What Punk Taught Me

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Originally from Red Deer, Canada, Greg Blair is an artist, writer, educator, and activist who resides in Evansville, Indiana, with his wife and two children. Blair is an Assistant Professor of Art and Design at the University of Southern Indiana, where he teaches digital design, contemporary art history, and gender studies courses. Blair's scholarly research and artwork intertwine various forms of writing, publishing, zines, sculpture, photography, sound, and installation. Blair's last book project, *The Politics of Spatial Transgressions in the Arts*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan. His writings have been featured in *Arts Magazine, The Journal of Art for Life, Echo: A Music-Centered Journal, Art Style Magazine, Visual Inquiry, and Kapsula Magazine.*

Jason Swift

Jason Swift earned his BFA from the UNCG in 1994, his MFA from the Rinehart School of Sculpture at MICA in 1997 and his Ed.M. in 2003 and Ed.D. in 2009 from Columbia University. He is an Associate Professor of Art at the University of West Georgia, where he teaches foundations studio and art education courses and coordinates the Art Education Program. In his studio and research practice, he investigates the influence of experiences upon the artist's visual vocabulary, skateboarding, punk rock, and his experiences with his grandfather. He has exhibited his artwork nationally and internationally.

H.C. Arnold

H.C. Arnold is a scholar of 20th-century American Art History with a particular focus on experimental and interdisciplinary art after 1960, late 20th-century curatorial practices, and the intersections between visual art and social movements. He is a Research Assistant for the Deputy Director of the Getty Research Institute and an Art History Instructor at California State University, San Bernardino. Arnold is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Riverside, where he is writing his dissertation on the woman-run 1970s Los Angeles-based art collective "Carp." Arnold also serves as the Archive Manager for the Trust of the late sound artist Michael Brewster. He has curated several shows of the artist's work in Los Angeles, including a large retrospective at the Mt. Wilson Observatory. In 2023, Arnold oversaw the donation of

Brewster's papers to the Archives of American Art, and in 2022, he presented on Brewster at the College Art Association Conference. Arnold's essays have appeared in exhibition catalogs and local art publications in Los Angeles, California, and Austin, Texas.

Dixie Lyn Boswell

Dixie Boswell was born in Tampa, Florida, in 1982. She studied painting, drawing, and art history at Mississippi State University, earning a BFA. Her studio fine art graduate studies were completed at Claremont Graduate University just outside of Los Angeles, California. Boswell's studio practice involves creating ethereal and non-permanent installations that repurpose materials, surfaces, and space to stimulate inward and outward reflection. As a curator and art professional, she strives for consistent productions and works toward creating equity and education by connecting communities through art of all kinds.

Clayton Funk

Clayton Funk is an Associate Professor of Teaching in the Department of Arts Administration, Education and Policy at The Ohio State University. His articles, book chapters and encyclopedia articles on the history of American art education focus on lenses of material culture, technology, and learning. They reveal learning filters, learning ways, and learning machines, as formal and informal education about art in schools, museums, theaters, and streets, and in virtual locations in the cloud.

Valerie George

Valerie George received her MFA from the University of California, Davis, is a Full Professor of Art at the University of West Florida, Arts Editor of *Panhandler Magazine: A Journal of Art and Literature*, a member of Good Children Gallery, and a Co-Founder and Co-Director of the 309 Punk Project. George is a visual artist, drummer, and, historically, a DIY recording artist. She founded Nam June Psyche Records, a DIY recording project that historically included a traveling recording studio. George recorded a range of projects, from folk musicians, experimental sound art, and noise, to seminal punk endeavors such as Rymodee, Mike Watt, ADD/C, Tuneyards, Scum of the Earth, to the final This Bike is a Pipebomb show at Sluggo's South. She has been an active member of the Pensacola punk community since the early 1990s.

Erin Latham

Erin Latham is an artistic researcher from Oklahoma. She received her Doctorate of Philosophy in Art Theory, Aesthetics, and Philosophy from the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts and her Master of Fine Art from the Pratt Institute. As a Professional Artist, she is the Manager of Current Co-op LLC, an artist-run cooperative studio space, co-founder of "Rock Paper Scissors Collaborative "an installation-based collaborative artmaking team, and founder of Eelpress printshop. As a Teaching artist for over twelve years, she teaches at both Elementary and Collegiate levels, and is currently part of the Oklahoma Arts Council Teaching Artist Roster, as well as an Instructor for the Edmond Fine Arts Institute. She is also the Artistic Directory for You Artistry Collaborative a nonprofit arts org serving communities and connecting artists. Her artwork explores the world around —the environment she exists within—both ecological and social— through an interplay of materials and processes that are based on community engagement, connectivity to nature, and the human experience of being with others. Her work is rooted in her experience as a Master Printmaker, a mixed media installation artist, and an academic writer.

Jaimes Mayhew

Jaimes Mayhew is a transgender artist who makes participatory, interdisciplinary work that addresses queer identities and how they are expressed through land use, speculation, and ecology. From installation, photography, and video to fiber art and performance, Mayhew's work is conceptually tied together through experimentations of queering relationships between humans, places, and things. Jaimes' collaborative and solo work has been shown nationally and internationally, including the Baltimore Museum of Art, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Hoffmangalerí (Reykjavik), City Arts (Baltimore, MD) and Cummings Art Gallery (New Haven, CT), among others. He has received grants and fellowships from The Fulbright Commission of Iceland, Maryland State Arts Council, Rubys Artist Grants, and The Saul Zaentz Innovation Fund, among others.

Stephen Morrow

Stephen Morrow's poems and stories have appeared in *The Kenyon Review, Tammy, The Laurel Review*, *Rattle*, and elsewhere. His videos (short films and web series) and scripts, all co-written with David Morrow, have been featured on ComedyCentral.com, at the New York Television and Austin Film festivals, and elsewhere. He currently lives in Louisville, Kentucky.

Donald Renner

Donald Renner is an independent artist, writer, and recovering musician, currently residing in Moorhead, MN, with his wife, a dog, and a cat. He grew up in Fargo, ND, where he spent a good chunk of his teenage years skateboarding, playing the bass in an imitation punk band, making weird art, and getting into all sorts of trouble. Renner received his BS in Psychology from North Dakota State University and his BFA in Visual Arts from the University of North Dakota. Renner is employed full-time in the retail services industry, but is fortunate enough to regularly make art. He believes he exists at the intersection of working-class banality, humble domesticity, mental illness, and aspirational armchair radicalism. Intellectually, Renner operates from a participant-observer phenomenological perspective, with a keen editorial voice informed by critical theory, post-modern philosophy, leftist political ideology, Buddhism, Dada, Surrealism, the Situationist International, and, of course, Punk. When he was in the 7th grade, he had the chance to see Circle Jerks live at the Fargo Civic Center, but his mom wouldn't let him go to the show! If his mom's intent was to protect him from the corrupting influence of Punk rock, she failed miserably. Thirty-six years later, Renner saw Circle Jerks live at First Avenue, with 7 Seconds and Negative Approach. It was a good show.

Jim Ruland

Jim Ruland is the LA Times bestselling author of *Corporate Rock Sucks: The Rise & Fall of SST Records*, which was named the best book of 2022 by *Pitchfork*, *Rolling Stone,* and *Vanity Fair*. He is also the co-author of *Do What You Want* with Bad Religion and *My Damage* with Keith Morris, founding vocalist of Black Flag, Circle Jerks, and OFF! Jim is a longtime writer for the independent music magazine *Razorcake* and a frequent contributor to the *LA Times*. He is the recipient of awards from *Readers Digest* and the National Endowment for the Arts. He is currently working on a new novel, a punk rock mystery called *Black Van*.

Samantha Russell

Samantha Russell was born in Flint, Michigan and currently lives and works in Southeast Michigan after much moving around. The daughter of an artist and mechanic, her life was filled with socially perceived opposites as she was introduced to everything art was and could be. At fourteen, she and her family moved to a small town where she found comfort in Punk as a welcoming space for misfits. In her mid-twenties, Samantha studied sculpture in Detroit, and Minneapolis, earning her terminal degree at the Minneapolis College of Art and

Design. After graduation, she was awarded an internship with the Kunstvereine program and spent two months in Würzburg, Germany, as assistant to President of the Arte Noah. Since returning to Southeast Michigan, she has maintained an art practice of creating objects with concepts and representations of the body's physical and emotional experience and researches the many intersections between punk rock and fine art.

C. Scott Satterwhite

C. Scott Satterwhite is a historian, writer, educator, and 9-year resident of 309. Scott writes for the IN Weekly and edits the zine *Mylxine*, which he started in 1995. He's contributed to several publications, including *Cometbus, Florida Historical Quarterly, Literature Compass*, and *Maximum RockandRoll*. The co-founder of End of the Line Café and the Open Books Prison Book Project, Scott was also in the band Tender Cobra. He holds a Master's Degree in American History and English Literature. His most recent book, *A Punkhouse in the Deep South: The Oral History of 309*, written with Aaron Cometbus, was released in the Fall of 2021 by the University Press of Florida. He teaches writing, rhetoric, composition, and literature at the University of West Florida.

Liz Worth

Liz Worth is a poet, novelist, and non-fiction writer. She is a two-time nominee for the ReLit Award for Poetry for her books *The Truth is Told Better This Way* and *No Work Finished Here: Rewriting Andy Warhol* (Book*hug). Her first book, *Treat Me Like Dirt: An Oral History of Punk in Toronto and Beyond* (ECW Press), was the first of its kind to provide an in-depth history of southern Ontario's first-wave punk movement. Her other works also include *Amphetamine Heart* (Guernica Editions), *PostApoc* (Now or Never), and *The Mouth is a Coven* (Manta Press). She is based in Hamilton, Ontario and hosts a podcast about people who are devoted to the 1980s.

Introduction: **What Punk Taught Me**

Gregory Blair

University of Southern Indiana

What is Punk Anyway?

In some ways, it seems that "punk" is sublime. Almost like something just beyond the limits of what language, critique, taxonomy, or a story told in the dingy bathroom of a punk show can fully and accurately capture or define. Perhaps the explanation or essence of punk is actually ineffable, something abstruse, buried deep within the realm of the metaphysical. The musician and music writer Bob Stanley once referenced this enigmatic ambiguity of punk when he wrote: "Ask forty punk rockers how they define punk and you'll get forty different answers, and they'll all be right."[1] In terms of the use of the word "punk" to describe a type of sound and music, the lore of its etymology often begins with the "noise boys" writers of Creem magazine in the early 1970s, most notably when Lester Bangs referred to The MC5 and Iggy Pop as "punks."[2] In 1971, it's said that Creem editor Dave Marsh coined the term "punk rock" in a review of ? & The Mysterians.[3] Since then, however, punk has shifted, morphed, and grown into a thousand different things for millions of different people. And that malleability is precisely one of the reasons that punk is so appealing and fascinating to me and the countless others who have dove into punk culture and willingly decided to become "punk."

At its broadest definition, punk is almost nearly amorphous. It surely started as a musical subculture characterized by a formula with certain key ingredients: the rebelliousness of Cherie Currie and the Runaways, the blitzkrieg blare of the Ramones, the "lascivious baritone growl" of Johnny Thunders, and the animated

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[1] J.P. Robinson, "The Rotten Etymology of Punk," *Medium*, https://jprobinson.medium.com/the-rotten-etymology-of-punk-86db2fcc16f8. Accessed on 4/23/24.

[2] Robinson, "The Rotten Etymology of Punk."

[3] Robinson, "The Rotten Etymology of Punk."

sneer of Johnny Rotten, to name a few, but it has also become so much more.[4] Some may take issue with my use of the term "subculture" here, considering the global spread and wider cultural impact of punk, but at least in its early stages, there was an "undergroundness" to it with only a few participants, often playing to sparsely populated crowds. After all, it has been documented that when MC5 played at Bumpers in London in 1972, they performed to an audience of Mark Blake, "Viv Prince—the former Pretty Things drummer—a Hell's Angel companion of Prince's and a large German Shepherd."[5]

Legs McNeil has written that when he and John Holmstrom, Ged Dunn, and Mary Harron were starting *Punk* the magazine, "the word 'punk' seemed to sum up the thread of everything we liked – drunk, obnoxious, smart but not pretentious, absurd, funny, ironic, and things that appealed to the darker side."[6] For Zack Furness, punk can be described as a "messy but nonetheless fascinating cluster of things."[7] For these two writers, punk seems to entail a certain multiplicity and intersectionality. Deborah Harry remembers a visceral and tactile quality to the early manifestations of punk. "Hot, wild, and exciting," writes Harry, "Punk was all about bursting out."[8] Professor Stevphen Shukaitis thinks of punk in terms of its revolutionary utility, especially when he writes that punk is "a radical pedagogical apparatus for conveying ideas, shaping social relations, and building communities."[9] In a similar estimation by Greil Marcus, punk was about breaking down barriers and opening up new potentials because "musically and politically, it announced itself as a harbinger of things to come, of all that was feared and of all that could not even be imagined."[10]And finally, when asked in an interview, "What is punk?" Exene

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[4] Mark Blake, *Punk: The Whole Story.* Mark Blake, Ed., Dorling Kindersley Publishing, 2006. 14.

[5] Blake, *Punk: The Whole Story.* 14.

[6] Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, Grove Press; 20th Anniversary Edition, 2016. 226.

[7] Zack Furness in *Punkademics: The basement show in the ivory tower*, Zack Furness, Ed. Minor Compositions, 2012. 11.

[8] Deborah Harry in Mark Blake, *Punk: The Whole Story.* Mark Blake, Ed., Dorling Kindersley Publishing, 2006. 8.

[9] Stevphen Shukaitis in *Punkademics: The basement show in the ivory tower*, Zack Furness, Ed. Minor Compositions, 2012. 126.

[10] Greil Marcus, *Punk* (1979), https://greilmarcus.net/2014/09/08/punk-1979/#:~:text=Punk%20was%20fake%20culture%2C%20product,to%20the%20next%20big%20thing. Accessed on 4/24/24.

Cervenka claimed that "it would be the indefinable, the most natural, the most anti-political yet political movement. It has a lot to do with music, it has the most to do with originality and rejection of corporate culture than any other form I can think of."[11] Yet, the seeming indefinability of punk is not a detriment; rather, it offers the ability for self-definition of the sort that is explored in this anthology. Each contributor to this anthology describes their own unique punk narrative and what they have learned from those experiences that have stayed with them throughout their entire lives.

The goal of this anthology is certainly not aimed at finding a definition for punk. Rather, this collection of stories aims to expand the thinking and scholarship about punk – beyond mohawks and safety pins – to demonstrate how punk provides a plethora of lessons to those who have been influenced by it in ways that range from aesthetics to ethics, community to collecting, to questioning authority and practicing non-conformity. Each of the contributors to this volume has been invited to share their own unique interpretation and engagement with punk. These writings range from anecdotal reflective journal entries to methodical critical analysis to philosophical inquiry and everything in between. Yet, each of them shares an intimacy and personal connection to punk culture, and we thank them for their openness, courage, and willingness to share their story. This anthology would not be possible without their tremendous efforts.

The intended audience for this book is anyone interested in punk culture, punk history, music history, punk aesthetics, American and Canadian history, cultural anthropology, and the philosophies of punk. This demographic should extend beyond just scholars of punk and appeal to any reader who is interested in how lessons from our youth are translated into the development of our personal and professional identities. While there may be an element of irony in the fact that a critical analysis of the punk experience is being generated largely from the realm of academia (traditionally viewed as one of the bastions of conformity and rote convention), many of our contributors show how punk in the 21st century has infiltrated, and thrives in, the college classroom. While other scholarly texts have examined the link between pedagogy and punk, such as *Punkacademics* and *Punk Pedagogies*, our text is not solely focused on

[11] Arielle Stevenson, "Interview: Exene Cervenka talks about her Pinellas days, punk, and what it's like to play with X forty years later," *Creative Loafing Tampa*, https://www.cltampa.com/music/interview-exene-cervenka-talks-about-her-pinellas-days-punk-and-what-its-like-to-play-with-x-forty-years-later-12182777. Accessed on 4/24/24.

academia and is more interested in how distinctive aspects of punk culture often form a critical role in the formation of identity, ethics, politics, communities, and epistemologies through the varied lessons it provides.

Beyond the problematics of defining punk, what punk actually *means* for different people is just as difficult to pin down because punk signifies so many idiosyncratic concepts and activities depending on who the person is, and what background they come from. Similarly, the experiences of punk, and how those encounters are channeled into various manifestations of methodology, philosophy, ontology, aesthetics, ethics, strategy, cultural phenomenon, or worldview can be equally diverse. One of the intentional things that many readers may notice is that most of the time in this text, the word "punk" has been written with a lowercase "p." For the most part, we decided to write punk with a lowercase to emphasize that it is not a proper noun—it is not something concrete with an absolute and tidy definition. Our hope is to leave it as a nebulous, unfinished, and messy concept, and that this ambiguousness will reflect the open-ended concept of punk that each of the writers in this anthology addresses.

A Canadian Prairie Punk

So, what does punk mean to me as formed through my own personal journey and set of circumstances? As a child of the '70s who grew up mostly in the 1980s, my introduction to punk came in the early 1990s, long after the first wave of punk had ended, but also at a time when grunge and pop-punk were beginning to explode. I still remember my first experience with punk, or at least the version that has been likely mythologized in my own mind, occurred when I was 16 years old and a friend of mine who was a year older and one grade ahead of me in school, handed me a cassette tape early one morning in high school and said: "You *have* to listen to this! It's so fast and amazing!" The cassette he handed me was *Damaged* by Black Flag. The cover immediately grabbed my attention—it seemed dangerous and uncompromising—one of the cracks in the mirror perfectly bisecting Rollins' right eye. I still remember rushing home after school, sprinting to my room, and after whisking the door closed behind me, slamming the cassette into my boom box, pushing play, and then just standing there… transfixed. As the very first track, "Rise Above," began with Robo's pounding drums, and then Ginn's screeching guitar following a few seconds later, I was instantaneously hooked. I had never heard anything like it before, so I listened to the album all the way through in its entirety (both sides of the cassette), and when it was finished, I thought to myself: "That is what I

want to be, I want to be a punk!" Now, more than thirty years after that first blast of distorted guitars, punk has become a permanent fixture in my life in one form or another. To remind myself about how punk has been permanently etched into my existence, when I was in my late 20s, I decided to get the familiar four black bars tattooed on my arm. The fact that one of my best friends from my old punk days did the tattoo for me made the decision seem even more appropriate and something that just needed to be done.

Bricoleur

One of the things that punk has come to mean to me is the notion of being self-sufficient and having the ability to use whatever materials and tools are readily available, I guess what I would compare to being a bricoleur. Derived from the French words 'bricoleur' and 'bricolage,' a bricoleur is a person who loves "to fiddle, tinker and, by extension, make creative and resourceful use of whatever materials are at hand (regardless of their original purpose)."[12] My conflation of punk with the bricoleur especially draws upon its description in the writings of Claude Lévi Strauss. In his philosophy, he utilizes the concept of the bricoleur to help explain distinctive types of scientific knowledge. My usage, however, is as an analytic tool for outlining the DIY ethos and strategies that are so frequently present in punk culture. For Lévi Strauss, the bricoleur is "adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project."[13]

This designation of "being adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks" is a fitting description of the DIY philosophy that is seen in many activities in punk culture, such as the history of basement shows or performances created in non-traditional venues. Many of these residential houses and basement spaces are often utilized for 'house shows' and would develop a following and reputation to the point of even having a formalized name. As one basement show organizer in Indianapolis, Zachary Gay, has stated, "Around 2016-2018 there were a ton of DIY spots… There was my spot, the Paradox Lounge, the Dream Fortress, the Sexx Mansion, the Pit, the Critter Den, and many that didn't have the dignity of a name. I saw and booked a lot of the bands that have become Indianapolis staples in the years since, like Cairo

[12] Online Etymology Dictionary, *bricolage (n.)*, https://www.etymonline.com/word/bricolage. Accessed on 4/23/24.

[13] Claude Lévi Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, University of Chicago Press, 1962. 11.

Jag, Pat and the Pissers, LIB, Kiddo, Antifeds, CML, Inner Peace, Dope Sweater, and many more."[14] Often, basement shows are created out of necessity because traditional venues require attendees to provide proof of being over the legal drinking age. Another reason for their bricoleur-like emergence is that the promoter or host of the basement show would simply not have enough money to pay the rental fee for many of the established or traditional musical venues where higher-priced musical acts would typically perform.

Another way that punk culture embodies the bricoleur, specifically Lévi Strauss' designation of being "adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks" is seen in the ancillary activities that comprise the local punk music "scenes." These activities often vary regionally and geographically but frequently include things such as zine creation and distribution, the exhibition of artwork, activism and protests, and the production of merch such as posters, stickers, buttons, clothing, patches, skateboards and skateboarding equipment, many other items, and even knowledge. With the Riot Grrrl punks that began in the early 1990s, one of the ways in which they demonstrated that "the set of the 'bricoleur's' means cannot, therefore, be defined in terms of a project" was to steadily grow their scene and community into an entire movement.[15] While the primary means to communicate a message and to create a community in punk culture is the music itself, in a very bricoleur fashion, often other means such as the Riot Grrrl Zine and the Riot Grrrl meetings at the Positive Force House utilized as part of the Riot Grrrl movement allowed it to have a wider reach so that even more people could hear the revolution. "It was almost like an earthquake" wrote one musician, "the reverberations that went out through that scene."[16]

But even beyond the traditional punk undertakings of touring, producing zines, and selling merch, the Riot Grrrl movement is an exemplar of the bricoleur spirit in punk because they planned and organized so much in addition to the punk shows themselves by "stitching young punks into the city's activist fabric through meetings, concerts, and political action."[17] Another of the important "diverse tasks" in their scene and community was the

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[14] Zachary Gay, "6 Years of Smelly Punks in my Basement," *Nuvo*, https://www.nuvo.net/music/local/preview/6-years-of-smelly-punks-in-my-basement/article_1dba48bc-879d-11ed-b6f1-53a65c1f1777.html. Accessed on 4/30/24.

[15] Claude Lévi Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 11.

[16] Sara Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, Harper Collins, 2010. 77.

[17] Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, 104-105.

publication of documents like *An Introductory Mechanics Guide to Putting Out Records, Cassettes, and CDs*, which was spearheaded by Kristin Thomson and Jenny Toomey of the band Tsunami. The booklet was intended to help any aspiring musician connect with the right tools and resources to "put out records and put their own stamp on their scenes."[18]

Other punk participants have adopted a bricoleur stance by going beyond the music in their own way. The Rock for Choice benefit concerts were originally organized in 1991 by the band L7 and the music editor of *LA Weekly*, Sue Cummings. Held over a ten-year period, these concerts were created as an avenue for musicians to provide support to the abortion rights movement. A litany of punk bands played at one of the concerts, including Bad Religion, Bikini Kill, Fugazi, Lunachicks, Seven Year Bitch, Nirvana, Iggy Pop, Rancid, Joey Ramone, and many others. Another example from 2004 was when the lead singer of the punk band NOFX, Mike "Fat Mike" Burkett, founded Punkvoter, which brought together a large group of punk bands and record labels to encourage younger people to cast their ballots at the next presidential election. As a complement to Punkvoter, Burkett also organized a series of concerts and compilation albums called *Rock Against Bush* that include bands such as Rx Bandits, Rise Against, Pennywise, Anti-Flag, Against Me! Green Day, No Doubt, Useless ID, NOFX, No Use for a Name, Descendents, Flogging Molly, and many more.

In many ways, "Rock Against Bush" was modeled after the Rock the Vote organization created in 1990, which often encourages young people to register to vote by having tents at popular music festivals and concert venues. Whatever form it takes in punk culture, the "kind of professional do-it-yourself person" that Lévi Strauss described in the bricoleur is what punk means for me and was certainly one of its magnetic draws as I became embroiled in a community of punk people that expressed themselves in a multitude of ways without having to follow the established rules or wait for permission to create.

Problems With Punk

Any scholarly discussion of punk culture and its legacy would be remiss, not to mention some of the problems and exclusions that have also been part of punk history. Punk is not perfect, and I think it is important to have a certain level of self-reflexivity, or as Zack Furness writes, "generally unpack some of the bullshit

[18] Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, 106.

that is often embedded within our own bullshit."[19] Some of this "bullshit" within the history of punk has at times included exclusionary practices, racism, and "varying degrees of machismo, sexism, homophobia, white privilege, classism, hyper-individualism, anti-intellectualism, passive conformity, and… conservative religious dogma."[20] For example, the DC-based Riot Grrls complained about how punk was a subculture that prided itself on being a substitute for mainstream culture and could provide a sense of sanctuary for those that did not fit in with mainstream ideals, but they still often felt that "boy's effort were lauded and girls' were unrecognized. Objection and sexual assault went unaddressed… The problems with the scene burned the girls up precisely because it echoed the way the world at large treated them."[21] Even the Riot Grrrl movement, with all of its groundbreaking efforts, often still lacked diversity and the inclusion of BIPOC voices.

Other experiences with punk have found a disconnect between the hollow messaging and actions taken. When describing her introduction to punk, Dr. Estrella Torrez recounts how "those who vehemently sung lyrics raging about social inequities did not act upon the injustices embodied within their music and it became disappointingly apparent that the musical rage was purely performance without action."[22] Historically, the optics of punk have also been almost exclusively white. Certainly, around 1977 in the UK, punks were mainly white working-class kids who were pissed off about their living conditions and prospects for the future. "To assume it would have been easy for a person of color to penetrate the scene is ignorant."[23]

There is no denying these problems with punk, both historically and currently, but it does not necessarily mean that we must throw the baby out with the bath water. There has been some good scholarly work that has been done that attempts to expose how various traditionally underrepresented voices have been part of the development of punk, but they have often been written out of history, white-washed, or marginalized. As the award-winning writer and editor Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff, whose writing has appeared in anthologies such as *Loud Black Girls,* has stated, "punk music is not the sole

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[19] Furness, *Punkademics: The basement show in the ivory tower*. 7.

[20] Furness, *Punkademics: The basement show in the ivory tower*. 11.

[21] Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, 92.

[22] Estrella Torrez in *Punkademics: The basement show in the ivory tower*, 132.

[23] KXSU Blog, *Punk So White*, February 5, 2018.https://www.kxsu.org/2018/02/05/punk-so-white/. Accessed on 5/17/24.

property of whiteness, even though to people of my generation it may appear that way at first glance. Like many facets of pop culture, its historical image has been whitewashed: when you think of punk's history, it's bands like The Clash, the Sex Pistols and the Ramones that immediately spring to mind. But the 'spirit' of punk is present, and has always been present, in music made by black people too, from obvious co-conspirators Bad Brains through to bar-spitting rude boys and today's radical, no-fucks-given rappers like Young Thug and artists like FKA twigs."[24] Even the influence of reggae, ska, blues, and Rastafarian fashion are increasingly being recognized as important elements in the development of punk.[25] Other small signs of increased equity have been seen, such as when Jennie Russell-Smith, musician and co-organizer of Rebellion festival, the UK's biggest annual punk festival, stated in 2014 that "years ago, I actively sought out women bands [for Rebellion line-ups]. Nowadays, because there are so many girl bands out there, I don't even think about it."[26] This personal anecdote does seem to provide some glimmer of equity, but just one year earlier, in 2013, the PRS for Music reported that (PRS Foundation is the UK's leading funder of new music and talent development across all genres) of the 95,000 songwriters and composers they represent, only thirteen percent were female.[27]

However, as recently as 2023, writers such as Micaeli Dym have noted that many contemporary punk bands have begun pushing beyond the traditional boundaries of both societal norms and the punk music genre. Dym writes about how the "modern punk movement draws from Riot Grrrl in combating the flaws of the historically male-dominated scene. However, it takes this a step

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[24] Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff, "Why is the history of punk music so white?" *Dazed*, November 12, 2015. https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/28372/1/why-is-the-history-of-punk-music-so-white. Accessed on 5/15/24.

[25] Two good examples include David A. Ensminger, *Roots Punk: A Visual and Oral History* (American Made Music Series), University Press of Mississippi, 2023 and Eileen Salsgiver, *The Contradiction of Punk Whiteness*, HUM370: American Culture Blog, San Diego State University, https://americanculturesdsu.wordpress.com. Accessed on 5/15/24.

[26] Charlotte Richardson Andrews, "Punk has a problem with women. Why?" *The Guardian Music Blog*, July 3, 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2014/jul/03/punk-has-a-problem-with-women-why. Accessed 6/1/24.

[27] Jack Urwin, "Punk Has Shamelessly Ignored Women, But Is It the Only Place Men Can Get Emotional?" Vice Noisey Blog, April 14, 2015. https://www.vice.com/en/article/ryg8jg/hypermasculinity-in-music?callback=in&code=ODJLYJU2YZATY2JKZS0ZMTK0LTLKZGETODY4MWY0OTBIMJIX&state=dc58bca31b0d4938ba8ecf202df28a4a. Accessed 4/24/24.

further in promoting self-expression outside of the traditional limits."[28] Even so, there is still work to do—punk can continue to be more inclusive, welcoming, and equitable—hopefully, so more people can experience some of the important life moments like the ones that each of the contributors to this anthology has detailed in the chapters to follow.

[28] Micaeli Dym, "Revolution Girl Style Now!: Punk, Feminism, and Intersectionality," *The Georgetown Independent,* Mar 25, 2023. https://www.georgetownindy.com/post/revolution-girl-style-now-punk-feminism-and-intersectionality. Accessed 5/20/24.

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