

Burgers for Tea? Crass, Flux of Pink Indians, D&V, Annie Anxiety +Films. May 2nd 1984, Marcus Garvey Centre, Nottingham.

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This gig was a big deal for us young Beeston punks. Since 1979, with the *Reality Asylum* record, the band had become firm parts of our minds, behaviour and practice. They were an enigma. In the pre internet world, their records mystified the usual available band images. The exception to this was the poster one of the weekly music 'inkies' *Sounds*, clearly made without band permission. Other images were collages around the borders of their *Stations of the Crass* LP. Other images were found in the Xeroxed pages of various fanzines. The band's art gave me nightmares. I'm not afraid to admit this now. The context of first term Thatcherism, the rise in Cold War tensions and the looming threat of nuclear catastrophe eagerly assisted these dreams...still hate Thatcher!

Back in those days there was a stable group of friends; Pat, Tim, Steve, Iain, Paul and the Cooper brothers. We'd traded records, drew poorly dimensioned two headed snakes on our bags and schoolwork and now adopted the black surplus Crass army style clothes of the band. We were all around fifteen or sixteen at the time and due to leave school in the following few months. Most of us had long given up attending that place regularly. The school viewed us with trepidation and saw the anarchist tendencies as a bad example to the younger pupils. I hated the place. Myself and a mate used to piss on the toilet rolls on a daily basis, graffiti the barn with 'fight war not wars' etc. and the jocks used us as a repeated target to bully: wankers! I hated that school and its dogshit teachers that much I took a shit behind the stage on leaving day, taking care to wipe my arse on the curtains; shortly before the police arrived to escort a large cohort of disenfranchised 'youth' firmly off the school premises. It wasn't the school that encouraged me to learn, it was Crass and all the other anarcho bands back then. I was devouring anarchist theory and Marxism at a rapid rate and living during the Miners strike context back then was a political education in itself.

Rumours circulated within our group that Crass were going to play Notts. Not only that so were Flux. This band was the reason for my thoughts on becoming vegetarianism. I'd toyed with this, much to the anger and bemusement of my family. The result back then was a private part-time arrangement. I was cutting down on the meat. The Flux song 'Sick Butchers' was definitely steering me in this way, with 'you try to stroke me in a field then go home and eat me as your meal'. Well I was getting there. Life changing stuff!

I could bang on for ages of all the other anarcho type stuff we got involved in back then. I'm not going to. Back then, amongst messing around gluesniffing, still blasting out to the back of the Broadmarsh centre on my BMX, way before it was acceptable for a young punk to do so, the Crass gig was on the horizon. It was a very sunny May back in '84. I remember not giving a thought to much else in the run up to this gig. I'd been to a few smaller shows but this was different. I was still earning cash from a paper-round back then and dashed home afterwards. Tim and Steve were on their way around and we were meeting the others on the bus to the gig.

I'd been cutting down on meat eating as a result though not fully given it up. My mother really couldn't get her head around the whole thing. There used to be blazing rows with the rest of the family. Constant family with myself on my teenage, moral hobby horse took with me chuntering back at them about animal exploitation, slaughterhouses and the general evils of the meat trade. There were quite a

few Sundays when I remember feeling sick at the smell of the family roast joint of beef and ending up sitting in silence eating a plate of mash, roast spuds, carrots minus the meat and gravy. Vegetarian products and meat substitutes were still a way off. That said there were times when I really just didn't have the stomach for a fight and surrendering to my mother's meaty menus, often gipping my way through dinners, enduring nauseating feelings for the sake of family peace with the greasy chewy substances that death diet involved. Anyway Tim and Steve arrived and we spent some time before getting on the bus chatting in the sun. I remember showing them some of the BMX projects I'd been working on which was a still a very big deal for me back then. I'd died my hair black by then, much to the annoyance of the school but was pretty chuffed with the results. I'd soaped it into a right mess, got my black combats on, Ruccanor baseball boots, Dead Kennedys shirt and felt very much the part for the gig. As was my mother's concern for her growing teenage punk son, she shouted out of the window, "would you all like some beef burgers for tea?" I knew this was a windup; she was trying to embarrass me in front of my mates. Tim and Steve looked a bit bemused by the request, hehe. I just played it cool saying "no thanks Ma". We were all too excited to be remotely bothered with eating anyway. That said, I was bloody embarrassed by the windup feeling my punk credibility as a compassionate vege punk was compromised. After that parental affront I made a mental note to increase the struggle with the family on the meat front.

We headed off to get the bus. All the usual punks were on the bus, Iain, Conrad and Steve, Paul and a few others whose names are lost in time. Back then we could smoke on the bus, each of us occupying a double seat at the back of the top-deck, puffing away on Benson and Hedges ciggies, feet dangling off the edges of the seats. Back then anti Thatcher graffiti was all over Beeston. 'Kill Thatcher and Tebitt' emblazoned the back of my seat. Great stuff. The Marcus Garvey centre was a short trot off the bus route and would be a future venue for a lot of other great punk and hardcore shows in the late 1980s. The large building was grey in pallor, surrounded by newly planted trees and greenery. A social cornerstone of the Nottingham West Indian community it was the perfect, non-corporate venue for Crass and co to play. Heading into the car park at the back, we were met with a view of hundreds of spiky-haired punks. I felt nervous at marginal, but definitely part of something. There was a great tension and energy in the air. We crouched down in a spot near the bins, drinking from two-litre bottles of cider and lager procured illegally from the off-licence. The painted leather jackets were striking, depicting various band names, studs and alum art/band logos. One struck me as awesome, a totally accurate painting of the Subhumans *The Day the Country Died* art. Jawdropping in every detail with artistic efforts that had been painstakingly adhered to in every brushstroke. It was a people-watching paradise. Various groups of stalwart punks from the midlands and beyond punk scenes were present replete with various grubby looking kitbags, ready for a night of floor-kipping. We sat there talking the usual gossip and crap until a queue began for form to get in the venue. My nerves and excitement were building as we shuffled along. Long since a casualty to too many house moves my treasured ticket displayed all the bands and the £1.50 entry fee. We'd bought them from the hippy co-op food shop Ouroboros on Mansfield road, run by a load of what seemed to us back then like ageing, beardy, baldy radicals and feminists that would prove, along with Nottingham's Mushroom bookshop, to be a valuable source of support in the subsequent radical activities of the cities anarcho-punks.

As we were nearly in the venue we looked up and there were a few members of Crass, Flux etc. looking down on the queue smiling. We'd never really seen clear pictures of Crass but they looked of mixed age, some slightly balding, all smiling. Ticket stamped, I made my way to the bogs before going into the venue for a piss; the cider had taken its bladder-toll. On the way into the bogs I spotted Les (later of Concrete Sox) stood by the doorway, dressed in what I remember as a cacophony of

black patched up clothes and a ragged blue jumper. He loosely clutched the book version of the *Christ the Album* book, *A Series of Shock Slogans and Token Tantrums*, most likely procured from one of the many radical information stalls in residence for the show. I'd met Les along with Gabba (later of Chaos UK) as a young punk BMX hanging out with a load of reprobates at the back of the Broadmarsh shopping centre. I remember being really impressed with 'em for noticing the young punk on what a lot of mates would call a 'noddy bike', fuck them! Back at the gig I didn't have the guts to talk to Les, I've always been a bit of a nervous type and as a fifteen year old this was much worse back then. Walking into the venue I was met with the awesome installation which was a 1980s crass show. The room held around five hundred people, was circled with various radical stalls displaying animal right CND, miners' strike and other literature. Obviously no pre-made crass t-shirts back then. The philosophy was to make your own shirts, sod the profiteers. The middle of the room was a platform with a very large sound-desk, a series of reel to reel projectors and lighting control panels. All the ace backdrops were in place, with the two headed snake, the Flux, *Fucking Pricks Treat us Like Pricks* art and the Crass 'Destroy Power Not People' banner. In fact every inch of useable stage wall space was occupied with projector screens and banners. The backline was daubed with various versions of two headed snake symbols. I was transfixed. A mixture of heavy dub reggae was blasting out of the hefty PA system. People were milling around talking waiting for the show to begin, the smell of weed, vegetarian cooking and roll-ups hung thick on the air. The atmosphere I sensed in the crowd was a mixture of anticipation, anger and interest.

The event finally kicked off, the wait finally over, the house lights came down. The strange thing striking me at the time was the films, shown on two, large screens with the soundtrack blasted through the PA system. Most of the audience sat down for the double-short bill of G-Sus's surreal image montage critiques, *Choosing Death* and *Autopsy*. The first film had a marked effect on me; a visual display of the slaughterhouse procedure replete with bovine's hung up, their throats cut and guts expunged slopping onto the concrete floor, all mixed with a surreal soundtrack and various seventies television adverts and billboards. Well, that's the way my memories replay it to me decades later. The effect? Well I was fucking glad I declined the mother beef burgers for tea. I'd have puked. The result was a subsequent and dedicated devotion to strict vegetarianism for the next few decades. The effect on myself and family cannot be understated; my daughter's been vegetarian since birth and now proudly embarking on her seventeenth year with the diet.

Next up was Annie Anxiety. I have to admit I wasn't her greatest fan. The record she did for Crass's label at the time struck my teenage punk taste as a load of arty farty poetic bollocks. That said she was mostly well received by that night. I was stood stage left for this and was kind of freaked out when one of the male members of Crass tapped me on the shoulder and asked if I knew where to procure some weed. That was weird, all I could muster in terms of a response was "sorry mate, I don't but you should definitely ask around as this is a West Indian centre, someone will be able to help". It was strange my drug use up to that point had been strictly glue: weed and all that blather of 'proper drugs' seemed a world away. That would change over the next year or so (another probably very boring story!).

D&V a duo consisting of drums and vocals took the stage next. The tension was building in the room. I had a soft spot for this band though many of my peers hated them. They played the songs off the Crass Records seven inch and two girls with spiky pink and red hair grapple danced each other around the crowd knocking into various people and splashing people's drinks into their chests. I was hooked, this was ace! The singer stood motionless for most of the set, barking lyrics into the mic. No guitars evident but it just worked. Great stuff. A few cigarettes and some chats with mates, another (underage) beer or two took place then the mighty Flux of Pink Indians took to the stage. They were a

big deal for me at the time and, having missed the legendary events of their previous gig at 'The Shed' club in Beeston, which ended in violence and inter-scene fighting. A song on their first LP *Strive to Survive*, the tirade against punk violence 'Take Heed' marked that show into anarcho punk history. Now Flux were in front of me. The singer, Coal, tightly grasping onto the mic stand, inflamed in passion, blasting out the lyrics. The band were tight and played a lot of material off the first LP, and finished the set with the amazing 'Tube Disasters'. As I remember, the crowd went mental to them, and the chaos of studded leather jackets bounding into each other, mixed with sweat adrenaline and various other substances.

Finally and it seemed to arrive so quickly, Crass took to the stage. The hair on the back of my neck stood up. There was this mystical and inspirational band there and in the flesh. I know all that stuff about anti rock-star ethos and all that flatulence, but aside from the Pistols and The Clash, (with the exception of Discharge) this band had had a massive effect on my life to that point. My politics, intellectual development and view on life was not shaped by school, it was this band and their often stark criticism of modern life during the cold war. I did hold them on a pedestal. This was reflected in the intro tape for the band, a spoof of news coverage of Thatcher's speeches on possible nuclear attack and the then prime-minister's sexual excitement at the prospect. My memory fails me as to the song order though this show has been available as a tape and an LP since the gig. For the purposes of aiding a shitty memory the LP *Christ the Bootleg*, served as a memory aid for the following account. The visual impact of the band was stark, rolling projections of various G-Sus altered cold war images, Crass record and fanzine art, mushroom clouds and the images from the *You're Already Dead* record of Thatcher and Michael Heseltine with their eyes and mouths animated out with scribbles. The first few tracks were from the *Yes Sir, I Will 12"* avante garde anti war statement. The strategy of the band was to start with the strange and move into more of their traditional material. The section 'What did you Know, What Did You Care?' part Beatles, Dylan and artistic performance, with the backing synth. Very moving.

That said, to see the band with their backdrops, visuals and the strange black Guild guitars which were definitely not the standard 'rock fare' aesthetic instruments. All the gear had a healthy tan of black spray-paint. The most striking memory was Andy Palmer, playing his guitar overhand and refusing to use chords. He tuned the guitar to open E and it sounded great. The entire band were dressed in a hue of various shades of black army surplus clothing. Steve Ignorant, the most 'tatty looking grasped the microphone, a set of lyrics rolled up in one hand, squinting at the crowd, shouting down the vocals without pause. The crowd sang along and smashed each other around to the music. The set hammered into later material from the *You're already Dead 7"* into earlier material from the *Feeding 12"* and *Stations* records mixing up later songs from the *Christ* LP. The occasional sample of news broadcast punctuated the band in between the songs. One of the more quiet songs, 'Smash The Mac', demonstrated the last of their punk rock based output before they collapsed into the artsy last records. Eve and Joy gave intense performances during the songs from *Penis Envy* standing and gesticulating in front of the mic's, Rimbaud sweating and offering one of the most original drum styles ever to grace to punk canon. The most stark image that remains with me from this show was Steve Ignorant's passion. He barked every lyric with such ferocious integrity it was clear that the world was turning to shit: we had to act. The message was compelling to me as a young man. I took the message from this that the world as it was then could be changed if were prepared to struggle.

Some of the faster songs, 'Hero' and 'Big a Little A' swirled the crowd into a frenzy. This was my first go at dancing at a punk show. The first few songs I jumped around with my jacket on though it got way too hot for that. I took my jacket off and tossed it to the side of the room. This was a clear mistake on my part. Soon enough the other studded jackets in the crowd scratched up my arms to a

sore and bruised mess. I lasted a couple more songs then sat the last bit of the set out just watching. While dancing, the delightful art of gobbing at bands became evident. A nasty business, as I noted Ignorant was peppered with a few greenies as he belted out the lyrics. All too soon the set ended, up came to lights to reveal the drooping mohawks and spikes, empty beer cans, fag butts and discarded flyers. I grabbed my jacket and hooked up with my mates again, totally exhilarated. We hung around for a while reflecting on the amazing thing we'd just witnessed. One of the things that struck me was two or three of Crass were hanging around talking to the audience while others gave out pamphlets and badges. Great stuff. We headed out of the venue and onto the last bus. It's safe to say that our lives were changed in a small number of ways forever. As for Crass? They split inside of month of doing this show collapsing into a short series of arty fartsy musical statements wildly divergent from their angrier output.

Postscript

It's safe to say on the thirtieth anniversary of this gig that this was a landmark life-event for me. Crass, whilst definitely of their time, influenced virtually all of my later journeys in both musical and intellectual worlds. Years later, the Punk Scholars Network, a grouping grown out of my intellectual reflections on my three odd decades of being in punk bands, invited Penny Rimbaud to an Oxford symposium in 2013 reflecting on legacies of anarcho-punk. I have to say that there were a lot of 'rose coloured' accounts that day presenting anarcho-punk as a golden age, neglecting the rich and huge legacy of global DiY punk scene that Crass partly inspired. In response to one particular romantic question, Rimbaud spat back in an acerbic tone (I've taken the liberty to paraphrase from memory here). 'It was shit being in Crass back then, with shows half empty, fighting with skinheads, long drives and half baked arguments with audience members etc. about the theoretical aspects of anarchism'. This to me was accurate. Those days were grim, and not the happiest of times to live through as a young punk. That said, there was definitely a pleasure to be had in protesting the grim times of the cold war: that pleasure was Crass and anarcho-punk. No more meaty burgers for me. Stay punk!

Gords (November, 2014)