The Paradox of Punk

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Abstract

In March 2013, Seattle Weekly music commentator John Roderick wrote about the Punk Movement claiming that it sold false hope to young and influential minds. In it, Roderick reflected on his own experience with the Punk scene/subculture, ultimately concluding that "Punk Rock is Bullshit" (Roderick 2013). We argue that this somewhat common criticism is representative of the paradox which confuses participation in a scene as being a member of a subculture. Furthermore, we must distinguish identity claims that are disposable expressions of self from those that are indispensable beliefs to one's life practice. How can punk's nihilistic tendencies be reconciled with the fierce idealism attributed to it by the punks themselves? Is punk meaningless, vapid, life-negating, hopeless and confused? In addressing these questions, our first task is to establish the primacy of ideology/ethos to punk identity. Our second is to address critical associations of punk rock with nihilism in music scenes and subcultures. Our third is to look at the wide-ranging ideological claims grouped under the punk umbrella that further confuse the identification of a punk ethic. Lastly, we will explain the paradox that exists between participants of the punk scene and subculture.

Keywords: Culture, Music, Punk, Subculture, Scenes, Identity, Youth

The Paradox of Punk

The paradox of punk music and its associated subculture is that it walks the line of nihilism and idealism while simultaneously recreating its authentic self. To hipsters, posers, and progenitors alike, punk subculture is frequently positioned in terms of a scene, subculture, and an ethos. The closer to the center of the punk subculture that one traverses, the more the stylistic trappings of externalized punk expression (dress, musical preference, subcultural capital, etc.) fall away as an internalized ideological core of beliefs and practices emerges as the locus of true "punkness" (Bennett 2006; Dynner 2007; Tsitsos 2013).

Despite this centrality of ethos/ideology to punk identity, attempts at positivistic identification of particular ideological positions attributed to punk subcultures become problematic. Punk's stylistic proclivity to express itself oppositionally is one factor at play. Rather than stating affinity, punks are more likely to express aversion than other music subcultures. This oppositionalism has contributed to the widespread critical association of punk with nihilism.

Yet, a positivistic definition of punk ideology becomes even more deeply problematic when one takes into account the sheer number of positivistic claims that *have* been made atop punk's opposition-oriented stylistic core. Many punks identify their culture as fiercely idealistic rather than hopelessly negating. A remarkably diverse set of ideological positions have at one time or another been co-opted under the wide-ranging umbrella of punk identity. From this perspective, it seems that rather that standing for nothing, punk stands for anything/everything.

This contradiction leads to the main questions this paper seeks to address. How can punk's nihilistic tendencies be reconciled with the fierce idealism attributed to it by the punks themselves? Is punk meaningless, vapid, life negating and hopeless confused? Is punk simply a bunch of "bullshit" as recently claimed by music commentator John Roderick (2013)? Alternatively, is punk the meaningful and empowering force it is claimed to be by adherents around the globe?

In addressing these questions, our first task is to establish the primacy of ideology/ethos to punk identity. Our second is to address critical associations of punk rock with nihilism in music scenes and subcultures. Our third is to look at the wide-ranging positivistic ideological claims grouped under the punk umbrella that further confuse the identification of a punk ethic. Lastly, we present our perceived value of punk as a subculture that functions as separate from its correlated scene.

Punk Ideology

The centrality of ideology/ethos to punk becomes apparent upon cursory examination. Various critical takes on punk over the last 30 years reflect this assertion (Hebdige 1979; Laing 1985; Shank 1994; Gosling 2004; Bennett 2006; Tsitsos 2013). In his exploration of the identity politics of aging punks, Bennett writes that, "punk has become less about style or even active scene participation than a set of beliefs and practices" that have "become ingrained in the individual." (Bennett 2006:26). Gosling (2004) writes at length about the primacy of ideology to punk organization and identity in his piece on the anarcho-punk scene. He states such primacy outright in his observations that "[t]his underground punk scene was distinctively characterized by the sociopolitical nature of its lyrics, artwork, and commercial activities" and that "artistic integrity, social and political commentary and actions, and personal responsibility became the scene's central points (Gosling 2004:170). He elaborates on the point by noting that "the songs displayed a certain philosophical and sociological awareness, thus far rare in the world of rock but having antecedents in folk and protest songs" (Gosling 2004:170). Here, Gosling comments on both the centrality of politics and ideology to punk rock as well as the uniqueness of this centrality within the wider body of rock.

Seeking critical evidence of the centrality of ideology to punk is likely unnecessary given its glaring importance within the subculture itself. Similar to Thornton's (1995) discussion of club cultures, members of the punk subculture tell a different story about themselves and their ideology than the pervading stories that exist in mainstream media. Attfield (2011) adds that there is intrinsic value to punks sharing an "insider" perspective to their scenes and subculture. This information is absent from the mainstream recollections of the subculture.

Within punk, discussions occur that do not take place within mainstream cultural outlets. For example, the work of Kathleen Hanna examines patriarchy and consumerism as it relates to women's experience in contemporary American culture (Taylor 2013). In the Against Me! album *Transgender Dysphoria Blues*, Laura Jane Grace explores her personal experience of gender dysphoria and transition in her own voice, unfiltered by mainstream media outlets. In both of these instances, a local means of production and distribution gives unfiltered expression to voices often not represented within mass media culture.

Susan Dynner's (2007) documentary *Punk's Not Dead* features an endless parade of punk artists talking at length about their ideas on political and social issues. In *Punk Attitude*, filmmaker Jim Jarmusch explains that punk is ultimately a "philosophical thing about how you look at something. The fight against complacency is punk rock" (Letts 2005). In this vein, punk often evinces a willingness to expose overlooked parts of lived social reality. The Operation Ivy song "Sleep Long" talks about the song's protagonists experience as he witnesses a homeless man dying alone on the street as he rides by on the bus. The song finishes with the lines, "In sheltered youth, our pretension. Divert our eyes just to divert attention. Only to see the human victims always there to remind us." These direct confrontations of homelessness and death are not often found in mainstream cultural outlets and evidence punk's willingness to examine a wide variety of lived experience.

Nihilism

"*Punk stands for fuck everything… fuck everybody else."* (Dynner 2007)

Culture texts regarding punk nihilism are abundant. A large amount of commentary on this element of the punk subculture stemmed from popular reactions to the introduction of first-wave punk to mass audiences in the late

'70s. Upon examination of these texts, it seems that punk's perceived nihilism may have been the element of the punk culture most reviled by agents of reactionary moral panic at this time.

A comical example is a 1982 episode of the TV show Quincy M.E. titled "Next Stop, Nowhere" in which the death of a teen is blamed on the influence of a fictionalized punk band who sings stereotypically nihilistic punk lyrics, including "Ain't no tomorrow just yesterday's pain. So cut your wrist and watch your life go down the drain. Next stop, nowhere!" (Danton 1982). The show features one of Quincy's cohorts claiming that what makes punk different from other youth subcultures (and therefore dangerous) is its "relentless negativity" (Danton 1982). These exaggerations of punk nihilism are common in mainstream media.

Although his own analysis is nuanced to avoid taking this reading at face value, Dick Hebdige's (1979) examination of subculture alludes to the perceived nihilism of punk, which was a common reading of first-wave punk. He writes of punks wearing clothes that were "the sartorial equivalent of swear words" and producing "noise in the calmly orchestrated Crisis of everyday life in the late 1970s—a noise that made (no)sense" (Hebdige 1979:128). Chaos, swearing, nonsense. He continues, "If we were to write an epitaph for the punk subculture, we could do no better than repeat Poly Styrene's famous dictum, 'Oh Bondage, Up Yours!', or somewhat more concisely: the forbidden is permitted, but by the same token, nothing, not even those forbidden signifiers (bondage, safety pins, chains, hair-dye, etc.) is sacred and fixed" (Hebdige 1979:128). This reading of punk points towards ultimate nihilism, the collapse of all signs and signifiers into ultimate nothingness.

On a more mundane level, punk nihilism is evidenced in a litany of lyrics from many punk artists. The Sex Pistols' "there is no future" tagline which is repeated seventeen times in their second single "God Save the Queen" is an obvious example. First-wave punk nihilism occurs on both sides of the pond, with American punk rock act the Queers singing, "Things aren't getting better. My future's not too bright. I'm really going nowhere. I hate this shitty life. Fuck the world." Suicidal Tendencies "Suicide's an Alternative" also fits the bill (although you can't help suspect that in this instance of Suicidal Tendencies a bit of tongue-in-cheek '80s media hysteria culture-jamming was afoot). Moving farther into the direction of the tongue-in-cheek and the satirical is essentially the entire lyrical output of the Dead Kennedy's Jello Biafra, with single/album titles such as "Kill the Poor", "Too Drunk to Fuck" and "Frankenchrist". Some commentators have ascribed the particularly nihilistic strains of punk expression to the male-dominated hardcore punk scene and noted that punk expression was often channeled towards less nihilistic ends amongst punks more radical, feminist, and queer strains (Downes 2012; Taylor 2013).

Idealism

Despite the admitted presence of nihilistic sentiment within the punk canon, an arguably more common punk expression is idealism framed as opposition. This distinction between nihilism and oppositional idealism is important. Nihilism implies indifference towards outcomes, apathy and a lack of positivistic belief. While we have shown that apathy and indifference are present in some punk lyrics, a large amount of punk output nonetheless voices fierce and passionate opposition to a wide array of social realities. Punk oppositionalism is reflective of stylistic tendencies that have been present since the genre's beginnings in both lyrical content and stylistic/sonic expression. Punk is at its most base level a sonically intense response to the bleakness of post-industrial life and the excesses of psychedelic sonic excursion. Where folk artists might have written songs advocating peace, punks decried violence and screamed outrage at the military industrial complex. Despite the difference in means, the two messages arise from the same impulse. For a concrete example, compare John Lennon's "give peace a chance" with Operation Ivy's "stop this war". Or consider Minor Threat's seminal "Straight Edge"—while the song promotes sobriety, clear thinking, and clean living, it expresses itself as being *against* drug-use and drinking. Rather than describing the benefits of sobriety, it ridicules the futility of substance abuse.

As we begin to draw together punk's stylistic nihilism and its idealistic tendencies under the heading of oppositionalism, we confront a more troubling difficultly in defining punk ethos. If we can admit punk's (oppositional) idealism, we are then confronted with the remarkably wide range of ideological stances thus articulated within the body of punk cultural output. We have mentioned Operation Ivy and Crass' pro-peace/anti-war stances. In fact, both bands espouse ideals not altogether unfamiliar to the ethos of the earlier hippie subculture, which points towards a larger trend of hippie/punk cross-pollination.

Putting aside the wealth of hippie-versus-punk rhetoric, it becomes obvious that many punks garnered inspiration from hippie-era lifestyles, arts, and ideologies. Punk-hippie cross-pollination is evident in punk tendencies towards radical left politics, populism, anti-authoritarianism.

Lett's *Punk Attitude* features the Sex Pistol's Steve Jones saying that the hippie movement was "just as punk rock as anything, when everyone was *against* Vietnam and they were doing their own thing" (Letts 2005).

Punk Attitude features another punk noting, "everyone was against the war but they were united generally against the establishment" (Letts 2005). These quotes are notable not only for their co-option of hippie ideals but also for the way they reframe the hippie impulse in punk-friendly oppositional language.

As it turns out, the co-opting of other social movements ideologies by punks does not end there. Bad Brains' Daryl Jenifer has claimed that Chuck Berry's duck-walk was punk (disregarding the fact that Chuck Berry first duck-walked across a stage a full fifteen years before the word "punk" had anything to with music or subcultures) (Letts 2005). Other punks have gone on to claim that Warhol, the Velvet Underground, Marlon Brando, and 60s garage rock were all punk (Letts 2005).

Upon expanding our focus even more, we can see that despite tending towards particular causes (radical left politics, anti-authoritarianism) the label punk can (and seemingly has) been applied to nearly every ideological position available at one time or another. History offers examples of Nazi-punks (Skrewdriver), queer punks (Limp Wrist, Pansy Division), Muslim punks (The Kominas, Secret Trial Five), Buddhist/Hindu punks (Against the Stream/Dharmapunx/Krishnacore), junkie punks (Darby Crash, GG Allin, Sid Vicious), conservative punks (Johnny Ramone), atheist punks (Leftöver Crack, Cheap Sex) feminist punks (riot grrrl, Bikini Kill) and straight edge punks (Ian Mackaye, Earth Crisis). This list could be expanded almost infinitely. It seems that nearly any word, action, person, or band (i.e. any signifier) has the potential to gain punk significance if framed as being oppositional and against the status quo.

Again, we stumble upon the paradoxical nature of the punk subculture. If it is the case that punk has the potential to walk the line between so many different and sometimes contradictory ideologies, it seems reasonable for Roderick (2013) to claim, "Punk rock is bullshit." However, as Moore (2004) points out, the competing tendencies within punk are more a reaction to post-modern society than the hypocritical farce that Roderick wants us to believe.

The tension that is created within the seemingly competing ideologies is further realized when we examine one's participation in punk scenes versus punk subculture. Scenes are often supported by causal participation by individuals consuming the music and its associated cultural products, but not necessarily the adopting the cultural politics and ideologies associated with the subculture. For this point, we believe that the development of literature differentiating participants in scenes was an important distinction from the previous umbrella whereby all participants where considered members of the subcultures.

Clearly, the punk subculture has come to represent far more than the costume or temporary participation in a particular event. For members of the punk subculture, punk is not bullshit because it has changed their worldview. The sensibilities that can be gained from engaging the punk subculture can fundamentally inform the way you engage politically within the larger social sphere. In this way, punk sensibilities, such as ethos, lifestyle, and politics can function similarly to or replace other institutional lenses like religion, family, and education. That being said, punk as a whole does not exist outside the influence of the larger social contexts from which it emerges. Because of that, punks are often engaged, by either necessity or desire, with mainstream society and mass-market capitalism. However, many punks attempt to circumvent mainstream avenues of mass production in favor self-production (and therefore self-representation) in the form of DIY practices.

In punk, there exists a fine line between bucking the trends and creating the trends that will be mass-produced and commoditized. As Nate Thompson reflects on his disdain for the store Hot Topic he states, "[its] the church of commoditization of subculture… this corporate culture is eating everything that exists up." Likewise, Jim Linderberg echoes that sentiment while struggling with that fact that his band is signed to a label that is "owned by a huge multinational conglomerate (Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation)… which is probably the worst words you can use in the punk arena." Some punks have taken intentional steps to avoid the mainstream co-optation of their cultural forms. For example, Marion Leonard discusses the intentional avoidance of the use of

marketable, identifiable fashions by riot grrrl's to avoid mainstream cooption and the riot grrrl's mockery of mainstream media's attempts to coopt their aesthetic (Leonard 1997).

Beneath these commoditized forms of punk, there exists a plethora of punk-related underground subcultures. It is important to note that, within these subcultures, ideology and politics play a role at all levels of production and consumption.

A persistent anarcho-punk scene has thrived throughout the past decades, characterized by its highly political lyrics and resistance to conventional mass-capitalist modes of cultural production (Clark 2003; Gosling 2004). We see evidence of resistance to mainstream capitalist practice by the DIY ethic, cited as a lasting legacy of punk ethos (Schilt 2003; Clark 2003; Gosling 2004; and Colegrave & Sullivan 2005). Many DIY punk bands produce and disseminate their music without participating in mainstream mass distribution networks, existing outside the music industry as they participate in a form of grassroots capitalism to get their products to consumers (Gosling 2004). This paradoxical nature of punk cultural production sees punk artists marketed by a variety of major-affiliated labels (Epitaph) alongside the production of DIY minimalist capitalist labels (Plan-It-X, Dischord, Alternative Tentacles, ad infinitum). Punks adopted DIY practices both out of opposition to mainstream capitalist practices and out of necessity, as many anarchist punk bands were excluded from mainstream popular music production, distribution, and consumption (Gosling 2004).

Furthermore, we see evidence of the idealism of punk by the expansion of politics into the realm of consumption. An example is the attempts of 90's riot grrrl acts (among others) to convert their gigs into a place of debate. For example, a Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear pamphlet passed out at a 1993 show stated "I want HER to know that she is included in this show, that we are doing is for HER to CRITICIZE/LAUGH AT/BE INSPIRED BY/HATE/WHATEVER" (Leonard 1997).

Oakland's famous club at 924 Gilman Street is also a prominent example of the politicization of the gig space, explicating barring bands with racist, sexist, homophobic lyrics and bands signed to major labels (Saincome 2012). The punk venue has been used as an opportunity to raise funds for politically significant causes. For example, Smash-It-Dead Fest, an annual radical/queer/feminist/trans*/POC punk fest in Boston started as a means to raise funds for the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center and uses the banner of punk to raise funds and hold workshops and discussions as an explicit means for spreading awareness about sexual assault (Smash it Dead 2013).

No Bullshit: Understand/Disengage/Act

"Institutions will never set you free. Ask questions. Take responsibility. Become your dream." – Soophie Nun Squad

What can be made of the paradoxical punk subculture that seems to stand for nothing, everything, and anything at all? Ultimately, we posit that any attempt to attribute particular ideological positions to the punk subculture, as a whole is at best a clumsy misrepresentation of the movement. While punk's nihilistic and oppositional tendencies render the endeavor problematic, it is the wide array of ideological stances, lifestyles, and the sheer diversity subsumed within punk culture that make attributing positivistic ideological stances to the punk subculture impossible.

However, we do not believe that this means that punk is "bullshit". Rather than adopting a particular political/ideological position, punk instead offers a quite meaningful open-ended platform for social critique, analysis, and action. Punk directs its participants/consumers towards great levels of sociopolitical interest and awareness as it primes them for direct action. This open-ended platform functions as a three-stage process.

First, punk piques participants and consumers interest in sociopolitical issues by directing their attention towards politics and the more problematic parts of lived human experience/social reality. Second, punk emphasizes self-actualization, individual fulfillment, and non-conformity as it offers participants an alternative community that then separates itself from the elements of social reality it deems problematic. Taken as sum, this effect invites participants to disengage the systems/ideologies they find problematic. Lastly, punk's emphasis on do-it-yourself social action admonishes participants to act out their ideological convictions. This can manifest as engagement in socio-political activism or through self-actualization and the forming of communities geared towards supporting social change and alternative identities/politics. We describe the sum total effect of this open-ended platform as a three-stage process of "Understand/Disengage/Act."

Understand

Through its ideological nature and sociopolitical leanings, punk leads many of its participants towards stronger political/social consciousness as it exposes them to the world alternative/radical politics and ideologies. Punk's willingness to expose social hypocrisy and discuss politics primes the ears of listeners who otherwise may not have been socially or politically engaged. Green Day's Billy Joe Armstrong has said that he didn't learn about politics from school" but rather "learned about politics from punk rock" (Dynner 2007).

He continues by stating that, punk presented him with social and political issues in a way that was more engaging than the presentation he encountered through traditional education (Dynner 2007). Buddhist punk/author Noah Levine (2007) summarizes that point when he says:

> "In punk rock, there's an attraction to… these people are telling the truth. They are pointing out the truth about this world in this sort of fierce language and there's a lot of wisdom, a kind of aggressive wisdom, in that punk rebellion of really pointing out the oppressive factors and the ignorance and injustice in this world" (Levine 2007).

Levine (2007) emphasizes the importance of understanding and truth to punk rock. Bad Religion singer/Cornell professor Dr. Greg Graffin furthers the point when he writes that "punk is a process of questioning and a commitment to understanding that results in self-progress, and by extrapolation, could lead to social progress" (Graffin 2002). The punk admonishment to avoid conformity and question the status quo leads punks to shirk conventional understanding as they formulate their own opinions and ideas. In this way, punk is an empowering influence as it provides participants with the impetus and support to pursue individualistic understanding(s) of their lived realities (Dynner 2007). The open-endedness and diversity of punk ideology may actually serve to promote critical thinking more so than any cohesive ideological stance could. Punk incites curiosity without providing answers, exposing listeners to a wide variety of ideas without dampening individualism by providing a set of standardized over-arching answers. Punk ultimately leaves participants with the responsibility of finding these answers for themselves.

Evidence of social interest and engagement in the punk subculture is abundant. In the anarcho-punk scene, participants are often involved in the reading and discussion of radical political theory. For example, Pat Schneewis of Ramshackle Glory uses social media to promulgate and discuss various anarchist texts. We found that several of the punks' social networks have primary interests in discussing sociology, queer theory/politics, feminism, animal rights, the politics of privilege/inequality, etc. Many have followed this impulse into the realm of higher education and are either involved in academia or alternative forms of knowledge production (zine production/film-making/grassroots organization). For example, the Queer Zine Archive Project seeks to archive queer zines of the past few decades (QZAP). The POC Zine Project has a similar mission related pertaining to zines made by people(s) of color (POCZINEPROJECT). Both of these type of grassroots knowledge creation and promulgation are examples of knowledge-based social interest and engagement within the punk subculture.

Punk lyrics value self-inquiry and an individualistic examination (or re-examination) of social reality. In "Here We Go Again", Operation Ivy's Jesse Michaels writes, "Relax from giving up what you want to do with your life. Ease up from giving up things like control of your own mind. Never ask no questions then you're never gonna get no answers". In her song "Loose Lips" (of *Juno* fame), Kimya Dawson tells the listener that she will "ask what you think because your thoughts and words are powerful". Black Flag's "Rise Above" condemns normative thinking by saying, "Think they're smart, they can't think for themselves. We're gonna rise above." All told, punk's readiness to discuss social problems and politics combined with its emphasis on individualistic critical thinking can serve as a platform that leads participants towards greater social/political interest and awareness.

Disengage

After encouraging understanding, punk provides the support necessary to disengage from the parts of society deemed problematic by participants as they forge their own self-directed identities and communities. Punk represents "a medium where people are trying to fight isolation and being alone and being in a society where they don't fit in" (Dynner 2007). Rather than penalizing human variability and individual expression, punk rock encourages it.

This claim is debatable, as many have argued that punk identities are policed with equal or greater rigor than conventional identities. While such arguments may have some validity, we argue that punk provides a valuable cultural space as well as communal support for persons possessed of or interested in characteristics and ideals that are not socially valued and/or socially sanctioned. Author Michael Knight Muhammad (a White American Muslim punk) says that, "it was the punk rock kids who brought me out of my shell and empowered me to

question myself and where I come from" (Ghomeshi 2009). Punk provides a safe place to experiment with alternative ideas, fashions, and identities. Mr. Muhammad continues by saying that "punk is all about creating/wearing/discovering your own identity, in spite of the rest of the world trying to make you in a specific way" (Ghomeshi 2009).

Punk is an open-ended philosophy that allows for a wide range of identity play within its boundaries, as evidenced by the wide variety of subgenres/ideologies/identities subsumed within the punk subculture. Punk presents a home to those who perceive themselves as being unwelcome in the mainstream culture. Anti-Flag's Justin Sane explains, "Punk is an alternative community. It's a community that provides people with an alternative to the mainstream" (Dynner 2007).

The punk culture offers multiple forms of support that enables practical disengagement from mainstream culture. Punk houses/communities offer participants an alternative communal structure that has emerged concurrently with the decline of the nuclear family in Western society. In personal networks, we have encountered numerous persons with backgrounds of trauma and/or persons who have found themselves marginalized and disempowered within mainstream society who have found communal support within subsets of the punk subculture. This sentiment in reinforced throughout the documentary *The Other F Word* where several members of seminal punk bands negotiate their past, as they become fathers (Nevins 2011) .

Punk offers a supportive platform to individuals who would otherwise be solitary in their non-normative identifications and endeavors. The preponderance of 'alternative' identities within the punk subculture, such as anarchist, queer, vegan, and straightedge, provides further evidence of punk's role in housing identities/communities that are marginalized within mainstream culture. While these types of identities are often not taken seriously and/or socially sanctioned within mainstream society, they are given a welcome place and a real voice within subsets of the punk subculture.

Act

On top of encouraging sociopolitical awareness and providing a basis to actualize disengagement from social norms, punk has the potential to encourage direct social action and engagement. In its impetus to disengage, punk allows personalized ideological formations to jump from theory into action. This can translate into the adoption of radical and/or alternative identities (personal transformation) and/or a call towards direct social action/activism (societal transformation).

One way that punk encourages activism is through the emphasis on do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos, which place responsibility on the participants to actualize their own identities/goals as opposed to depending on external institutions to provide personal/communal fulfillment. Gosling explains how the 'anyone-can-play-guitar' sonic styles of first-wave punk blossomed into a wider DIY ethic emphasizing direct action, self-actualization, grassroots organization, and community building (Gosling 2004:168-169). Taking this idea further, Moore and Roberts (2009) show that the DIY zines have produced a "substantive infrastructure of underground media" that tackle political issues. In fact, Moran (2010) notes that many punk zines focus more on the politics associated with the subculture than on the music.

Punk rock has long provided the impetus for personal and societal actualization in the form of alternative community formation and social activism. An early example is the alternative lifestyle formation in the punk scene is the Dial House community formed by members of Crass in the late '70s (Cross 2010). Members of Crass formed an alternative anarchist community centered at the Dial House estate in Essex, England. This community became a platform for social activism as members of the community participated using techniques such as culture jamming, ad-busting, pranksterism, and the organization of alternative anarchist/squatter communities to further their cultural agenda (Cross 2010). Later instances of grassroots organization can be seen in the formation of DIY independent labels (of which Alternative Tentacles and Dischord are famous examples though Chris Clavin's Plan-It-X and many others are perhaps truer to form), the organization of grassroots touring networks (Gosling 2004), and the formation of squatter communities across the globe.

The punk subculture has also gone on to radicalize and inspire a large number of individual activists. Animal rights activist and punk singer Russ Rankin explains that that "the social/political message in a lot of punk" and the punk idea that "we can effect real change through our actions and choices" acted as the primary radicalizing influence and as the impetus for his lifestyle of social activism (Roth 2011). Dead Kennedy's Jello Biafra has transformed his punk celebrity into a career as a spoken-word performer, activist, and even a quasi-earnest, failed

politician. Biafra once claimed that "[punks] are the patriotic ones because we are the ones who care enough about our country to say [fuck you] to the government when they run it wrong" (Dynner 2007). Levine explains that his punk-influenced form of Buddhist practice is to "dismantle and disempower and disengage the greed-based hatred and fear-influenced norms in our society" and it seeks "the destruction of the systems of oppression and sexism and racism and classism" (Levine 2007).

Conclusion: A Subculture Revealed

Although the punk ideals have not resulted in revolutionary changes to larger societal institutions per se, punk's effects continue to reverberate through the lives of innumerable participants whose core ideals, identities, and ways of being have been shaped and supported through their participation in the subculture. The Subhuman's Dick Lucas sums this up perfectly. He claims that although punk rock has left the problematic realities of mainstream society unchanged, the personal lives of many punks are impacted:

> "Punk rock has changed a lot of people's lives for the better because they have met a whole bunch of people who have given vent to their ideas and characters because they've been given an area that… contains a sort of roots values of being able to do exactly what you want" (Dynner 2007).

When we revisit Moore's (2007) idea of the Punk subculture as reacting/responding to the contemporary social issues, even at an individual level, it becomes difficult to conclude that punk has been void of impacting change. It is true that the punk subculture did not overthrow the government. Nor have they done away with war or various forms of hate, however; at the grassroots level, it is clear that the punk ethos has changed a number of people's relationship and interaction with the larger social institutions. This has important rippling effects throughout mainstream culture through the increased discourse and awareness.

Although punk is quite simply too diverse and unorganized to claim any particular ideological stance, punk acts as a potent platform for personal actualization and direct social action. Ultimately, we believe that the question of punk(s) meaning comes down to whether or not the values/beliefs/identities of the members of a society are considered meaningful or valuable in their own right. On an individual level, members who passively participate in the punk scene are less likely to place meaning and value on the subcultural ideologies as they have invested less into the creation and maintenance of those ideologies. As a result, members of the scene are less likely to see returns on their investment. Additionally, with less invested, the outcomes associated with the lifestyle and ethos are less likely to be attributed positively to the Punk subculture as is the case for Roderick. That is, as a casual participant, Punk subculture becomes an easy target whether positive or negative as the situation dictates. However, we have shown that his article does not successfully speak to the larger subcultural network of punks.

On the surface punk appears to have fallen short of enacting mass change in societal institutions, we show that members of the punk subculture inspired a large number of organizations and persons involved in social/political action. We believe that this is subtle distinction is important, and is what separates passive members as being part of a scene versus the active participants of the subculture. Subcultural participation extends beyond the casual interactions to far more nuanced choices and networks. It requires both participation and action and as a result, it holds that those with stronger subcultural ties are more apt to make lifestyle choices in line with the subcultural ideology. This participation becomes cyclical as punks maintain and nurture friendships and networks that further support the subcultural lifestyle. As Sarah Thornton (1995) points out, there is positive reinforcement through subcultural and cultural capital. This can exist in a scene, however, the hierarchy within the subculture controls not only the positive and negative reinforcement, but they also act as the gatekeepers. Within the punk subculture, these gatekeepers are particularly skeptical of the casual participant.

As we reflect on Roderick's claim, it seems necessary to highlight the importance of individuals' participation in the subculture and the subcultural ethos on the individual lifestyle. This transcends simply putting on a leather jacket and watching a band play on the weekend and claiming a punk identity. Instead, the punk ethos permeates their value system and becomes a barometer for one's life work. As Roderick makes light of his friends refusal to have a savings account, he shows that he never really bought into the punk ethos. Their refusal to participate in the capitalist system of savings is more than just symbolic of punk identity claims, it represents a fundamental change in how one deals with the concept of money in the present, and the future.

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