

The performance and meaning of punk in a local Swedish context

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When punk culture travelled from The US and England to Sweden in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the result was a mix of symbols, emotions and attitudes from all three national contexts. One Swedish town where punk made an impact was Norrköping, a middle-sized working class town south of Stockholm. The focus of this article is the transformation of punk as it entered a new national and local context. We are interested in what happened to punk as it travelled from centre – London, Detroit and New York – to periphery – Sweden and Norrköping and what kind of meaning-making practices that became possible in the new context. The empirical material consists of interviews with 24 informants who were part of the punk scene in Norrköping during the period. Besides the interviews we have made use of photographs, song lyrics and newspaper material. Our methodological approach is interactive memory work in which we together with the informants reflect on the performance and meaning of punk in Norrköping.

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I hadn't seen Snibbe for some time. One day I walked over to his house on Generalsgatan and rang the doorbell. As he opens the door, I notice that his hair is dyed in a very clear red color, standing straight up. I ask him if he's up for miming to some KISS songs, as we had done so many times before. But he laughs and says that he doesn't do that stuff anymore. He says he's into punk now. We enter his room, and he turns on a record on a small turntable with plastic loudspeakers placed on his desk. The aggressive sound of Sex Pistol's "God Save the Queen" hits me hard. This experience was to throw me like a projectile into the punk universe. It meant that the KISS era was definitely over. No more boots made of wood and no more fake guitars. It was for real now (Qvarse, in Lalander & Qvarsebo 2014:95).

In this article we analyse how punk was used and charged with meaning by young people in Norrköping – a midsize Swedish working-class town – in the late 1970s and early 1980s. We focus on what happened to punk as it travelled from the USA and the UK and was put to play in a local context in Sweden. We were both actively involved in Norrköping's local punk scene and have recently released a book about Norrköping's punk culture during this period.¹ The article is based on the empirical data – interviews, newspaper articles, local punk lyrics and photographs – gathered for the book project.

The complexity and fluidity of punk

Punk is a dynamic and fluid phenomenon and not easily defined (Hebdige 1979; Marcus 1993). The local punk culture in Norrköping was put together by elements from several national and local contexts. The first influences came from the punk scene in Britain. Later on the Norrköping punks were strongly influenced by the British Oi!-movement, which was a development of punk with a strong working-class element. But the earliest expressions of punk, going back to the early and mid-1970s in American cities like Detroit, New York and Los Angeles, also had an impact on punk in Norrköping (Lalander & Qvarsebo 2014). These influences have to do with much more than just musical expression, even if music has always been central for punk

¹ Lalander, Philip & Qvarsebo, Jonas (2014), *Punk i Peking: Motstånd, attityd och mening*, Malmö: Peking Studio & Förlag.

experience. The early American punk culture was to a large extent about self-expression and raw energy, and about being creative and anti-authoritarian. It had an artsy and avant-garde outlook and was not politically outspoken (Marcus 1993). Later on this would change with the punk culture that emerged in California with bands like Dead Kennedys and Black Flag. British punk took on some of the elements of early American punk but merged it with a more politically outspoken approach – punks raising their voices against new forms of raw capitalism and the industry of war. The political component of British punk became stronger in the Oi!-movement, where angry young men glorified traditional and masculine working-class symbols and sought to fight and resist the system in their own way (Worley 2014).

As punk culture travelled to Sweden, it brought with it elements from both the American and the British context where it was merged with elements from the new national and local context. The result was a new mix of symbols, emotions, attitudes and political ideas. A way to make sense of this process is to use what Hebdige (1979) has called “signifying practices”, a creative and dynamic construction of cultural meaning through the use of role models and symbols as reference points. In the works of the Birmingham School, youth and subculture has been perceived as resistance to a suffocating bourgeoisie culture, and as a symbolic reaction to the economic, political and social crises of the UK in the mid-1970s (Hall & Jefferson 1975/1991; Willis 1977; Johansson & Lalander 2012). However, as Nick Crossley (2014) has pointed out, it is not tenable to explain the rise of subcultures from working-class people suffering from various crises only (see also Hannerz 2013). And this is certainly true for punk. We have already mentioned the early American punk culture, which was not politically outspoken, at least not in the way we generally think of politics as a way of trying to influence state and government in certain ways.

The working-class explanation for the rise of punk can be questioned in the British context as well, since punk culture in Britain was partly developed by middle-class young people at art schools. The founding members of The Clash, for instance, met at art school. The British punk scene also had a musical background in the many bands that played simple and raw rock'n'roll at local pubs during the early

1970s. Several of these bands later became punk bands. In analysing the proliferation and popularization of punk, Crossley (2014) also stresses the importance of the marketing and promotion strategies by entrepreneurs like Malcolm McLaren – the legendary manager of The Sex Pistols. Sarah Thornton's work (1995) on the important role of media in the creating of subcultures can also be mentioned here.

Rather than understanding punk as an expression of class struggle, we view its emergence and transformations against the background of many different style elements that can be put together in various ways given the specific cultural conditions of possibilities (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Hence, local punk cultures have been constructed in the intersection between different media-constructed styles, role models, and social life circumstances and social structures. Punk can also be understood as a struggle for authenticity, as acts of distancing oneself from what is perceived as mainstream, both within punk culture and in society at large (Hannerz 2015). In line with this some punks have defined themselves as the real deal, while defining other punks as too commercial or as fakes. Some punks have valued DIY, the do-it-yourself-ideal, while others have favoured a more aggressive and sometimes commercial style with clothes bought from commercial punk stores. These practices of inclusion and exclusion of style elements within punk culture have varied in different contexts and have not followed any predetermined rules.

Furthermore, punk music is a very diverse phenomenon containing influences of many different sorts. Punk has sometimes sounded much like classic rock'n'roll with a more aggressive and loud expression. Elements from musical styles such as reggae, ska, rocksteady, garage rock, dub, pop and blues can all be found within punk music. Hip-hoppers have their four elements that connect the whole world of Hip-Hop and give that culture a sense of coherence. This is not the case when it comes to punk since no fixed elements are there to bind the culture together. Some symbols that are often associated with punk – such as safety pins, black leather jackets, rivets and coloured hair – may signal a coherent style. Yet, some very influential punk rockers have not looked very punky if these style elements are viewed as defining for punk culture. An influential band like the Clash, for example, basically looked like a rock'n'roll or rockabilly band, and

The Ramones, with their simple leather jackets, t-shirts and jeans did not use the typical punk symbols either. And many other examples like this can be mentioned. The non-coherence and fluidity of punk has made possible several different versions of the style. Thus, punk is put together by many different visual, musical and emotional elements without a predetermined framework or logic (Hebdige 1979).

The punk culture in Norrköping was first shaped by influences from the early punk scenes in the UK, the USA as well as other parts of Sweden. However, as early as 1981, it became heavily influenced by the Oi!-scene in England (Lalander & Qvarsebo 2014). British Oi!-culture was to a large extent a product of British working-class culture, with bands like Sham 69, Angelic Upstarts and Cockney Rejects. Oi!-lyrics were about everyday life in the working-class districts, about going to the pub, being on the dole, going to the football stadium; and it was fuelled by a sense of pride in one's local neighbourhood. According to Matthew Worley (2013:29), Oi! was a "song from the street". The early punk movement, had, to a large extent, been individualistic and was known for its shocking and provocative expression. The Oi!-style, on the other hand, was much more uniform in its visual expression and had a strong emphasis on the collective. The pub fellowship, the football firm and the uniform-like skinhead look were some of the important collective symbols that bound Oi!-culture together.

The class identity of Oi!-music was thus clearly working class, and Oi! can be viewed as a kind of symbolic restoration of a working-class identity that had become fragmented (Worley 2013). Many of the bands that appeared on the Oi! albums (six influential albums released with the Oi!-name between 1980-1994) – clearly struggled to maintain their working-class identity through their lyrics and attitude. Consequently, Oi! was very much about taking part in a class struggle in the UK, in contexts where a strong working-class tradition existed (Worley 2013). Nevertheless, Oi! Cannot define punk as a whole, which, as already stated above, is more diverse when it comes to class identity.

In the empirical part of this article, we describe and analyse some central themes of the local punk culture in Norrköping and show how different elements of punk culture were put to play in this context. We also highlight how the Oi!-symbols were imported, decoded and used on the streets of Norrköping, and how this entailed a transformation

of the original meaning of Oi!. Even though the visual symbols in many ways were identical in both contexts – bomber jackets, short hair or shaved head, Doc Marten boots, thin braces, and so on – the circumstances and possibilities of meaning were different. The different context made possible a play with these symbols in which they took on a different meaning and provided possibilities for a political alternative that was different from the original context.

An interactive memory work

As indicated in the introduction, we have made use of our own experiences and memories as a way of understanding the Swedish local punk culture in Norrköping. However, the bulk of the empirical material is based on interviews with 24 persons who participated in the Norrköping punk scene during the period. We contacted and recruited our informants through Facebook and met them for qualitative interviews and conversations. We listened to their stories and memories from the punk era and asked questions about why punk was important to them and how they viewed their own involvement in punk culture. In the conversations, we helped each other to fill various memory gaps. As a consequence, we as authors and the interviewees became involved in what can be viewed as a collective and interactive memory work. We experienced what Lindesmith, Strauss and Denzin have described in the following way:

When we are within a given group (for example, our families) over a period of time, the members talk about past experiences and keep them fresh in our minds. Familiar faces and old haunts become linked with memories of past events. When we leave the group for a long time or permanently, the memories fade, along with the faces, places and names, until a skeleton of almost nothing remains. If we return after many years to the old group and the old environment the memories are revived, although they are not the same. (Lindesmith, Strauss and Denzin 1999:168)

At the start of this project, we had not had any contact with each other or with our old friends for more than thirty years. Therefore, we really had “left the group” for a long time. Some of the informants still viewed themselves as punk rockers of some sort, maintaining contact with a network of old punks. These informants had the most

vivid memories of the punk era, probably because they had maintained their relationship with the punk movement over the years. Through our conversations with the informants, we remembered things that we had never really reflected on before. We realize of course that we do not remember things as they actually happened since our perspectives of the world and ourselves – our habitus – have changed over the years. Yet, this can also be seen as an advantage in that it has made it possible for us to analyze our past from a distance and from sociological and historical perspectives.

In addition to our evolving memories, interviews and conversations, we have used more than 400 photographs. The photos helped us to more closely investigate the style that the punks composed and to reflect on the different influences of the style. Hairstyles, jackets, different logos, types of boots, ways of posing, and so on, provided us with a semiotic material that we could use in combination with the interviews. Lastly, we conducted searches in databases for local newspapers and found some interesting articles about the punk culture in Norrköping with several quotes from young punks who were interviewed on the streets.

Situating Punk in Norrköping and Sweden

Although Norrköping is known as a classic Swedish working-class town, its development in the 1900s in comparison to similar towns was not a story of success. That said, the 1700s and 1800s were the heydays of Norrköping as it was one of the country's most successful textile towns. At its peak, Norrköping was known as Sweden's Manchester. However, in the 1900s the town became known for the mass closure of its factories and for large-scale unemployment. The situation worsened after the Second World War; between 1950 and 1980 over sixty companies were forced to close down, and the effects on the economy and on general living standards were quite devastating. However, post-war Sweden was also the period of the "strong state", as the Social Democratic Party had a unique strategic role in planning and designing society at every level. Therefore, the crisis in Norrköping was countered by political intervention such as the state-sanctioned relocation of five large state agencies from the country's capital to Norrköping (Nilsson 2000).

This state action was characteristic for Swedish welfare state politics in the 1960s and 1970s. Integral to this politics was the endeavour to do away with all the remains of the former poor and dirty Sweden. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Social Democratic housing politics led to the demolition of entire old districts in the inner cities. The old buildings and city districts stood as symbols of poverty and misery for the Social Democratic politicians, who, in many cases, had grown up in these poor areas of the cities. The new and modern welfare state needed new and modern buildings with clean running water, modern toilets and spacious apartments. A large-scale demolition and rebuilding of many Swedish cities was the very concrete consequence of this political vision (Nilsson 2000; Lalander & Qvarsebo 2014).

As a result, many parts of the inner city of Norrköping in the 1970s were laid in ruins and some parts of the town resembled – in the words of the Specials - a ghost town. During this period, it became common to talk about Norrköping as the “bombed city”. Though Sweden was never bombed during the war, the housing politics created a war-like topography. Looking out over Norrköping during the late 1970s, one’s thoughts were more likely to revolve around war and destruction than modernity and future hope. However, as Joe Strummer, the lead singer of the Clash, pointed out when commenting on the rough exterior of the city of Belfast in the 1970s, “Punk was the perfect soundtrack to the ravaged cities” (O’Neill & Telford 2003:50). The demolished appearance of the urban landscape became a context and a symbol that could be used to shape the emergent punk style in creative ways.

Other old symbols of the old working-class town were also done away with in this process. The beer halls, for instance, located here and there in towns like Norrköping, were all closed down. This was not done by accident or because of market reasons; rather it was a strategic move in Swedish health politics where beer halls were viewed as bad for people’s health and were, therefore, to be shut down. The new and modern society was to be populated by healthy and productive citizens, not unproductive drunkards who hung out in beer halls. Other older meeting places and symbols in the city centres went the same way during this period. The Swedish welfare project was all about creating an equal society with small class distinctions; and through political intervention, the entire population became lower middle class people

with very small differences in income and living standards. In this process, many of the symbols that were important for working-class identity disappeared.

Still, not everyone liked the remodelling of the cities. Besides the very unpleasant war-zone like environment that the housing politics created, critical voices were raised against new types of social problems that emerged in the new city districts and suburbs. Several of the new districts had become plagued with problems such as drug addiction, violence and criminal behaviour; and on a scale that Norrköping had not seen before. The political intentions behind the housing politics were good, but the results were very mixed. People lived in more modern, spacious apartments as a result of the housing politics, but the suburbs and new city districts seemed to be situated in a new and dark world (Nilsson 2000).

Critique of this dimension of the Swedish welfare state project was quite common in the punk lyrics of the 1970s and early 1980s, and it mirrored a widespread uneasiness in the new and modern society. “There is nothing to do in these boring suburbs, there is nothing here for us. Well, excuse me I exaggerated a bit, we can always do booze, drugs and fight” (our translation), as punk band Ebba Grön put it in 1979 (Ebba Grön 1980). The anger and frustration of the early punk movement can also be illustrated by the 1980 song “Suburban Kids” by the band KSMB.

Suburban kids! Suburban kids!
They kick senior citizens in the head.
Suburban kids! Suburban kids!
They steal in every shop.
Suburban kids! Suburban kids!
They spit the headmaster straight in the face.
Suburban kids! Suburban kids!
They cut up the seats in the tube (KSMB, Various 1980, our translation).

Sometimes the punk lyrics went even further with the critique of modern society and bordered on a terrorist like approach, for example, Ebba Grön’s songs “Shoot a Cop” (unrecorded) and “Arm Yourselves”, with lines like “I hate King Gustaf and Prince Bertil”, “We from the suburbs will arm ourselves” and “They can take a little lead in their necks” (Ebba Grön 1980, our translation).

To understand punk culture in Sweden and in Norrköping, we must also situate it in relation to earlier youth cultures. During the latter part of the 1950s, the youth culture in Sweden had taken on a more independent relationship to the adult world. These earlier youth cultures emerged in the meeting places that were available to the young back then: coffee houses, cinemas and dance halls. The car became more and more important during the 1950s, and the youth group called “raggare” (roughly comparable to “Teddies” in Britain) made the car the prime symbol of identity (Bjurström 1990). Raggarna, with a strong working-class identity, had a very traditional masculine style. They drove around in large American cars and listened to rockabilly, partied and got drunk on Fridays and Saturdays. However, on the weekdays they were law-abiding citizens who got up in the morning and went to work in the factories.

When the punks showed up on the scene in the 1970s, raggarna became their fiercest enemies. The punks, with their coloured hair and gender transgressive style, were perceived as a threat to raggarnas’ traditional masculine and gender stereotype identity. Many of the punks we have interviewed have told us stories of how they were beaten up by raggare. The punks, who were much younger than raggarna, answered with their strongest weapon, which was their music. Lyrics like “Raggare is (*sic*) a Bunch of Motherfuckers” by the Rude Kids (1978) and “Refuse Raggarna Petrol” (our translation) (P-Nissarna 1980) are examples of this response.

In the wake of the 1968-movement, a new youth culture had emerged in Sweden. They were called “proggare” (from the word progressive) and basically looked like hippies. This movement had a completely different outlook compared to raggarna. If raggarna represented a small-town, working-class masculine style, proggarna represented a new politically conscious and urban subculture. Proggen was a combination of a music movement and leftist activism, with the emphasis on the latter. There was quite an overlap between proggen and the early phase of the punk movement, especially when it came to song lyrics. Later the punks would free themselves from the outspoken leftist politics and soft style of proggarna and develop a much more dystopic and aggressive style; but during the early phase, there were several connections between these two youth cultures. Ebba Grön’s

close collaboration with the progg-group Dag Vag was one expression of this connection.

Yet, it was a form of high culture that still dominated the cultural landscape in Sweden in the late 1970s. Pop and youth culture had not yet become a part of what was considered real culture, and the boundaries between pop culture and high culture were not as fluid as they are today. The culture journalism in the local newspapers in Norrköping at the time preferred to cover theatre, art exhibitions, classical music and poetry evenings rather than small concerts where young punk bands were screaming out their frustration, cutting their arms with razors and squirting beer on the audience. Punk culture, with its raw and aggressive expression, furious rock'n'roll and the scandalous behaviour on stage was shocking to the general public and caused great anxiety within the cultural establishment. However, the high culture opposition to the punk movement served to enhance the voluntary alienation from mainstream society among the punks and increased their feeling of being subversive rebels in a society of boredom (Lalander & Qvarsebo 2014).

Creating punk: subverting normality

Above we have outlined some aspects of the social and cultural landscape in which the local punk culture in Norrköping emerged and was a reaction to. In the following section, we will highlight some defining themes of early punk culture and show how they were enacted in creative ways in Norrköping. These themes and symbolic expressions gave punk a specific outlook and helped to differentiate punk from other youth cultures and from what was perceived as mainstream and “normal” (compare Hannerz 2015).

In our material we have discerned four broad themes that have to do with the subversion of normality in various forms: subverting the body, the use of provocative signs, subverting space and subverting gender roles. These themes were intertwined in several ways, but for analytical purposes we will treat them separately. Through these themes the politics of punk in Norrköping also becomes visible. We use the term politics in a broad sense in this article, as a way of shaping life that becomes an alternative to the lifestyles of mainstream society; the opening up for new possibilities to do life.

Subverting the body. Cultural analyst Pasi Falk (1994) has shown that the public exposure of bodily liquids or materials is condemned in modern culture. Whether it is faeces, urine or blood, these things, when visible, create intense feelings of discomfort in modern society. The punks challenged cultural taboos of this kind, especially as the punks often used blood in public. One of the local punk pioneers in Norrköping who we interviewed was called Dino. He was also known by his self-invented last name Disastro, and says that he was inspired by The Sex Pistols' legendary base player Sid Vicious and the singer Iggy Pop, both of whom used to cut themselves with razors and broken glass on stage. Dino used to cut himself on stage and at parties, making his blood a component of his public performance.

Dino tells us that the purpose of his behaviour was to appear bizarre and weird and to shock people. It was his way of showing that he did not follow the normal rules of conduct but that he walked his own way. Dino claims that his actions were a way to create a new and more aggressive identity. By acting out punk in this manner, Dino became somewhat of an icon among the punks in Norrköping during the early years. He could neither play guitar nor any other instrument, and he was not a formal member of any punk band, even if he used to jump up on stage and perform at various concerts. His competence consisted mainly of acting bizarre and strange, and of transgressing ordinary rules of conduct by showing his bleeding body. This is reminiscent of Sid Vicious from The Sex Pistols, who was not a skilled musician, but who knew how to use his bass as a prop and to appear in a shocking manner; and through this, he made a name for himself and his band (Marcus 1993:21).

The early Norrköping punks also used safety pins in unorthodox ways as did punks all over the world in the late 1970s. Mankan, who was one of the early punks in Norrköping, says that he could sometimes sit in the classroom in school and press a safety pin through his cheek, letting his blood drip down on the desk. Just like Dino, this was meant to shock his teachers and classmates and send out a message of individuality and freedom. This was long before body piercing became normalized in Western youth cultures, and it was more about hurting yourself and showing your blood as a shock effect than about ornamentation (Lalander & Qvarsebo 2014; Marcus 1993).

Another aspect of subverting the body concerned various rules pertaining to hygiene. One group of punks was characterized by the other punks as “garbage punks” or “slum punks”. They were not a big group, perhaps only eight or ten people. We interviewed five of them. They got their name because they were dressed in whatever clothes they could find and in many ways resembled homeless people. They used to hang out on the streets, smoke discarded cigarette butts that they found and ask passers by for money. In this way they were subverting the rules of cleanliness and hygiene in various ways. The slum punks sometimes hung out with the local adult alcoholics in the parks, one of the punk girls tells us, and some of them sniffed glue and sometimes even sniffed gasoline straight from cars parked on the street. These punks could be as young as twelve or thirteen, and they took the “no future” attitude of punk to the extreme. Karin, one of the punks says:

During the summer between sixth and seventh grade (at the age between twelve or thirteen) I was probably not sober for a single day. This is quite frightening when you think about it now, when you have kids of your own. We used to hang out in Oxelbergen (a local park area in Norrköping). We hung out there for a whole summer, with the alcoholics, drinking booze and sniffing glue.

According to anthropologist Mary Douglas, every society and culture creates rules of purity and taboos (Douglas 1966/2002). The slum punks broke with these rules by living on the streets and in hanging out in public parks. This behaviour can also, at least in part, be tied to the will to shock people, as shown above. By breaking completely with rules of normality, they challenged the order of society.

The use of provocative signs. Another element that was taken over from the punk movement in the UK was the use of swastikas and other symbols from Nazi Germany. Some punks painted big swastikas on their t-shirts and wore them in public. As with the cutting phenomenon, Sid Vicious, who often wore a red t-shirt with a big black swastika on the chest, was an inspiration. A punk rocker who was interviewed in one of the local newspaper in 1980 explained this phenomenon as follows: “We want to shock people, to make the Joneses react” (Lalander & Qvarsebo 2014:118). But at the same time, he was very clear about not

sympathizing with the Nazi ideology in any way: “Sometimes people do not understand that we are being ironic. That can be a problem. When we have swastikas painted on our t-shirts, people think that we are Nazis. But we are the opposite of that” (Lalander & Qvarsebo 2014:118). Using these types of symbols was a sure way to provoke people. The Second World War and the Holocaust were really not very far back in time, which meant that use of Nazi symbols could stir up very strong emotional reactions.

The most influential local punk band in Norrköping between 1979 and 1983 was called Peking SS. “Peking” is a nickname for Norrköping and the inspiration behind the name came from the early British punk band London SS, founded in 1975 and included Mick Jones, who later became a central member of the legendary punk band The Clash. London SS were criticized for their name, since it obviously could be connected to SchutzStaffel, the German national socialist’s paramilitary elite organization. However, Jones and his band mates made it clear that they did not have any Nazi sympathies whatsoever; the same was true for Peking SS. The lead singer, Thomas, tells us in an interview that the name was meant to provoke and that the SS letters also could stand for Super Star or Skjut en Snut (Shoot a cop). He states, “It was good branding, and we never thought about changing our name”. The provocation value in the band name was tested when Thomas, during a religion class in school, was printing posters for a gig. A teacher saw the poster – which included both the name Peking SS, the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and a swastika – and then contacted the principal, who had a “serious talk” with Thomas.

Subverting space. The punks were carving out a way of life that stood in stark contrast to how “normal” people lived their lives. This can also be exhibited through how the punks used public spaces and the consumer pathways at the shopping malls. In conjunction with the building of new city districts and suburbs in the 1970s, large shopping malls replaced the smaller shops in Norrköping as well as other Swedish towns. Instead of the many small shops along Drottninggatan (the main street) – the butchers, the bookshop, the tobacco shop, and so on – big malls that looked like huge concrete blocks appeared. According to the capitalist logic of the day, a good citizen was a good consumer who shopped in the malls. The streets were now for walking

to and from work, for catching the bus or for walking to the malls. However, by using the urban areas in new and unpredicted ways, the punks subverted public space. They gave the urban landscape a new character by sitting or lying down outside the shopping malls.

Several of our informants say that people often stared at them because of how they were dressed, their haircuts and their odd behaviour. As we have stressed above, the purpose of the punks' attire and actions were partly to provoke and to wake up the Joneses, but it was also about claiming a place of their own in the urban landscape, a place where they could hang out and have fun together. Although the punks used to go to a billiard café and a music studio to rehearse with their bands, they also deemed it important to hang out outside the shopping malls to make themselves public because they saw malls as an arena of recruitment for new punk rockers, who could hang there for a while, try out the style and feel how it was to hang out with the punk gang.

Subverting gender: Another component in the early punk culture of Norrköping was a type of queer style, similar to the early US punk scene and some of the glam icons such as David Bowie, The Sweet and Alice Cooper. Thomsen, the drummer in Peking SS, says that the American punk scene was a strong influence on him and that it inspired him to wear a skirt and to use lipstick. He tells us that he quite often was chased around by raggarna, who wanted to beat him up because of this provocative appearance. Dino Disastro adds that he too used a lot of makeup around his eyes and that this made raggarna furious. One time they got hold of him and beat him up in a restaurant basement. Raggarna even forced him to wash the makeup from his face. Some of the punk girls we have interviewed say that punk culture was a free zone from gender stereotyping; it was a zone where they did not have to live up to commercial feminine ideals such as Olivia Newton John from the popular movie *Grease*. One of the punk girls, Mala, says:

You didn't have to look like everybody else. You didn't have to be thin really, you didn't have to be pretty and have the latest haircut and the newest shoes. You were allowed to be yourself, you were accepted by almost everyone.

The punk girls could, for instance, dress in men's clothing, such as their grandfather's old coat and military boots, when they wanted to.

The theme of subverting gender boundaries thus had very much to do with notions of emancipation and were tied to subverting normality as such (Berkers 2012).

From these themes about subversion and transgressions of normality, it is obvious how several elements of the punk style were imported from the UK and the USA to Sweden, and how they could be used in creative ways on the streets of Norrköping. The role models were popular icons like Sid Vicious, Johnny Rotten, Siouxsie Sioux and Iggy Pop. Through these icons, and the various symbols that punk culture provided, young people could construct themselves in new ways. They could resist the hegemonic culture and reject ideals of what the future should be like: ideals that authority figures from the established society – such as politicians, parents, teachers and football trainers – held as the only option. Therefore, punk provided young people with an opportunity to resist established norms and practices and to construct an alternative way of life as outsiders in the urban landscape. Nevertheless, this way of using symbols was changed when the Oi!-style gained increased local popularity in the former industrial city of Norrköping.

When Punk turned into Oi!

Oi!'s principal objective, therefore, was for bands to work together and inject an authentic working-class voice into popular music. (Worley 2014: 8)

During 1981 and 1982, the local punk style in Norrköping began to change quite dramatically as the Oi!-culture was imported from the UK. This is obvious from interviews as well as from photographs, both of which reveal a change in style and in attitude. Some of the local punks in Norrköping used to take the ferry from Gothenburg, on the west coast of Sweden, to London in order to be inspired by the punk scene there. They visited places like the famous 100 Marquee Club, where all the punk icons of the day performed. They drank beer at pubs and bought clothes and records that were unavailable in Sweden at the time. In this process, sounds and styles were imported from England to Norrköping. Rick was one of the most active local punk rockers when it came to taking in and importing influences from various places. He

tells us that he often visited London, but also Stockholm, and he got to know many punks and skinheads in these cities. Rick introduced new musical influences in Norrköping with bands such as Exploited, Anti Pasti, The 4-Skins and Cockney Rejects, as well as the Oi!-albums.

The Oi!-culture had a strong impact on the local punk scene in Norrköping even though many of the punks had a middle-class background, which should perhaps have made them an unlikely target for the Oi!-culture. Thomas, the lead singer of Peking SS, tells us that he came from a typical suburban middle-class background. But he became very attracted to the Oi!-music and its raw expression. He says that the Oi!-music was a “revitalisation of the whole punk scene”. When he tries to capture the energy he initially felt with his first experience of Oi!, he compares it to getting a “hard punch straight to the face”.

Thomas felt this power of Oi! even though he was very far from the working-class culture in England in which Oi! was born. Thomas had not experienced the closing down of factories and having a dad on the dole as many young British Oi!-kids had. Rather, he came from a nice middle-class family with regular family meals and annual ski holidays in the ski resorts of northern Sweden. Neither did Rick, the major importer of Oi!-culture, and his younger brother Fippe, have a working-class background. Their father was a museum curator and their mother a psychologist. Qvarse came from a family of actors and art-professions people who were very much part of the cultural establishment in Sweden. There are many more examples of Norrköping punks who came from a middle-class background that was far from the British working-class experience.

But despite their middle-class background, these young punks eventually changed their symbolic outfit – from the earlier and chaotic punk style to a more uniform skinhead/Oi!-style with shaved heads, Doc Martens boots, bomber jackets, thin braces and chlorine bleached jeans. In this way, they became a part of a youth culture that had been shaped and formed in a very different culture and class background than their own. Furthermore, by taking on the style and symbols of Oi!, they were also part of a local transformation of Oi!, in which it was made into something different than the original British context. Though there were also Oi!-punks and skinheads in Norrköping who had a working-

class background, they were not considered more authentic Oi! than the kids from the middle-class. As a consequence, class background meant little to the Oi!-expression in Norrköping; class was not a theme in the lyrics of local Oi!-bands such as Anti Society League and Peking SS. In fact, class did not seem to have been important at all.

Most of the punks who were influenced by the Oi! began wearing local English football symbols: scarfs, badges and sweatbands. In one photo of Rick, he is wearing a West Ham scarf, even though he did not have any connections to West Ham and that particular district of London. However, West Ham was the team of Oi!-band Cockney Rejects. The West Ham logo, therefore, became charged with a new meaning through Oi!-culture, thereby becoming a general symbol for Oi! when this culture travelled to Sweden. We asked him about this photo and he agrees with our interpretation, that wearing the scarf was a way of copying the members of Cockney Rejects. This symbolical interest in football clubs could also embrace Swedish football clubs who had nothing to do with Norrköping. Some of Rick's friends, who now had become Oi!-punks or skinheads, became enthusiastic football supporters, especially of the Stockholm club Hammarby. This club's green and white colours now became a part of the Swedish Oi!-/skinhead look. In trying to understand why many punks started to wear symbols of Hammarby it is possible to discern a certain logic that can be described in three steps.

Firstly, as described above, the Oi!-style had an outspoken working-class identity. As a result, you had to use working-class symbols of some sort, even if you came from a middle-class culture in order to be authentic Oi!. Moreover, going to a football stadium to get drunk, watch the game and fight against other supporters was a part of this type of British working-class identity. Secondly, the Stockholm club Hammarby was, and still is, seen as the number one working-class football club in Sweden. This means that the colours of this club are possible to use for signalling a connection to working-class identity. By becoming a Hammarby supporter, one could, therefore, identify with a similar-working class identity as the Oi! punks/skinheads in England, and thereby create a sense of authenticity. Thirdly, the majority of the Stockholm skinheads were Hammarby supporters; and since there was a quite lively interaction between the local Oi!-culture of Norrköping

and the skinhead-culture of Stockholm (only 160 km away), Hammarby could become an identity marker also in Norrköping. The town had its own local football club, IFK Norrköping, which was quite successful, but no Oi!-punks/skinhead in Norrköping supported their own local club. Norrköping's local football club had not become symbolically connected to the Oi!-culture, even though it was the local football club. Therefore, it was not thought of as a symbol of identity.

It is a bit paradoxical that the punks in Norrköping became so interested in football, since many of them have told us they had bad experiences of all types of team sport in their childhood. If the punks were into sports of any kind before entering punk, it had for many of them been skateboarding, which fit well with the individualistic nature of early punk culture. It is obvious that the use of Oi! to a certain extent copied the Oi!-movement in the British context if we view it from a symbolic perspective. However, the local Oi!-culture in Norrköping did not have the connection to local working-class culture that was important in the British context. If it had, the punks would have chosen their own local working-class football club. What is more, if the working-class connection had been important, they would have supported the quite unsuccessful working-class football team, Sleipner. But they did not. Rather, they saw it as more authentic to create connections with clubs that were loaded with Oi! and working-class identity in the British context, such as West Ham and Manchester United.

As we have shown above, much of the traditional working-class identity of Norrköping was swept away during the modernisation of the city. In the British Oi!-movement, you were proud of your working-class identity, one which was symbolically maintained by the link to spaces such as the pub and the football stadium. These attributes of British working-class culture were also often referred to in the Oi!-songs, which often centred on local everyday life circumstances – a poetry of the streets and the neighbourhoods. The lyrics of the local Oi!-bands in Norrköping, such as ASL (Anti Society League) and Peking SS, were not about local places, the streets or the sorrows of everyday life. Rather, the lyrics were about more distant things like war, the military and the coming doomsday. These themes of a future dystopia were inspired from reading newspapers, watching the news on

television and dystopic movies about the cold war and new destructive technologies. When it came to lyrics, the Norrköping Oi!-culture had perhaps a stronger affinity with American hardcore punk bands such as Dead Kennedys and Black Flag than the British Oi!-bands. Below the sample from a song by Peking SS titled “Doomed to Die” illustrates the dystopic theme in Oi! in Norrköping.

Who want's to throw his life away?
Who want's to be blown to pieces?
When those in charge are fucking assholes?
We are doomed to die
We are doomed to die, die, die, die, die, die
(Our translation)

There is neither locality nor working class-identity here. Still, even though the local punks used Oi!-style in a more fluid fashion, the young punks and skinheads could sense a similar energy from the local Oi!-bands as they did from the British bands. Thus, Oi! in Norrköping was more about furious rock'n'roll and raw energy than social class.

The meaning of punk in Norrköping

In this article, we have stressed the fluid and complex nature of punk, a culture capable of taking on different meaning in different contexts. The young punk rockers in Norrköping made use of American as well as British punk symbols in the transformation of their identities. Thus, punk can be viewed as a culture of openings and opportunities, a toolbox from which one can pick attitudes, emotions and behaviour and use them for transgressing normality in various ways. Subverting the body, signs, and rules of normality, space and gender were some important themes in this transformative practice in Norrköping that we have highlighted in this article.

This transformative and subverting character of punk indicates that punk can be viewed as a form of identity politics, though a very open and fluid one since it is not fixed on a specific and shared identity marker such as class, race or ethnicity. Rather, the punk politics consists in pointing out the possibility of an alternative way of life. Furthermore, punk culture has the capacity of taking up various elements from

different contexts and putting them together in new ways. At the heart of the politics of punk in Norrköping was the forming of a fellowship for young people who felt that they did not belong anywhere else. This new fellowship and way of life included forms of resistance against what was perceived as an oppressive normality. In a sense, the local punk culture in Norrköping can, therefore, be seen as an alternative society where inclusion and fellowship was not based on the established societal norms for how life should be lived. No formal authorities governed this society: everyone had a potential say and nothing was predetermined.

Another metaphor that can be used for the punk culture in Norrköping is that of a family. As many punks did not feel at home in their biological families, the punk group became a family-like structure where they could belong and feel accepted. The punk family had its own “family values” where individuality, freedom of expression and creativity were celebrated, and where the boundaries of the family were not closed as in the nuclear family but open and fluid. Inclusion in the punk family was not based on pursuing what the Joneses pursued: things like having a job, building a nuclear family and behaving according to established gender codes and societal norms of decency. Instead, inclusion was based on not belonging anywhere else.

The element of resistance and protest in Norrköping’s punk culture was not specifically aimed at right or left politics, but against the system as a whole. The enemy was not capitalism first and foremost, or the Social Democratic Party who sat in government at the time. Rather, the enemy was the whole culture of boredom and all the predetermined ways of life that young people were expected to follow. The authority that was resisted by the young punks in Norrköping was, therefore, adult authority as such – parents, football coaches, shop owners, politicians, teachers, police officers and security guards. The subversive practices that we have described above can be viewed as important strategies in this resistance against adult authority and the system of boredom.

Furthermore, we have shown that punk in Norrköping had different expressions. Even if the punks liked the same kind of music and bands, there were differences when it came to style and expression. The DIY-punks composed their style from any old clothes they could find while

other punks travelled to London to buy the right kind of brands. The slum punks took the no future attitude of punk to its absolute limits with their voluntary outsider lifestyle. The ideal of rejecting authority made it possible to be strange and odd if you wanted to, and this culture of strangeness meant that young people who felt odd at home and in school could be accepted in this new kind of family with its own carnivalesque family values.

With Oi! the individualistic dimension of punk was gradually toned down and replaced with a stronger emphasis on a collective with a much more uniform style and use of symbols. In retrospect we view this transformation as quite dramatic. Former punks suddenly began to look very similar to each other with their shaved heads, bomber jackets and boots, the aggressive look, and so on. In this change of style, the former punks also began performing a tough form of masculinity. Many punks in Norrköping, more or less, took over this new style. However, they did not fully understand the working-class nature of original Oi! and the links to everyday life in the British local setting, elements that Worley (2013 and 2014) has pointed out as the very core of Oi!.

A reason for this lack of understanding was the different social and national context in Sweden. The energy and power of Oi! meant a revitalization of punk in Norrköping but in a different way compared to the British context. The contribution of Oi! had more to do with tough masculinity than with class. We believe that this “misuse” of Oi! was largely due to the different social organization of working class in the UK and Norrköping/Sweden respectively. Oi! In Norrköping did not, as in the UK, develop organically within working-class culture as a result of various economic crises; instead, it developed in a more postmodern way, using the symbols but not the cause behind them. In Norrköping there was no strong working-class culture to relate to. Although the same symbols were used, there was no working-class politics in them, no belief in or struggle for a better existence for young people through social mobilization.

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