and the total immersion into an artistic experience unfolds. It was made real.

⁶ Alan O'Connor, *Punk Record Labels and the Struggle for Autonomy: The Emergence of DIY* (Rowman and Littlefield): 19.

⁷ Alida Jekabson, Interviewed by the author, Digital Recording, New York City, NY, July 23, 2019.

⁸ "Crass," Trouser Press, Accessed August 3, 2019, <http://www.trouserpress.com/entry.php?a=crass>.

Bibliography:

Bestley, Russ. "Design it Yourself? Punks Division of Labor," *Cadernos de Arte e Antropologia* 5.

Binns, Rebecca. The Quietus. "Between the Human and the Animal: Gee Vaucher at Firstsite." Last modified January 2017. [https://thequietus.com/articles/21561-gee-vaucher / -crass-introspective-firstsite-colchester-review](https://thequietus.com/articles/21561-gee-vaucher/-crass-introspective-firstsite-colchester-review).

Jekabson, Alida. Interviewed by author. Digital recording. New York City, NY. July 23, 2019.

O'Connor, Alan. *Punk Record Labels and the Struggle for Autonomy: The Emergence of DIY*. Rowman and Littlefield.

Reed, Davy. Crack Magazine. "Crass' Penny Rimbaud is Still Resisting the Grip of Authority." Accessed July 23, 2019. [https://crackmagazine.net/article/long-reads/penny-rimbaud / -freedom-fighting/](https://crackmagazine.net/article/long-reads/penny-rimbaud/-freedom-fighting/).

Trouser Press. "Crass." Accessed August 3, 2019. [http://www.trouserpress.com/entry. / php?a=crass](http://www.trouserpress.com/entry./php?a=crass)



Figure 1

The original double 12" vinyl, Stations of the Crass by Crass. Released in 1979.

<http://gonzo-multimedia.blogspot.com/2012/05/crass-by-name.html>



Figure 2

The poster in the Stations of the Crass Album sleeve. Designed by Gee Vaucher.

<http://theartofcrass.uk/static/crass/CRC/07002.html>

