Postgraduate Voices in Punk Studies

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Your Wisdom, Our Youth

Edited by

Mike Dines and Laura Way

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Mike Dines would like to thank Sam, Molly, Spike and Eric.

Laura Way would like to thank Dean and dedicate this to Islay.

INTRODUCTION

"TEENAGE TIME KILLER," OR "HOW I TURNED OUT A PUNK POSTGRADUATE (SCHOLAR?)"

LAURA WAY

Your wisdom, our youth
Old school, new school
Punks uniting
Old school, new school
Stop your fighting
"Your Wisdom, Our Youth"—Fig 4.0

I first heard Fig 4.0 in about 2002 when we got a support slot with The Mingers (also from Leeds) playing this DIY gig in Guildford. The gigs were put on in a community centre and there'd always be one guy who got naked. Sadly, Fig 4.0 split up in 2004, but their album, which this particular song is taken from, remains on heavy rotation on my CD player. During my last year at school I started playing in a band with some older guys. We found one another through adverts in a local music shop, began practising in a spare bedroom, and played a few jam nights with our small repertoire of covers before building up our own material. It was never intended to be a "punk" band. I was the only member who listened to any punk music (which at this point was still a fairly limited selection, having only really heard Dead Kennedys and The Clash from my parents' record collection); yet our sound would get compared to the likes of Bad Brains and Minutemen. So it was only from playing in a band that got labelled as "punk" that my punk education really began.

Alongside this my mainstream education continued, and in my third year of college I took an AS level in sociology. To this day one class sticks in my mind, although this may just be a reflection of the very few classes I actually attended during this academic year. (This says nothing about my interest in the subject itself, however, and I was often found reading sociological literature for pleasure in my own time, albeit with a pint in

one hand/hangover in progress.) To start, the lecturer said nothing, merely turning up the volume of his CD player and allowing the Sex Pistols' "God Save the Queen" to penetrate the quiet classroom. Fellow students made faces at each other whilst a friend and I smiled knowingly, recognising the band. This was the first suggestion that I would one day be able to combine the study of sociology and my love of punk music. From here, I abandoned plans of studying to become an English teacher and enrolled onto a single honours degree in sociology. Ironically, about six years down the line, I ended up becoming that sociology teacher who uses punk music (The Slits rather than the Sex Pistols, mind) to introduce learners to studies by members of the BCCCS (Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies).

As I became more familiar with my discipline, I began to see sociology and punk as increasingly capable of going hand in hand. The capacity of sociology to question the status quo, for example, was a value I also attributed to punk. It was when I came to choosing an area to investigate for my Master's dissertation in women's studies that everything fell into place: I could bring together my interest in punk with my feminist values under the guise of a sociological piece of research. And so my entry into punk scholarship was set in motion.

But what is this "punk" I keep referring to? Since you picked up this book I might assume you either hold an existing interest or are reading around the topic as part of your own research project. In either case, you probably have some grasp of what we are taking "punk" to mean and we are assuming some existing familiarity amongst the readership, so the purpose here is not to provide a historical account or detailed discussion of what punk entails. Put briefly, many would equate punk with a particular style of music and, moving beyond that, a particular view on/of life. Some also situate punk within a specific point in British history; but then, trying to offer some kind of objective definition of punk could, in itself, be viewed as problematic, and an appreciation of how different individuals view it might therefore be more relevant (indeed, definitions are something I will consider in my PhD when looking at the construction of the identity of post-youth punk women). Personally, for me, punk is about a particular music, and there are certainly bands I love who would be considered "punk." That said, possessing a certain approach to life has become increasingly important—whether it's taking a critical standpoint on day-to-day experiences, or being a believer of "doing it yourself."

When I started my PhD at the University of Leicester in 2012 I felt welcomed into an existing academic community, but I wished to find other punk scholars, driven by the desire to discuss ideas with like-minded

individuals (or maybe just the prospect of talking music). Yet I never would have thought there was an actual, tangible community of punk scholars in existence. A chance meeting with a member of the Punk Scholars Network's (PSN) online mailing list at a one-day symposium introduced me to the group. Finding the PSN provided a community of peers within which ideas could be bounced around, article suggestions shared and, naturally, the odd YouTube link uploaded. It also offered a way to connect with fellow postgraduates pursuing their own punk research pieces, whether for master's dissertations or as part of doctoral studies.

The network has a long-standing commitment towards nurturing research, not only in terms of post-doctoral output but also within pedagogical and academic support for postgraduate students. When the idea of a postgraduate symposium emerged I was excited when asked to be involved in organising it. The response to the call for papers revealed what a diverse area of scholarship punk studies really was, with the focus of topics spanning not just genres within punk, but also social groups and global parameters. It is from this symposium that this collection stems and also reflects this diversity.

When organising and implementing the symposium I endeavoured to encapsulate what I considered to be punk "values." Furness (2012) attempted this in his collection *Punkademics*, avoiding the preferred way that academics tend to bring together contributions for an edited publication and challenging the methods of the "Ivory Tower." For example, the fairly flexible approach to content (whether biographical pieces or what might be seen as more-traditional academic "papers") or forgoing a usual "call for papers" by starting the project through emailing people whose work he admired (Ibid.). Likewise, whilst a call for papers was issued for our postgraduate symposium, there were no suggested issues or themes to restrict the scope and focus to postgraduates, which shifted the focus away from those who were already established in their academic careers. Furthermore, rather than sifting through abstracts and whittling it down to a predetermined number of participants, we instead based the design of the symposium around the participants to incorporate them all, as long as their work fell under the banner of "punk studies." Perhaps even the lack of fancy catering, with food hastily grabbed from a local supermarket the night before, could be considered DIY.

Further challenging of the Ivory Tower, as well as upholding do-it-yourself values, might be seen in the manifestation of this very publication in the way the contributors were (and still are) in the process of completing postgraduate research as opposed to being established

academics (or early career academics publishing work based on their completed doctoral research). Even my own lack of editing experience (by which I mean none) meant that the process of bringing this publication to light has been very much a case of "learning on the job." So, not only is the subject focus of this publication punk, but perhaps the approach towards its manifestation is too—from keeping the proofreading "in house" and therefore costs to a minimum, to sourcing the cover photo ourselves with the intent of showcasing what would be considered, in layman's terms, an "unknown" band rather than one of punk's usual poster bands (read: the Sex Pistols). For me, it was also important to highlight female musicians of the punk scene, as typically visual representations of punk have remained male-dominated.

There have been numerous academic publications focusing on punk, so why another? By arising from a punk studies symposium, which served to showcase postgraduate research in this area, it is therefore the first academic collection of articles drawing from a range of postgraduate disciplines exploring the punk scene. The justification for this publication is clear, then, in that it reflects an array of focus and perspective, seeking to highlight the diversity of emerging punk scholarship. This is demonstrated in the variety of issues addressed by the authors as well as the global perspective pursued. In keeping with punk values, it also moves academic publication away from the aforementioned trends of the Ivory Tower, highlighting the value of listening to the voices of those at the very beginnings of their academic careers. It is worth noting that these chapters are not to be taken as "polished" academic pieces: they are works in progress, and as editors we have been respectful of this.

Dr. Russell Bestley, Reader of Graphic Design at the London College of Communications, who delivered the keynote at the postgraduate symposium, provides our foreword. Bestley considers the question of punk within academia, for example: "How can punk be academicised?", "What is gained—and what is lost—in that process?" and "Why does punk need to be studied?" These are key issues to consider as punk studies continue to both grow and evolve as an academic discipline. Another question Bestley addresses—"Who studies punk and why"—is something which could be asked of any of our contributors, and is perhaps in part an inspiration for my autobiographical ramblings which opened this introduction.

The proceeding chapters are loosely based around three themes: scenes; gender, "race," and sexuality; and therapy and laughter. Within subcultural literature there has been considerable debate (indeed, some might even consider that too much energy has been invested in this)

concerning which terminology is more appropriate for describing such movements as “punk.” By naming our first theme “scenes” we are not offering this as a preferred term but instead using this to reflect two facets of diversity found here. Firstly, there is diversity in that these chapters are not just about punk per se, considering what some may view as offshoots or subgenres, such as post-punk (Mankowski and Foster), anarcho-punk (Licourinos) and sXe (Bedu). Secondly, there are geographically dispersed considerations which contribute to emerging discussions that consider punk through a global lens (Dunn 2016), with Bedu focusing on sXe in France, Foster’s discussion of the Dutch ULTRA movement, and Ward’s chapter on Indonesian punk.

We start with Guy Mankowski’s chapter, “‘Be Pure, Be Vigilant, Behave’: What Did Post-Punk Manifestos Aim to Achieve?”, which explores manifestos through various post-punk case studies: Throbbing Gristle, followed by Scritti Politti, Gang Of Four, Manic Street Preachers, and Savages. Having considered these, Mankowski considers whether post-punk manifestos achieved their goals and to what extent such manifestos have altered the consumption of music. Post-punk is envisioned in another way in chapter three, with Foster’s discussion of the Dutch “ultramodern” (ULTRA) movement. From interviewing original scene members, Foster draws out a number of key elements that comprised this movement. These include squatting and upholding the do-it-yourself approach whilst revealing the contradictions present in this scene. Squatting and DIY have long been associated with anarcho-punk in the United Kingdom (Glasper 2014; Dunn 2011; Cross 2010)—the scene under examination in the preceding chapter by Simon Licourinos which deliberates the application of a “connections, relationships, traits” model (CTR) in understanding its evolution.

The way punk scenes have emerged across the world and at the same time offered commonalities as well as differences is, as already indicated, an issue gaining increasing academic attention, and the way punk scenes respond to localities is a focus of chapters four and five, with Vincent Bedu discussing French sXe (straight-edge) and Oliver Ward punk in Indonesia, respectively. Bedu looks at the reception and appropriation of sXe in France, examining the role of venues, for example, whilst Ward concentrates more specifically on sociopolitical impacts. Both serve to remind us of the continuing significance punk has for individuals across various local backdrops whilst contributing new areas for exploration. Whilst sXe has been discussed in academic literature there has been no exploration of the French sXe scene, and Ward’s chapter contributes to the

growing body of studies on what has been referred to as one of the largest punk scenes globally today (Donaghey 2015).

Here we move to our next theme. Discussions of gender, "race," and sexuality have rightly retained their place in punk studies as a response to previous portrayal of punk as a predominantly white, straight, and male scene (Leblanc 1999). And though there might now be recognition that punk involves individuals who do not subscribe to the "whitestraightboy" criterion, Karis Hanson argues in her chapter that a whitestraightboy "hegemony" still prevails. Hanson's chapter focuses on the contemporary London punk scene, but similar issues are addressed by Tanja Wälty (chapter seven) in her exploration of Mexican punk women and their embodiment. Hanson explores how this whitestraightboy hegemony reproduces societal inequality based on gender, race, and sexuality, acting as an exclusionary force against women, women of colour, and queer people within the punk scene. Similar issues are addressed by Wälty through focusing on the body in her interviews with Mexican punk women. These punk women, whilst attempting to defy convention regarding femininity and beauty, still operate within a scene which purports femininity as a patriarchal, classed, and "racialised" construction—not too dissimilar to the hegemony described by Hanson.

Our last theme, "Therapy and Laughter," comprises two chapters by Tony McMahon and Rebecca Binns. McMahon looks at punk's healing pedagogy, or how punk can be used as a learning tool, drawing upon his own experiences in the creative writing classroom. Punk pedagogy is yet another emerging focus within punk studies, and so McMahon's chapter contributes to what he certainly views as an exciting new field. If McMahon's proposal of the healing aspect of this pedagogy reflects the theme of therapy then the glints of humour in his chapter satisfy the theme of laughter, but it is humour as a component in building a language of resistance which Binns focuses on. Binns explores the design language utilised in visual material by Gee Vaucher as part of the anarcho-punk band (and collective) Crass.

The co-editor, Mike Dines, rounds off this collection with his afterword. As one of its founding members, he provides some further contextualisation concerning the Punk Scholars Network. The lyrics from the band Fig 4.0 which open this introduction, and from which the book's title derives, are used metaphorically to reflect the hierarchy of credibility which exists within academia concerning where individuals are positioned in terms of their research careers. Dines reminds us of this and emphasises again the value of raising the volume of postgraduate voices within academic discussion and practices; in part, the reasoning behind this book.

With a second postgraduate symposium now under its belt, the PSN continues to make these voices heard and work at breaking down this hierarchy. Hopefully, this is a sign of not just the punk scholars and postgraduates uniting, but might also contribute to wider discussions concerning postgraduates’ place within the Ivory Tower.

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KEYNOTE

(I WANT SOME) DEMYSTIFICATION: DECONSTRUCTING PUNK

RUSS BESTLEY

What does "punk scholarship" mean in practice? This is a question that keeps coming back to haunt me, and one that I am constantly wrangling with on a personal as well as a critical, academic level. How can punk be academicised? What is gained—and what is lost—in that process? Even the notion of the "academy" should be subject to question here, particularly in the ways that definitions of academia and scholarship act to reinforce notions of exclusivity. In the field of punk and popular culture, such distinctions can be unhelpful at best, and counter-productive to research, collaboration, and accessibility for the researcher and potential audience alike. Why does punk need to be studied? In relation to which fields of enquiry and bodies of knowledge could, or should, it be examined? What kinds of people undertake such study, and what motivates them to do it? What is their connection to the subculture itself, as observers, analysts, or contributors? What constitutes a critical study of punk in any case? Many punk followers are interested in the history of the subculture, sometimes to the tiniest detail, but does that make them "scholars" or merely active participants (or punk nerds)?

I hadn't realised when I returned to college as a mature student in the early 1990s that punk could be a legitimate subject for academic study. It's a contentious issue—those inside the subculture can be mistrustful of the "scholars," while others within academia or, for instance, in the media may question the validity of studying something as ephemeral and throwaway as popular culture (and especially something as daft as punk). Alastair Gordon, founder member of the Punk Scholars Network, discovered as much when he self-published his thesis on the subject of Crass and anarcho-punk in 1995, one of the first academic works arising from within the subculture itself. "Shot by both sides," as Howard Devoto may have said. Since completing my own PhD in 2007—on the subject of

punk graphic design and the wider evolution of the subculture across the UK regions—and moving across to post-doctoral research in the field, I have observed something of a transformation in the reception and acknowledgement of our field of study. Certainly, the establishment of the Punk Scholars Network has reflected this shift in perspective, along with the *Punk & Post Punk* journal, now in its third year of publication, and the variety of events, conferences, symposia, books, and exhibitions that touch on the subject from a variety of specialisms—including history, (sub)cultural studies, social sciences, musicology, politics, feminism, gender studies, art and design, visual communication, media, and fashion.

This list is not exhaustive, though I worry that it may eventually become *exhausting*, draining the last remnants of life out of punk as we know it. As Pauline Murray noted at the Entertainment! New Wave, Post Punk and Authenticity symposium in May 2014, the constant picking over punk's bones could be seen to have simply sucked the life out of it—what is left being "just dust." Equally, the study of punk just in and of itself—endless recounts of who did what and when—often crosses the line with popular journalism for the middle-aged punk reader, a kind of bondage zipped and safety-pinned *Mojo* feature: fine for a casual read to pass the time, but ultimately offering no deeper insight or reflection. Punk *is* very interesting—and useful—to study in broader contexts of cultural, political, and socio-economic history, though questions need to be constantly asked as to the value and purpose of research into the field. The "so what" question (which also relates to so much academic research across disparate fields and specialisms) needs to be constantly at the forefront of our work, asking "who cares?" and "why should they?" Academic discourse can be enlightening, revealing—entertaining, even—though I am concerned that it can at times also be stifling and limiting, drawing ever-tighter conclusions and definitions and in the process suffocating a punk subculture that has always been messy, disparate, deliberately antagonistic, uncontrollable, and downright bloody awkward.

One of the ways in which punk's uneasy marriage with academia could be subject to some critical reflection concerns politics, and in particular the pressure on the punk canon to be contained within a liberal and/or progressive set of parameters in order to have legitimacy. The term *liberal* implies a wide range of readings. In terms of this paper, I have chosen to adopt a similarly broad definition to Nick Cohen, relating liberalism to "progressive middle-class opinion" (2007, 14), which in turn filters down and is further entrenched through academic discourse. Much academic discourse from the 1960s onwards has adopted a Marxist/post-Marxist critical position, or at least a broadly left-leaning ideological viewpoint,

particularly in the humanities and social sciences, and the co-option of punk's apparent radicalism as some kind of symbol of political agency has led to it becoming similarly entrenched, mired in a well-meaning but ultimately self-congratulatory mirage of shared "values" and "principles." Such a viewpoint positions punk firmly within a liberal (rather than libertarian) *progressive* context, narrowing its breadth and clipping its unruly wings in the process. Popular "historians" such as Jon Savage and Simon Reynolds constructed ideological frameworks for the first wave of punk (and its accompanying philosophy, inclusions, and notable exclusions) and post-punk respectively, but the projection of such themes to imply common values and codes of conduct is deeply problematic. Ian Glasper (who could perhaps be considered as another cultural gatekeeper in relation to the punk canon) faced a similar dilemma when compiling his popular historical overview of UK anarcho-punk, *The Day The Country Died* (2006), and the potentially inflammatory inclusion of anarcho-punk-turned-far-right songwriter John Cato of AYS (Admit You're Shit). Glasper even raised the issue in his introduction to the book, noting the flak that he anticipated he would receive in advance, and explaining his rationale for not shying away from the issue.

So-called academic accounts of punk as a lifestyle and a philosophy further entrench this liberal/left-wing ideological agenda. In this sense, Craig O'Hara's *The Philosophy of Punk: More Than Noise!* (1999) and Lars J. Kristiansen's *Screaming For Change: Articulating a Unifying Philosophy of Punk Rock* (2012) have about as much critical credibility as the various publications on punk aerobics, punk cookery, and punk yoga that litter the shelves of remaindered book stores, or a Virgin Money Sex Pistols credit card. Robin Ryde's *The Truth of Revolution, Brother: The Philosophies of Punk* (2014) at least tried to work from the ground up, via a Kickstarter campaign and a series of interviews with "key" figures within the (largely anarcho and hardcore) punk establishment, though I would argue that the initial premise of the project is flawed from the outset—determining punk as, by definition, left-leaning, liberal, and progressive, and seeking validation of that position in the construction of the debate.

In broader terms, punk could generally be seen as oppositional, but what it opposes varies across the wider culture and contexts that it operates within. As a result, it is not always inherently "progressive," and at times may be reactionary, orthodox, or politically ambivalent. The sense of morbid fascination held by a wide range of participants within the subculture and punk's "dark heart" also merits a study all by itself, together with its transgressive streak that at times shows little restraint in

the pursuit of trashing acceptable moral codes and the polite conventions of social etiquette. Such deviancy has touched on gender, sexuality, language (particularly profanity), religion and belief, morality, ethical taboos, and politics, and almost by default this has allowed voices to be heard from across the spectrum of acceptable, or unacceptable, opinion. Reactionary positions may be put forward for shock value or as parodic statements to undermine or reveal inconsistencies in established thought, or they may simply be based on personally held convictions—it is sometimes hard to judge where borders are drawn in these cases (from Dee Dee Ramone's obsession with Nazi-era Germany to fellow band mate Johnny's much-touted Republican politics, the Stranglers' playful sarcasm in reaction to accusations of misogyny, Minor Threat's "Guilty of Being White" or pretty much the entire back catalogue of many US and UK hardcore groups who skirt the boundaries of acceptable opinion, including Dead Kennedys, Fear, Angry Samoans, The Meatmen, The Macc Lads, Anti-Nowhere League, and Chaotic Dischord). Former Dead Kennedys' vocalist and lyricist Jello Biafra, for instance, was almost as fond of liberal baiting and satirising the stifling rules and regulations of the left as he was attacking the political right. Dead Kennedys' classic debut single "California Über Alles" targeted Democrat California governor Jerry Brown and drew parallels between liberalism and authoritarianism, while "Holiday in Cambodia" mocked the patronising, self-righteous attitudes and double standards of educated, middle-class liberals towards the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge.

The study of punk also offers a suggestion of rebel chic and dangerous glamour. In mildly conservative circles (particularly those struggling to retain a semblance of liberal ideals and values, including higher-education institutions and the ivory towers of colleges and universities), punk is seen to still carry an aura of rebellion, where some of its radical lustre can rub off on those who study it, keeping them from wholesale sell-out to respectable, middle-class academia. I don't think any of us who work within such institutions can deny that attraction—though it's a double-edged sword in my experience, with funding bodies and senior academic managers happy to sponsor punk research, perhaps also keeping one eye on their own public image and cultural credibility, while at the same time questioning its relevance to the furtherance of academic knowledge. Punk-centred books, exhibitions, and conferences might then be seen as a bit of a funky area for academic enquiry, but ultimately a little bit lightweight when compared with more "serious" concerns within more-esteemed departments.

Then there are the institutional conventions and the policing of critique, keeping any approach to the subject within the bounds of acceptable academic discourse. Academia's current obsession with postmodernism, identity politics, and cultural relativism must be partially to blame here, with its accompanying range of liberal cul-de-sacs and paranoid, self-defeating arguments relating to *equality* in every aspect of race, gender, sexuality or, more recently, belief. In similar ways to the stifling of discussion on problematic issues within contemporary culture, the study of punk is bound by rules of academic etiquette and the imposition of proscriptive regulations based on the pretext of avoiding "offence," as Nick Cohen argues in relation to campus discussions concerning race, gender, sexuality, and religion:

> We have gone from the principle that only speech that incites crime can be banned to the principle that speech that incites gross offence can be banned to the principle that speech that provokes discomfort can be banned. This is not so much a slippery slope as a precipitous drop. (Cohen 2015)

Such developments imply the return to a kind of moral puritanism within the academy, with tightly controlled regulations governing what may or may not be publicly discussed. The debate over no platform extends to student unions and representatives, and leads to a peer-pressured form of self-governance across the student body. As Cohen further notes, "Mary Whitehouse and the American moral majority wanted to stop broadcasters from 'pumping filth into our homes.' Today's student leaders are their successors" (2015). Thus, pressure to maintain a kind of liberal academic conformity comes from both the institutional hierarchy and its participants (researchers, lecturers, and students) alike. Add to this the increasing level of ideological policing from within contemporary punk communities themselves, and the study of punk's darker undercurrents is likely to be met with a difficult reception, if not outright hostility on all sides.

It might be argued, however, that one positive marriage of punk and academia is in the concept of criticality itself—the Western academic tradition of questioning, critical thinking and critical being, as Barnett defined the term. In his acclaimed text *Higher Education: A Critical Business*, Barnett extends the notion of critical thinking into a framework for "critical being"—including thinking, self-reflection, and action: "Critical persons are more than just critical thinkers. They are able critically to engage with the world and with themselves as well as with knowledge" (1997, 1). Critical being is therefore a holistic approach to life, thinking, and criticality that participants in higher education should aspire to. Punk's oft-cited scepticism and adversity to convention (which

may just be another common trope, but bear with me) could resonate with this model of academic practice. A critical outlook—not believing the "gospel truth," seeking validation, asking difficult questions, and questioning accepted codes and conventions—appears to tie a significant section of academic thinking and punk ideology to the same mast. Don't believe what you're told—a useful maxim for the punk academic, and perhaps doubly important when reflecting upon our own subcultural roots and subject area.

Safety in Numbers

In broader terms, social media has impacted on the internal discourse of contemporary punk in much the same way as it has across other networks and social groupings, and the self-governing nature of the online liberal punk hive has also contributed to a narrowing of acceptable discourse or behaviour by participants in, and commentators on, the subculture. Obviously, there were earlier, pre-social media examples of punk rule making and the entrenchment of codes of acceptable practice and behaviour within sections of the punk fanzine and publishing arena. Notable contributors to the debate included 1970s' UK publications *Jolt* and *Temporary Hoarding*, followed to a much more extreme degree by *Maximumrocknroll* and *Profane Existence* in the US—two major "underground" magazines that extended the notion of the opinion-shaping 'zine editorial to new heights of aggressive pomposity, in turn shaping and defining a liberal/left-wing orthodoxy of conduct and belief within the hardcore punk "community" as it evolved through the 1980s and 1990s. The natural (online) extension of this theme is partially reflected in the ease with which commentators can sign an e-petition or jump on a campaign bandwagon without any real effort (usually following being *offended* by something or "calling out" offenders who have *offended* someone else or harmed their delicate self-confidence), and the impact that this has on punk conventions and practices. For example, the 1980s' comic punk band the Anti-Nowhere League re-released one of their earlier songs, "The Day the World Turned Gay" (a track taken from the 2006 album *Pig Iron*), in late 2014 as part of a joint release with a US label, and the record caused a storm online for its homophobic sentiments, with numerous campaigns from within the punk community to *call out* such disgraceful behaviour and boycott the label and the group. The fact that the song was originally recorded and released several years earlier to little public outcry at the time seemed to pass commentators by.

In this new age of punk and identity politics and its increasing obsession with a stifling level of correctness—of behaviour and thought—the rules have changed, and transgression is apparently a much bigger deal than it may have been only a few years ago, punishable by social exclusion, campaigns to shut down the perpetrator's business interests and employment opportunities, and a moral crusade to stigmatise them within their wider social circle. Cohen once again sums this up neatly: "identity politics and the demands for freedom from offence it breeds create a Hobbesian world where everyone can demand the censorship of everyone else" (2015). Why the opprobrium now, all of a sudden, in the case of the punk moral transgressors? I think the answer lays in the medium, rather than the message, in this case, the online (self-appointed) subcultural gatekeepers of punk's identity, ideology, and discourse, together with the increasingly thin-skinned hypersensitivity that seems to define much social activity in the modern world. That gatekeeping role may have been played in previous eras by punk musicians, journalists, and fanzine writers, but the ease with which the modern global punk "community" can spread a meme and raise passions against a perpetrator of supposed community rule-breaking or unacceptable behaviour has magnified the issue beyond recognition. It's rather ironic that participants in the punk subculture in previous generations tended to be far more self-assured and thicker-skinned when it came to receiving criticism—or outright abuse—and commonly accepted punk social conventions tended to see them bite back rather than shrink into an introverted bubble while calling on others to publicly rally against the perpetrator of this affront to their dignity and fragile self-esteem.

There is also a long history of attempts by political activists (both left and right) to *engage with* the punk subculture, and an equally long history of resistance to such interference, from the Sex Pistols to Crass and beyond. The threat of co-option from the political right has largely faded, at least in the West, but I for one would hate to see left-wing militants succeeding in tapping into and ultimately narrowing punk's wider margins for their own ends, changing the nature of punk historically, culturally, musically, or artistically in order to bend it to fit acceptably left-wing, progressive values and standards. However, it does need to be acknowledged that large sections of the punk subculture have traditionally embraced such piety, along with what could be termed a Protestant work ethic and the promotion of honesty, truth, authenticity, independence, and equality. It cannot be denied that punk's anti-racism, anti-sexism, and egalitarian, non-judgmental liberalism *are* widely embedded and accepted codes of practice across a broad swathe of the subculture, nor that those

same conventions of punk etiquette have travelled with the subculture as it has grown and expanded worldwide, to the extent that they have become received "punk rules" by default. The fact that they are not the *only* codes of practice is my bone of contention here, and a truly critical model of academic discourse on the subject really must recognise this and not shy away from the more difficult ends of the spectrum when describing and defining it. Liberal platitudes and the inherent niceness of a (broad) section of the punk community may make for a comfortable place (or a "safe space") in which to hang out, but it would be a dereliction of academic duty to stay there too long without questioning what lies around the edges.

There have been attempts to chart this complex territory, and it is important to recognise that some academics have offered a deeper critique of accepted norms in relation to punk and politics. Notable contributions to the debate include Roger Sabin's seminal chapter "I Won't Let the Dago By: Rethinking Punk and Racism" (1999), Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay's *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race* (2011), and Matthew Worley's excellent "Shot by Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of 'Consensus'" (2012), together with PhD theses by Russ Bestley and Ana Raposo. David Simonelli attempted to critique the "failure" of punk's political agenda and "revolutionary moment" in "Anarchy, Pop and Violence: Punk Rock Subculture and the Rhetoric of Class, 1976–78" (2002), but his argument was flawed from the outset by his insistence on punk as a de-facto revolutionary and progressive movement that was subsequently corrupted by commercialism.

Punk studies have also become too-often confined to the area of punk politics, social groupings, subcultural relationships, ethnography, and the further demarcation and concreting of the punk canon. Punks as a holistic subcultural group are often studied as if they are a lost tribe, with commentators seeking out their habits, motivations, and ambitions as though they shared a common bloodline with no individual agency. Social sciences can at times further cement these interpretations, offering up supporting "evidence" through the quantitative analysis of data sets that can be called into question—particularly through their lack of depth or scope, the narrow limits of the sample, and the lack of a clearly objective (or indeed scientific) method. Punks don't "think this" or "do that"—even if the statistics are weighted toward some common generalisations regarding worldviews, networks of activity, or channels of communication, the findings of such "scientific" methods can be flawed at best, since the punk subculture is so incredibly diverse and wide-ranging, with only the stereotypes forming any kind of commonality upon which to pass judgment. Such stereotypes and widely accepted practices *are* useful,

of course, in framing a general picture and establishing broader themes—the problems arise when these generalisations are distilled down to become embedded *facts*, and a rigid system of rules and codes of behaviour ensues.

Popular accounts of punk, particularly during its early period, can narrow the subject to a museum piece and a series of simple steps, individuals, meetings, actions, and events, rather than problematising stereotypes and questioning common interpretations. Even the history of great men and women becomes narrowed to a set of key characters in a flowing narrative, with authority still attributed to the winners and pioneer status given to the movers and shakers who apparently authored and guided the foundation of the subculture. Not only does this deny the importance of other contributors or participants, but more importantly it also isolates punk—whatever that is or was—within a glass bubble, without antecedents or heritage, removed from a sense of historical or critical context and the world around it. It also seems increasingly important as the original punk generation—and the first generation of punk scholars—moves on and the baton is passed to the next generation that the tacit knowledge derived from experience is retained as far as possible and not narrowed to a simplistic narrative that will become even further entrenched over time as accepted fact. This position does need to be tempered, however, by a critical reflection on what might be termed "my story" approaches to the study of punk and its historical context. The idea that subjective experience either lends itself to universalism or demarcates a "real" interpretation of punk is all too pervasive and needs to be debated. I am not arguing here for a primacy of "lived experience," more a deeper reflection on the range of cultural, political, and social contexts within which punk developed; an avoidance of Wikipedia stereotypes and clichéd conventions.

Punk Scholarship and Unexplored Territory

Extending the knowledge and understanding of punk on a global scale, identifying, mapping, and interrogating punk conventions and punk scenes in new territories, highlighting hidden voices in punk history, bringing new models of punk identity to the fore—all of these areas seem ripe for a serious, critical model of punk scholarship to focus upon and thrive. Conventions need to be questioned, accepted truths challenged, rules bent and broken, voices raised. Some of these approaches may well map onto wider academic discourse in a range of other disciplines and practices. Others should offer new insights, extending those disciplines and

reshaping the punk canon beyond safely stereotypical or identity-driven narratives. To that end, I'm going to suggest a few ideas for areas that I think may be ripe for exploration. The list is not exhaustive, nor is it an attempt to control the development of our discourse, but I would like to put forward a few proposals relating to areas seldom (if ever) touched upon within academic studies of punk, with a view to opening up a dialogue on where we are going and what we hope to achieve in the process. Many of my suggestions relate to the historical and contextual analysis of (particularly) the first wave of UK punk—an area of academic study that, it might be argued, could or should have been largely exhausted by now. By raising these examples of areas seldom (if ever) touched upon within an already heavily studied punk field, I hope to not only reveal new avenues for enquiry but also highlight the potential for an even more extensive range of opportunities in relation to the later time periods and wider geographies of punk's worldwide evolution.

Firstly, I would propose a more formal and rigorous critique of the range of oral and written accounts of punk by those involved in the subculture at different stages of its development. This should go beyond the standard autobiographies, biographies, histories, diaries and collected recollections and include the perspectives of other participants who were perhaps more tangential to the group/fan dynamic, including management and administrators at venues or labels, promoters, ticket agents, security staff and sound engineers, along with casual staff who supported punk's wider impact or acceptance through their work. A useful model might be seen in Louis Barfe's fascinating *Where Have All the Good Times Gone?: The Rise and Fall of the Record Industry* (2005): a detailed study of the ways in which the established music industry facilitated, financed, and (to an extent) manufactured "punk" could offer a unique perspective on the wider context and background of the new scene. Punk didn't happen in a vacuum and the notion of "year zero" was completely overplayed, to the extent that many of these important stories were sidelined or ignored and have been lost within most accounts of the subculture.

It would also be interesting to study in detail the range of reflections from outsiders looking in on punk—critical, or popular, observations from the press, the public, or non-participants. Punk stereotypes are often deeply entrenched, and a clearer picture of how, why, and where those conventions were founded would seem essential to a better critical understanding from both inside and outside of the subculture. Within the early punk period in the United Kingdom there have been few accounts of the role played by cultural gatekeepers who supported and facilitated punk behind the scenes—musicians, producers, journalists, A&R men, designers,