



# Vliv skupiny Sex Pistols na styl vystoupení kapely Green Day

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Faculty of Science, Humanities  
and Education



# The Influence of Sex Pistols on the Style of Green Day's Performances

## Bachelor thesis

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Cílem práce je ukázat, že ačkoli živá vystoupení kapely Sex Pistols měla značný vliv na styl skupiny Green Day, převzaté symboly se používají za účelem vytvoření jiného ideologického významu.

### Metody:

- 1) studium odborné literatury
- 2) komparativní strukturální analýza vystoupení z pohledu stylistických a symbolických prvků a následná identifikace společných a odlišných znaků
- 3) analýza souvislosti použitých symbolů a jejich role v sebereprezentaci kapel.



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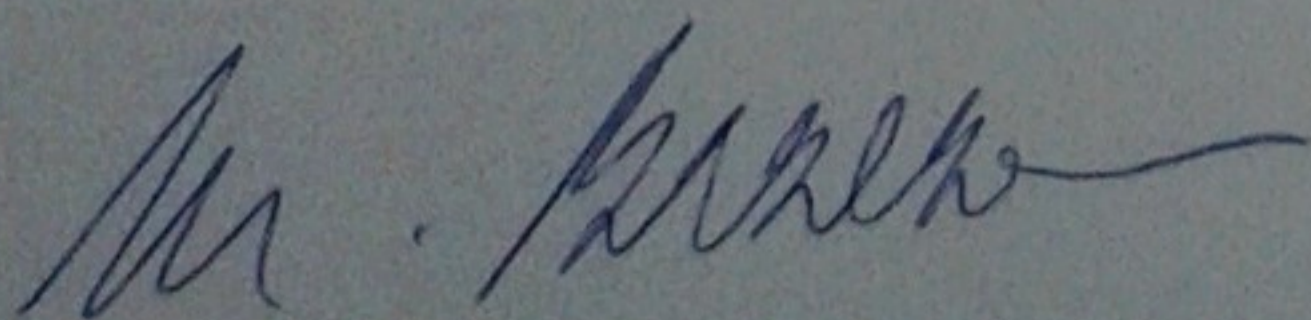
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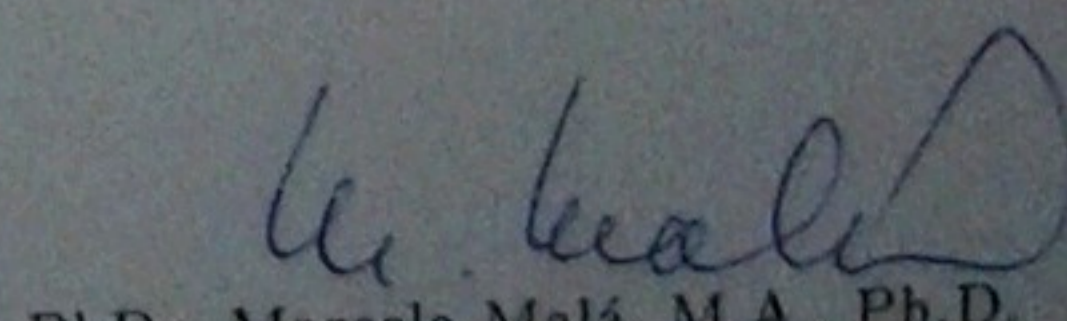
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## **Anotace**

Práce se zabývá vlivem skupiny Sex Pistols na vystoupení skupiny Green Day.

Zaměřuje se také na další aspekty, které jsou součástí jejich vystoupení.

## **Klíčová slova**

Punk, Sex Pistols, Green Day, vystoupení, analýza, hudba, publikum

## **Annotation**

The thesis deals with the influence of Sex Pistols on the style of performances of Green Day. It also focuses on other aspects which are part of their performances.

## **Key words**

Punk, Sex Pistols, Green Day, performance, analysis, music, audience



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# 1. Introduction

I decided to choose this topic for several reasons. Sex Pistols as one of the first punk bands are a part of the history of the United Kingdom and also an inspiration and a model for many punk bands all over the world. As a band which to compare, I chose Green Day, since it is a convenient example of a band which is not from the UK, but which has possibly been influenced by Sex Pistols. Both bands have an international following and both are part of cultural history in their own countries, although Pistols being the older band of the two, this process has obviously been more complete in their case. At the same time, while Pistols are said to be one of the very few true punk bands ever, Green Day members are considered as a promoters of a new punk wave. “Within a small but growing circle of punks, Green Day had made a name for itself” (Egerdahl 2010, 34).

The aim of this paper was thus to find similarities in terms of their performances and other aspects connected to that. The aspects involved are the development of punk, punk image, the lyrics, instruments and punk audiences and their behaviour.

I also focused on Sex Pistols and Green Day as such to introduce them briefly.

The aim of the thesis is to prove the influence of Sex Pistols on Green Day in terms of performances. After analysing the behaviour of both bands and the other aspects, I found that there are many similarities and commonalities, which confirmed my thoughts.

I also focused on the development of punk since the era of Sex Pistols to the present and some important historical events in order to see how they influenced the lives and opinions of the bands, with particular attention to how these events are shown in their lyrics.

I also analysed the behaviour of the people who attend live performances, since



punk audiences are a part of the show, and since they are crucial for punk bands, as they spread the bands' ideas. Punk audiences are also special, as they differ from other audiences in many ways, such as their image, their dancing style or their behaviour. Punk is also said to be live music without "useless" instruments, so I also examined the instruments used by Sex Pistols and Green Day to show if there are any changes to be found.

The thesis examines the special image of punk bands during their performances and also the image of the audiences both in term of the similarities and differences of the two bands' audiences and in term of punk bands' alleged aim to shock society and differ as much as possible from the mainstream, as well as in relation to their self-professed concern with societal problems. In my opinion, this aspect is so strong in the case of the two bands in question that this could be considered as one of the main motivating factors for me to choose Sex Pistols and Green Day.



## 2. Sex Pistols

This band is considered to be “the first punk band ever” that had made something new (Bartelt n.d. ,2). “They were inspired by anger and poverty” (Sex Pistols Official, 2016). The first show was in 1976 in London. However, this band actually began in 1972, when a group of school friends decided to form a band. Many music critics and punk fans claim that “Sex Pistols are the only punk band and the others are only punk-rock” (Sex Pistols Official, 2016).

Their beginnings were not easy, because many people did not get it. They did not understand their music, their voice and their costumes, but there were some people who supported them. Sex Pistols meant something new for everybody, for some people in a negative meaning and for the others in a positive way.

As also the culture, television and radio became more widespread in the 1960s, which was the time of a revolution in terms of technology and consumerism in Britain, new movements started their existence.

“Alongside change in continuity, there were major attempts to stress new beginnings, in both style and content. For example, and dramatically so, in the mid-1970s the punk style set out to shock and transform popular culture in reaction to the commercialized world of popular music. Punk was a conscious reaction against the technical wizardry and excessiveness of ‘glam rock’.” (Black 2004, 55).

Naturally, Sex Pistols members were ones of them.

“The most famous punk group to emerge was the Sex Pistols, whose anarchic behaviour soon attracted as much attention as their music. Yet, to reach a wider audience, punk itself had to be taken up by record companies and television, who, in the case of the former, then exploited



it for their own financial ends. Tamed in the interests of commercial viability, punk ultimately entered the cultural mainstream, giving birth to new and positive music such as ‘two tone’ bands, and affecting style in fashion and design” (Black 2004, 55,56).

Obviously, Sex Pistols was influenced by these events, so that is why they have mentioned them in their lyrics.

Their debut single *Anarchy in the UK* (1976) is still well-known and many people claim it is like a hymn of punk music (Adams 2008, 469). Other of their famous songs are “God Save the Queen” (1977), “Pretty Vacant” (1977) or “Holidays in the Sun” (1977).

People were amazed by their performances, because it was something that nobody has ever seen before. The music was different, the style of singing was different and what was the most visible was their way of dressing. Pink and yellow glared everywhere, checked trousers with big boots and their hairstyle gave their audience the impression of something extraordinary and rebellious.

Besides their way of dressing and their style of clothes, they were one of the first, who gave preference to “raw” music and energy during their shows (Double 2007, 37) rather than to technical proficiency. This is something that a huge amount of punk bands have accepted and followed ever since. Moreover, Sex Pistols wanted their audience to be involved in their performances and sometimes they used to sing on their own without the singer, who simply stopped singing and listened to his fans being a part of their live music. Their fans were also allowed to dance, drink and roar. “All these elements have since become typical for punk and Sex Pistols are said to be the pioneers of them” (Sex Pistols Official, 2016).



## 2.1. Sex Pistols and politics

Sex Pistols is often referred to as one of the first groups to have actively reacted to the political and economical situation of the 1970s. They sympathized with the young generation, which was not satisfied. “In 1976, economic conditions were the worst they’d been since 1940; in June, 1,501,976 (6.4% of the population) were unemployed in Britain and the pound dropped to \$1.70.”(Bartelt n.d., 2) Moreover, a huge part of the unemployed were the youth. The specific problems of 1970s youth were reflected in various songs of the albums *Anarchy in the UK* (1976) and *God Save the Queen* (1977). The Pistols were not satisfied with the situation and they dealt with it by their political songs mentioned above. John Lydon later said of it: “You don’t write a song like ‘God Save the Queen’ because you hate the English race. You write a song like that because you love them, and you’re fed up of seeing them mistreated” (Smith 2010, 1). For example the line from *God Save the Queen* (1977) says: “*They made you a moron*” As Thornton (2012) explains, “They’ are those who sustain the monarchy, the judiciary, the armed forces, the bureaucrats, the police, the educationalists who indeed do ‘make morons’ of the working classes by limiting them to lives spent in hard toil and depriving them of the educational advantages provided to the rich” (1). This proves that there were perceptible differences among the classes in society.

Naturally, their style, their music and their opinions were highly criticized, especially by the upper-classes, because they were against the monarchy, which was openly declared by publishing *God Save the Queen* in 1977. Official reactions, however, even came earlier: “On the occasion of the Queen's Silver Jubilee, 6 June, the Sex Pistols played on a boat on the Thames before police boarded the boat and ended the gig” (Smith 2010, 1). But there were also many sympathizers. Their first concert outside London in Manchester in June 1976 is considered as the "greatest gig



of all time" that "changed music for ever" (Morley 2011, 1). Although there were not that many fans as yet, thanks to this gig, they were able to build a bigger and bigger audience. "Those who like to nourish the legend favour an estimate of around 40; other less romantic minds suggest a number closer to 100" (Morley 2011, 1).

## **2.2. The Pistols as the symbol of punk**

Pistols are the symbol of something new for many people up to this day, because they were not afraid of doing something that nobody has been doing before, even though it was truly dangerous to behave this way in the 80s. However, if they have not done this, punk might not have developed to its characteristic shape. The fact that plenty of current punk bands copy their music, their clothing and mainly their live performances, is because they can be regarded as legends, as the band that had taken the most important steps to propagate this style. Although it is clear that Sex Pistols is unique and none of the bands can be completely like them, there are nevertheless some that get closer to the original inspiration. That is the reason why I compare Sex Pistols and Green Day to see the influence and naturally some differences.



### **3. Green Day**

Green Day is one of the most famous and successful punk bands ever. They restored punk music in a modern music scene in the time, when the classic punk music like Sex Pistols was a bit in the background. “The history of this band is dated to the age of 1988”, (Egerdah 2010, x) when Billie Joe Armstrong – the singer and guitarist and Mike Dirnt – the bassist decided to form a band during their studies at school. The band was called “Sweet Children” (Egerdahl 2010, 8) and their first EP was punk, really the raw punk with no special effects and it was quite successful. After that came the drummer Tre Cool. (Egerdahl 2010, 14) Green Day still exists in this composition.

During the 90s, Green Day published some successful CDs like *Dookie* containing the hit “Basket Case,” which meant a big achievement for them. Then they published another CD *Nimrod*, which was more successful than *Dookie* and the experts claim that Green Day improved their performances and became more successful band with a huge audience a many fans all over the world.

The biggest success of Green Day was undoubtedly their “CD *American Idiot*”, containing the most successful hit “American Idiot,” which became a hit over a night. (Ben Myers, *Green Day: American Idiots & The New Punk Explosion*, 2006). This album attracted people’s attention because it criticizes the American government, media and propaganda.

#### **3.1. Sex Pistols as their model**

Green Day is definitely one of the current punk bands, that adopted Sex Pistols's style of presenting music to their audience. It is evident and indubitable from many

points of view. Their way of clothing, playing the music with no special instruments and effect, especially at the beginning, and also their opinions and ideas they present to the public and during their performances correspond with the idea of punk and Sex Pistols. The most obvious is their way of using the national symbols during their performances. In case of Green Day, it is connected to *American Idiot*, containing the song "She's a Rebel." "They went back to artist Chris Bilheimer, who had designed the *Nimrod* and *International Superhits* album covers, to put together a cohesive look for everything from the album cover to the stage backdrops to the T-shirts. Bilheimer pinpointed a line from "She's a Rebel" as his inspiration: "And she's holding on my heart like a hand grenade." He created the blocky, stencil-style logo of an outstretched hand gripping a heart-shaped grenade, dripping with bold, bright red" (Egerdahl 2010, 119).

### **3.2. Green Day as the symbol of the new wave of punk**

Simply, it was something new at the beginning of the twentieth century and people loved it and they wanted to see their shows, because they were full of energy. The band used to wear peculiar clothes and there was a big stage full of effects during their tour. However, they did not want to be as another punk band, they wanted to be partly different. "We don't want to look like every other punk band out there." For their sharp, slim black suits, they went to rock's king of fashion, Hedi Slimane, who designed men's clothes for legendary design house Christian Dior" (Egerdahl 2010, 119-120). that the facts that they wanted to be partly different makes them just like Sex Pistols.

In general, Green Days shows are full of energy, well-played punk music accompanied by special effects like large screens with videos or some fire. Those are



the outcomes of modernsmodern society and of the requirements of the audience that were not possible before. All these logically help the band to make their shows to give a better impression and “allow their audience” to spend the concerts more wildly and, the same as “Sex Pistols, to be a part of history“ (Adams 2008, 472).

## **4. How did punk change?**

### **4.1. The beginnings**

After the year 1960, punk was at its beginnings and many aspects of this style were different from what is now considered as punk. There were only a few bands trying to play punk and this music was not famous at all. “In the late 60s, ‘punk’ described garage bands, groups of teens who got together just to play music, usually on instruments they could barely use” (Little 2011, 1). The breaking point was when Sex Pistols appeared in the 1970s, because “they changed fashion, youth culture and brought about an entirely new form of performance and gigging” (Little 2011, 1). The economical situation in the United Kingdom was bad and many young people were unemployed. The members of Sex Pistols were also teenagers who wanted to do something with this poor life. “In 1976, economic conditions were the worst they'd been since 1940; in June, 1,501,976 (6.4% of the population) were unemployed in Britain and the pound dropped to \$1.70” (Bartelt n.d., 2). As a reaction to that, Sex Pistols started playing their raw, rebellious punk music. “Punk is seen as a sign of the disenchantment with Britain's social decline”. (Wall, 2003, 37). Their crucial song was “Anarchy in the UK” (1976). “Pistols called for anarchy in the UK and attacked the British monarchy, as a consequence no doubt of the band being born and bred Londoners the culture which they both drew on and reflected was English” (Adams 2008, 469). However, it was not easy to behave in a different way and to really do something against the system. Moreover, punk was considered to be unacceptable and strange. “Due to negative publicity from the first days of punk, the public had formed a negative opinion of the subculture in general. Punks



were seen as unnatural and violent” (Bartelt, n.d., 6). Yet, Sex Pistols managed to be famous and their audience was bigger and bigger. Certain music magazines also showed some interest in them, which helped them to be more famous, too. “When first a number of fanzines, and then specialist music magazines, defined this diverse music as 'punk' they set the boundaries of its meanings, and placed the Sex Pistols at the centre” (Wall, 2003, 60). At this time, there were also some punk bands in the USA, so as Sex Pistols became famous and some of the bands in the USA could be heard in the UK, this music started to be more and more famous and supported by young generation.

#### **4.2. The changes**

“It was this cultural exchange between the US and the UK over the middle of the 1970s that led to the formation of punk rock as we know it” (Bartelt n.d., 1). Certainly, punk is not the wild, rebellious movement as it was in the 1970s. During the years since, many bands wanted to be like Sex Pistols and followed their model to become a punk band. Some of them were successful, some of them less, but there are some bands still considered as punk “proper”. “Today, punk has stemmed off to form many other subgenres, some of which are selling vast amounts of records around the world. Punk has been a genre associated with Green Day, The Hives, The Cribs, and noticeably The Fall” (Little 2011, 2). Obviously, over the years punk has been combined with other music genres like reggae, ska, pop and especially rock. Punk became mainstreamed and although it is a part of culture now, many people still regard punk as a strange music connected to rebellious actions. Originally, bands like Sex Pistols did not want to sell out big halls and get much money from it, but today, it has changed. Bands such as Green Day are well known and play in arenas

capable of hosting thousands. They wanted to be famous, wanted to get the audience and wanted to sell CDs, so it is natural that their concerts are usually sold-out. However, that does not mean that they are not punk. That is exactly what Egerdahl says : “Even though the original 1970s punks were rebelling against bloated stadium rock and self-indulgent musicians who spent millions on terrible concept albums, Green Day dared to suggest that punk could be flexible, and even popular”(Egerdahl, 2010, 147). At the same time, as a parallel process, the “music business had already begun to refashion punk into something less disruptive than what Johnny Rotten and crew had been offering. New wave was more pop-orientated, less angry and aggressive, and markedly ironic in its approach to rock music and culture” (Moore 2003, 174). To summarize, we can see that punk has changed, but the ideology of the style is still alive, even if it has become more commercial since the era of Sex Pistols. “The punk scene has continued to exist in one form or another ever since, with bands such as Green Day and The Offspring enjoying considerable commercial success in the last fifteen years” (Double 2007, 37). Punk turned into a music style which is famous, widespread and enjoyed by multitudes, which help the bands to earn money.



## **5. Image as the important part of the show**

### **5.1. Extraordinary clothes**

At the beginning, Sex Pistols wanted to come up with something new, with something that will be shocking. Their manager, “Malcolm McLaren and his wife, designer Vivienne Westwood, ran SEX; a clothing shop that created sado-masochistic and bondage inspired fashion, with Westwood as the seamstress. This sculpted the future of punk fashion, and McLaren has occasionally been dubbed the ‘architect of punk ideology’” (Little 2011, 1). They started to wear these extraordinary pieces of clothes and thus they were formative of punk’s style of dress. The style has been a signal for something strange and rebellious up to these days, but it is important to say that it was more visible and radical in the 1970s. “Fascist and Nazi symbols for the most part did not indicate a political or ideological affiliation with the groups but rather were intended to point out everything that was wrong with society (or at worst simply to shock)” (Bartelt n.d., 1). As Gelbart (2011) claims: “The visual and behavioural trappings of punk such as the Pistols wearing swastika armbands to shock, or swearing during a prime time television interview that bought the movement fame and infamy.” It is obvious that their aim was to shock the society and to be different. However, these radical symbols were not enough. Pistols combined these pieces of clothes and accessories with bright colour such as yellow, pink or red to become more conspicuous. No bands before had been using such bright colours on their clothes, hair or shoes and matched them with black colour and materials such as leather. Especially tiny, leather trousers accompanied with a spiky belt with small “pyramids“ from a kind of metal were popular. The belts were

shining in the lights of reflectors, which helped them to make their shows more live. The element of metal pyramids repeated on their black leather jackets.

## **5.2. Hairstyle and make-up**

When they added their unusual hairstyle like a mohican or a hairstyle which reminds one of a hedgehog, they created a new image which looked like something from another planet. The hairstyle of Green Day is similar to Sex Pistols, primarily the mohican. The singer Billie Joe Armstrong also likes wearing negligent and sloppy hair. They dye their hair with red, blond or ginger colour very often, because these colours give the impression of being different from the society.

Another important part of their image is make-up. Sex Pistols members used to make-up their eyes with an eye-pencil, because they were then more distinctive and conspicuous on the stage. We can observe make-up also on Green Day members' faces. They usually do not make-up their faces during an ordinary day but mostly for their performances, because it is a part of their image which is very important during their shows.

## **5.3. Inspiration for current bands**

Many bands who were punk and also many present-bands have taken over this image. It is also the case of Green Day, which can be considered as a good example from the range of current punk bands. However, it is necessary to say that their image is smoother and more mainstreamed than it was in the age of Sex Pistols. Nevertheless, mainly the black tiny trousers and jackets are nearly the same. As for the bright colours, Green Day usually wear something black in combination with something red – for example a tie or braces.



#### **5.4. Clothes as the symbol of patriotism**

Sex Pistols also used to wear clothes with national symbols like the flag of the United Kingdom – Union Jack, because “they were proud to be Englishmen” (Adams 2008, 476). “Punk offers reasons to be proud of being English that do not rely on the subjugation of other races or nations, or of the lower social classes” (Adams 2008, 476). Particularly when they were playing “Anarchy in the UK,” the symbol of the Union Jack made their performance more real and it supported their pride to be a part of the UK. Something similar is clearly visible in the case of Green Day mainly in connection with their release of their CD *American Idiot*. “They went back to artist Chris Bilheimer, who had designed the *Nimrod* and *International Superhits* album covers, to put together a cohesive look for everything from the album cover to the stage backdrops to the T-shirts” (Egerdahl, 2010, 144). The tour then was full of American flags on the stage. Also the members of the band were wearing some badges with the flag and their fans were allowed to buy them too.

#### **5.5. The uniqueness of Green Day**

What makes Green Day unique in case of the inspiration by Sex Pistols clothes? In my opinion, it is mainly their attitude to their country and political system which partially inspired the image of both bands. Sex Pistols used to wear the Union Jack and Green Day the flag of the United States. The way they present the national symbols is similar. The other image components like the make-up, leather or bright colours are used by many punk bands all over the world, but they are necessary for Green Day’s image too.

## 5.6 Sex Pistols' and Green Day's image in pictures:

### 1 Sex Pistols in the 1970'



<http://vinilosblankgeneration.com/galleries/sex-pistols/#prettyPhoto> 2014)

This photo of Sex Pistols proves their extraordinary and rebellious image. Figure one, from the left, is wearing a black jacket accompanied by some steel accessories and ragged jeans. More controversial is the outfit of figure two, who is wearing a T-shirt with a swastika. They used to wear this symbol “to shock” (Gelbart 2001, 233). The third figure is wearing an old jacket with black trousers accompanied by a T-shirt with a notice. The most significant, however, is the T-shirt of the fourth figure, because he is wearing the Union Jack, the symbol of the UK, which is connected to their song “Anarchy in the UK”. Their outfits, together with their hairstyle, create the typical image of a punk band. Altogether, they form a group of people who wants to shock and to deal with the situation in the United Kingdom.



## 2 Green Day at their beginnings



<http://www.greendayauthority.com/photos/406/full/2016>

Visibly, this picture shows the band's attempt to look different from mainstream society from the very beginnings of their existence. The most noticeable is the hairstyle of all members. They dyed their hair with strange colours. Mike Dirnt, on the left, is wearing a black shirt with metal accessories. Tré Cool, the man in the middle, has green hair, and he is also wearing black clothes. The third figure is Billie Joe, whose hair is blue and is wearing a red tie featuring a question mark, with a black shirt.

If we compare these two pictures, the most visible feature they have in common is the fact that both of these bands seem to want to be different. Other common features are the dyed hair and the untidy haircuts. However, there is a difference in the design of their clothes: the pieces of clothes worn by Green Day members are not so tattered.

### 3 Green Day in the era of American Idiot



<http://www.greendayauthority.com/photos/3979/full/2016>

This photo was taken in the era of *American Idiot*, which meant a huge success for Green Day. It was the time when they most actively reacted to the political situation in the USA (Similarly to Sex Pistols' reaction in the UK in the 1970s) and their image was full of American flags and other pieces of clothes connected to the nation. This may have been their reaction to the results of the elections: Tré Cool, the drummer, said: "I knew the day George Bush was elected president that we were in deep, deep shit." (Egerdahl 2010, 99). So they decided to build a new image based on American symbols, accompanied by elegant clothes, such as jackets. This image was crucial for their performances.



### 5.6.1. Performances



4 Photo 1: (Richard Young 1976)



5 Photo 2: (<http://www.sexpistolsofficial.com/photos/?wppa-album=3&wppa-photo=191&wppa-occur=1> 1976)

I found two photos of Sex Pistols from their performances in 1976 in order to show that they were wearing extraordinary clothes to make their shows more special. In the picture on the left, there is the singer Johny Rotten. One can definitely see that he is wearing a white shirt with a red vest accompanied by black trousers. Together with his messy hairstyle and his screaming expression, these elements form their typical image.

In the second picture there is a view of the whole band. The bassist Glen Matlock on the left is wearing red trousers with a mottled shirt, Johny Rotten is wearing a white shirt with black trousers and it is obvious that he used to change the colour of his hair quite often. On the right there is Steve Jones wearing a black shirt or a t-shirt with leather trousers. The drummer in the middle of the photo has a t-shirt with a photo or a notice on. This photo proves that red, white and black combined with leather and

notices were crucial for their image.

I would like to focus on Johnny Rotten a bit more. An important part of his image besides the clothes is his facial expression. As the singer, he was usually screaming and his open mouth became a part of his performance.



[6 \(http://greendayonline.blog.cz/en/0710/green-day-1992-1994-fotky-2007\)](http://greendayonline.blog.cz/en/0710/green-day-1992-1994-fotky-2007)

This photo was taken between the years 1992-1994. In this era, Green Day used to play in this composition and their show had not been so huge as they were later. However, if we take a look at their image, almost everything is typically punk. Billie Joe on the left with his blue hair, black shirt with a red tie accompanied by some buttons with notices had been photographed in his typical clothes. Mike Dirnt in the front has a t-shirt with a notice on and shorts, his hair is also dyed. Tre Cool behind the drums has green messy hairstyle and he is wearing simple t-shirt with black shorts. In my opinion, this is their characteristic image from their beginnings.



Photo: (Kevin Mazur/Getty 2015)

This is a current photo (7) taken in 2015. Although, it was taken more than twenty years later, Green Day's image is still the same. One can clearly see the influence of Sex Pistols and also the fact that Green Day keep this punk image is obvious. The main difference is maybe that they now perform in four with Jason White, who play guitar as well as Billie Joe.

However, back to their image. Billie Joe in the middle and Mike on the right are wearing black trousers with some sneakers. Also Jason White is wearing some trainers with red trousers and a black shirt. Billie, as usual, is wearing a shirt with a jacket, but instead of a tie, he is wearing a bow-tie. What is interesting is his sense of detail. I mean the spots on his bow-tie and his socks. These patterns root in the age of Sex Pistols when they started to wear stripy or checked clothes. Mike Dirnt is wearing a black vest, another typical piece of clothes for punk. We can barely see Tré Cool, but his image is probably very similar to that of the others.

All in all, Green Day members visibly keep the rules of appearance set by Sex Pistols. Although there are some minor differences, the typical features, such as the colours black, white and red, the leather and many of the finer points of dress are



there.

## **6. Instruments used in punk**

### **6.1. Members of Sex Pistols and Green Day and their instruments**

Sex Pistols used to perform in the composition consisting of the “singer Johnny Rotten”, who only sang and he did not play any instrument, “Steve Jones – the guitarist”, “Glen Matlock” and later “Sid Vicious – bass guitar” and the drummer Paul Cook (Double, 2007, 37). This arrangement conforms to punk’s central idea of using only basic instruments, as professed by the band itself: “Central to punk is the idea that musical virtuosity is less important than energy, excitement, and self-expression. As The Sex Pistols memorably declared in February 1976, ‘We’re not into music . . . We’re into chaos.’” (Double, 2007, 37)

“In fact, most of the Pistols were musically competent enough to play energetic rock and roll very well, although guitarist Steve Jones has acknowledged that Sid Vicious, who replaced Glen Matlock on bass, ‘couldn’t play a fucking note’. However, their preference for non-musical aspects of pop performance is borne out by their approach. When the manager of the Sex Pistols, Malcolm McLaren, auditioned Johnny Rotten (a.k.a. John Lydon) for the role of lead singer, he asked him to mime to an Alice Cooper song on the jukebox in the corner of his clothes shop” (Double 2007, 37).



This is a photo (8) of Sex Pistols taken in August in 1976 by Wolfgang Heilemann which shows the band performing in their typical composition. Visibly, they used to play the bass-guitar, the guitar and the drums. Of course, there is also Johnny Rotten, the singer, in the middle. On the left there is Glen Matlock playing the bass guitar and on the right Steve Jones. Behind the drums there is Paul Cook. They proved that one can play successful music with basic instruments.

When we compare this constitution of the band with Green Day, it is evident that it is nearly the same. Green Day are composed of the singer “Billie Joe Armstrong”, who also plays the guitar, which is probably the only difference between these bands. Then there is a bassist “Mike Dirnt”, who also sings vocals (Egerdahl, 2010, 1) and the drummer “Tre Cool” (Egerdahl, 2010,14). Green Day usually appear in this composition, but “in 1994, future Green Day touring guitarist Jason White joined“ (Egerdahl, 2010, 35)

## **6.2. Not much instruments are enough**

These instruments are the basis of each rock or punk band, so it is clear that none of these two bands use any extra instruments, like a keyboard, a saxophone or an accordion, which are very often used by bands of other genres, but they soften the



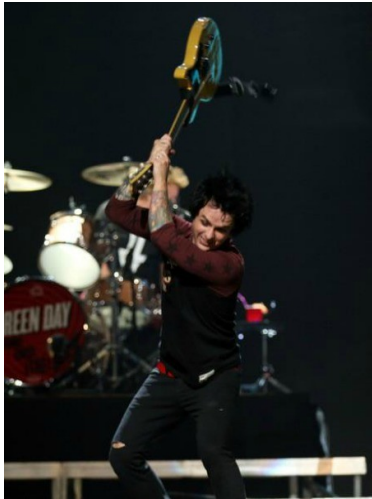
music, which is not the aim either of Green Day or Sex Pistols. For both bands it is crucial to play “raw“ music, to be full of energy on the stage, because they consider it to be one of the most important things. Because of their intention of playing live music, their records sounds also live. “Punk records generally sound ‘live’, as if the studio had not come between the intentions of the musicians and their listening audience” (Shuker, 2001,161). With the help of these instruments they can express their anger and they can highlight their strict attitude to the society, the state or to some important situations that happened, as explained by Marcus Greil:

“As a minimalist genre, punk rock eschewed the growing use of electronic instruments associated with ‘progressive’ rock, and featured a strict guitar and drums instrumental line-up: ‘this was a sound best suited to expressing anger and frustration, focusing chaos, dramatizing the last days as daily life and ramming all emotions into the narrow gap between a blank stare and a sardonic grin’” (Marcus 1992, 595 quoted in Shuker 1994, 162).

So there is no space for the instruments mentioned before, which soften music, for these punk bands.

### **6.3. Instruments as means of gestures and movements**

The bassists and guitarists frequently run or jump on the stage to make their show more live and to look more energetic and dynamic. They also lift their guitars and bass above their heads. These movements and gestures are connected with various grimaces and mows which they make at their audience. Usually, these faces are linked with the lyrics, because they are used to emphasize the meaning. Some of these faces are an opened mouth, winking or closed eyes.



9 ([www.cleartonestrings.com](http://www.cleartonestrings.com) 2014)

Billie Joe Armstrong makes many different positions and gestures with his guitar. Sometimes he destroys his guitar in the middle of the show. He simply lifts his guitar above his head and smashes it to the stage. In my opinion, this behaviour, however, is not something strange in punk, since bands play songs full of anger and hatred.

#### **6.4 What makes Green Day to be like Sex Pistols in terms of the use of instruments?**

Obviously, Green Day adopted their original composition. Both bands started playing only with a guitar, a bass guitar and drums. Both of them use their instruments to show their anger and disagreement with the society, in which they used to live.

However, as punk became more mainstreamed and the technique of playing and recording music became advanced, Green Day had to take on a new member Jason White to have one more guitarist in order to play more detailed music. Sometimes, during their recent and current shows, one can see there also someone playing

a saxophone or an acoustic guitar. Green Day has started involving some extra instruments in the era of *American Idiot*. “When Jason Freese came in to play saxophone on “Homecoming,” the band played him “Jesus of Suburbia” to introduce him to the album” (Egerdahl 2010, 116).



## **7. Lyrics and songs as another important part of the performances**

The lyrics and songs' melodies are one of the most important things that help bands to get the audience and to express their feelings, opinions and ideas, which they can share with the audiences during their shows. Their fans are used to sing with the band, because they agree with the text of the song and like the music. They sing mainly the choruses and the singer usually lets the audience sing on their own.

A song with its specific lyrics usually reflects the bands' opinions. "But, as various analyses demonstrate, in many cases punk are like collages, a series of often fractured images, with no necessarily correct reading" (Sabin 1999 quoted in Shuker 2001, 162).

Sex Pistols and Green Day have many opinions in common. Besides the music, their ideas are partly the same, especially their opinions about politics and economics. Both of them wrote some songs which were a reaction on the political, economical or social situation.

In the case of Sex Pistols, it is important to mention "Anarchy in the UK" (1976) and "God Save the Queen" (1977), which meant a revolution in punk music and also in Sex Pistols' life. These songs are controversial, because, on the one hand, these songs helped the band gain more fans, but on the other hand, they were more criticised from the point of view of official politics. "American Idiot" (2004) and "Holiday" (2004) are similar songs written by Green Day. "American Idiot" is demonstrably anti-establishment and "the theme of 'Holiday,' and that of the album as well, perfectly coincide with the antiwar movement started in the US" (Thomson 2013,1). I would like to introduce these four songs, which deal with politics and war.

I chose them, because they are considered to be crucial for the bands and they reflect their opinions.

### **7.1. Sex Pistols' famous songs**

Anarchy in the UK (1976)

Right! now ha, ha

I am an antichrist

I am an anarchist,

don't know what I want

but I know how to get it.

I wanna destroy passer by

'cos I wanna be anarchy,

No dogs body

Anarchy for the UK

It's coming sometime and maybe

I give a wrong time stop a traffic line.

Your future dream is a shopping scheme

cause I wanna be anarchy,

In the city

How many ways to get what you want

I use the best I use the rest

I use the enemy.

I use anarchy

'cause I wanna be anarchy,

Its the only way to be

Is this the MPLA

or is this the UDA

or is this the IRA

I thought it was the UK

or just another country

another council tenancy.

I wanna be an anarchist

(oh what a name)

And I wanna be an anarchist

(I get pissed destroy)

(Sex Pistols Official, 2016)

The aim of this song, in my opinion, was to shock the British society of the 1970s. At the time, the social, economic and political situation in the UK was not ideal. As pointed out earlier, “[i]n 1976, economic conditions were the worst they’d been since 1940; in June, 1,501,976 (6.4% of the population) were unemployed in Britain and the pound dropped to \$1.70” (Bartelt n.d., 2). The Pistols’ reaction was to call for anarchy. The song “indicates the congruence between punk as music and the social location and values of the associated punk subculture” (Shuker 2001, 162). In order to shock, the text contains a rude word, “pissed”, but this is by far not the most



controversial aspect of it.

Sex Pistols, as it is visible from the lyrics, did not support Christianity, or at the very least tried to shock Christians: “I am an antichrist, I am an anarchist”. It must have been revolting for the Christians and for mainstream society, because various forms of Christianity have been the most widespread religious affiliations in the country.

I consider it as one of the causes of the conflicts the Pistols had with the official politicians.

Beyond this, however, the song’s lyrics also pointed out some problems in the country, as the following lines explain: “Is this the MPLA or is this the UDA or is this the IRA I thought it was the UK or just another country another council tenancy.” The MPLA is a political party that ruled Angola, the abbreviation stands for the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola. The beginning of this movement, later political party, reach back to the 1960s, when the members started their activity. “MPLA guerrillas launched their first military operations in eastern Angola on May 18, 1966“ (Weigert 2011, 39). Sex Pistols, in my opinion, may have mentioned this movement in a critical context, detecting intentions beyond their alleged effort to help Angola. “They needed their mass movement if they were to have any hope of riding to power, but mass movements have a tendency to throw up autonomous or deviationist tendencies” (Spence 1980, 12). In fact, the reason behind mentioning them in the lyrics may be rooted in the conviction that members of the MPLA only wanted to rule a territory: “The MPLA leaders had a dear vision of the 'socialist Angola' they wanted, because they could see its paradigms in the world around them. For them, the liberation struggle was a project with a defined goal, and a clear sequence of events: kick out the Portuguese, form a government, legislate for

socialism” (Spence 1980, 14-15).

Likewise, the letters UDA also have their strongly political context, as it stands for the Ulster Defence Association. “The UDA is the largest paramilitary group on the Loyalist side. Launched in September 1971, its initial function was to serve as an umbrella for the various vigilante organisations that had sprung up all over Belfast” (Dingley 2009, 47).

While the probably best known of the three abbreviations is IRA, Irish Republican Army, an armed movement in Ireland that is known to have fought for the whole of Ireland becoming an independent republic. “Northern Ireland is part of the UK, but had a history of internal self-rule since 1921” (Dingley 2009, 10). “Northern Ireland has been engaged in an ongoing sectarian conflict and terrorism since 1968. The main protagonist is/was the IRA, a terrorist group with a history going back to 1917, and before this in other guises” (Dingley 2009, 10). A few years before the publication of *Anarchy* in the UK in 1976, some important events had happened. One of those events was the separation of PIRA from the original organization IRA. “In 1970 the IRA split between the Official and Provisional wings and since then the Provisionals’ (PIRA) have been the main terrorist group” (Dingley 2009, 10). Maybe, the increasing force of terrorism was the reason why Sex Pistols put the abbreviation IRA to their song. “The PIRA were originally a split from what became the Official IRA in 1970, and later splinter groups then emerged from the PIRA. There were also Loyalist terrorist groups, primarily the UDA, UVF and UFF, but these never constituted a threat to the state, nor did they target the security forces, which were relatively easy to deal with” (Dingley 2009, 54). At the same time, members of the IRA killed many citizens in order to, as they claimed, protect Ireland, albeit it might

not be either the most efficient or the least controversial way to protect a country. “It is hard not to define as ‘terrorist’ an organisation like the IRA, whose activists have been responsible for killing and injuring thousands” (Alonso 2007, 1).

In my opinion, Sex Pistols put these three abbreviations to their song, because all of them are controversial. IRA and UDA were fighting against each other. At the same time, both of them are considered as terrorist organizations. In other words, since these movements are in no way compatible with each other, it is feasible that rather than supporting their individual agendas, the Pistols might have put all of these, in themselves incompatible, organizations in the lyrics, because the UDA, the IRA and also the MPLA were violent and radical movements, killing many people in order to achieve their aim, not afraid of anarchy and chaos.

The Pistols also did not agree with the economical, social and political developments leading to a consumer society. During the 1960s, there were some noticeable changes in British society in terms of economy and life-style. The most evident change concerned new ways of shopping, primarily the shopping centres. “Big shopping centres were the moulders of taste and provided spheres of spending activity at the centre of the consumer society. Almost all their customers came by car, abandoning traditional highstreet shopping, with its gentler pace and more individual service” (Black 2004, 13). Sex Pistols’ lyrics criticize this fact in the following line: “Your future dream is a shopping scheme”, commenting on society, and the customers, “being forced to” do shopping in big centres. Furthermore, with the expansion of big shopping centres, many inventions like television became more popular and more common in the UK households. “By the 1970s, almost every household in the country had a television, most households had labour-saving devices such as vacuum



cleaners, washing machines and refrigerators, and about half of all households had a telephone” (Donnelly 2005, 30). These changes, of course, also brought a higher level of informedness, bringing far away political struggles and problems closer, and also providing a more instant source of information on local events: “improvements in mass communications such as satellite broadcasting and faster travel by air led commentators to talk seriously for the first time about a ‘global village’ in which there was increasing recognition of the interdependence of nations” (Donnelly 2005, 4). This might partially explain why, other than to shock, do the lyrics combine the MPLA, the UDA and the IRA into one image: in the age of the global village, there are no real differences between movements near and far.

At the same time, while building an increasingly consumer society has led to a more comfortable and richer life for some, it has also broadened the income gap, and made the poor even poorer. This is why “[t]he unprecedented rises in living standards and consumer conveniences that accompanied the decade coincided both with the ‘rediscovery of poverty’ in its middle years and the anti-materialism of the counter-culture towards its end“ (Donnelly 2005, 3). The growth of poverty was clearly apparent and tangible for most people. While it is undeniable that there were many rich people who enjoyed the new shopping centres and the new inventions, there were increasingly more poor ones: “Across Britain there were millions of individuals and families who frequently faced a day-to-day struggle to make ends meet” (Donnelly 2005,131). The poor suffered from the lack of money and also from the social inferiority. “Not only did the poor (of course) have the lowest incomes, they were also in every sense under-privileged. The effect was of a vicious cycle of poverty” (Donnelly 2005,134). There were also other events that point out future

problems. “The hike in oil prices in 1973 signalled the end of economic good times and the arrival of recession induced political and industrial strife, culminating in the ‘winter of discontent’ of 1978–9” (Donnelly 2005, 13). In other words, while the 1960s and 1970s meant huge progress in the UK, it also brought many problems going hand in hand with the success.

Sex Pistols highlighted this problem in terms of the housing, this is why the line “another council tenancy” appears. Many people were poor and or simply had problems to pay the high rents, since, in fact “otherwise reasonable wages might [have] prove[n] insufficient to support a family being charged an exorbitantly high rent” (Donnelly 2005, 133). Those, who could not pay the rent were given council flats. Although, it might be considered a logical idea, the situation was not as ideal as it may seem. “As people have been given more choice in housing, those with no choice are increasingly concentrated in the housing that few people want: of poor design and quality, expensive to heat, in black environments, often isolated on the edge of towns and cities” (Taylor 1998, 820). Moreover, there were also problems with shopping opportunities and services. “Lack of choice in housing is reinforced by a lack of choice in services and goods: high priced or boarded up shops, the least successful schools with falling rolls and falling investments, public services that are devalued and increasingly starved of funds” (Taylor 1998, 820). These aspects were leading to increasing poverty and many poor people started taking drugs. As Taylor declares in his article, public housing in some areas was already experiencing a labelling cycle from which it was difficult to escape. What was maybe the biggest problem according to the Pistols was the fact that the cities did not want to deal with the bad situation. “Policies based on community and individual pathology only

reinforce the cycle of exclusion by focusing on the failure of the estate and those who live in it” (Taylor 1998, 821).

The members of Sex Pistols were radical, so that their aim was to establish anarchy, seeing this as the only way out of the ways of the establishment. The lines saying “I wanna destroy passer by 'cos I wanna be anarchy” look as if the Pistols wanted to behave their own, violent way because the situation seemed so hopeless that the only possibility remaining to change something was anarchy.

God Save the Queen (1977)

God save the Queen  
the fascist regime,  
they made you a moron  
a potential H-bomb.

God save the Queen  
she ain't no human being.  
There is no future  
in England's dreaming

Don't be told what you want  
Don't be told what you need.  
There's no future  
there's no future  
there's no future for you



God save the Queen

we mean it man

we love our queen

God saves

God save the Queen

'cos tourists are money

and our figurehead

is not what she seems

Oh God save history

God save your mad parade

Oh Lord God have mercy

all crimes are paid.

When there's no future

how can there be sin

we're the flowers

in the dustbin

we're the poison

in your human machine

we're the future

you're future

God save the Queen

we mean it man

we love our queen

God saves

God save the Queen

we mean it man

there is no future

in England's dreaming

no future

no future

no future for you

no future

no future

no future for me

no future

no future

no future for you

no future no future for you

Sex Pistols saw the future only in the young, probably punk, generation, because “there is still an element of positivity here, that hopefully the punk generation will see through the smoke and mirrors, the bread and circuses of distraction and diversion tactics” (Thornton 2012, 4). This song was controversial at the time it was realised, although rather than being a consistent political program, the text is “[m]ore anarchy than politics, the song is a perfect reflection of the group: a vitriolic shambles that barely holds itself together” (Smith 2010, 1). In fact, “’God Save the Queen’ was as much an event as a song” (Smith 2010, 1), and its controversial reputation had a lot to do with the perfect timing of the song’s release: “[t]heir 1977 single [...] caused such a fuss during the ‘celebrations’ for Her Majesty’s silver jubilee 35 years ago” (Thornton 2012, 1). In the lines saying “and our figurehead, is not what she seems,” amongst other things, they might point out the transience of media messages: “Her cult of personality is abetted by a fawning and sycophantic media as disgustingly obedient as any far eastern despot state. Who is the REAL Elizabeth Windsor? Maybe she doesn’t know the answer to that herself” (Thornton 2012, 3).

The Pistols were fed up with the fact the English citizens were only dreaming and they did nothing with the bad political and economical situation. They thought that there was “no future” for the UK.

The most complicated part of the lyrics is maybe this one: “When there's no future how can there be sin we're the flowers in the dustbin we're the poison in your human machine we're the future you're future”. It is a combination of words with different meanings, which should have pointed out the situation in the UK. On the one hand,

there in a positive element with the hippies, the reference to the flowers possibly standing for them, for flower power: “The semiotics of the sixties, the fashions, the music, the flower-power aesthetic, have never been far from the surface of contemporary culture“ (Donnelly 2005, 3). In fact, however much of a self-proclaimed counterculture, “[t]he psychedelic, flower-power imagery provided the dominant aesthetic of the later sixties, and in ‘make love not war’ the counter-culture coined one of the sharpest advertising slogans of the post-war period” (Donnelly 2005, 124). On the other hand, the positive image of the flowers appears directly juxtaposed to words like “dustbin” and “poison” which are negative. In my opinion, the word “dustbin” might be connected to the revolution in lifestyle in the 1960s mentioned in their song “Anarchy in the UK”: the big shopping centres and households full of modern inventions. While the hippies might have been beautiful flowers, they ended up in the dustbin of consumer society celebrating disposable goods and values. In fact, the line “we are the poison in your human machine” might also be connected to consumerism, either trying to say that those, who did not accept the modern society and new ways of shopping were not suitable for society, or alternatively, emphasizing that those who disagree with the values of consumer society (i.e. hippies and punks) are as potent as poison in undermining establishment values.

The fact that the lyrics of Sex Pistols saw potential danger in some new inventions is clearly visible: “they made you a moron a potential H-bomb”. The H-bomb is one of the most dangerous inventions of the 1960s. At that time, many people all over the world were afraid of a devastating war: “The sixties are viewed as the years when the world remade itself after the two World Wars, and not just in Western Europe and the United States“ (Donnelly 2005, 5). People were worried about their future and about



their life. “The hydrogen bomb and the space race made questions of peace, disarmament and international cooperation ever more urgent and interesting to a wider range of people” (Donnelly 2005, 5). The line dedicated to the Queen “they made you a moron” followed by the line about the H-bomb should say that the Queen was not as powerful as she was considered to and that maybe she did not see the potential danger and disaster of the policies of UK governments, or at least was powerless to do anything about them.

## **7.2. Green Day's songs**

American Idiot (2004)

Don't wanna be an American idiot

Don't want a nation under the new media

And can you hear the sound of hysteria?

The subliminal mindfuck America

Welcome to a new kind of tension.

All across the alien nation.

Where everything isn't meant to be okay.

Television dreams of tomorrow.

We're not the ones who're meant to follow.

For that's enough to argue.

Well, maybe I'm a faggot America

I'm not a part of a redneck agenda  
Now everybody do the propaganda  
And sing along in the age of paranoia

Welcome to a new kind of tension  
All across the alien nation  
Everything isn't meant to be okay  
Television dreams of tomorrow  
We're not the ones who're meant to follow  
For that's enough to argue

Don't wanna be an American idiot  
One nation controlled by media  
Information age of hysteria  
It's calling out to the idiot America

Welcome to a new kind of tension  
All across the alien nation  
Everything isn't meant to be okay  
Television dreams of tomorrow  
We're not the ones who're meant to follow  
For that's enough to argue

The best example of political Green Days songs which can be compared to

“Anarchy in the UK” and “God Save the Queen” is “American Idiot”. Although there are about 25 years between these songs, one can surely find many similarities.

It is obvious at the first sight that both “Anarchy in the UK” and “American Idiot” are about the bands’ home-lands and that they want to scream to the world that there are some things that should be changed. This is also reflected in the band’s behaviour at live concerts when they play this (and similar) songs: “Armstrong introduced songs with lines like ‘This next song is a big f\*\*\* you to George W. Bush,’ and ‘I want you to scream this next one so loud that every redneck in America hears you!’ He sang ‘American Idiot’ wearing a Bush mask” (Egerdahl 2010, 147).

The passing of time between the two songs, however, can be easily seen. Whereas Sex Pistols criticized the media only in general, without specific references to its technological aspects, Green Day sings about propaganda on television, which is now more widespread than it was 30 years ago.

In terms of rude words, Green Day’s song also contains them, maybe even more frequently than the earlier song. At the same time, these songs are not broadcasting-compatible, so just “[a]s the band expected, the words ‘f\*\*\*,’ ‘redneck,’ and ‘faggot’ were censored“ (Egerdahl 2010, 145). “Anarchy in the UK” as well as “American Idiot” became some of the songs that many people remember if they hear the name of Green Day or Sex Pistols.

In my opinion, Green Day’s lyrics encourage citizens to deal with the propaganda in the media, since they claim that the political situation is manipulated by the media. Besides that, it also points to the problem that many official politicians only want to be famous and supported and they do not have problems with the propaganda in order to get votes in the elections. Especially these lines are about the brainwashing

by the media: “Don't want a nation under the new media. And can you hear the sound of hysteria? The subliminal mindfuck America”.

Holiday (2004)

Hear the sound of the falling rain,  
Coming down like an Armageddon flame  
The shame the ones who died without a name

Hear the dogs howling out of key  
To a hymn called faith and misery  
And bleed, the company lost the war today

I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies  
This is the dawning of the rest of our lives  
on Holiday!

Hear the drum pounding out of time  
Another protester has crossed the line  
To find, the money's on the other side

Can I get another amen (Amen)  
There's a flag wrapped around a score of men  
A gag, a plastic bag on a monument

I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies

This is the dawning of the rest of our lives

on Holiday!

The representative from California has the floor

Sieg heil to the president Gasman

Bombs away is your punishment

Pulverize the Eiffel tower

Who criticize your government

Bang, bang goes the broken glass and

Kill all the fags that don't agree!

Trails by fire setting fire

It's not the way that's meant for me!

Just cause, just cause

Because we're outlaws, yeah !

I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies

This is the dawning of the rest of our lives

I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies



This is the dawning of the rest of our lives

This is our lives on Holiday!

“Holiday” comes from the CD *American Idiot* (2004) just as the song “American Idiot” does. Both songs deal with society, the political situation and wars. As it has been pointed out above, “The theme of ‘Holiday,’ and that of the album as well, perfectly coincide with the antiwar movement started in the US” (Thomson 2013,1). In the lyrics of the song, Green Day is dissatisfied with the situation, namely that the US Army is involved in various wars, for the reason that there are also many Americans included. In doing so, “Green Day is comparing the Bush Administration to the Nazis” (Thomson 2013, 1). This comparison is most obvious in the line which says: “Sieg heil to the president Gasman.” Further, “[i]n the chorus, Green Day is urging Americans to not buy into the lies of politicians and media” (Thomson 2013, 1), as it is exemplified by the line in the chorus saying “I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies.”

The lyrics might also aim to point out the manipulation by the media. For example, in the line saying: ”The shame the ones who died without a name”, the lyrics highlight the fact that wars are cruel and the soldiers are in danger every day. Furthermore, people are usually manipulated by the media, because the television lets us know only the information that is approved by the politicians. In the lines: “This is the dawning of the rest of our lives”, “on Holiday!” the text uses the word Holiday, but it does not necessarily have to mean holiday as we know it. In fact, while the media sometimes claim that soldiers fighting in wars are not in danger and

that everything is going to be all right, so it at times sounds as if the soldiers were on recreation. “There’s a flag wrapped around a score of men, A gag, a plastic bag on a monument”. When I read these lines, I imagine the news in television where it is usually said that the fallen soldiers will have an opulent funeral and there are always many flags, also over the coffins. In my point of view, Green Day’s lyrics show that the fallen soldiers are actually seen as numbers or maybe some weapons and that the news one can see in the media is only an illusion. However, there is another terrifying event mentioned and it is the terror attack on September 11 in 2001. The USA and also the world were shaken by this act of terrorism. The following lines are talking about this: “Bang, bang goes the broken glass and Kill all the fags that don't agree! Trails by fire setting fire It’s not the way that's meant for me!”. In fact,

“[w]hen Islamist insurgents hijacked four commercial airliners on September 11 2001 and crashed them into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, destroying the Trade Center and killing almost 3,000 people, the attacks were widely described as a moment of historical rupture, an epochal event that drew a clear line through world history, dividing what came after 9/11 from what went before” (Holloway 2008, 1).

The Americans were not satisfied with the situation in their country, because they were not feeling safe and accused the politicians of it. That is exactly what Green Day explains in their lyrics. Why are many soldiers in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan if it was necessary to improve the situation in the USA?

“After 9/11, and in the middle of an ongoing international security crisis, with the country still at war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the spectacle of the

administration's anti-terrorism chief calling the president an enemy of the people and a threat to the republic was truly sensational" (Holloway 2008, 31).

### **7.3. Common and different elements**

I found out that Sex Pistols and Green Day have many opinions in common. Both of them are interested in the political situation and also in global problems connected to politics like war and peace. By means of their songs, they want to deal with the political situation and other problems and they want the world to know about it. The criticism of the media is typical for both bands. However, it is maybe more obvious in case of Green Day, because their songs were written later, when the technologies were fully developed. Heads of their homelands – the Queen in case of Sex Pistols and the president in case of Green Day, are also what they wanted to point out and what was, according to them, one of the problems in their countries. Moreover, terrorism is mentioned in their lyrics. On the one hand – it is mentioned in a critical way. I mean in American Idiot in connection with the attack on September in 2001 and also in Anarchy in the UK, where the Pistols criticise the behaviour of members of the IRA, UDA and MPLA. However, the difference is that Green Day refuse terrorism at all, Sex Pistols were not so strict in terms of anarchy.

To sum up, one can definitely find out that Green Day were and still has been influenced by Sex Pistols, because the topics are sometimes nearly the same or at least similar.

## **8. The Audience**

### **8.1. Characteristics of punk audiences**

I consider the audience to be an important part of each live show, so I think that some typical characteristics of punk bands' audiences should be mentioned. I have said that "the Sex Pistols allowed their fans also to feel as if they were part of history" (Adams 2008, 472), as well as Green Day. There are many things that both of the bands have in common also in case of their audience.

Johnny Rotten as well as Billie Joe Armstrong encourage their fans to sing and scream with them the lyrics and some slogans including rude words: "Armstrong introduced songs with lines like 'This next song is a big f\*\*\* you to George W. Bush,' and 'I want you to scream this next one so loud that every redneck in America hears you!'" (Egerdahl 2010,147). However, it is not only the singer who screams rude and nasty words, the audience is used to shouting on their own, especially between the songs, when they want to encourage the band to play more wildly and more aggressively. It really helps if the musicians see some reactions and feedback from their audience. If we look at any video showing a live performance of Green Day or Sex Pistols, we will find there communication between the audience and the musicians. "Often there are verbal exchanges between the performers and their audience" (Shuker 2001, 206). It does not necessary mean only screaming and singing, but also lifting hands above the head to show the band their support. It definitely makes the shows full of energy and the fans are involved in the performance.

### **8.1. Slam dancing and pogo as the dancing styles of the audiences**

Without any doubt, the dancing style of the audience is an important part of the concert. Different kinds of music involve a wide range of dancing styles that are typical for each kind of music. It is a way that helps one to express their feelings and emotions and to enjoy music more lively. When we talk specifically about the music style called punk, it is necessary to mention *pogo*, which was called *slamdancing* before. “Slamdancing originated in the punk subculture of the late 1970s as a modification of the ‘pogo’, and moshing emerged in the 1980s as a variation on slamdancing. Both are aggressive dances performed mostly by males in the ‘pit’, an informally bounded, roughly circular area near the front of the stage” (Shuker 2001, 204).

In the age when punk music started to appear on the stage, the audience needed to find some special moves to dance at the concerts. It was between the 1970s and 1980s when the punkers came up with that. It is said that “it was allegedly invented by Sid Vicious himself before he joined the Sex Pistols as he, standing in the back of the hall, tried to get a better view of the band at the ill-fated 100 Club festival in the fall of 1976” (Bartelt, n.d., 5). Shuker mentioned in his book that a variation of slamdancing called “Moshing is a form of circle dance: ‘a hard skipping, more or less in time to the music, in a circular, counterclockwise pattern. Elbows are often extended and used as bumpers, along with the shoulders’ (Weinstein 1991a: 228), and arms are frequently swinging.” (Shuker 2001, 204). Based on this quotation, we can describe this style as a chaotic dance involving jumping and pushing to fans standing around. It might look like it has something to do with violence and aggression, but that is not necessarily true. This dance functions as a way to express



the punk audience's attitude and to show the band that the audience is connected with them and they like their music.

If we take a look at Sex Pistol's performances, we can definitely see slamdancing there. They are considered to be one of the first punk bands whose fans used to dance it. "Slamdancing mirrors an 'apolitical punk ideology of rebellion' in the breakdown of symbolic order which seems to occur in the pit, with its 'assertions of individual presence and autonomy'".(Tsitsos 1999: 407 quoted in Shuker 2001, 205). This claim corresponds with Sex Pistols' anti-political ideology. Sex Pistols encouraged their fans to practise slamdancing when they were playing their faster songs which were full of aggression and when the singer was nearly screaming to the microphone to give the audience the impression of being more aggressive. Slamdancing is now usually known as pogo. This style functions as a reaction against the "smooth" dancing which we can see in disco clubs. When we focus on Green Day's shows and their audience's dancing style, pogo is definitely what we will find. However, it is not present to such a huge extent as it used to be at the time of Sex Pistols, because punk music and people have changed since. There are usually some people at Green Day's performances who would wait for a long time before the concert to get to the hall first and to stay as near as possible. These people commonly dance pogo below the stage. It looks like the old slamdancing, so they jump around and use their hands to push the people surrounding them. The function and connection between the fans and the band is still the same. Just as in the case of the Sex Pistols and other "classical" punk bands, here as well, "[o]ften there are verbal exchanges between the performers and their audience, usually good humoured, but sometimes more confrontational" (Shuker 2001, 206).

## 9. Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to prove that Sex Pistols was a band with an influence on live performances of Green Day. In order to do this, beyond using relevant theoretical texts, I used the bands' photos, videos and lyrics to be able to analyse the relationship between Sex Pistols and Green Day.

The result of my research is that it is indeed possible to detect strong similarities in the lyrics, style of playing music, image, opinions and behaviour on stage, and that the reason for this strong commonality might be Sex Pistols' influence on Green Day, even if other possible reasons cannot be completely excluded at this point.

The first and most obvious similarity I found is the use of only three basic instruments: the electric guitar, the bass and the drums, instruments which are considered standard for playing punk music. I also have to admit, however, that later in their career, Green Day started using acoustic guitars keyboards, which can be considered both a deviation from "true punk" or a natural development of the genre.

Another common point is the two bands' focus on politics and historical events to the extent of these issues appearing in their lyrics. Typical common topics that

I identified are heads of state, wars and terror. Beyond these, they also share a marked interest in the rising power of the media and propaganda, which also influenced the two bands' career in terms of fame, as well as criticism and censorship.

As a third aspect, I compared the two bands' audiences at live shows, not only because of both Sex Pistols and Green Day claim that their fans are crucial for them

and they are the way for them to be “a part of history” (Adams 2008, 472), but primarily because the two bands share common elements in the audiences’ special image and behavior, in particular swearing, shouting and dancing pogo, originally called “slamdancing” (Shuker 2001, 204).

All in all, one can theorize that Sex Pistols, as a legend of punk music with a huge impact on many old and current bands, is logically expected to have left an influence on Green Day, as well. The reason I chose Green Day as my focus of research is because I consider it one of the best examples of an independent punk band with sovereign opinions prominently similar to those claimed by the Pistols, as this thesis showed.

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