

THE HUMBLE COMPILATION

HOW ANARCHO-PUNK COMPILATIONS HAVE DEFINED THE PUNK SUBCULTURE

Written by: Danny - back2front_danny@yahoo.co.uk Illustration by: Shaun - seprock82@hotmail.com

At the very centre of the anarcho-punk movement (or DIY community if you prefer) lies the oft overlooked compilation album. The humble compilation as we all know is a collection of bands all appearing on the same release but the compilation is important on a number of other levels. It's often the starting place for many bands who couldn't afford to put out their own releases, or just didn't know how to. It is also often a way for bands to come together and split costs, but more importantly, as we shall see; the compilation is what has actually defined the anarcho-punk movement both culturally and politically. You can, for example, pick up a compilation from another part of the world you know very little about and discover some of the grass-roots activity that takes place there. You could even make contact and get involved or highlight their activities in your part of the world. It is through this type of networking that the international movement we have today gradually took shape.

So let's take a trip down memory lane and have a look at some of the compilations that helped to define and shape our community. Of course, given the vast array of compilations that are out there, especially those outside the English-speaking world, it is only possible to mention a fraction of them here but I hope it will be an interesting trip and maybe inspire a few people to get involved in doing their own.

My first compilation was *Top of the Pops 1976*, which is irrelevant to this article really but I just wanted to point out that compilations can also be steaming piles of dog turd.

The first compilations of note in the UK were the *Bullshit Detector* series released by Crass Records. The first *Bullshit*

Detector came out in 1980 and although it definitely wasn't the best sound quality, being made up largely of rough demos, it offered an overview of the newly emerging anarcho movement and featured a few bands who would go on to other things such as Amebix, The Disrupters and Alternative.

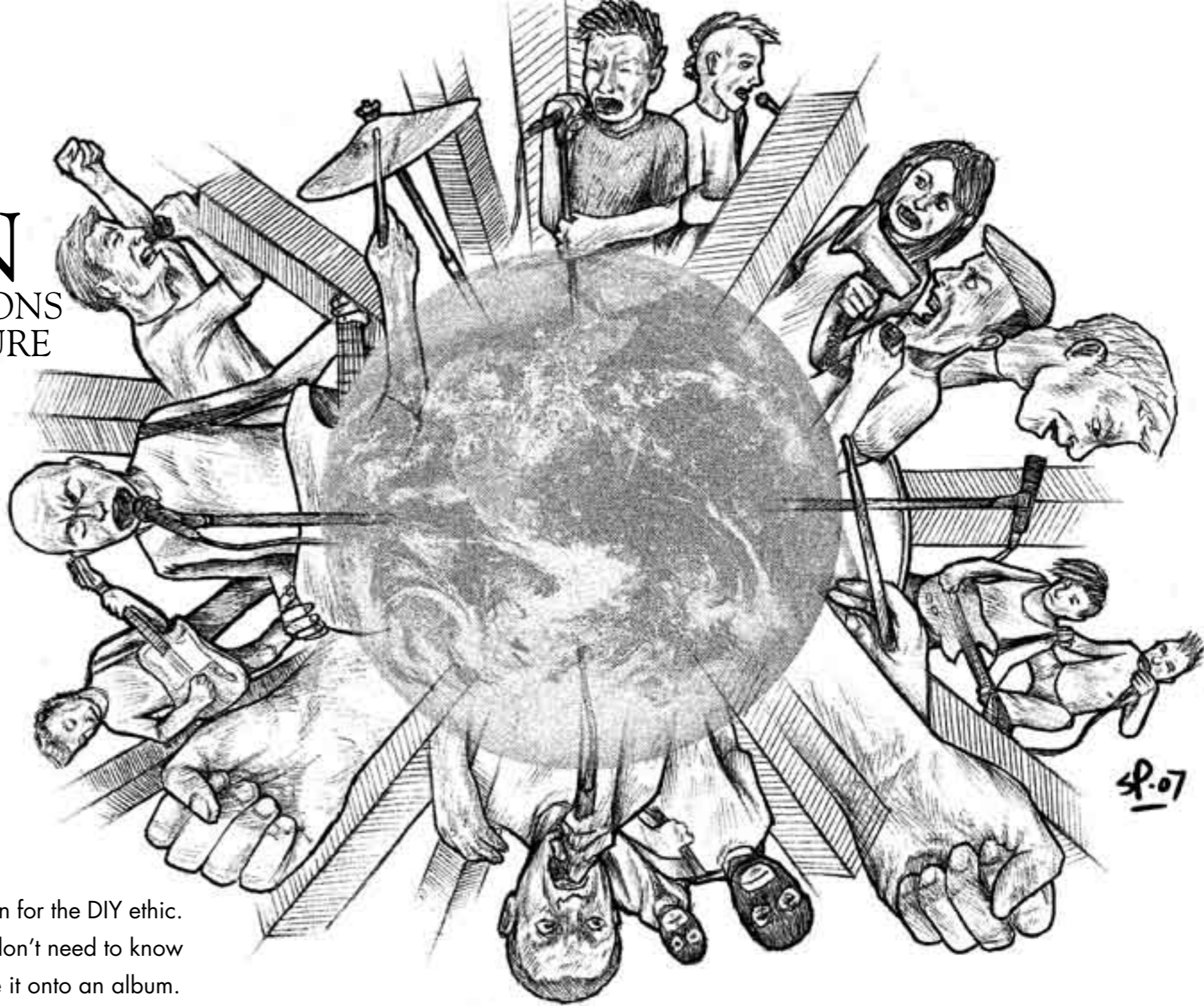
The phrase *Bullshit Detector* came from a song by The Clash called 'Garageland'. The Clash were the original political punk band but their guitarist's desire for stardom and their subsequent fame in America led many to believe they'd sold out. They wanted to live the ideal rather than shout from a stage or the back of an album cover, but they did however inspire many bands and individuals, including Crass themselves.

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The Bullshit albums laid the foundation for the DIY ethic. Anybody can form a band, you don't need to know how to play your instruments, and anyone who listens to this rough and ready record will know that you can be truly awful and still make it onto an album. Crass invited bands to send in their demos which went straight onto the disc without any studio tomfoolery. *Bullshit Detector 2* appeared in 1982 and introduced the world to Omega Tribe, Chumbawamba, Kronstadt Uprising, Naked, Youth In Asia and others, some of whom went on to greater and better things.

In 1983 Crass released the final instalment titled, oddly enough, *Bullshit Detector 3* which featured Napalm Death, Health Hazard and Verbal Assault among others. The inspiration behind this series should not be underestimated, as many people woke up and realised what was possible, encouraging many individuals, myself included, to set up bands, gigs, zines, venues and most importantly provided a challenging political overview. As the front cover to *Bullshit Detector 3* put it:

"Don't expect music when the melody is anger, when the message sings defi-



ance, three chords are frustration when the words are from the heart."

Pax Records released the brilliant *Wargasm* album in 1982 which included Dead Kennedys alongside Captain Sensible and Flux of Pink Indians.

With records like these and especially the ideas they contained, the movement began to spread all over the world. Let's take a leap across the Atlantic to the USA where the burgeoning hardcore movement was about to take off. The Sex Pistols, The Damned and The Clash had played the States in the late 70's and punk bands were springing up everywhere in reaction, particularly in California and

New York which had harboured its own independent proto-punk scene.

Alternative Tentacles was probably the first major DIY label in America promoting a more anarchist slant spearheaded by Jello Biafra and Dead Kennedys. The *Let Them Eat Jellybeans* compilation appeared in 1981. The original release actually came with an insert which mentioned all of the punk bands known to be active in the US at the time thus spreading the idea of community. The record featured the cream of the era including Dead Kennedys, DOA, Black Flag, Bad Brains and the mighty Flipper.

The cover, depicting Ronald Reagan, the extreme right-wing president of America at the time, who's favourite sweets were said to be jellybeans, revealed the cultural shift against so-called Reaganomics as well as the expansionist foreign policy that was decimating south and central America in that era. It helped influence a generation just as the *Bullshit Detector* records had done in the UK not just towards the DIY ethic but towards anarchist politics and libertarian vision.

In Canada the troubled *Vancouver Complication* appeared in 1981 (and has recently appeared on CD for the first time), and was a document of the