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Lost in the Seventies: *Smash Hits* and the Visual Culture of Popular Music.

That *Smash Hits*, the popular music magazine launched by EMAP in **1978**, transformed the mores of the music press by celebrating the **visual culture** of popular music has been acknowledged by a number of writers working within Popular Music Studies including Eamon Forde (2001), Roy Shukar (2001), Paul Gorman (2002) and Gestur Gudmundsson et al (2002). However, the tendency has been to focus on the apex of the title's commercial success from 1981 onwards under the editorship of David Hepworth and Mark Ellen. In these accounts, and those of Dave Rimmer (1985) and Simon Reynolds (2006), *Smash Hits* is viewed as synonymous with New Pop and the success of Duran Duran, Spandau Ballet and Wham! This moment in pop music history is thereby read as explicitly Thatcherite, and *Smash Hits* framed as a principle agent in the acquiescence of cultural consent to a new hegemony. Instead, I will focus on the **visual culture** of *Smash Hits* in the **1970s** and the legacy of launch editor Nick Logan.

Nick Logan had previously been editor of *NME* during the Punk era and went on great success with the creation of *The Face* in 1980. However, his legacy at *Smash Hits* is glossed over in the various accounts of the period. The magazine is interesting, therefore, because it is the missing link between polyglottic voices of the inkiies in the mid-**Seventies** (influenced by New Journalism and Beat Writers) and the monoglottic corporate register that characterised *The Face* and *Q* in the Eighties. In this direction the **visual culture** of the magazine could be said to have inaugurated a new sensibility, influenced by consumer lifestyle journalism and fashion. Moreover, the preference of coverage for the commercial mainstream did not distinguish between genres providing it sold in sufficient quantity. This challenged the existing ideological frameworks for understanding popular music rehearsed by the press, which were cohered around notions of authenticity and musicianship. Instead, *Smash Hits* introduced a more reflexive, post-modern sensibility, whereby popular music could be understood as an active part in the construction of the audience's identity.

The lost **visual culture** of *Smash Hits* in the 1970s is significant to Popular Music Studies for a number of reasons. Firstly, in so far as popular music is a consumer product, the year **1979** is significant because not only was it the first full year in which *Smash Hits* was on sale, but it also represents a high point in terms of 7-inch single sales in the UK. This no-mansland between Punk and New Pop has been ritually ignored within the Academy and yet was period of originality and invention in the mainstream of popular music. Secondly, in so far as the music press exists to encode and decode the meaning of contemporary popular music, *Smash Hits* embodied ways of thinking about popular music that have been sidelined within approaches emanating from the Social Sciences. Studying the **visual culture** of *Smash Hits* in the **1970s**, however, has the potential to reacquaint the study of popular music with its more performative dimension and the **televisual** aesthetic that Simon Frith (2002) has argued is central to understanding its development.