

Anarchy in the UK: punk's early years

Sheila Rock's fascinating photographs of punk, which have been turned into a lavish book, document the scene in its thrilling infancy. Nearly 40 years on, she explains why she never dreamed her work would prove so significant

- [Sean O'Hagan](#)
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Jordan, the shop assistant in Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's Sex, Kings Road, London, 1976. Photograph: Sheila Rock

"I was simply in the right place at the right time," says [Sheila Rock](#) of her archive of early [punk](#) photographs, which, having sat in a box in her garden shed for years, have been turned into a beautifully designed, limited edition book entitled *Punk+*. Having just arrived in London from America, Rock was invited to see the [Patti Smith](#) Group's now legendary performance at the Roundhouse in May 1976 by her friend, [Lenny Kaye](#), Smith's guitarist. Kaye also told her about a punk group called the Clash, who were playing a few months later at the ICA. Intrigued, Rock went along with her camera and started snapping.

"I became a photographer there and then out of curiosity, and the photos I took add up to a kind of reportage of the early punk scene in London, though I had no idea that is what I was creating back then. I just drifted into the scene and was immediately struck by the creativity and style of these young people. In 1976, you could tell something was happening and these kids were at the vanguard of that change."

One of Rock's first locations was the [Acme Attractions](#) shop on the Kings Road, where she came upon the famous "[Bromley contingent](#)" that followed the [Sex Pistols](#) and included Siouxsie Sioux and Steve Severin, who would soon form [Siouxsie and the Banshees](#). She was present when Acme's owner, John Krivine, relaunched the shop as Boy, lining the walls with black bin bags and creating a window display of fake burnt body parts. After complaints from the public, the police raided the shop and confiscated the offending items.