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Punk Fashion as a Metaphor in 1980s Britain and Poland

Abstract: While cultural theorists (Hebdidge, McRobbie, Muggleton, Fowler, Reddington) and fashion historians (Wilson) unanimously cast Punk's sartorial practices within the discourse of rebellion and subversion, it is worth noting that the meaning of that rebellion differed across cultures and social contexts. While in Britain, Punk's complete rejection of the established codes of dressing signified rejection of the middle-class values and Thatcherism, when transplanted on to the Polish ground, Punk was 'hijacked' for the purpose of political warfare, and Punk fashion became one of the sites of the battle against the oppressive communist regime. Elements of Cognitive Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Blending Theory are applied to examine metaphorical meanings of Punk fashion in Britain and in Poland, exemplified by the sartorial practices of female singers and Punk fashion icons Siouxsie Sioux and Kora (Olga Jackowska, a vocalist of a Polish band Maanam).

Keywords: Punk, fashion, subcultures, cognitive metaphor

Examining fashions of the past centuries, particularly as represented in portrait paintings and photographs, makes it perfectly clear that clothing metaphorically communicated the value systems of societies in which these images were created (Hollander xv). While some of these values have prevailed well into the contemporary times, others have been modified or marginalised. Lakoff and Johnson's cognitivist analysis of orientational metaphors, which "have to do with spatial orientation" and "have a basis in our physical and cultural experience" (14) allows us to better comprehend how inherent qualities of the items of clothing communicate social values. For example, in Western societies until the 19th century in menswear and until the 20th century in womenswear, fashion seemed to have reflected the cultural value describe by Lakoff and Johnson as "MORE IS BETTER." Excessive ornamentation, decoration, and exuberance of fabrics used for creation of attires of those in position of power were also expressive of and coherent with other spatialization metaphors proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, namely "MORE IS UP and GOOD IS UP" (22).

While fashion has been lauded as a tool for constructing and communicating identities (most importantly and universally gender identities, but also class, ethnic and national identities), the exact mechanism through which this is possible has remained largely unexplored. At the same time, although some cognitivists have already examined metaphors in non-verbal expressions e.g. John M. Kennedy ("Metaphor and art", 2008), Alan Cienki and Cornelia Müller ("Metaphor, gesture, and thought", 2008), or Lawrence M. Zbikowski ("Metaphor and music", 2008), so far fashion, despite being a vital element of visual culture and visual communication, has been left out by cognitivist scholarship. Yet, it seems that cognitive metaphor theories, such as Lakoff and Johnson's conceptualisation of metaphors and their metaphor paradigm *A* is *B* (1980) may shed some more light on the signification process which occurs in and through fashion.

Similarly, Conceptual Blending Theory as proposed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner in their ground-breaking work *The Way We Think* (2002), appears to offer a viable tool for the analysis of fashion as a cultural phenomenon that is linked to concepts of identity. While the theory accounts for a largely obscure operation of the human mind, conceptual blending can be traced in texts of culture ranging from literature to scientific inventions. It also lies at the core of metaphor formation and interpretation processes. In fact, according to the authors, it is conceptual blending that establishes the foundation of creativity and all human actions, including design, "conceptual blending underlies and makes possible all these diverse human accomplishments, (…) it is responsible for the origins of language, art, religion, science (…) it is as indispensable for basic everyday thought as it is for artistic and scientific abilities" (vi). While humans are preoccupied with forms such as music or art, these forms are characterised by their complexity because human beings "have the most effective abilities for the construction of meaning" (5). One of the products of these largely unconscious operations of the mind in relation to form, which manifest themselves in the ability to recognise sameness and difference, is identity. Because fashion is frequently conceptualised in terms of its ability to construct and subvert identities, elements of conceptual blending theory are applied to explain how identities may be constructed through Punk clothing.

Many scholars (Hebdidge, McRobbie, Muggleton, Fowler, Reddington) have emphasized rebellious character of Punk and its sartorial practices. Complete rejection of the mainstream codes of dressing represented by British Punks signified rebellion against the middle-class values and Thatcherism. In Poland of the 1970s and the 1980s, the socio-political conditions were radically different to those in Britain. According to Polish fashion designer Barbara Hoff, any attempt at imitating Western European fashion was viewed by communist authorities as an act of political subversion and provocation (Fibiger). Therefore, when transplanted on to the Polish ground, Punk was 'hijacked' for the purpose of political warfare, while Punk fashion became one of the sites of the battle against the oppressive communist regime. Through analysis of fashion, the paper seeks to demonstrate how the selected performances of Siouxsie Sioux and Kora reflected Britain's and Poland's different socio-political contexts as well as contributed to different constructions of the rebellious body.

The two vocalists have been chosen for the analysis of cultural translation of Punk fashion, because their biographies seem to share many similarities. Susan Janet Ballion, who was born in May 1957, is only six years junior to Olga Jackowska, born in June 1951. Both singers experienced difficult and lonely childhoods marked by deprivation, abuse and illness. Having adopted pseudonyms, as if to separate themselves from those troubled pasts, they both became female lead singers in male bands; they both started their careers in 1976, and have remained active musicians to the present. Like Sioux, Kora has not only been acclaimed by the critics and attracted huge public following, but also become renown for her stage persona and style. A detailed analysis of stage personae of Siouxsie Sioux and Kora in selected video clips and concerts from the 1980s examines the metaphorical meanings of Punk fashion in the period when cultural exchange between Western Europe and Poland was officially restricted and very difficult.

While the body is central to any contemporary discussion of fashion, the fashioned or styled body is at the centre of Punk aesthetics. Therefore, it seems that a discussion of Punk fashion needs to be rooted in scholarship directly addressing the body in general and the fashioned body in particular. In her book *The Fashioned Body* Joanne Entwistle (2007) notes that "bodies which do not conform, bodies which flout the conventions of their culture and go without the appropriate clothes are subversive of the most basic social codes" (7). The notion of "oppositional dress," which holds a prominent position in fashion theory, provides a theoretical framework for the discussion of Punk fashion, one of the most frequently quoted examples of "oppositional dress" (Wilson 195). Similarly, to other/earlier youth culture groups, such as Teddy Boys or Mods, Punks have been said to epitomise rebellion against the consumerist values and sartorial practices of British mainstream society. The visual coding of that (Punk) rebellion included a supposedly random combination of garments and accessories whose common denominator was framed by the ugly, the socially unacceptable, the revolting. Consequently, the imagery/stylistics that British Punks drew from when constructing their identity through fashion included references to a range of other socially excluded groups – prostitutes, pirates, sexual deviants. Punks also subverted the socially cherished and taken for granted gender distinctions by wearing androgynous styles.

If cognitive metaphor theory might be used to explain the projection of cultural values onto clothing and specific garments, conceptual blending theory appears to effectively account for endless modifications of styles, which gives rise to reinterpretations of past fashions as well as creation of new meanings. In fact, while Dick Hebdige argues that the creation of subcultural styles can be explained with reference to the concept of *bricolage* (103), the very semiotic mechanism behind *bricolage* seems to be the result of conceptual blending. As, according to Hebdige, members of subcultures "could be said to be functioning as *bricoleurs* when they appropriated another range of commodities by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original straight meanings", (Hebdige 104), the Punks' extremely creative outfits can be viewed as a sartorial realisation of their ability to transform and combine diverse mental spaces. Fauconnier and Turner argue that "mental spaces are small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action" adding that mental spaces are related to "long-term schematic knowledge called 'frames" (40). In contrast to frames, however, mental spaces are fragmentary and fluid, for they can be "modified as thought and discourse unfold" (40). When the concept of mental spaces is applied to the analysis of a frequent female Punk sartorial practice of wearing underwear as outerwear, it becomes clear that such an outfit could be interpreted as an example of a conceptual blend. Since according to Fauconnier and Turner, the blended space arises when elements from two or more input mental spaces are "projected to a new space" (47), in this case the two input mental spaces are: 1) female underwear, and 2) female outerwear, which are mapped on the third space 3) the generic space including elements of clothing worn on the lower and upper parts of the body, such as bras, corsets, pants, stockings/tights and T-shirts, trousers, skirts, respectively. When the elements of the two input mental spaces and the generic space are projected into a new blended space, a bra or a corset seems to perform a function of a T-shirt while stockings or tights function as trousers.

Punks' vestimentary rebellion was also expressed through their use of black colour, which started to dominate in subcultural stylistics, for once black ceased to be the colour of mourning, it "has established itself as the colour of anger rather than sorrow, the signal of aggression and revolt" (Wilson 189). As noted by Wilson, black clothes were particularly appealing to youth subcultures in Britain, because they fitted urban landscape dominated by granite, glass and brick better than soft-coloured garments. Also, since British subcultural fashions reflected "the British obsession with class" and "have been a form of resistance to the straitjacket of snobbery" (190), urban connotations of blackness seemed to have served as the most visible manifestation of that resistance. So was any choice of incongruous elements, such as "lavatory chains", "safety pins", "bin liners", whose main objective, once they were turned into garments, was to shock (Wilson 195). By examining one of these elements as a metaphor of working-class rebellion, for example, SAFETY PIN IS WORKING-CLASS REBELLION, it can be observed that specific qualities of A (safety pin) are mapped onto B (working-class rebellion), while in the process both become redefined. The way Punks wore safety pins generated the meaning of subversion because of a cognitive blending of a safety pin with a brooch. Being worn as if it was a decorative element or a badge, the safety pin connoted not only Punk's general rejection of aesthetics and ornamentation, but also questioned the dominant values of a hierarchical society in which for centuries brooches as well as badges, orders etc. had connoted privilege and status.

Even though British Punk was erroneously viewed as dominated by men (Hebdige, Fowler), female contribution to the subculture should not be underestimated. In fact, the restoration of women to the dominant academic narrative about Punk by such scholars as Angela McRobbie (1975) or Helen Reddington (2007) acknowledges the important role that many female Punks played both in the realm of music and of Punk fashion. Though Vivien Westwood has been the unquestionable icon of Punk fashion, the contribution of other women to Punk stylistics should not be undervalued. For example, Westwood's friend from Malcolm McLaren's shop, Jordan (real name Pamela Rookie) who was reported to have daily commuted to London "in full rock'n'roll/fetish/retro regalia" (Blake 46) causing sensation among fellow commuters, was likely to have made greater impact on the general public than any catwalk show. Likewise, Siouxsie Sioux stage persona seems to have played a significant role in the popularisation of female Punk fashion. With Siouxsie and The Banshees being described by *The Times* as "one of the most audacious and uncompromising musical adventurers of the post-Punk era" (Williamson 2004), her style deserves closer examination regarding overall Punk dress style. Consequently, in the section that follows, Siouxsie Sioux way of dressing is examined in relation to Westwood's Punk fashion creations, to demonstrate the pivotal role that Sioux, as a Punk musician, played in popularising the Punk look.

In the spring 1981, shortly after Westwood had realised that she wanted to pursue a career of a Punk fashion designer, she showed her first ever fashion collection called Pirate. Following McLaren's advice to search for inspiration in history, Westwood based the collection on garments worn in the past by one of the socially excluded groups – pirates, as if symbolically alluding to Punk's social self-exclusion. Characterised by gamboge yellows and scarlet reds, arranged in all sorts of geometrical or striped patters, Westwood's

ensemble of loose fitting, buggy trousers and belted tunics provided a unisex style that was immediately accommodated by the mainstream. Westwood's official website features the following description of the collection "Pirates, Inspiration from Native Americans. Ethnic cuts. Pirate trousers had a baggy bum/complete contrast to hippy hipsters and tight arse. Position of neck hole – when worn, garment is asymmetrical" (http://www.viviennewestwood.com/history/early-years).

The Pirate collection is clearly referred to in a video clip to Siouxsie Sioux's song "Spellbound" (1981). In the video, Sioux is shown wearing various items of clothing, which include a bright yellow dress with an asymmetrical neck hole, red tunic paired with baggy bum striped trousers, leather buckled cuffs and a head band. These visibly connect to Westwood's Pirate imagery. The "forest" mise-en-scène of the video clip also seems to reinforce connotations with the wild as opposed to the civilised, nature as opposed to culture, bringing the stylistics closer to the thematic scope of Westwood's collection, which was based on ethnic and Native American motifs.

Likewise, in a video clip to a song entitled "Dear Prudence" (1984) filmed in Venice, Sioux's sartorial choices bear close resemblance to Westwood's renown creations. Interestingly the parallels between Westwood and Sioux extend beyond the realm of fashion, as in 1984, when the Venice-based video clip was produced, Westwood herself moved to Italy and announced a deal with Giorgio Armani. Sioux selection of garments presented in the video clip reflects both Westwood's Pirate collection and the earlier styles popularised through Westwood's – McLaren's store called "SEX", which opened in 1974. In the video clip Sioux seems to reference sex-shop stylistics through her red corset and black lace mittens, of which the former seems to be a conceptual blend that connotes rebellion. The connotative meanings associated with the video's mise-en-scène i.e. Venice, revolve around the themes of love, lust, and carnival[1]. The historical urban landscape of Venice visibly alludes to Westwood's interests in costume history as well as adds an element of theatricality to the video clip.

While British Punk rebellion generally targeted the injustice of a rigid class system, deliberately casting pirates, prostitutes and other representatives of the groups marginalised by that system, as their heroes, Polish Punks chose the communist regime as the immediate target of their revolt. The pervasive and state induced obliteration of class distinctions accompanied by overt endorsement of proletarian values by the communist governments in People's Republic of Poland created a radically different context for Polish Punk rebellion. As observed by Mirosław Pęczak (2013), Punk in Poland, unlike in the UK, did not have working-class roots. In fact, due to the existence of the Iron Curtain, the movement was started by representatives of the "intelligentsia", the privileged youth who came from relatively well-off families of artists, directors, and distinguished communist party members (Pęczak 109). Thanks to high salaries and frequent foreign travels of their parents, only those young people could gain access to and become influenced by Western music and culture. Consequently, Pęczak notes that the "first Punks in Poland were the children of intelligentsia" (109)[2]. Similarly, Piotr Szarota points at the differences between

1 For more information on the connection between carnival and Punk see Lane Van Ham, "Reading Early Punk as Secularized Sacred Clowning" *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2009.

2 Although, Pęczak does not define the term "intelligentsia", he juxtaposes it to the term "prole-

Polish and British Punk movements and their aesthetics. Following Duda-Dudkiewicz, Szarota observes that in contrast to British Punk, which expressed rebellion against capitalism, in Poland, Punk was a form of a protest against socialist boredom of uniformity. Because Polish Punk was less commercialised, argues Szarota, it might also be viewed as more authentic, with shortages of goods in Poland stimulating Punk DIY (Do-It-Yourself) stylistics - for example, Polish Punks would use poster paints instead of a hair dye (Szarota 151).

Although Kora's family background was far from privileged, the way she has constructed herself as an artistically sensitive, widely-read person, for whom the world of literature, theatre, and film offered escape from impoverished childhood, corresponds to Pęczak's account of the Polish Punk subculture. Shortly after Kora had become Maanam's vocalist, its founder Marek Jackowski decided to shift into the realm of Punk music, as according to Jackowski, Punk was gradually sipping into Poland. While Maanam stormed the Polish music scene with Punk music, Olga Jackowska seems to have successfully challenged male domination on the Polish Punk rock scene. Even though the first Polish Punk musicians were invariably men, with Tomasz Lipiński founding the first Punk band Tilt in 1978, followed by all-men bands: Brygada Kryzys (Crisis Brigade) in 1981, and Kult (Cult) in 1982, Maanam with its female lead singer became one of the most popular Polish bands in the 1980s.

Already in 1983 a documentary film was made about the band, directed by Waldemar Szarek and entitled "Czuję się świetnie" (*I Feel Great*). In the movie, the band members are filmed while on a tour around Poland. Lacking a voice-over narration, the film draws the viewers into a close, even personal relationship with the band members, who allow access to their private moments. Produced for Maanam's youthful fans, who had been sending hundreds of letters to the band and who (00:16:20), as stated by Kora, "thank us for giving them the purpose to live (…) and as we travel we can see that truly their lives lack any meaning/aim" (00:16:20). The film appears to present "the point of view of its female protagonist" (Reddington 1), for by displaying a patronising attitude to her male band-mates (most visible in the way she introduces them as "MY guitarist, MY bass guitarists, MY percussionist"), Kora seems to accentuate her dominant position in the band, and on the Polish music scene.

Olga Jackowska states in her autobiography, written with her long-time partner and husband Kamil Sipowicz, that already in the 1960s she was under the influence of rapid developments in the music of Western European countries. While that was the decade when the hippie movement in Poland gathered momentum, in 1968 during the first Polish hippies' reunion in Mielno, Jackowska adopted the name Kora (Sipowicz 48). Recalling that period, she lists a number of British bands and vocalists such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, Eric Clapton, whose records had to be smuggled from abroad, as otherwise they were unavailable in Poland. Because only few had tapes with Western music, people would meet in private homes to listen to those records (Sipowicz 48), Jackowska comments. Heavily overdosing amphetamine, Jackowska mingled with the artistic and intellectual circles of Cracow represented by Piwnica pod Baranami, where she could easily come into contact with artists from Europe and the USA (Sipowicz 52).

tariat", which according to him gave rise to the Punk movement in Britain.

She observes that while the intense Cracow period was characterised by an atmosphere of rebellion against the establishment and political activism, the young people whom she met at students' clubs apart from listening to music would discuss literature, world politics, and the Polish issue (Sipowicz 52). Jackowska's account, seems to confirm Mirosław Pęczak's views on Polish subcultures, who in his book entitld *Subkultury w PRL. Opór, kreacja, imitacja* (*Subcultures in the PRL. Resistance, Creation, Imitation*) connects subcultures with political resistance, "youth subcultures in Peoples' Republic always, sooner or later, were regarded by the society as having political meaning" (110).

Although in her autobiography Jackowska names Siouxsie Sioux among the greatest and most inspiring vocalists (Sipowicz 79), and proudly recalls that at the German Roskilde Festival, Maanam played alongside Siouxsie and The Banshees (Sipowicz 98), her Punk-rooted vocal was frequently accompanied by attire that did not directly correspond to dress styles adopted by Sioux or other British Punk musicians. Yet, the analysis that follows aims to demonstrate that though seemingly idiosyncratic and at best loosely related to Punk fashions, Jackowska's vestimentary practices represent a sartorial translation of Punk rebellion.

The juxtaposition between Kora's non-Punk looks and her Punk songs can be easily noticed in the styles she adopted for the annual Opole Festival. Known as The National Festival of Polish Song in Opole, it has been running from 1963 to the present, with only one-year break in 1982 due to the martial law. Widely televised, it has been one of the most important popular music events in Poland. Maanam's performance at the 1980 Opole Festival shook the audience, as Kora's Punk music-inspired songs entitled „Boskie Buenos" ("Godly Buenos") and „Żądza pieniądza" ("The Desire for Money") shifted Polish mainstream music scene into a radically new direction and paved the way for the band's success. At the Opole Festival in 1980 cropped-haired Kora was wearing a Mod-inspired suit, which comprised tight-fitted ankle-length trousers, a cream jacket and black wedge shoes. Her metallic eye make-up also bore closer resemblance to Biba's style than to panda-eyes popularly associated with the Punk women look. Through clear reference to Edwardian stylistics that informed men's Mod suit (Wilson 189), Kora's image seemed to connote exclusive elegance and chic. It is hard to resist temptation not to read that image as a metaphor of a rebellion against enforced classlessness of Polish society under the Communist regime. The all-pervading drabness and grimness of life in the Peoples' Republic of Poland, where in the 1980s the system of rationing was extended far beyond the one during the Second World War, meant that the visual protest against that system could hardly involve ripped T-shirts and torn jumpers in the style of Jonny Rotten of the Sex Pistols, or the pirate look of Siouxsie Sioux. In other words, it was through the adoption of inaccessible glamour that Kora seemed to have achieved what Wilson called "the sophistication of Punk, its surrealism" (Wilson 196).

Likewise, gleaming silver Twiggy-like court shoes, which Kora sported the following year at the Opole Festival 1981, in the Polish context should perhaps be viewed as a form of a visual manifestation of opposition to drabness and literal greyness of the Polish realities shortly before the introduction of the martial law in December 1981. A couple of months before shoes became rationed alongside food, "silver" court shoes could only be interpreted as a metaphor of ultimate excess and exclusiveness, which stands in oxy-

moronic relationship to both the title and the lyrics of Kora's Festival song „Szare miraże" ("Grey Mirages"). The lyrics describe a nobody, an average grey, i.e. colourless person, who is, however, capable of a metamorphosis:

> Only because you are nobody
> You can talk to another human being
> A rich life, full of secrets
> In a grey man, in a grey man
>
> Careful with words, faces, smiles
> Don't say too much, you grey man
> Though you are nobody, stay who you are
> Trust your grey secrets to me
>
> Thousands of faces, hundreds of mirages
> You're creating metamorphoses
> Thousands of faces, hundreds of mirages
> You're creating metamorphoses
> Thousands of faces, hundreds of mirages
> You're creating metamorphoses
> Metamorphoses. [Translation mine]

The shoes paired with a Mary Quant-like, pale-blue dress seemed to evoke the Modernist glamour. As both the dress and the shoes were a metonymy of an affluent Western woman, Kora's attire metaphorically suggested an escape from drabness into a distant mirage of metamorphosis and a promise of a new identity.

Applying Elizabeth Wilson's concept of dandyism, one might have an impression that in early 1980s Poland, Kora represented a dandy, who through "oppositional style" expressed the dissent or distinctive ideas of a group, or views hostile to the conformist majority" (Wilson 2013, 184). According to Wilson, it was dandyism's anti-fashion that led to timeless elegance of men's classical wear, as "Antifashion is that 'true chic' which used to be defined as the elegance that never draws attention to itself, the simplicity that is 'understated', but which for that very reason stands out so startlingly" (Wilson 183). One might conclude then that by rejecting the overtly Punk fashion and opting for the dandy-inspired timeless chic, Kora managed to „stand out", combining the two directions of dandyism discussed by Wilson, i.e. that of „conventional (…) wear" and „oppositional style" (Wilson 183).

Kora's subsequent turn towards more Punk-inspired stylistics might be viewed as rooted in political repressions inflicted on the band for their refusal to participate in a concert of friendship with the Soviet Union in 1984. As a form of punishment for doing so the band was made to disappear from the radio, television and the press. After their return to the mainstream music scene, Maanam played at Opole in 1985. Kora's image at the concert visibly shifted from the earlier Mod-inspired to more visible Punk stylistics. The black lace mini-dress she was wearing, might be read as a conceptual blend, which incorporated 1) the conceptual space of a formal female evening dress, 2) the conceptual space of a lace slip dress (underwear), and the generic space of a dress. It challenged mainstream sartorial practices and so could be interpreted as a metaphor of rebellion,

particularly as it was accessorised with black leather cuffs with buckles. The cuff-bracelets were also conceptual blends combining 1) the conceptual space of female wrist jewellery (bracelet) with 2) a conceptual space of a wrist protection gear (bracer), which through its reference to medieval bracers used by archers connoted hegemonic masculinity. The cuffs coordinated with Kora's black bra clearly visible from beneath her lace dress resulted in incongruous Punk style, and came the closest to "young Punk women in fishnet stockings" discussed by Reddington (1). A year later, in 1986, Maanam dissolved. When the band returned in 1991, the socio-political context following the collapse of the Communist regime was very different. Radically different was also Kora's new stage persona, although not infrequently, she has openly alluded to Punk fashion.

To conclude, the application of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory to the study of subcultural visual texts (Punk singers' stage personae) seems to highlight the fact that while Punk was an international phenomenon, its visual language (dress code) differed from country to country. As the analysis of selected examples demonstrates, in Poland and in Britain of the 1980s female Punk singers evoked Punk rebellion using radically different stylisations, and the drab dress style of British Punk vocalist Siouxsie Sioux was "lost" in the process of "translating" and "transplanting" Punk onto the Polish music scene by Kora. Despite the existence of substantial amount of research on Punk in general, cross-cultural variations of Punk fashion and their metaphorical meanings remain severely underresearched. Thus, the presented analysis is but an attempt to at least partially fill this scholarly void.

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