

 KUNSTENAARSBIJDRAGE

PIRATE MEDIA: *An Affective Film Experience*

Taf Hassam is an artist. He studied Photography and English Literature in his birthplace Brighton (UK), and Photography, Artistic Research & Scientific Practice at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. He later received an MA in Fine Art at the Dutch Art Institute in Arnhem. Since March 2010 he has been one of the organizers at Goleb, Amsterdam: an independent art space where he is one of nine founding members.

In the beginning, there was a YouTube link. This text by Taf Hassam, originally accompanying his audio contribution to a 2011 radio show that LapTopRadio hosted on protest songs, is an ode to coincidental discoveries, marginal histories, medialized reincarnations and 'poor images'. The audio contribution can be found on www.tijdschriftkunstlicht.nl.

The piece is made in homage to the filmmaker John T. Davis, his 1979 film *Shellshock Rock*, the bands that made it happen, and Terri Hooley; 'the one eyed hippie who discovered punk and changed everything.'¹

*The poor image is a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.*²

– Hito Steyerl

*LapTopRadio is a real nomadic radio: broadcasting irregularly on the Internet with a most simple setting: a laptop with a modem connected to a mobile-phone network. If there is a mobile connection, we can broadcast. The old dream of independent pirate radio (but now on the internet) is coming true.*³

– LapTopRadio

Dear LapTopRadio,

The title for this submission is *Do You Really Care*

Duration 9:45 sec

I got to hear of *Shellshock Rock* when a close friend and colleague sent me a YouTube link while I was in the process of planning a show about protest songs in the Gdansk Shipyard. The digital link contained a pirated version of the film, distorted and now pixelated, the copy was most likely made with a VHS camera sometime in the early 1980's. The film kind of summed it up for me; meaning that 'protest music' was about something more than an acoustic guitar or even a song's lyrical content, but was rather about an 'energy', sonically delivered and interwoven with a particular time and place. It also has a lot to do with interpretation. I mean when you think about it, anything can be a protest song; you just have to put it in the right context.

But mostly, I believe it is about people, and where they find themselves.

For Davis, it was 1977 and it was Belfast.

After receiving a commission to take some photographs of the burgeoning punk scene by a local newspaper, Davis began meeting and talking with the bands, and got to hear of Terri Hooley's independent record label Good Vibrations. Hooley had started up the label out of his own bedroom in the early 1970's. At first it was purely out of love for music, reselling classic hits and distributing records. But after an introduction to Belfast punk through a police raid on a concert, Hooley's

main objective quickly changed to introducing punk bands from Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK; finding that Northern Ireland groups (due to the political climate) hardly receiving any attention.

The label went on to sign various bands such as Victim, The Outcasts, The Tearjerkers, Rudi, The Moondogs, The Shapes, and Protex, and operated out of a small record shop and hangout in the centre of Belfast. Actively organizing punk concerts, and usually under a different pretence, Hooley would hire hotel function rooms, church halls, youth clubs, and any other available venues he managed to sway. Davis ended up following these bands around, filming their concerts, talking to the people and filming the country's daily life; namely the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

As a result, the film, *Shellshock Rock*, was banned from the 1979 Cork Film Festival, which is one of the most celebrated film events in Ireland. The statement issued for this ban declared that the 16mm film was 'not up to technical standards.' After a media storm, orchestrated by Hooley and Davis, the festival director was forced to retract the original statement, but wouldn't offer a plausible reason for banning the film. With the political orientation of the festival in question, the various bands that appeared in the film traveled to Cork and played alongside a special screening of the film that was independently set up on the University Campus.

More than two thousand people reportedly attended this event.

Ultimately, *Shellshock Rock* recognized that there was much more to Ulster punk than simply some great music, which can be seen in the scenes where local punkers reflect on what punk means to them, and how it has impacted and changed their lives. While punk might have proved to be little more than a marketing ploy elsewhere, in Belfast it drew people together, cutting across divisions of class and religion, creating a very real sense of local pride, whilst inspiring people to think for themselves and to go out and do their own thing.

Go and watch it on YouTube.

Since receiving this link, *Shellshock Rock* has been an integral part of the following projects: *Draft Card Burning Here – Notes of Protest* – Performance, archive, and rehearsal space for local bands. Curated by If I Can't Dance I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution. The Wyspa Institute of Art, Gdansk, Poland (2010)

Shellshock Rock – Installation tracing the folk tradition in Punk. Containing fragments of the film "To Hear Your Banjo Play" (1947) Directed by Irving Lerner, Willard Van Dyke and produced by Alan Lomax. Goleb, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2011)

Do You Really Care – Audio track and text produced for LapTopRadio, hosted by Ceel Mogami de Haas. Geneva, Switzerland (2011) This radio is a collective project, initiated by Laurent Schmid; it is linked to the work.master MFA-studies programme at HEAD Genève, Geneva University of Art and Design.

(Self) Conscious Over You – Title taken from another John T. Davis film, originally from a song by The Outcasts. Lecture series delivered as part of the We Are The Time Conference. Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2012)

F.I.R.E.I.N.C.A.I.R.O. – Temporary Live Radio Event Space and Publishing House, inspired by the story of Good Vibrations. We Are The Time: Art Lives in the Age of Global Transition. Conference week at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2012)

With special thanks to Tim Furey.

- 1 'The man who brought punk to the Province', *News Letter*, (Published on Tuesday 2 September 2008), http://www.news-letter.co.uk/lifestyle/features/the_man_who_brought_punk_to_the_province_1_1876321, 24 February 2012.
- 2 H. Steyerl, 'In Defense of the Poor Image', *e-flux journal* #10 (2009) 11, pp. 1-9 (1), http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_94.pdf, 24 February 2012.
- 3 From the LapTopRadio website, <http://laptopradio.org/about.html>, 24 February 2012.