<CT>Going Through the Motions: Punk Nostalgia and Conformity

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<NP>There are hundreds of books charting the evolution of punk in the mid-1970s or celebrating the cultural importance of famous participants in the scene, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom (Savage 1991; Lazell 1995; McNeil and McCain 1996); an 'official history' that is broadly uncontested beyond the critical notion of excluded voices and identities. After all, no one seriously denies the impact of the Ramones, the Sex Pistols, the Clash, Malcolm McLaren, Vivienne Westwood, Jamie Reid and dozens of other celebrated individuals in the early days of what would come to be known as punk rock. These narratives have become accepted and embedded in the mythology of punk, with longstanding fans re-articulating variations of the same story, often through a nostalgic lens centred on personal experience and memories. This chapter interrogates and unpacks the relationship between contemporary punk scenes in the United Kingdom, with an emphasis on a network of small-scale local activities, tours by longstanding or reformed punk bands on the revival circuit and a number of large-scale punk music festivals.

<TEXT>Looking back on a scene that resonated with his youth, Portsmouth punk fan Trevor Paviour recalled the personal impact of punk:

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> Punk threw the shite out, opened up the real world good or bad. And wrote a new chapter in British music, giving a much-needed FUCK OFF for the real talent to shine. You were proud of your record collection and still are today, if you're one of the lucky ones who didn't sell them when you were skint. The clothes you wore were you and you couldn't give a shit about what people thought or any comments they made. In fact the more comments only made you more determined to wear them. The music came from THE WORKING CLASS KIDS, LIVING IN RUN DOWN COUNCIL ESTATES. ALL WITH ONE THING IN COMMON. DEFIANCE, DETERMINATION, and NOTHING TO LOSE, but the lyrics came from the heart. <SRC>(Eckersall and Paviour 2019, original emphasis)

<NP>As Paviour's comment indicates, the standard narrative of the punk 'revolution' has been internalized by a generation of fans, embodying heroic tales of legendary performers and a conveniently ambiguous suggestion of an 'underground' or 'alternative' culture that has remained intact and largely unchanged for more than forty years.

By contrast, recent academic studies have highlighted the contribution of previously less celebrated and high-profile figures, emphasizing the role of women and marginalized groups (Stewart 2019; Ward 2019; Lohman and Raghunath 2019) along with expanded histories of the evolution and fragmentation of punk in the United Kingdom (Bestley 2012; Worley 2017) beyond the stereotype exemplified by most popular accounts of the subculture. Contemporary academic writing on punk has a tendency to focus on the more overtly ideological or explicitly political scenes, or to seek out 'lost tribes' in exotic and under-explored places. There are some obvious reasons for this – punk's standard narrative has become so deeply embedded, its cultural and historical position so neatly summarized, that there is a desperate need for alternative perspectives that might sustain a sense of engagement and highlight new contributions to knowledge within a tired and over-familiar field of study.

Media clichés and narrow histories of punk deserve to be challenged, but there is an always inherent danger of ignoring the bigger picture in the pursuit of novelty. Recent discourse on personal and group identity has also changed the nature of punk scholarship, with punk's self-styled radicalism challenged in relation to participants' attitudes towards, for instance, gender, race and sexuality and actions measured against perceived notions of 'authentic' punk practice. In the early twenty-first century, post-subcultural theories relating to subcultural capital and authenticity (Muggleton 2000; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003; Thornton 1995) led to a closer focus on individual representation within subcultural groups. The ethical problems that arise when the contradictions and compromises at the heart of lived situations are contrasted with a concrete set of political ideals have also been subject to scrutiny (Avery-Natale 2019; Kristiansen 2020), further questioning, or perhaps reaffirming, a punk canon.

Many researchers, then, are drawn to points of difference, to the USP and academic credibility that comes from being able to report on an undiscovered branch of the global punk community or the cutting-edge ideological position adopted by a sub-group within the bigger scene. However, that narrowing of the field of vision and the reification of politically radical or 'authentically' DIY punk scenes may leave the researcher – and the field of punk studies more broadly – blind to the wider environment beyond the microscope. This brings into stark relief one of the key dilemmas facing established punk scenes around the world – what happens to 'youth cultures' when they grow old and become widely accepted as mainstream cultural activity?

Andy Bennett (2006, 2012) conducted groundbreaking research on punk scenes involving older participants, aged between 35 and 53 at the time, in south east England. Recording their relationship to a younger scene centred on the ska-punk boom of the early 2000s, particularly in relation to audience participation and dancing rituals at live gigs, Bennett noted a sense of cultural capital associated with age and experience along with an internalization of 'punk ideology' and a move away from spectacular dress styles. Reflecting on this research in 2012, Bennett noted that his study of ageing punks in the United Kingdom suggested,

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a less restricted series of options for scene participants, with those in their forties and fifties still attending, and sometimes performing, at gigs. <SRC>(Bennett and Hodkinson 2012: 2)

<NP>Meanwhile, Paul Hodkinson's 2011 study of ageing participants within the goth scene contrasted the longevity of individual activity with other scenes such as punk:

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It has not been the primary purpose of this article to definitely explain why such high numbers of goths have remained involved in their subculture into their adulthood, or why some youth cultures – such as goth and northern soul – age and develop collectively while in others – such as punk (Bennett 2006), straight edge (Haenfler 2009) and some dance cultures (Gregory 2009) – older participants seem more likely to find themselves in the minority. <SRC>(Hodkinson 2011: 280)

<NP>It is interesting to note that Bennett's original research took place in the early 2000s, with his observation of older scene participants 'in their forties and fifties' sometimes performing at gigs. A significant proportion of active scene participants in the United Kingdom nearly two decades later *are* in their forties, fifties and even sixties, and that demographic comprise perhaps the majority of audience members *and* performers at the large punk festivals and on the mainstream punk gig circuit. Joanna R. Davis touches on this theme, re-framing punk as an 'approach to life':

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Whereas mainstream journalism tends to frame punk solely in musical and stylistic terms (and maybe with some consideration of the punk 'attitude'), subcultural journalism demonstrates how some 'old timers' reconceive of punk in terms that allow for more compatibility between punk scene participation and the realities of growing older. […] When conceived of in ideological terms, punk becomes more than one kind of music, or

mere youthful rebellion; it becomes portable and adaptable – an approach to life rather than simply a phase of it. <SRC>(Davis 2012: 105)

<NP>Dick Hebdige's pioneering work of the late 1970s highlighted the 'spectacular' elements of youth subcultures such as punk, in opposition to the ordinary, the everyday and (supposedly) less committed or 'authentic' participants (Clarke 1982). The theoretical principle established by Hebdige and the CCCS that commodification indicates the decline – and ultimate extinction – of a subculture might also preclude a significant, and longstanding, body of punk activity from study. Frank Cartledge (1999), Dave Muggleton (2000) and Nathaniel Weiner (2018) responded to this narrowing of the punk canon, turning attention instead towards individual narratives of subcultural belonging and, in Weiner's case, the ordinariness of many punk actors. Their focus, however, was on historical examples of youthful involvement rather than the position of older participants who still see themselves as part of a contemporary punk scene. Bennett's work on ageing moved the debate towards an examination of the attitudes of older scene members along with intergenerational relationships with younger participants, but maintained something of a distinction between punk lifestyles and mainstream culture. More recent research by Laura Way, Alison Willmott and Matt Grimes has attempted to investigate the lifestyles and outlook of punk and former punk fans as they age, including an analysis of those elements of their original scene participation that continue to influence their outlook and actions (Way 2019a, 2019b; Willmott 2019; Grimes 2020).

<TEXT>In the words of Thomas Johansson, Jesper Andreasson and Christer Mattsson, there is a 'complex relation between subcultures and the mainstreaming of certain values, opinions, and practices' (Johansson et al. 2017: 1), indicating an ambivalent and dynamic relationship between a subculture and what they term the 'common culture' within which it sits:
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When addressing questions regarding subcultures, we often immediately think about young people and youth culture. If we study contemporary subcultures, it becomes apparent that there are strong intergenerational connections and roots in previous subcultural formations. Many leading profiles are middle-aged or older. To study subcultures, we need to contextualize and investigate both the complex and contradictory structure and content of these 'cultures', as well as the hierarchical relations involved in organizing subcultures. <SRC>(Johansson et al. 2017: 8)

<NP>As scene participants age, they often experience an evolving and changing relationship with their peers within the subcultural community. Angelique Haswell, a glam rock and early UK punk fan, suggests that fan participation in the scene and attendance at gigs and other gatherings fluctuates over time, with personal commitments broadly coinciding for people of the same age group:

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> We used to have a big crowd who would meet up at gigs and for nights out, but it gradually declined as people went through the process of getting married and having kids. Once their kids were older, the fans were back on the scene, only to step away again a few years later as grandchildren came along, again taking their time and attention away from personal interests. <SRC>(Haswell 2019)

<NP>The notion of punks growing up and having children was even parodied by early DIY punk pioneers the Television Personalities in their song 'Happy Families' on the *Where's Bill Grundy Now?* EP, released in 1978:

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> Mummy looks so happy as she sits in her deckchair
> Daddy getting nice and hot, he hasn't got a care
> The children are so happy, they've gone to the funfair
> And daddy still remembers when he had green hair
>
> They met at the Roxy when they were just nineteen
> He thought she looked a bit like Poly Styrene
> He gave her his favourite safety pin and autographed her knee
> And now they're a happy family
>
> Here come the happy families
> Here come the happy families
> Mummy punk and daddy punk
> And baby punk
> <SRC>(1978)

<NP>Perhaps ironically, as the original punk participants *did* actually grow up and have families, attitudes towards 'normality' and the need to include a new generation within the scene began to change. Interviewed by Dom Gourlay for the *DrownedinSound* website in June 2018 Jenny Russell, one

of the key promoters of the annual Rebellion festival in Blackpool– a major international punk gathering approaching its 25th year – noted the increasing number of parents attending the festival with their young children. This is something that the festival organizers actively encourage, with free entry for under-16s accompanied by their parents:

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> I think it has grown organically every year. What I particularly love about it is seeing an increase in the younger generation coming. Parents who came to the first ones have now started bringing their kids, so it's become a family affair which is what we hoped it would be. <SRC>(Gourley 2018)

<NP>For the purpose of this chapter, I use the term *mainstream punk* to describe followers of 'big name' punk and new wave groups of the late 1970s and early 1980s who continue to tour on the commercial circuit and those attending weekend indoor festivals that bring together high-profile band line-ups throughout the year: No Future (Bristol, March), Undercover (Woking, March), Manchester Punk Festival (Manchester, April), Great British Alt Festival (Skegness, October) and Morecambe Punk Festival (Morecambe, November). The annual Rebellion festival is the largest and most successful of these, now running to a full five days in August each year at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool. Many contemporary punk followers are older, life-long fans of punk music who have grown up within their local scenes and share common interests, tastes and, to an extent, values with other participants.

<TEXT>Punk in the United Kingdom features a range of interconnected and overlapping local and national scenes, some reflecting different age groups and interests. A politicized DIY hardcore punk scene spans across generations to involve older anarcho-punk participants alongside younger fans and groups influenced by modern progressive politics, particularly centred on identity, gender, race and sexuality. This punk scene often displays a commitment to a highly charged equality and diversity agenda that can lead to disagreement and even direct conflict with other sections of the UK punk community. Such radical themes are obviously of interest to academics in the field, leading to something of an unbalanced view of the larger UK punk scene that prioritizes the now-traditional stereotype of a 'youth' subcultural fight back against an oppressive mainstream culture. A largely apolitical mainstream punk circuit operates in parallel, with touring bands playing smaller venues (pubs, small clubs) around the United Kingdom; a network of bands supporting the scene and in many cases attempting to get a prized spot on the bill at one of the bigger festivals. This scene is often equally DIY in nature to the more overtly political hardcore scene, but can be differentiated by its far

more ambiguous approach to politics, often relying on a loosely defined sense of individualism and ambivalent non-conformity as a unifying principle.

The DIY gig circuit

<NP>As UK punk began to decline through the mid-1980s, at least in relation to the commercial music industry and the media, an underground network of dedicated bands, fans and supporters established a DIY circuit based largely on mutual respect and free/low cost exchange. Drawing inspiration from the innovation and experimentation inherent in the early UK punk scene, the 1980s DIY punk scene was seen by many involved as a positive enterprise in itself, not simply an angry reaction to the mainstream:

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I think punk was as much about opportunity as it was a reaction to oppression. There was disused city centre space, there were places people wouldn't go, there was boredom. Remember Sundays. So fucking grey. *Songs of Praise* and nothing open. Certainly venues on the whole seemed to always be an opportunity. We used the back rooms of pubs that no-one went to so they would be happy for beer sales and put up with the weirdos popping into the public bar. We even did gigs in youth clubs. Alcoholic drinks concealed in disguised containers. <SRC>(Haywire 2019)

<NP>The 1990s DIY network embraced both the remnants of an anarcho-punk and hardcore scene together with a broader set of participants who placed the 'DIY' nature of cooperation and participation over and above a 'punk' identity. Nath Haywire suggests that that period was essential in keeping the scene alive, ironically providing a base for the punk revival market to then tap into:

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The DIY punk and hardcore scene was very political as in the politics of the deed (as well as the obvious big P politics for some), and this is in truth what kept punk's corpse alive in the late 80s and 90s. Bands driving vans around the country to play back rooms of pubs and supporting a cultural exchange. Had it not, I'm not sure the nostalgia trip scene would have had anything to feed off. <SRC>(Haywire 2019)

<NP>DIY in these terms often relates to a mode of personal or group agency and practice rather than an ideological or oppositional position associated with the concept of subcultures. This model of DIY cooperation has continued to operate in smaller towns and the wider regions of the United Kingdom over the past 30 years, with an embedded network of promoters, venues and bands working together

to maintain an active, open and participatory punk scene. Andy Matthews, guitarist with Portsmouth punk band 5 Go Mad, acknowledges the fact that social and communal aspects of group identity play a large part in local DIY events:

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A free or low-cost DIY gig down the local on a Friday or Saturday night is a chance to socialise and maybe see a band you may not have heard of before without breaking the bank and a chance to catch up with your mates and have a drink and chat. A social opportunity away from the 'norms' and a chance to have a good night out on a purse string. The beer won't necessarily be cheap but you'd be going out anyway and you may as well be in the pub with a few like-minded people. <SRC>(Matthews 2019: n.pag.)

<NP>In 2014 Jim Rogerson, a lifelong punk fan from Bognor Regis, decided to actively contribute to the maintenance of the local punk scene on the south coast by establishing a small festival in nearby Worthing, a small town on the south-east coast of England, over the May Bank Holiday weekend. The first Bash The Bishop festival was originally planned as a one-off with apolitical/comedy punk band Asbo Retards (Brighton) and On Trial UK (West London) sharing the bill as joint headliners. The venue, Bar 42 in Worthing, has a capacity of around 100, with ticket sales of around 60 to 70 needed to break even. The first event made a loss, but Rogerson notes that 'it was such a great atmosphere we decided to do it again'. Welsh UK82 hardcore punks Foreign Legion headlined the festival the following year, again resulting in a loss, then in 2016 the higher profile Peter & the Test Tube Babies offered to play for a reduced fee which allowed the organizers to break even. Rogerson recalls this influenced his planning going forward:

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Having a bigger name band on raised the profile of the gig and we had over 110 bands apply to play in 2017 so we decided on a two-day event with XSLF headlining the Saturday and Menace on the Sunday. This drew good crowds but my insistence on paying every band travel money meant another financial loss. Another two-day event in 2018 with the Blue Carpet Band headlining Saturday and Menace on Sunday suffered quite a big financial loss, so I decided to reduce it back to one day in 2019, not have a headliner and ask all bands to play a 40-minute set. I gave all bands the same travel money and this worked brilliantly. <SRC>(Rogerson 2019)

<NP>The network of DIY and pub gigs is also mutually supportive, through a longstanding unwritten agreement between bands and promoters to pool resources and provide a space to play in different

regions. The principle, in short, is that a visiting band will make an effort to invite the local bands on the same bill to visit their own town and to play there in response. A number of band members themselves take the role of promoter, with an understanding that their own band may benefit from a wider reach and greater exposure through playing live in other regions as a result.

<TEXT>The risk, of course, is a longer-term decline, with bands simply playing to an audience of other bands and few others beyond a naturally decreasing cohort of regular supporters within the local scene. The need to inspire a younger generation of participants is highlighted by many older fans and promoters (Rogerson 2019; Youens 2019), though they often do not give a rationale for why they think the long-term sustainability of a punk subculture is necessary or even desirable. This reflects Joanna R. Davis' assertion that parenthood might provide punk scene participants with a new sense of purpose:

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> parenthood can become a vehicle for perpetuating punk ideology, and by passing it on to the next generation, or sharing it, the age-specific aspect of punk resistance can seem irrelevant. <SRC>(Davis 2012: 116)

<H1>*Vive Le Rock* and the major players

<NP>The late 1980s and 1990s DIY punk community continued to develop in parallel to a growing commercial interest in punk and alternative music, from the success of the Offspring, Green Day, Rancid and Bad Religion in the United States to the launch of the Holidays in the Sun punk festival in Blackpool, UK in August 1996 – the precursor to the Rebellion festival a decade later.[1] As Andy Bennett suggested in 2006, punk festivals managed to span generations and became a familiar part of the UK punk scene in the early 2000s:

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> It became apparent from interviews that, despite the mainstream rock and pop associations which over the years have become inscribed in the term festival, older punks have very little trouble in deconstructing such associations and re-framing the concept of festival as a more typically 'punk' event. <SRC>(Bennett 2006: 231)

<NP>With high-profile punk bands reforming to play at Holidays in the Sun and a network of venues promoting still active groups on the regular punk scene – including the UK Subs, Peter & the Test Tube Babies, the Anti Nowhere League, the Damned, Menace, the Vibrators, Chelsea and the Lurkers – the mainstream punk scene was seen as relatively sustainable beyond the millennium, despite the

ongoing and inevitable decline in audience numbers. The team behind the Holidays in the Sun festival even managed to branch out their operation to promote smaller-scale events in Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, Japan and Italy under the HITS/Rebellion brand name. However, given that many fans were now entering their late forties and fifties, questions began to be raised about the future of the punk scene and the level of interest or contribution coming from the next generation. Portsmouth punk fans Pamela Eckersall and Trevor Paviour regularly attend local punk gigs and also attend some of the bigger punk festivals, particularly Rebellion. For them, punk is very much a way of life, and they highlight the positive sense of shared community:

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When you go to festivals and see youngsters with new bands under the same roof as the older bands all mixing, enjoying themselves, you can understand why punk has gone from strength to strength. It's a community, you either get it or you don't.

<SRC>(Eckersall and Paviour 2019)

<NP>Eckersall also highlights the role of social media, in particularly Facebook, in spreading information and supporting a virtual community of punk fans and participants:

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And with Facebook everyone stays in touch with gig information or how they are doing. It's a wealth of information unlike the old days having to buy *Sounds* or *NME*. Without a doubt there's a huge punk community with Rebellion being the biggest punk festival.

<SRC>(Eckersall and Paviour 2019)

<NP>London-based Big Cheese Publishing, a small independent magazine producer, publishes three magazines targeted at punk and alternative rock music readers: *Vive Le Rock*, *Louder Than War* and *Down For Life*. The Big Cheese website markets both print and digital editions of the titles, aimed broadly at fans of punk, indie rock and hardcore/metal respectively:

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Welcome to the home of the worlds coolest rock 'n' roll mags, now available on a digital platform! For all the best in alt rock, indie and hardcore check out our three titles *Vive Le Rock, Louder Than War* and *Down For Life*. <SRC>(Vive Le Rock 2020)

<NP>Self-styled Big Cheese 'El Presidente' Eugene Butcher founded *Vive Le Rock* magazine in October 2010, seeking to provide a regular magazine for a broad range of fans of punk, rock 'n' roll, new wave, rockabilly and alternative music, particularly in the United Kingdom. Initially published quarterly, the

magazine now goes out ten times each year, with circulation running to around 10,000 worldwide and a regular readership of around 40,000, with a further 35,000 engaged through social media (Butcher 2019). In many ways the magazine attempts to build a bridge between the dynamism and enthusiasm associated with early punk fanzines and the wider world of commercial music publishing.

<TEXT>It is a fragile market – Garry Bushell's *Street Sounds* newspaper (2012 to 2015), which attempted to resurrect the style of the 'inkies' of the late 1970s and early 1980s, was fairly short-lived and suffered distribution problems, while the former stalwarts of the UK music press – *New Musical Express*, *Sounds*, *Melody Maker, Record Mirror* – had all but died out by the early 2000s.[2] There is still a market for glossy, high production monthly magazines aimed at the 'mature' rock and pop audience (*Mojo, Q, The Wire, Classic Rock*) and specialist genres such as metal (*Kerrang!*, *Metal Hammer*) and dance music (*Mixmag, DJ Mag*), but most 'punk' and 'alternative' titles have struggled to find a home. *Vive Le Rock* offers a fairly upfront and enthusiastic style of writing, with features heavily tilted toward well-known punk bands of the late 1970s, particularly those still treading the boards on the nostalgia and revival circuit. Butcher suggests that the editors do everything they can to support the contemporary punk scene:

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> *Vive Le Rock* tries to support the scene as much as possible. We are pretty much the only punk magazine in the world reviewing old and new UK and worldwide punk, new wave and rock 'n' roll records. We sponsor and put on shows, premiere videos and songs all the time. <SRC>(Butcher 2019: n.pag.)

<H1>**Recuperation or incorporation?**

<NP>The socializing aspect noted by several interviewees as a driver for local gigs and DIY events also plays out at larger events and festivals. However, with larger crowds, bigger line-ups and higher status of bands performing, together with the non-localized nature of the events themselves, most of these events sit far more closely to the mainstream live music and entertainment industries. As Andy Matthews notes, audiences at the larger punk festivals will often have made a significant commitment to attend, financially and with their time (such as holiday leave from work), and their attitude towards the performers may be quite different as a result:

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> The punk festival crowd may be slightly more driven to watch the bands. There is obviously the fact that many people would have had to travel some distance to attend the festival and had to pay more to get in. Yes, there is the social element too, but the

tickets are probably slightly more (or even vastly more in some cases) than the one night, four band local gig. There will probably be more bands you've heard of and familiar faces in the crowd that you may not have seen for a while. (Matthews 2019: n.pag.)

<NP>Such festivals and larger-scale events reflect demand from fans, particularly those who have identified with the punk scene for a longer period and view punk as something deeply embedded in their own actions, associations and purchases:
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Many 'punks' only recognise the bigger bands as 'proper punk' bands. That's fair enough for those trying to re-live their youth and keep a fingernail grasp on what it is they think the punk movement is/was. There is a huge element of nostalgia for many of them. We've all seen the spikey haired, mohair jumper wearing, black shiny leather jacket punk rockers at Stranglers, Damned, SLF, 999, UK Subs etc gigs in recent years, but where are they the following Friday night at Punk Night down the Dog & Duck? <SRC>(Matthews 2019: n.pag.)

<NP>However, business strategies based on mass participation can only have a relatively short life, as the 'punk scene' is set to diminish in line with older participants moving away from regular social gatherings, not going to gigs or festivals, or becoming distracted by other important issues related to ageing, health, life, work and family. These sentiments also reflect something of a departure from the notion of an implicit hierarchy within punk scenes centred on age and long-term involvement as described by Bennett, who had been critical of other writers for their focus on nostalgia within contemporary scenes centred around punk and other forms of popular music and instead chose to focus on continued active involvement among older participants:
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The second situating strategy of the older punks was articulated through a form of discursive practice, whereby they positioned themselves as critical overseers of the local punk scene. This discursive practice was designed both to celebrate the survival and development of the punk scene and to self-assert the older punks' collective authority, won through age and longevity of commitment to punk, to supply critical judgement on the scene and those involved in it. <SRC>(Bennett 2006: 228)

<NP>The term *recuperation* was coined by the Situationist International in the early 1960s to describe the process by which radical ideas are absorbed, incorporated and commodified within bourgeois

society and thus become neutralized and socially conventional. In relation to spectacular youth subcultures, this process mirrors Hebdige's subsequent critique of the eventual absorption of radical or challenging ideas within a commercially driven mainstream culture. By implication, this does suggest a prior assumption of an implicitly *counter-cultural* model of opposition to mainstream consumerist culture contained – at least initially – within subcultures such as punk, which may be subject to question. By contrast, *incorporation* implies a more neutral contract, without the precondition of a counter-cultural challenge to hegemony. Since punk in the United Kingdom always had a direct and close relationship to commerce and to the branding, marketing and consumption of objects, the shift from a perceived outsider status to mainstream commercial acceptance is more subtle, and the notion of punk's inherent radicalism may be justifiably contested.

<TEXT>It is not difficult to find examples of a commercial market for 'alternative' culture in the United Kingdom, particularly in relation to music, media, fashion and dress. In fact, the visual conventions and semiotic elements of 'punk' style have been widely co-opted by commercial enterprises for decades, in some cases as pastiche or as blunt marketing tools for major corporations (such as McDonalds) but more widely, and perhaps more subtly, by businesses that operate within, or in close allegiance with, the punk scene itself. This is clearly evident with mainstream punk or 'alternative' media channels – *Vive Le Rock*, *Louder Than War* – together with punk-specialist record labels (Overground, Grow Your Own, Captain Oi!, Damaged Goods, Cherry Red), record shops (All Ages) and clothing retailers (Underground, Attitude Clothing, Egg and Chips Clothing, Punk Rock Shop and dozens of smaller retailers). Punk still sells – numerous television documentaries along with anniversary events, exhibitions, books and magazine articles demonstrate the existence of a commercial market and a receptive audience.

<H1>A network of mutual interests

<NP>Communal gatherings and social activities among punk participants in the United Kingdom take various forms, from small-scale DIY gigs in local pubs and an underground punk fanzine market to larger media outlets and festivals. These include magazines such as *Vive Le Rock* and high-profile concerts and festivals featuring well-known artists, often on the mainstream entertainment circuit. Punk scenes are often sustained through the feeling of belonging to a larger group, manifested through communal gatherings at events such as the Rebellion Festival in Blackpool every summer. This highlights an inherent tension within contemporary punk scenes, particularly those in larger towns and cities with an established network and a wider pool of scene participants. Individuality and self-expression, embedded tropes in many generic definitions of punk, are directly contrasted with

participation in a shared, collective community; particularly one where visual markers of punk identity have gone from 'spectacular' counterpoints initiated in direct opposition to mainstream culture to become widely accepted conventions of a longstanding fashion and style-led lifestyle activity. For many ageing fans, the punk lifestyle reflects a sense of community, longstanding friendship bonds and nostalgia far more than it does a political project with a shared ideology beyond a vaguely expressed anti-establishment sentiment.

<TEXT>Contemporary UK punk occupies an uneasy space between the very small-scale local scenes involving perhaps a few dozen regular participants, the bigger touring and festival circuit – which centres largely on reformed 'name' acts and nostalgia – and the mainstream music market which has moved well beyond punk at the same time as it has undergone radical change and diminishing status within the wider entertainment industry. It seems that while UK punk has become more incorporated within mainstream culture over the past 40 years, the significance of popular music and style-based subcultures as radical, counter-cultural voices of opposition has diminished at the same time.

Interviews with participants in the UK punk scene indicate a level of acceptance that punk has become an activity based around a relatively small number of longstanding, committed contributors. The incandescent idealism of punk as a youth subculture has become settled, with the rhetoric of 'anarchy and chaos' supplanted by a comfortable community, snarling in selfies and projecting a 'radical' self-image but generally happy to conform to an ageing punk identity. These sentiments are coupled with a desire to maintain the scene through the inclusion of new generations of 'punks', though the underlying *need* for something called *punk* to continue to exist in future is seldom articulated. Meanwhile, researchers should perhaps take a step back from their eternal pursuit of novelty and attempt to find ways to analyse a contemporary mainstream punk scene that involves by far the majority of participants who continue to identify as 'punks'.

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Notes

[1] Holidays in the Sun was established as the first large-scale UK punk festival at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool, in August 1996. The festival relocated to nearby Morecambe the following year, and was renamed the Wasted Festival in 2004. In 2006 it returned to Blackpool Winter Gardens and was renamed the Rebellion Festival from 2007 onward.

[2] The *New Musical Express* (*NME*) was the leading British weekly music paper in the 1970s and 1980s, changing from a newspaper to a magazine format in 1998, with an online site from 1996. The *NME* merged with *Melody*

Maker jn 2000, with sales declining rapidly over the following decade. It was relaunched in September 2015 as a free glossy magazine, before finally ceasing print publication in March 2018.