

# **PUNK NOW!!**

**CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON PUNK**

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# ‘What About a Future?’: Punk as History and Document

*Alexander Hay*

## *Introduction*

This chapter is about punk music, or rather, one of its many meanings. Indeed, if there can ever be one certainty about punk, amidst the myriad arguments about what it is or is not, it is that punk is certainly versatile. In its time, it has served as agitprop, business model, youth movement, protest, means of promoting politics from a wide spectrum of beliefs (Curran 2015: 166) and even entertainment. It is a movement that has been both commercialized (Huxley 1999: 96) and has subverted commercialization (Borowska 2012: 12–13). Indeed, part of the reason why punk remains a topic of discussion is precisely this multiplicity of purpose, a tendency towards both fragmentation (Hannon 2010: 85) and reinvention (Adkins 2015: 21–22). However, the chapter will focus in particular on whether punk can serve as a means of understanding history, as a kind of document of its times and if so, how. In so doing, the question that will be asked is not if punk can serve as a kind of formal historical document – which, of course, was never its intention to begin with – but instead whether it can serve as a form of folk history, a subjective reflection of its times that captures the emotional responses of a particular moment in history.

By necessity, this discussion will require a definition of what a historical document is in the context discussed here. As the chapter will argue, it is a document or text created at a particular time for a particular audience at that point, and with content and concerns that reflect them both. Such a definition, of course, extends the concept of the ‘historical document’ far and wide, and this is how it should be if a discussion of historical events from all possible perspectives is to be possible. Here, the questions asked of the source material are as important as the source material itself, and a midway point between viewing it in isolation and merely as one part of a greater social context is reached (Gossett 1992: 95–96).

In that sense, then, punk music as historical document is valid in the sense that it reflects some of the subjective responses to events, and it is what it reveals about the mindset, circumstances and ideologies of the authors at the time that makes it valid. Through punk rock, we can see history through the eyes of some of its malcontents, its refuseniks and its marginalized.

This chapter's intention is not to engage in an in-depth exploration of such a reading, as its intention is firstly to introduce the idea and secondly to demonstrate one possible approach in doing so. Chosen arbitrarily, as a way of pressure testing the method, the chapter will begin this discussion by focusing on two particular albums from the early 1980s, The Exploited's *Troops of Tomorrow*, from 1982, and *The Riot City Years*, a compilation of material from that period by Chaos UK, but latterly issued in 2004. These albums not only reflect the development of punk after its 1970s heyday, at least in terms of media interest in the genre, but also because of their shared combination of black humour, satire, aggression and political agenda.

### *UK '82: The second wave of punk and the rise of Thatcherism*

These bands are also significant, given the state of the punk scene by that time. If punk was not strictly dead in the early 1980s – *Troops of Tomorrow* still made it into the Top 20 album charts – its media profile had dimmed somewhat, for the simple reason that the all-important media visibility, in terms of both broadcast and newspaper coverage, had moved on; outrage and provocation have limited shelf lives. When what Martin Conboy refers to as 'the extremes of human experience' that 'amplifies a polarization which is characteristic of the tabloids' (Conboy 2006: 16) becomes passé, or familiar, by definition, the media circus must move onto the next folk devil or outrage – tomorrow's front page or news bulletin will not populate itself. This certainly did not stop The Exploited making the news when they were arrested in Spain in 1985 (Glasper 2014: 406), but the retreat from the mainstream had long since commenced, as shown by The Toy Doll's Top 5 hit cover of 'Nellie The Elephant' in 1984 (The Journal 1999: 18); punk could only briefly make it back into the public consciousness through standardized rock 'n' roll excess or simple novelty.

Conversely, the punk bands of the time had not only weathered the storm of declining fashion but had learned lessons from the first wave of punk bands and their decline. For the second wave, the point was the music itself, insofar as a business model focused on independent record labels and success on a smaller scale would allow, while a sense of a unified and more orthodox aesthetic and set of concerns had become established (Glasper 2014: 11–12). Of course, there is also the criticism that these bands were simply benefitting from the purity of

opposition, where it was easy to retain integrity because there was no mass media success awaiting, unless one was willing to embrace a far more mainstream sensibility, as former punks Adam Ant (Hoare 1991: 14) and Boy George (Kelly 1995) had done. To a degree this is true, but it also allowed these bands to develop their voices away from a mass media glare and also away from the ugly, or perhaps uglier, compromises and interferences a major label would impose.

Punk music from this period was also released or at least written and performed at a key time in recent UK history, when the mainstream left was in disarray, culminating in the defeat of Labour in the 1983 General Election, and Thatcherism was in the ascendancy. Millions, in the words of Chaos UK, learned to, as the song says, 'live and suffer on a pathetic salary'. By the early 1980s, mass youth unemployment, combined with a decline in the educational opportunities offered by industry (Smith 2005: 163), had led to considerable social exclusion. This informed youth culture to a considerable degree, as evidenced by its influence on an emerging goth culture in parts of the country at the time, with its focus on thrift and recycling over consumerism (Dawson 2016), new age traveller culture and squatting, all of which reflected and resulted from government policy leading to deleterious economic circumstances (Martin 2002: 725–27). That is to say, government policy created a marginalized body of people, and then proceeded to persecute it, as the 1985 Battle of the Beanfield and the later 1992 Criminal Justice Bill demonstrated. This disaffection was the start of a deliberate decline of social housing and the sense of community and security it provided – many young people no longer knew the security that their parents took for granted (Hodkinson and Robbins 2012: 61). Punk, of course, was not alone in voicing concerns over this tumult as Wham! played benefit gigs for the 1984–85 miners' strike (Redhead 1990: 15) and UB40's politically inclined lyrics demonstrate (Williams 1981: VI), or the social critique of synthpop bands such as Soft Cell (Ellis 2012: 103) and John Foxx (Simpson 2000: 20), but it was certainly far more relentless in its critique than pop music during this time.

### *Punk's not (un)dead*

Given all these factors, it is clear that punk was the product of a very specific era in post-war British history, yet this in turn raises questions. Punk as history of course is challenging. Encarnacao's work in this area (2013: 28) views punk historicity not in general terms, but directly in regards to the genre's canon, its development and what it includes, or does not. In other words, punk music should be only seen in its own context, with surrounding events taking place around it, at best, a relatively secondary concern. Indeed, Encarnacao explicitly states that

the origins and the development of punk rock and its attendant aesthetics are his primary focus, and that there has, by implication, already been a great deal of attention lavished on the sociopolitical context of punk, to the exclusion of the music (Encarnacao 2013: 2).

Is this a valid counter-argument therefore? If we view music as primarily a form of entertainment then other concerns may be dismissed. In terms of social transformation, after all, punk from this era certainly failed, as demonstrated by Thatcher winning not one but two further terms in its wake. The miners were defeated. Industries were privatized. Council housing stock was sold off. Political rejection of Thatcherism was confined to political opposition and popular culture. Ironically, it took fellow Conservative MPs and her government's own disastrous Poll Tax scheme to finally dislodge Thatcher. How, then, can punk music provide any more insight into the politics of the period than any other failed response to Thatcherism?

This of course relies on the argument that punk and counter-narratives to Thatcherism in and of themselves failed, yet their persistence and the fact they were expressed at all suggests an altogether more complex picture. Thatcherism may well have prevailed on many fronts, but as second wave punk demonstrates, resistance and rejection were both persistent and consistent. Furthermore, even Encarnacao notes that punk does not exist in a vacuum, even a particularly spiky and belligerent one: 'Although it is possible that some [...] recordings may also be read as indicative of their times, it is arguable that the artists [...] place an uncommon, at times unconscious premium on operating outside of contemporary values' (Encarnacao 2013: 30). Which is to say, even aesthetic discussions of punk cannot ignore the politics, context and ideology underpinning the music. Indeed, in many ways, punk is the sum of its influences, a music of response and counter-attack to a challenging environment. Indeed, as Iain Ellis has noted (2012: 74), one cannot understand punk without taking into account the effect contemporary developments had in influencing it, for example, the woman's movement in the 1970s and assertive female figures in the scene and its many splinters, from Siouxsie Sue to Crass' Gee Vaucher, anti-Thatchers personified.

Nor, as argued earlier, can music culture as a whole be easily divorced from the Thatcher era, especially punk, but also the music that directly and indirectly emerged from it and its many mutant offshoots, from the two-tone scene to the Smiths (Ellis 2012: 99–100). In many ways, Thatcher was the muse of punk – everything it rejected and railed against, and yet horribly persistent and personified. No successor of Thatcher has captured the imagination of musicians as much as she has. Indeed, without Thatcher, there would be no 'Maggie, You Cunt', as The Exploited would no doubt be first to point out. Thatcher looms large in punk after 1979. Her departure and disappearance robbed punk of its muse, its locus point of provocation and its reason for being. Much as the right-wing press turned

on Thatcher's successor, John Major, for not being an adequate replacement as figurehead (McRobbie 1994: 201), so punk lost its rudder. Fittingly, then, John Lydon condemned those who celebrated Thatcher's death in 2013 (Bychawski 2013), while right-wing supporters of Thatcher tried to get the 1979 punk song, 'I'm in Love with Margaret Thatcher' by the Notsensibles, to chart without any degree of irony (Horsburgh 2013). The Exploited's lead singer, Wattie Buchan, even went so far as to say in 2003, ten years before her death, 'she was a bit of a cunt, but at least she was honest' (Froelich 2003).

Regardless, during her political ascendancy, Thatcher inspired vitriolic music, art and passion, as evidenced by many examples displayed at the 2015 *Punk Rock!! So What?* exhibition, which took place at Birmingham City University (Express and Star 2015). Here, Thatcher was, time and again, raised as an icon in order to be desecrated, often with humour, sometimes with brutality. No political figure has replaced Thatcher in her primacy; even George W. Bush's punk opposition was too divided and unfocused by comparison, further diluted by some aspects of the US punk scene coming out in his favour (Siblo 2016: 133). Therefore, this chapter is as much about Thatcher's Britain in the early 1980s as it is about punk from that period. The two are intertwined.

### *The mentally insane daily news*

Yet while this demonstrates that punk is a product of history, obvious though that might sound, it does not answer the question as to whether punk can be used to study history. With that in mind, let us begin with the first song this chapter will examine, The Exploited's 'Daily News'. The song was chosen for three reasons: First, the notoriety of the band. Second, its publication in the early 1980s. Third, its being a satire of news media coverage of politics and the state of the nation as a whole, at least as it stood between 1980 and 1981, as these lyrics demonstrate:

Maggie Thatcher priceless in their press  
She runs this country  
In a right solid mess  
You got no jobs  
So you end up on the dole  
You end up in prison  
You won't get no parole

This might be described as standard punk lyrics in many ways, but it makes more sense if combined with the next stanza:



I know Maggie Thatcher's in her dress  
 Telling the civilians  
 What a fucking mess  
 One disaster  
 He did it for free  
 They're just a bunch of arseholes  
 They're all a sham

The song concludes with lead singer Wattie declaring there are still '12 deaths' and, like a newspaper seller, he then demands we 'read all about it'. This is where the song becomes interesting from a historical point of view; who did what for free? Who are the 12 dead?

To answer this question, let us start by looking at the release date of the album; 15th of May 1982. Prior to this, the band released a double single featuring 'Attack', but also a version of 'Alternative', which suggests that the album had been written and recorded in the previous year.

What events, however, was the song referring to? The chapter shall now propose one potential reading and explain how it can be justified through analysis. That is, the chapter will argue that the combination of 'civilians', 'disaster' and the 12 dead can be narrowed down to one event in February 1974, namely the M62 bombing where a bus carrying off-duty servicemen and their families was destroyed by an IRA bomb (Ford 1992: 3).

This killed nine servicemen and three civilians, including two children, bringing the death toll to 12, plus 11 serious injuries. If we take this as the event referred to in the song, the lines about how 'they're just a bunch of arseholes' and 'they're all a sham' makes more sense. The band was attacking the IRA and its bankrupt philosophy with as much rigour as they were attacking Thatcher, which is unsurprising given lead singer Wattie's time in the British Army in the Royal Scots, and the band's open distaste for the IRA and figures such as Bobby Sands (Army Rumour Service 2012).

As for Thatcher, she was still just a minister in Ted Heath's Cabinet in 1974 (she would become Tory leader in the following year). However, by 1981–82, she had not only been Prime Minister for several years but was now a familiar sight on the television, issuing righteous defiance towards republican terrorists for the benefit of the 'civilians' at home.

One criticism that can be levelled at this approach is that it is speculative; in essence, it seeks to find connections and links that are not implicit in the original text. After all, The Exploited may well have their own perspective on what is, after all, their work. Yet what is, after all, a deconstruction of the text nonetheless serves a purpose, and its reading has validity. In other words, the ability to read beyond a text's self-imposed limits and the assumptions of its

audience is important precisely because it allows for discovery and discussion beyond these parameters, the danger lying in a 'mummification' of meaning, which surely goes against the very disruptive nature of punk (Caputo 1997: 79). Hopefully, then, this introductory discussion has demonstrated how apparently abrasive and direct punk lyrics may demonstrate a deeper meaning and be open to analysis, and how they may yield a historical perspective hitherto overlooked.

This also applies to another Exploited song, 'UK '82', which, as its name suggests, is a sort of jeremiad for the United Kingdom and its sociopolitical circumstances. What exact form does this take, however? Once again, the lyrics appear opaque to the point of being nearly indecipherable:

At first those brothers tried to pass away this land  
Now this is on the edge of town  
And all run down

The song also references 'Russian Lads' and wonders what's so wrong about them. Equally confusing is this stanza:

Just throw the body on the scale  
You play the game but it's real  
Why don't you find out where she lives  
Go dressed in your best you'll still be taxed

What does this mean? The clues are another line in the lyrics – 'making love in her flat/doesn't say you got class', followed by 'you don't feel but you know it's wrong/so are they Americans?'. The clue lies in the song's title, 'UK '82' – again we have a song full of dense metaphor that can only be understood in historical terms. In other words, the song represents the state of the United Kingdom at the time via imagery that can be understood through the correct historical context. The 'brothers' in the first stanza, for example, can be interpreted as trade unionists, but also soldiers in the wake of the Second World War, their 'passing away' the land being a reference towards their post-war legacy and how they tried to pass this down to the next generation. How might this be demonstrated beyond the merely speculative, however? A cross-referencing of historical events from the period of the late 1970s to the early 1980s can support this reading. For example, it can be linked to the decay of Keynesianism in the mid-1970s as a political consensus (Congdon 2007: 90–91), and its repudiation by both the Left and Right of UK politics thereafter (Tomlinson 2014: 95–96). This meant both a discrediting of the unions – indeed, their being blamed in part for this decline (Tomlinson 2014: 95–96) – and the very collectivism of the post-war period that they represented. This can be seen in the slow, inexorable decline of

trade union membership that began during the 1975–85 period, and continued into the twenty-first century (Wrigley 2002: 18–20). With the post-war consensus gone, the ‘edge of town’, now ‘run down’, hints at the ugly, failed modernism of the council estates found on the outskirts of many big cities, not least the band’s hometown of Edinburgh (Murie 1998: 110–24). If ‘UK ‘82’ does not reflect these circumstances, therefore, it is challenging to see what else it is alluding to.

By 1981, of course, the final stages of Cold War had begun, with a great escalation in tensions epitomized by the United States (‘the Americans’) stationing cruise missiles at Greenham Common, and the resulting protests. Perhaps, as the song suggests, the Russian lads aren’t so bad after all? Yet who is the woman? Apparently, the character addressed by the song is having an affair with her in order to increase their status – she could represent the seductive lure of early 1980s Thatcherism, still promising greater opportunities for consumerism and social mobility, though as the song implies, this is not guaranteed. Though you may sell your ‘body’ and soul for it, you just end up playing a ‘game’ with very real consequences for both yourself and society as a whole.

Again, an analysis of the lyrics and the context of the period in which they were written demonstrates that this music can contain a wealth of historical detail and commentary. Yet it is limited by this chapter focusing so far on only one band’s output. Will this approach also work on another band of the era? The lyrics of Chaos UK during the same period are perhaps more challenging in this sense; their lyrics are altogether more direct and unsubtle. What do they have to offer a historian? However, a closer analysis yields a great deal of promise in terms of historical relevance. For example, the song ‘Mentally Insane’ appears at first to suggest an altogether straightforward reading:

The glueheads walk with spaced out heads  
 Their eyes are open wide  
 The zombie walk that they have learnt  
 Has now got to their minds  
 They save to buy a pot of glue  
 They know it rots their souls  
 But now they find this very filling  
 And decide to sniff it all

The choice of subject matter was certainly relevant. Solvent abuse was on the rise in the early 1980s, with its availability, legality and cheapness making it particularly attractive to younger male teenagers, particularly those from white working-class backgrounds – precisely the disaffected groups many punk bands at the time most appealed to (Gascoigne 1982: 3–6). Glue sniffing also had a high casualty rate.

In 1981, 39 deaths occurred; of these the average age was 16.8, the vast majority (with a 13:1 ratio) were male and from 'manual working classes', particularly in Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland (Anderson et al. 1982: 207–21). Interestingly, South West England, where Chaos UK emerged from, had the lowest death rates, which suggests the band was addressing what was a national rather than a local problem, in turn implying the band's outlook was one which viewed the problem in a broader sense, as befitted a band that toured across the country at the time. As such, 'Mentally Insane' had a socially responsible meaning, an imploring of young men in the punk scene to avoid dangerous habits, which has echoes of Black Sabbath's song, 'Hand of Doom', which had a similar message for fans who found themselves attracted to heroin.

Another Chaos UK song, 'Four Minute Warning' is unambiguous in its overt meaning – an anti-nuclear war song akin to that of Discharge's 'A Hell On Earth', also released in 1982. Much like other punk songs covering the subject, and thrash metal bands following in their wake, particularly Nuclear Assault and Carnivore, and even black metal band Bathory and its 1987 song 'Chariots of Fire', the tone is direct and its detail brutal:

Hiroshima was just a start  
For America to act out a part  
Nuclear forces give us pain  
While killing us with blackened rain

Again, a closer analysis allows deeper meaning to be discovered. Interestingly, the song mentions America explicitly, as well as Hiroshima, one of two cities destroyed by the atomic bomb and then blighted by black rain, both at the hands of the United States. What is missing, however, is the other likely protagonist in a nuclear war – namely the USSR. Why is this so? The song's title suggests, obviously, that the song is about the United Kingdom being destroyed by the Soviets – the 'four minute warning' being the time between Soviet nuclear weapons being launched and their detonation on the UK mainland.

Again, the meaning of the song acquires greater depth if we view it in historical context. The song was first featured on the band's 1982 EP, the aptly named 'Burning Britain'. This was a year after the United States first stationed the aforementioned 96 cruise missiles at RAF Greenham Common, leading to widespread protests outside the base (Stead 2006). While this was a defensive measure, in that it was intended to discourage a conventional Warsaw Pact invasion of western Europe, critics in Parliament, the media and the public argued that this would instead serve as a provocation, and so make a nuclear exchange even more likely (Fairhall 2006: 43). Chaos UK was therefore not only reflecting an ongoing protest

movement, but also making a pointed political comment – that any resulting nuclear war would be the fault of America. The problem with this rhetoric, of course, is that in order to make this argument, the band completely removes any responsibility from the Soviets. One can say, in fairness, that it takes two (plus France and Britain) to tango in a nuclear war, but Chaos UK's implied argument is that the United States and by extension the United Kingdom itself were provoking a potential nuclear conflict through their rash actions. Again, an alternative viewpoint and commentary on then contemporary events is articulated, not to mention a genuine sense of fear.

### *Conclusion: The troops of yesteryear*

As these examples have demonstrated, punk rock offers a rich vein of material for both historians and punk scholars who wish to explore the context in which punk has operated and continues to operate. Its methodological approach would surely prove just as fruitful if applied to the first wave of punk, with its roots in the febrile 1970s, and successors of the second wave, in the form of Crust and Grind, as well as other genres where punk and its sensibilities have spilt into, such as Alternative Rock and underground heavy metal.

Yet what purpose does this serve? After all, one could just as easily make a case for pop music from the same era being read and studied in a similar fashion. They were, after all, products of their time too, though whether the output of Bucks Fizz could provide the same levels of critical commentary on the 1980s as, for example, Soft Cell's 'Bedsitter' is another matter. One answer is that the expressly political and confrontational nature of punk grants it a more valid authority precisely because its whole, and distinct, purpose was to engage with and comment on the times that surrounded it. On a broader level, rock music has always clashed with both sides of the political spectrum and served as a locus against the establishment ideology, be it Thatcherism or East European Communism, as Pekacz (1994: 45) observed. Punk, however, was defined by a very specific pursuit of authenticity, and a do-it-yourself self-reliance, rooted in anarchism and a make-do-and-mend working-class tradition in equal measure. This was unified around a clearly defined and distinctive culture with a shared sense of aesthetics, approach to cultural production, politics and a sardonic, disaffected approach to the broader mainstream culture that surrounded it (Triggs 2006: 70). In such a context, even terms used in popular music acquire a more distinct flavour. As O'Connor noted (2002: 233), the term 'scene' does not just encompass a locality's music, but, in a punk context, an ongoing commitment in terms of time, resources and frustrations, as well as an attempt to create and nurture a particular worldview, centred around

its own distinctive music (Gelbart 2011: 234). Equally significant is punk's very specific role in providing a voice for the marginalized and a distinct challenge to the existing consumerist, post-Thatcherite context we find ourselves in (Martinez 2015: 195). Nehring notes that punk's significance in this regard has been downplayed by latter waves of postmodern criticism (Nehring 2007: 9), despite the way its distinctive ethos haunted the music scenes that followed and continues to this day (Nehring 2007: 13). Therefore, punk's significance as a mirror of its times is one that is both readily available and yet, for numerous reasons both ideological and academic, still to be fully explored.

In other words, punk serves as an effective historical artefact precisely because it actively engages with the events and the contexts taking place around it and in a fashion unique to itself. This also provides the ways in which punk can be used in such a way; it serves as both a Greek chorus and a counter-narrative to the point of its production. Through it, we can look at history as it was if *The Exploited and Chaos UK*, for example, were providing the marginalia to more orthodox readings of history. While this is fitting, given punk's fringe nature, it also demonstrates the usefulness of punk as historical artefact. Conventional histories focus on a clearly defined narrative, but punk can provide a counter-narrative in part because it is a conscious attempt to provide one in the first place, but also because it captures and expresses emotional responses otherwise ignored or set aside. As Bailey has argued (2016: 165), the study of emotions offers a rich vein of material for historians, and punk is nothing if it is not pure, often transgressive, sometimes ugly but always vivid emotion, of the kind that is relevant and rooted in the times it was produced.

Therefore, there were also a great many other punk bands at the time whose work may offer similarly promising material for study. *The Exploited and Chaos UK* were not alone in terms of style, sound or concerns, as bands such as *Discharge*, *the Antinowhere League*, *UK Subs*, *Rudimentary Peni* and *The Varukers* demonstrate. Likewise with punk scenes abroad and close cousins such as hardcore and post-punk. It is also a necessary area of study; the punk era coincided with moments of great social, cultural and economic transition. If we are to understand these often complex and contradictory forces, which shape this world today, a wide range of perspectives is necessary. With that in mind, punk may find itself in the unexpected position of folk historian as well as societal bogeyman or, at its most wretched, it might simply be considered another aspect of the British heritage industry. Yet I would argue that it would also re-energize punk and bring it a greater standing; its historicity does, after all, have something to offer society as a whole as well as the underground it presently finds itself in.

To conclude, it is a sad necessity to point out that punk's next great defeat came in 1983, with another majority for Thatcher, doomed mining and northern industrial communities and a final severing of links between punk and a mass audience.

Nonetheless, punk continued to remain vital and inventive, as the crust, grind and anarcho-punk scenes that followed demonstrate, albeit marginalized by definition, yet uncompromising in their extremity. As mentioned earlier, punk became subliminal in a sense – a satirical viciousness that seeped into many arenas over time. Its subversive nature ended up manifesting in comedy and popular culture, as evidenced by the irreverent wit lurking between the lines of *Smash Hits* and any number of computer game magazines. Then, there was stand-up comedy and, ultimately, television shows like *Father Ted*, a satire that would have been unthinkable before punk made transgression accessible to all.

As for the punk music of the early 1980s, it may have lost the argument, in that it was never a mass movement that transformed society as a whole, but as this chapter argues it was, at its best, incisive, nuanced and determined. The surprising longevity of many punk bands and events, such as the ongoing non-profit Common Ground Festival, with its hosting of all types of punk sub and sub-sub genres, suggest that punk's alternative perspective and witnessing of history will continue. Whether this counts as 'punk' is, of course, an ongoing debate. The fracturing of the scene and what 'is' and 'isn't' punk is, however, as much a part of punk as the music itself. What unites all these manifestations, however, is how they reflect and comment upon the circumstances that surround them.

The real legacy and value of punk is that it provided and continues to provide a critique of its times, perhaps vital once more in an era of ideologically driven austerity and vindictive pursuit of the poor. It must not have slipped the attention of many punks that the current Conservative government at its most callous and cartoonish resembles many a punk lyric's caricatured plutocrat or red-faced authoritarian. This value is not just contained within the sentiments of the music however; for as this chapter has argued, punk music also serves as a historical stage, one place where the big men and iron ladies of history do not get the last word, and where the underdog and the marginalized make their voices only too loud and clear.

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# PUNK NOW!!

## CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON PUNK

'*Punk Now!!* captures the continued importance of a culture that evolved and mutated across time and space. A brilliant snapshot of contemporary scholarship, the book points us towards the future of punk-related study.' – Matthew Worley, University of Reading

*Punk Now!!* brings together papers from the second incarnation of the *Punk Scholars Network Conference and Postgraduate Symposium*, with contributions from revered academics and new voices alike in the field of punk studies. The collection ruminates on contemporary and non-Anglophone punk, as well as its most anti-establishment tendencies. It exposes not only modern punk, but also punk at the margins; areas that have previously been poorly served in studies on the cultural phenomenon. By compiling these chapters, Matt Grimes and Mike Dines offer a critical contribution to a field that has been saturated with nostalgic and retrospective research. The range and depth of these chapters encapsulates the diverse nature of the punk subculture – and the adjacent academic study of punk – today.

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