

stimulus → *respond*

ISSN 1746-8086

www.stimulusrespond.com

The cover this issue is by *Ansuman Chakraborty*.
Instagram @ansumanchakraborty

Editor in Chief

Jack Boulton

jack@stimulusrespond.com

Editor - Art

Alan Dunn

alan@stimulusrespond.com

Editor - Literature

Sourav Roy

sourav@stimulusrespond.com

Editors - Female Gaze

Liz Stirling

liz@stimulusrespond.com

Jo Hassall

jo@stimulusrespond.com

Casey Orr

casey@stimulusrespond.com

Laura Robinson

laura@stimulusrespond.com

Editor - Human/Machine

Ian Truelove

ian@stimulusrespond.com

We welcome unsolicited material from our readers. If you would like to make a contribution to a future issue, please contact the editors.

All material is copyright (c) the respective contributors. All rights reserved. No reproduction without prior consent. The views expressed in the magazine are those of the contributors and are not necessarily shared by the magazine. The magazine accepts no responsibility for loss or damage of manuscripts, artwork, photographic prints and transparencies.

For contributor's contact details, please email the editor-in-chief.

STIMULA®TION

What do we do when ideas dry up, what are the projects we return to for re-energising, who are the designers or activists we look to for values and levels, what are the songs that remind us of irresponsible youth, what machines elevate our capacities beyond our capabilities, what are our desert island concepts, what drum sound makes us stand still and listen, what apps make us smile, what hacks make us panic, what lyrics make us look at our speakers, what amount of money will we do it for, who are we trying to impress, what do we do if we lose all our jobs, what can we do if we can't travel, where inside do we look, where does help come from, what sleeves make our hearts flutter, which stories do we actually believe, which games make us grind our teeth, whose compliments do we crave, whose eye do we want to catch, what do we want to leave for posterity, how often should we make stuff, how many projects are the right number, is it ok to look back to the eighties, which TV series make us drool at the budgets, which artworks make us want to give up ... for a while, how much should we leave after we die, what would it take for artists to go on strike, what is your Degree worth, what's wrong with being silent, which type do we rely on or which font do we dream of, which family member drives us mad, where does our dog go in her mind when she gazes off, which new colour should we invent, what is the point, is there a future for banners, what makes us click our fingers, which dream makes us perspire, what projects do we direct students to, what makes our eyes water, when are our most creative times of day, do creativity lessons belong on TV, what is blended learning, who do we sing for and why?

Alan Dunn, May 2020

COVID-19: a call to PAUSE

Words by *Gruppo Pause*

The following text, written on the 3rd April 2020 during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, was a response to the mechanisms then being put in place to manage the temporary closure of arts institutions, galleries, museums, theatres and performance venues across the arts and cultural sector in the UK. And furthermore, a critical reflection on the immediate drive, on the part of the global art world and all its actors, to transition to online platforms and continue to incessantly curate, make and produce for an online audience. This text draws attention to the mass rush to fill the void that continued without pause, thereby reducing the possible spaces and vital capacity in which to imagine other possible worlds.

Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.

(Illness as Metaphor, Susan Sontag, 1978) (1)

03/04/2020

Arts Council England has recently announced its Emergency Response Fund to provide ‘financial support for artists, creative practitioners and freelancers’, a scheme designed to support artists who have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance for applicants, in particular the eligibility criteria for support, raises concerns. Many of us do not easily fit into simple financial categories of accounting. Many of us are invisible precarious workers, the ‘dark matter’ of the creative economy. (2)

As artists, our working lives do not align with Arts Council England’s evidently narrow understanding of how artists actually survive, get by, and create the conditions to sustain a practice. More worrying is what this scheme reveals about Arts Council England’s definitions or categorisations of what an artist is, which is based on economic success. Over the last few decades, the art industry has laid bare its own precarity. Many artists and institutions have been involved in the open critique of hierarchies of power, repeatedly drawing public attention to the exploitation of unpaid interns, volunteers and zero-hours contracts in the maintenance of systems of art production. What might appear to be minor details in a necessarily rapid drafting process of empathetic support for artists reveals the unswerving neoliberalisation of creative work.

Just as with Government’s fiscal packages in the form of loans and grants to support the self-employed and small businesses affected by COVID-19, many of us cannot apply, because we don’t fit the criteria, are already indebted, or must now demonstrate profits. Balance sheets showing losses reveal the fact that artists of all forms and descriptions not only subsidise their own practice, but the creative industries themselves, through many forms of unpaid or poorly labour. Artists, like most other precarious workers in a gig economy, have many jobs, typically a combination of cash-in-hand, PAYE, freelance contracts, grants, per-diems, honorariums, fees and short-term contracts. Our current economic system is built on the backs of the neoliberal subject in the form of a ‘flexible’ workforce: the self-employed, the entrepreneur, and the part-time leftover fragments of labour on the cutting floor of what were once full-time positions.

And yet, under the published funding criteria, Arts Council England will only award grants if your creative practice accounts for more than 50 per cent of your total earnings. This can be read as an attempt to establish a legalised professional identification for an artist, one in which money is the main measure by which we should value art.

Arts Council England's insistence that one must earn more money from their practice than on PAYE is ethically dubious and discriminatory to practitioners and makers. It distorts the primary motivator of artistic labour. The presumption of a steady stream of art commissions or sales, and a consistent profit margin, means that only those who already have money can apply for money.

Cancel everything: pay everyone!

We are less concerned here with the politics of state funding for the arts and more about how neoliberal society defines the role of the artist. The COVID-19 pandemic brings this into sharp focus. In this moment we are reminded of how it would be unimaginable to cope in isolation without music, books, film, performance and other forms of art and culture. This moment is also an opportunity to break from our usual patterns of consumption, and pause to rethink.

Every obstacle is a challenge to circumvent, but what these attempts to selectively support individual practitioners reveal is a different kind of monstrosity: the artist as neoliberal subject and 'cost centre'. More competition! is the cry into the void opened up by COVID-19. What comes back through the screen, the tablet, and the phone is an exponential demand for more, even more than before. The spectre of self-invention is reflected in a viral hall of mirrors.

The blurring of art into life, and life into art, as a world of endless over production and consumption, leaves many artists on a treadmill of self-exploitation. COVID-19 demands a response. The cultural economy and the public are fuelling early demand for content in a pandemic that has not yet peaked. This could be read as a premature shock reaction to the abrupt cessation of life as we know it under capitalism. It is as if someone pressed the pause button: a harsh awakening for many, and for others an opportunity to stop and rethink. This unique opportunity to actually pause demands that we stop pouring petrol on the fires of self-exploitation and the entrepreneurialisation of the self.

This is not a critique of necessary distraction and the sharing of creative responses and storytelling that genuinely help create vibrant online communities and alternative visions. It is a challenge to shape a different political subjectivity, first by accepting the invitation to PAUSE, and secondly a refusal to accept business as usual in the world to come.

To pause is to acknowledge privilege. COVID-19 does not distinguish between rich or poor. But the lock down ruthlessly exposes inequality and COVID-19 is worsening its spread. All around we see life without security.

In response to these recent measures, and in solidarity with all those on the frontline who are not able to stop and reassess, and all precarious workers, business owners, self-employed, the least employed and the unrecognised labour that supports life - to all those that cannot get the support offered, we call upon artists to PAUSE.

This has rapidly become an exceptional time of social upheaval, and like the pandemic, we are only at the start of many struggles that are emerging from this crisis. Artists will be called upon to bring new poetics and objectives into these social struggles as they take shape.

The pandemic has caused work to stop. Paradoxically, only a general strike could have achieved this before. Artists were among the first to invent responses to the social and political events during May '68, in a coming together of workers with students and artists in the production of a radical critique. 'Art is the armchair in which the State sits for its own pleasure' wrote Alain Jouffroy, an artist active in the strikes as he joined others in putting art in the service of revolution. In this moment of COVID-19 the pause, as a deliberate act of non-productivity, is not an intention 'to end the rule of production, but to change the most adventurous part of "artistic" production into the production of revolutionary ideas, forms and techniques.' (3)

To pause is to cease to be usefully productive for capitalism, but not to surrender your work. The pause is the moment to regain strength for the refusal to accept business as usual in the world to come. Artists have the ability to reassign their labour power to resist commodification. It is the act that reassigns the labour of non-productivity to imagining and instituting other possible worlds and futures.

To pause means we down tools, at least for a little while. It means taking time to look at the world we've created, not in abject horror or fear but to make sense of our collective responsibility. Embrace the void, accept the silence. Live with your personal responses before propelling them into the world. Learn to own your emotions without transforming them into opportunities for others to consume more and more. Pause to consider what it means to really share.

Let others breathe. Let everyone who is able to do so, pause.

We cannot switch off our social media, we should not. We are in an unprecedented moment of community building and connection. We need each other. But don't drown out this moment by asking us to consume more, look at more, read more, share more, produce more. Many of us are facing a multitude of fights to simply survive this crisis.

To pause during this pandemic means galleries, museums and other cultural institutions participate too. Participate in the pause - embrace the void, accept the silence. This pause is open-ended: we must not rush to fill it, abolishing the horizon. Let us use this space to think, not show more and ask of others to produce more and to consume more. Yes of course let us use art to reflect and to help us understand, to come to terms, to heal, to imagine other possible futures. But not when we are in the thick of it, not when our friends are struggling, not when we don't yet know what lies in front of us.

"As a gesture of protest and in solidarity with my peers who are not getting paid, my website will be closed until further notice". To pause is a courageous act that others have already taken. Whether that's in solidarity with precarious workers, to think how to proceed, to refuse business as usual, to manufacture alternatives or to imagine alternative futures.

To pause, we give ourselves the space to ask questions. With a longer pause we create space in which to think about the answers to those questions.

The urgent questions we need to ask right now are too numerous to list here. Let us instead consider how COVID-19 and the cessation of life as we know it, exposes capitalism's cracks. After years of austerity, growing inequality and exploitation, capitalism now depends on socialism for its own survival. Precarity as the condition by which neoliberal capitalism has enacted its domination is now fully exposed.

To pause is to evaluate. Do we want more and more of our lives 'online' and to work remotely? Before we have even addressed this question, the pandemic brings about its inevitability. We are living out right now the triumphs of Silicon Valley and its dream of total neural connection and distraction, seduced to reside in cyber space via the tentacular internet of things. The digital world is gearing up to facilitate an ever-present online universe, taking our ancient practices and rituals of togetherness and proximity and making them virtual. In the months to come, unless we pause, we will help eradicate the imperatives of space and proximity in the pursuit of machine intelligence and surveillance revenues, further dismantling the institutions of social solidarity. Universities will learn to better commercialise distance learning and AI capabilities. Companies will let go of expensive office and work spaces in favour of working from home. Galleries and museums will find new revenues from virtual audiences and online exhibitions.

PAUSE means facing the world, and acknowledging that this is not the world we want to live in.

Calls for a new ecological thinking reverberate in empty skies, with no planes overhead, and the uncanny appearance of dolphins in the Venetian waterways, where once giant cruise ships docked. In this unprecedented moment of temporary cessation, the opportunity arises to invent new narratives and mentally prepare for a post-carbon economy. As we discover new ways of being together and acting collectively, we will also develop strategies of adaptation. As artists we have a responsibility to invent responses, to invent new languages of criticism and of hope.

The one refusal we must share in the formation of new struggles and new solidarities is the collective cry that says NO to *business as usual*. We cannot go back to *business as usual*, to how things were. We cannot truly say NO unless we pause first.

Gruppo Pause (Ben Parry, Lia Mazzari)

1 Sontag, S. (1978), *Illness as Metaphor*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

2 Sholette, G. (2006), *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in an Age of Enterprise Culture*. London: Pluto Press

3 Jouffroy, A. (1968), 'What's to Be Done About Art?' In Casseau, J. (ed.), *Art and Confrontation: The Arts in an Age of Change*. New York: New York Graphic Society.

LOOK, LOOK: OP ART/POP ART IN XTC SINGLE SLEEVES 1977-83

Words by *Peter Mills*

Andy Partridge is a true believer in pop, and the aesthetics of the 7" 45rpm record: the single. Indeed the last commercially issued new XTC track penned by Partridge was his tribute to the 45, 'Spiral' (2005). In an irony which would not have been lost on him, it was an internet-only release. Between 1977 and 1983, the first period of XTC's life *en publique*, they were touring and recording incessantly, yet Partridge designed all but one of the sleeves for XTC's singles of that period. While producing one's own cover art may be commonplace at the DIY /Indie level it's much more unusual when the band is working at a high level of success, as were XTC back then. We can't discuss them all here, but I've chosen a representative sample illustrating how the band's music was packaged by their own chief songwriter. It's art to look at as well as listen to.

To be clear: XTC was by no means just Andy Partridge. Colin Moulding was there throughout and wrote many of the band's biggest hits. Terry Chambers, Dave Gregory and Barry Andrews all proved irreplaceable. In matters of design, however, Moulding told me that while he had some input on 45s featuring his own songs, 'Andy was fiercely protective over what he thought was his domain. I think the people at Design Clinic did the donkey work'(1). Partridge's very strong visual sense – he *sees* the music- comes over in his songs; in the documentary *This Is Pop* (Charlie Thomas 2017) he explains and demonstrates how this works, how certain musical tones suggest visuals to him, which are then turned into words and melodies. It's a music-focussed synaesthesia. This visual realisation of the musical tone or chord goes way back to his adolescent musical endeavours with early versions of XTC trading under the names Star Park and The Helium Kidz (that 'Z' evoking mid 70's British pop at its Sladest). Furthermore he knows the lineages of pop music; what it sounded like, what it looked like. He also loved comics, pulp sci-fi (recording a whole instrumental album inspired by the art of Richard M. Powers) and pop art. That pop/comic sensibility informed the covers he designed for XTC singles; wit, invention, and an extension of musical meaning into the visual.

XTC were signed to Virgin in Spring 1977 and despite future difficulties with the label they were the ideal home for someone with Partridge's creative sensibilities. Virgin had welcomed mavericks since the label's 1973 launch: Mike Oldfield, Slapp Happy and Hatfield & The North albums all sported striking, wilfully eccentric covers. Indeed, legendary 49p album *The Faust Tapes* may have influenced XTC in unexpected ways: Bridget Riley's kinetic op-art piece 'Crest' on the back cover was echoed in a 1983 single sleeve, as we shall see, and the label design was recreated/revived for XTC alter-egos The Dukes of Stratospher's *25 O'Clock*.

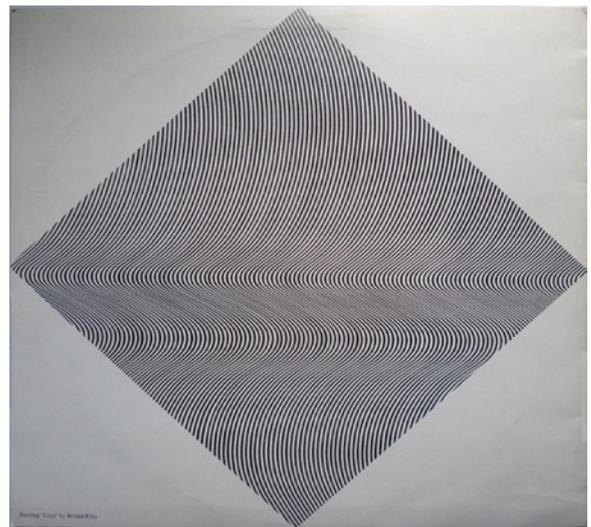


Figure 1 Bridget Riley 'Crest' on back cover of *The Faust Tapes* (Virgin 1973)



Figure 2 Original Virgin Records label (1973-76)



Figure 3 Label for The Dukes Of Stratosphear (XTC) *25 O'Clock* (Virgin 1985)

The sleeve for XTC's July 1977 debut '3D EP' brings this mix of retro-futurism to bear, in a kind of pop art/op art/ sci-fi collision. The cover says that just as you need special lenses to see this cover properly, you need to listen differently to this music as well. In the 70's the idea of 3D was antique in that the pop sci-fi experiment in 3D cinema in the 1950's was by then an arcane footnote, while its digital revival lay decades ahead. So it was at once both a retro and a futuristic device. The front cover carries no information about the music or the artist. It could easily be a standalone artwork, not a record cover at all. As far as I know the record did not come with 3D glasses to help the potential buyer.

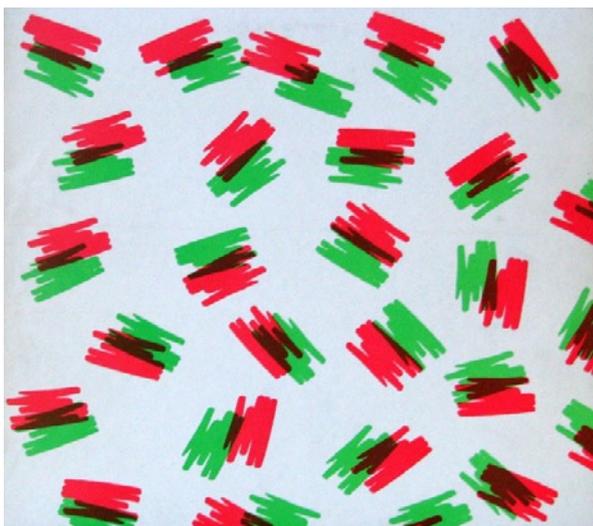


Figure 4: XTC '3DEP' (Virgin 1977, front cover)

Flipping the sleeve you'd see a more conventional back cover, but one still rendered in 3D. You can read it, but you have to make an effort. This is in itself a tone-setter. XTC music and sleeves always require you to engage, to give something to the artwork, to

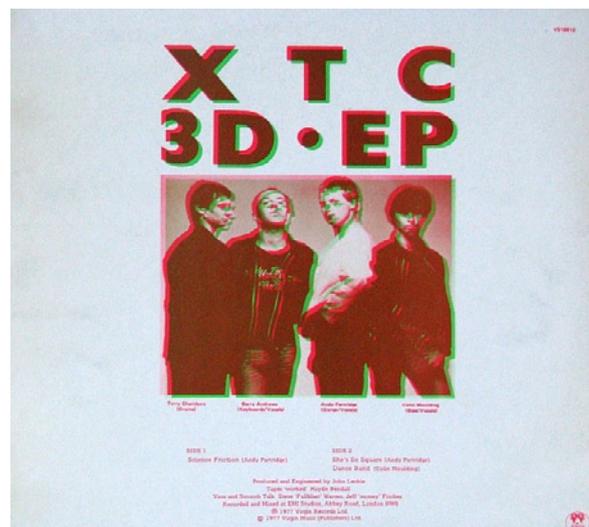


Figure 5: XTC '3DEP' (Virgin 1977, back cover)

make an effort: they ask the viewer and listener to become more than a passive receiver.

We see the band name – as a debut release, few people would have known them– and the disc's title is rendered in two pairs of characters, both of which 'mean' something in their abbreviated state:

'3D' [three dimensional image] 'EP' [extended play record]. What is now considered a classic early portrait of the quartet occupies centrefield, with credits introducing the players to us. In the lower segment are song titles and mandatory recording/publishing credits. Catalogue number upper right corner; in the bottom right, that very recognisable 'double' Virgin logo. Incredibly, only four years separated the '3D EP' from *Tubular Bells* and *The Faust Tapes*.

Partridge disliked the design given to their next single, 'Statue Of Liberty', from their debut album *White Music* in January 1978. He commented via email:

I designed the first one, '3DEP'/'Science Friction'. Then we were touring constantly and 'Statue of Liberty' got released which I wasn't around to design. So appalled was I by that sleeve that I swore I would design all sleeves from then on...my sketches being worked up to finished artwork usually by Ken Ansell and Dave Dragon/Jill Mumford at Design Clinic, now just called Clinic. (2)

Here is the cover to 'Statue of Liberty' that so upset him. Clean white field, band logo (which they stuck with for some years), bold type, title-friendly image. I quite like it - but it's not my song.

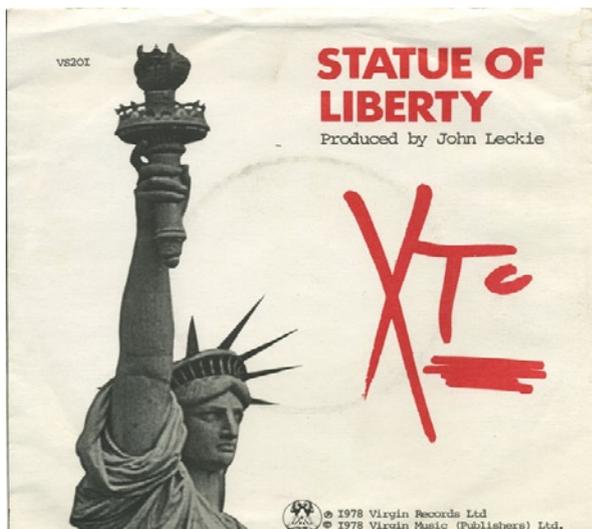


Figure 6: XTC 'Statue Of Liberty' (Virgin, 1978, front cover)

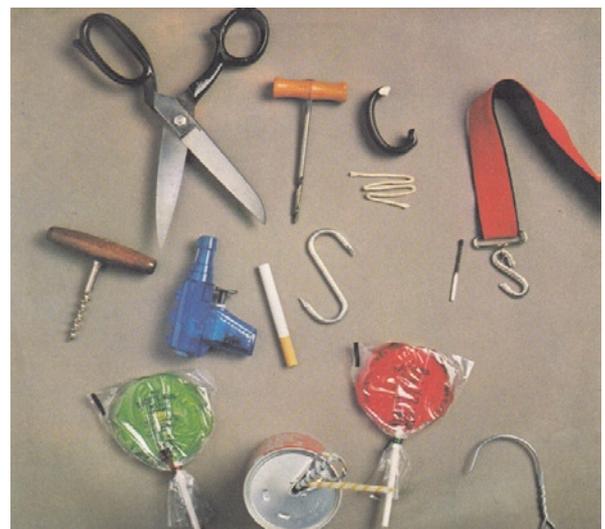


Figure 7: XTC 'This Is Pop?' (Virgin 1978, front cover)

The next 45 was all Andy. 'This Is Pop?' is a zoom'd up re-record of the *White Music* version. It's a declaration of intent and self-identification; yet, ever suspicious of the easy assertion, Partridge adds a question mark to the sleeve – the wire coat hanger - and the song's title. It's 'unheard' on the record, but we hear it feelingly.

The cover is a collage of what we might now call 'found' objects, everyday items you'd hardly notice in the normal scheme of things, which we most likely would not think of in terms of their design at all. It's almost like a puzzle: make something out of these household objects. Mark Fisher, creator of the XTC fanzine *Limelight* discussed this sleeve with me:

They [the objects used] are democratic: the scissors, corkscrews, lollipops, coat hanger, cigarette, broken cup handle, belt and water pistol are everyday objects that anyone would have to hand. It's not the unattainable glamour and cocktails of Roxy Music, but the cheap accessibility of a sweet shop. (3)

This insightful nod to Roxy Music - great exponents of artwork adding to the ambient meanings surrounding the music – reminds us that these are aesthetic and commercial choices; a sublime kind of advertising strategy. A collage can often generate meaning through the serendipity of juxtaposition but here the elements are consciously employed to serve an important question – *this is pop?*. I enjoy the incredulous tone that the question mark adds. Note too the little squiggle of string under the 'C' of XTC, recreating the scribble in the band's logo as seen on the 'Statue Of Liberty' cover. The question really is, are you paying attention? The camera shy question mark of 'This Is Pop?' moved to centre stage on the sleeve of October 1978's 'Are You Receiving Me'. A standalone 45, it was the last to feature Barry Andrews, arriving a fortnight before the single-less *Go2* LP. It was their second successive single with a question for a title, but this time there was no ambiguity. The sleeve features a huge, centred question mark rendered in a kind of typewriter font, with inkily uneven margins, on a matt white field. It's absolutely clear but also kind of...smudgy. It's also suggestive of a letter or note typed out and sent from one person to another; the letter arrives, and is read, but is it understood? 'I put it in a letter/What could be better?', says the lyric.

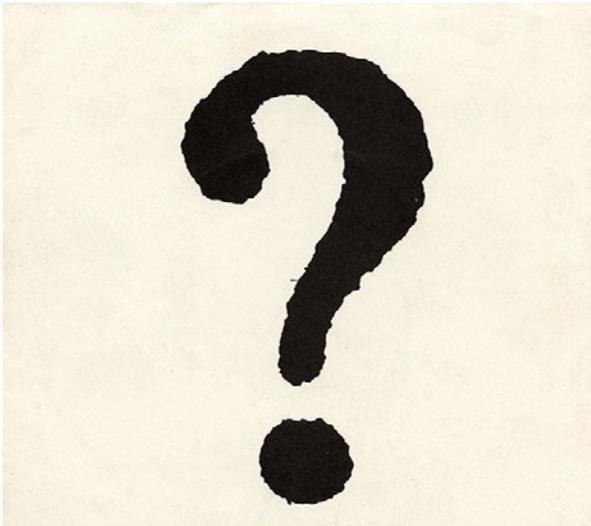


Figure 8: XTC 'Are You Receiving Me' (Virgin 1978, front cover)

The dynamic simplicity of the design reminds me of a piece of pop art, or the reverse polarity version of a silent film intertitle, which were usually white text on a black field.

Yet if we look at the title on the sleeve, and indeed on the record label, we find no question mark. This woozy drifting in and out of presence feels like the surge and fade of a radio signal; anyone who used to listen to Radio Luxembourg in the 60's and 70's (and I will bet you ten shillings that Andy Partridge did) will know that sound. Radio waves as metaphor for communication were not new for XTC – *White Music* opened with 'Radios In Motion' – and this clash between hearing, seeing and feeling is at the heart of Partridge's songs. Are you receiving me? Thoroughly 'through-designed', the single's b-side was Colin Moulding's 'Instant Tunes'. The form is absolutely consistent with the a-side and the exclamation mark is a pleasing fit with the song – where 'Are You Receiving Me' was loomed over by a big question mark on its sleeve (if not appended to its title), 'Instant Tunes' has its NASA space food vibe confirmed by the immediacy of the exclamation mark. 'Instant tunes, only just been made' runs the lyric. It's also an observation on the quick turnover of the pop industry – the volume of it, we might say – to which the band suddenly found itself subject; with the constant demand for new songs to take to market comes the idea of music as commodity. The exclamation mark delivers the apposite bolt of current, the sting of surprise, the shock of the new. Pay attention!



Figure 9: XTC

The exclamation mark was a staple pop art device, of course. It adds much to any

word or title (imagine The Beatles' cry for *Help!* without one) and 60's pop culture sprinkled them liberally. Think of the works of Roy Lichtenstein, or the cartoon emphases of *Batman*, while Michael Nesmith got to wear one in the 'cheerleader for war' segment of The Monkees' 1968 movie *Head*, too: all Partridge favourites.



Figure 10 : i) Roy Lichtenstein 'Pop!' (*Newsweek* magazine cover 25/4/66)



Figure 10: ii) Adam West as Batman with cartoon intercession (chewing gum trading card, 1967)



Figure 10: iii) Michael Nesmith in *Head* (Bob Rafelson 1968)

Once Barry Andrews left the band in January 1979 XTC were reconstituted as a guitar, bass and drum outfit and, unusually for them at this time, spent three months off the road writing and rehearsing with new member but old friend, guitar player Dave Gregory. First fruit of that was the pointedly 'old school' 45 'Life Begins At The Hop' which won a spot on *Top Of The Pops*. Colin Moulding's song showcased the band's new guitar-focussed sound while Partridge's sleeve paid tribute to the band's Swindon childhood. It recreated the design of the Garrard RC 121 turntable, typical of 1950's and 60's decks. Garrard was based in Swindon and, after the railway companies, one of the town's top employers. The vinyl was clear, the better to blend in with the design, in which a clear plastic pocket was overlaid with the turntable graphic and invites us to relish the rituals involved in playing, responding to and plain enjoying pop records. Garrard's operations in Swindon were scaled down after it was sold to Plessey in 1979, so there is also something elegiac about the imagery on this sleeve.



Figure 11 : XTC 'Life Begins At The Hop' (Virgin 1979)



Figure 12: Garrard RC 121 turntable, made in Swindon by Garrard Engineering and Manufacturing Company c.1960

This recalibration of form – from retro-pulp sci-fi to local habitation - was registered in the title and content of their August 1979 album *Drums and Wires*, the success of which surprised everyone, not least the band. It was led from the front

by XTC's first top 20 hit, 'Making Plans For Nigel'. Again it was Colin Moulding's song, and the sleeve builds upon and extends the song's meaning. Initial copies of the 45 contained a board game. In 1984's *Play At Home* documentary, Partridge spoke about his love of inventing board games, even demonstrating one he'd had custom made, called 'Ant Hill'. So the narrative of 'Making Plans For Nigel'

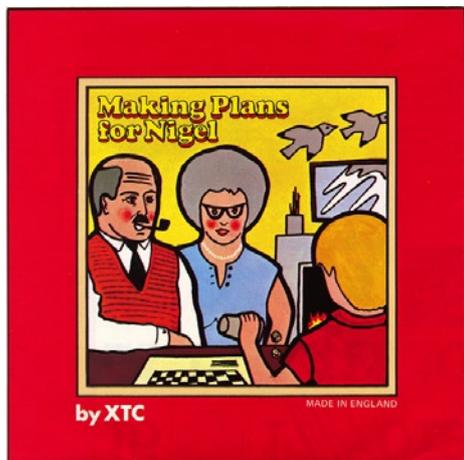


Figure 13: XTC 'Making Plans For Nigel' (Virgin 1979, front cover)

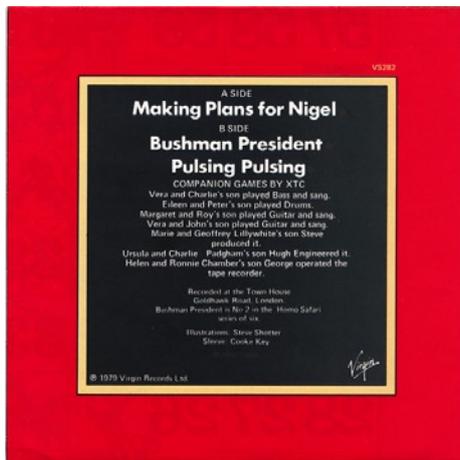


Figure 14: XTC 'Making Plans For Nigel' (Virgin 1979, back cover)

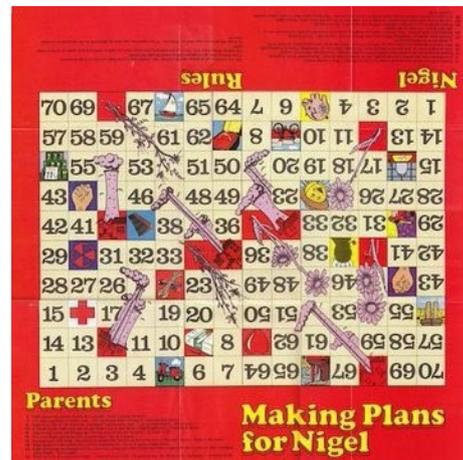


Figure 15 a, b: XTC 'Making Plans For Nigel' (Virgin 1979, board game included with initial copies)

becomes an actual game you can play, with no guaranteed winners. Sleeve credits list the contributors via their parentage, resonating with the song's subject having no real say in his own life: Nigel does not speak in the song 'but he loves to be spoken to...Nigel is happy in his work'.

Partridge didn't feel as though the final sleeve reflected his original vision, surrendering the task to the Design Clinic while XTC toured the world and elsewhere promoting *Drums and Wires*:

Anything that I could do with sleeves I'd have to phone in from wherever we were on tour. I'd have to try and post in sketches, or whatever. And it was all snatched on the hoof really. But I liked the idea of having an interactive single bag, where you made decisions on Nigel's life and played it as a game. (4)

Even when imperfectly realised, his ability to 'see' the music provides the means for connecting sound and vision, relating the realms of tactile object and intangible sound.

The sleeve to 'Great Fire' –issued in May 1983 - is effectively a multimedia performance device: every time you take the record out of the sleeve you start a fire. The description of the sleeve on Discogs beats any paraphrase I could muster: 'The cover comes in a plastic sleeve with a corresponding wavy pattern on it, so that when the paper cover is removed, the action of doing so produces a fire-like visual effect.'

Like the collage of 'This Is Pop?' the sleeve playfully employs a formal art method. Moiré isn't or wasn't a person – it's from the French, being the name of a type of textile pattern which has a rippled appearance. This gives a kinetic effect which suggests movement to the eye, not unlike the Bridget Riley piece used for *The Faust Tapes*. It's a prime op-art technique, and one Partridge was enthusiastic about. He discussed how he put this sleeve together:



Figure 16: XTC 'Great Fire' (Virgin 1983, front cover with kinetic 'flame' effect)

You can sometimes see these little sets of Moiré patterns in books...and you can run the patterns across the book and where the lines on the optical pattern on the plastic interacts with the optical pattern of the drawing underneath, you get a third image. You know that principle, you sometimes see a stagecoach wheel on TV and it seems to be turning backwards. Our whole stage light show was built on the white lines principle, interacting mechanical optical patterns from three projectors. So I thought that was a good thing to carry over into the artwork as well. (5)

It is fascinating to learn that he applied similar ideas into the kinetic artwork of the band's light show, too.

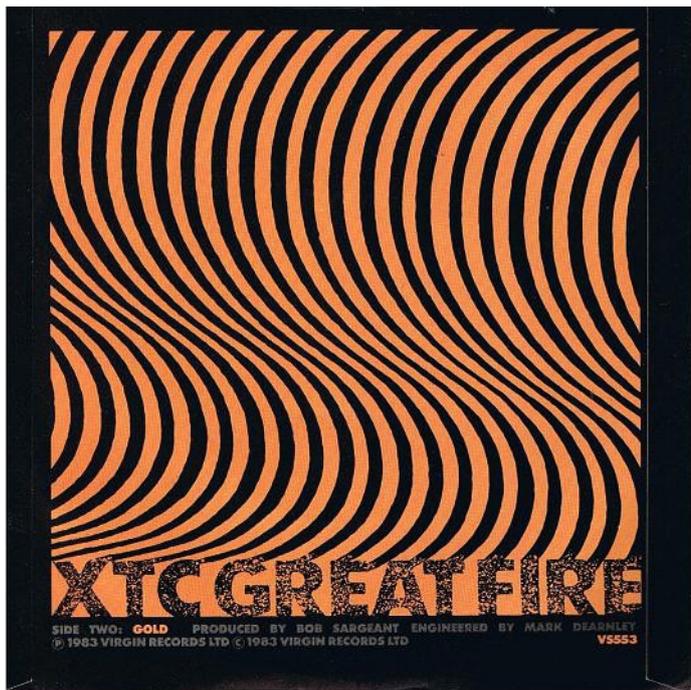


Figure 17: XTC 'Great Fire' (Virgin 1983, back cover)

I asked film maker, musician and art lecturer Stuart Hilton about the Moiré technique, and this sleeve:

I do love the idea of laying a screen of thin parallel lines over another similar - or slightly dissimilar one - to create unexpected patterns or better yet illusions of movement - it's ready made abstract animation without having to do anything strenuous. That sleeve has got that op art Bridget Riley thing going on - and a really nice connection between fire and waves. Also another really important factor is that he knows what you have to do to put the record on - it's a physical performance of having to slide the inside sleeve out to get to play it. It's interactive! You are the animator! You want to control the effect when you see it. You make it burn.
(6)

Hilton draws our attention to the similarities in representations of fire and water as elemental forces, and how one can cancel out the other according to circumstances: evaporation or dousing? The kinetic movement of the sleeve is in the hands of the user: 'you make it burn', as Hilton observes. It is also the work of a real lover of 45s, the man who went on to write that hymn to the single, 'Spiral': 'he knows what you have to do to put the record on - it's a physical performance of having to slide the inside sleeve out to get to play it.'

My final example is 'Love On A Farm Boy's Wages' issued in April 1984, based on Partridge's observation that a 'double single' (a mid-80's marketing device, four songs across two discs with a 7" gatefold cover) was not unlike a wallet.

"That was actually my wallet. I got together again with Dave Dragon [Design Clinic] and I said, "What I'd really like to do, to signify wages, is to make the double gatefold EP type sleeve a wallet." You know, 'cause you open a wallet and that's what shape it is." (7)

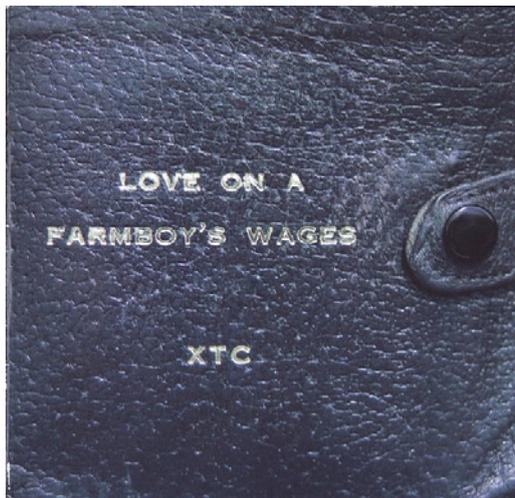


Figure 18: XTC 'Love On A Farmboy's Wages' (Virgin 1983, front cover)

The song's title is embossed in gold on a real wallet, band name below. The button which closes the wallet is popped into place to the left of the image. It's not a picture of a wallet; the sleeve *is* the wallet. What's inside?



Figure 19: XTC 'Love On A Farmboy's Wages' (Virgin 1983, double single gatefold, inner)

A picture of a young woman dressed in 1930's style, an old salmon-pink 10 shilling note, a cloakroom ticket, a Players' No.6 cigarette voucher (my own father used to collect these; I recognised it instantly) and a wage slip. The stuff of work alongside scraps of hope and pleasure, glimpsed and tasted briefly. Almost incidentally, papers bear the titles of the extra songs, 'Toys' and 'Desert Island'. The 45's themselves are tucked into the two halves of the wallet. Nothing is here without good reason; the wallet is a curated artwork. For all the apparent simplicity of the package, my feeling is that this is the most satisfying and integrated piece of art/music, op art/pop art produced for an XTC 45 during this initial period of creativity.

XTC's career went off on wayward tangents after they stopped touring in 1982 and became a studio band – The Dukes Of Stratosphere, the huge success of the Todd Rundgren produced *Skylarking*, the lost years battling with Virgin –but Partridge continued to design the packaging for all the band's music in order to both reflect and push back against all that happened. But that's another story.

Notes

1. Colin Moulding via TC & I Facebook page 24th of April 2020
2. Andy Partridge via email 19th of March 2020
3. Mark Fisher via email 23rd of April 2020
4. Optimism's Flames website accessed 10th of February 2020
5. *ibid.*
6. Stuart Hilton via email 24th of April 2020
7. Optimism's Flames website accessed 10th of February 2020

Selected Discography

XTC:

- '3DEP' Virgin Records 1977 (VS 18812)
- 'Statue Of Liberty' Virgin Records 1977 (VS 201)
- 'This Is Pop?' Virgin Records 1978 (VS 209)
- 'Are You Receiving Me' Virgin Records 1978 (VS 231)
- 'Life Begins At The Hop' Virgin Records 1979 (VS 259)
- 'Making Plans For Nigel' Virgin Records 1979 (VS 282)
- 'Great Fire' Virgin Records 1983 (VS 553)
- 'Love On A Farmboy's Wages' Virgin Records (double single) 1983 (VS 613)
- 'Spiral' (2005, issued online with download code included in *Apple Box* (IDEACD007))

As The Dukes of Stratosphear

- 25 O'Clock* (six track mini album) Virgin Records 1985 (WOW 1)

Other:

- Faust *The Faust Tapes* Virgin Records 1973 (VC 501)