

Editorial

Notes in the margins

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Recently, and particularly in the wake of the 40th anniversary of punk in the United Kingdom, there has been a growing trend to reflect on the importance of defining and understanding the legacy of punk and its importance in shaping our cultures and societies both in Europe and beyond. There is no doubt that punk as a countercultural movement created reverberations that have, over four decades, had tangible effects both on individuals who identify themselves as punk and those outside the scene. Punk has encouraged a spirit of questioning and provided a counterpoint to apathy and blind acceptance of authority and convention in far-reaching aspects of all our lives. However, the nostalgic Zeitgeist of our academic reflection has also brought a number of complex issues to the fore that now demand a re-examination of how punk has entered our collective memory and our lived experience.

The move to assess the legacy of punk has opened up the space to confront the most important and disturbing aspect of how we negotiate punk identity. This is not so much working out what punk is, in an attempt at an oversimplified definition, but identifying what has been silenced over these 40 years from the vast potential of this countercultural movement, what was pushed out to the margins, what we have lost sight of.

It is often assumed that the punk movement is receptive to ideas of inclusivity and it has, at points and especially in the early days, acted as a successful interface between diverse groups. It is not overstating the case that early punk culture with its DIY ethos and

decentralized politics of resistance often cut through entrenched lines of social and cultural difference in ways that had unforeseeable and remarkable consequences. If we consider for example the extraordinary achievement of RAR (Rock Against Racism) it is striking how important punk was in raising awareness of the race agenda in the United Kingdom. Similarly the groundbreaking feminist polemic of bands such as the Slits provided new and critical insights into women's identity politics, providing a meaningful alternative voice for a generation of women who no longer sought permission to speak out. Tom Robinson singing that he was 'glad to be gay' countered homophobic narratives and assumptions. The mere presence of Ian Dury, fronting the Blockheads on *Top of the Pops* in 1978, was a direct challenge to prevalent ableist norms. These examples just scratch the surface.

Therefore it is troubling that in the discussions about the legacy of punk, the centrality of these marginalized identities has been easily overlooked by so many. In fact it can be argued that punk was given credibility by the socially and politically marginalized: women, people of colour, queer people, etc. It is indisputable that punk was powerful in introducing a range of political and social discourses in a concrete and immediate way, but it is often ignored that it was marginalized groups who contributed this vital factor and provided the necessary enrichment to allow punk to be more than just another youth style dominated by white, cisgender, heterosexual men. Punk's countercultural and political credentials were almost entirely dependent on these groups who defiantly confronted and dismantled stereotypes and were crucially and, often for the first time, visible not only to a wider culture but more importantly also to each other.

This is partly a legacy of what happened immediately after punk first burst onto the scene: while people from marginalized groups were undoubtedly present, as punk was 'picked up' by mainstream record labels the focus shifted to narrower groups of punks: Sex

Pistols, the Clash and the Jam. It is also pertinent to note that sexism, racism and homophobia were all part of that early punk scene; the 'diversity of the scene' did not preclude tension and bigotry. Indeed, punk inclusivity has often fallen short since its early days with particular homogeneity in hardcore punk scenes.

This inevitably raises questions over the potential for punk to truly offer a sustainable shared and level platform for marginalized groups. In other words as the movement has evolved over time, punk seems to be subject to the same tensions that replicate social inequalities of racism, sexism, homophobic and ableist norms in contradiction to its own ideals of nurturing and empowerment of marginalized groups and is disappointingly more concerned with discussions about 'selling out' and laddish egos than nurturing genuine collective political and social change. Saying that, the DIY ethos and focus on inclusivity that was present in early punk remains an important tenet to new generations of punks. We see this most notably with queercore and riot grrrl's successive challenges to straight male dominance of punk.

It is these problems of inclusivity and tension that form the underlying theme of this special edition, which has invited critical texts on how marginalization is encountered, recorded and experienced from a diverse range of perspectives. The first paper engages head on with the complex negotiations that are currently facing punk artists, marginalized by a prescriptive scene whereby they are forced to pick their way through a minefield of criticism and hostility – in this case, transphobia – that runs counter to the inclusive ethos of punk. Kristen Carella and Kathryn Wymer in 'You want me to surrender my identity: Laura Jane Grace, transition and selling out' explore punk politics and the experiences of transgender woman and punk musician Laura Jane Grace to highlight the reality of carving

space for trans identities and the impact this can have for an individual fighting for acceptance on the punk scene.

Francis Stewart's 'No more heroes' gives a strong critique of how punk is being wrongly profiled for posterity as white and male. Her article uses autobiographical and autoethnographic experiences to highlight 'marginalized' voices of punk women that are in real danger of being written out of punk history and effaced from a movement that was shaped through real lived experience.

Kirsty Fife's 'Not for You? Ethical implication of archiving zines' takes on another contentious but vital question: the need to be alert to conservation choices related to punk and how archival choices not only impact the original voices of marginalized groups who used zines to create networks but also institutional agendas. Her research highlights the sensitivities around punk scholarship, data and resources and the responsibilities that academia has not only to preserve marginalized voices but also do this in a conscious and ethical way.

The contemporary struggle of punk women in China is the topic of Christopher Zysik's paper 'Hang on the box', which provides an insight into the obstacles facing punk musicians who are marginalized not only by gender but also culturally and politically. Zysik offers a theoretical perspective using post colonial cultural theory to explore the levels of displacement that these women encounter and their determination to self-expression and identity linking a punk ethos to resist patriarchy at a personal, political and cultural level.

Our final paper is an analysis of older punk women's voices and addresses the crucial importance of these narratives and perspectives from women whose lives were and still are defined by a punk identity that goes far beyond the music scene. Laura Way's article 'I don't

go to the gigs to go to the gigs' highlights fundamental questions about how being a punk woman changes with age and the issues of marginalization that come into play.

Finally, as guest editors we would like to thank *Punk & Post-Punk* for the opportunity to put this issue together and thank all the contributors for their brilliant papers. This special edition started life as a post conference conversation about what we experienced as the absence of marginalized voices in punk scholarship and the need to acknowledge this glaring omission. This special edition of *Punk & Post-Punk* is therefore less a celebration of the diverse nature of punk but more a call to arms to encourage more research in this vitally important area. As we reflect on the legacy of punk and how we move forward, it is crucial to remember how important our subculture is/was/has been in changing attitudes to those unrepresented, marginalized and struggling to be heard. However, it is even more important to acknowledge that this is still what makes punk as relevant today as it has ever been. We hope you enjoy this special issue and hope it contributes something positive to that discussion.

Up the punk scholars!