

*HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF PUNK SUBCULTURE IN THE USA AND THE UK*

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## Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Subculture and punk .....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Culture and subculture .....	6
1.2 Punk .....	7
1.3 Punk subculture .....	9
<b>2. Main thoughts of punk.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3. History of punk subculture .....</b>	<b>15</b>
3.1 The roots of punk subculture .....	15
3.2 The US punk subculture.....	16
3.3 The UK punk subculture .....	18
3.4 Differences between the US and the UK punk subcultures .....	24
3.5 The end and resurrection of punk subculture.....	25
<b>4. Movements related to punk .....</b>	<b>27</b>
4.1 Skinheads.....	27
4.1.1 Oi! .....	28
4.1.2 Street punk .....	29
4.2 Hippies .....	29
4.3 Nazism and neo-Nazis .....	30
4.3.1 Nazi-punk.....	34
4.3.2 The white power skinheads.....	34
4.4 Anarchism.....	35
4.4.1 Punk-anarchism .....	36
4.4.2 Anarcho punk .....	37
4.5 Ska and reggae .....	37
4.5.1 Ska punk .....	38
4.6 Hardcore punk.....	38
4.6.1 Straight edge .....	39
4.7 Feminism and women in punk .....	39
4.7.1 Riot girrrl.....	41
4.8 Popular punk .....	42
<b>5. Punk style and fashion .....</b>	<b>43</b>

<b>6. Punk today and future visions .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>7. Survey.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>List of references .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Appendix 1 – Survey (transcription) .....</b>	<b>58</b>

## Introduction

Punk is a highly abstract phenomenon and the subculture related to it has attracted attention since it came into existence. As such, punk has had a significant impact on many aspects of life of not only British and American society, but its influence can be found all over the world.

This thesis aims to investigate and describe the history and development of the punk subculture in the USA and the UK. Since the meaning of the term *punk* has changed throughout time, the first chapter will be focused on defining the expressions essential for the thesis, i.e. *culture*, *subculture*, *punk* and *punk subculture*, with the goal to explain the meaning under which they will be used further in this work.

The next part will focus on the *main thoughts of punk* in order to reveal the cornerstones upon which its ideology is built and to introduce the main attitudes of an ordinary punk follower.

Chapter 3 will be centred on the *history* of punk and subcultures in both the USA and the UK. First, each of them separately and, consequently, they will be compared with one another so that the main differences, as well as similarities, could be found.

The punk movement did not exist in a vacuum, and thus during its history it has been influenced, adopted and, to some extent, consumed by many other subcultures. The most important of them will be introduced in detail in Chapter 4.

Next, *style and fashion* and *punk today and future visions* of the subculture will be examined. The two chapters aim to present the appearance of punk members and contemporary trends in the movement with respect to the future. The contribution of punk to the arts (graphic design and typography) will be stressed, too.

The last Chapter will be focused on the *survey* based on present and/or former followers of the punk subculture, as well as subcultures related to it, from various countries in order to discover some aspects of their attitude towards the above-mentioned subcultures. The most remarkable outcomes will be discussed.

# 1. Subculture and punk

## 1.1 Culture and subculture

The punk subculture has undergone a remarkable evolution since the 1970s. Thus, for the first approach, it is necessary to focus both on *punk* and *subculture* and examine their original meanings. Each of them separately, and then together, may provide a relatively undistorted description and understanding of what the term *punk subculture* originated from.

Rarely is there an agreed, final answer to what an abstract term means, and the words *culture* and *subculture* are no exception. According to Raymond Williams, a Welsh sociologist, *culture* is even “one of the two or three most complicated words in English” (Williams, “Keywords” 87). He distinguishes three categories in the definition of culture: *ideal* (culture as “a state or process of human perfection”), *documentary* (culture as “the body of intellectual and imaginative work”) and *social*, which is the most important for the sake of this thesis and can be seen as a way of life of a group of people which expresses certain values, either implicit or explicit, of the group (Williams, “The Long Revolution” 57).

*Subcultures* exist within the main culture. In the broad sense of the word, subcultures can be understood as “groups of people that have something in common with each other” (Gelder and Thornton 1), as “the culture of a distinguishable smaller group” (Williams, “Keywords” 92), and also as “culture variants displayed by certain segments of the population” (Komarovskiy and Sargent 143). These approaches, of course, are too general for the purpose of this thesis. Furthermore, they fail to deal with the prefix *sub-*. Other authors, however, do stress its importance. Gordon Milton, an American sociologist, perceives subcultures as “subdivision[s] of a national culture” (Gordon 40), while Dick Hebdige, a British sociologist, as “a subordinate group, which has expressive form and rituals, which denounce public order”

(Hebdige 2-3). A more concrete and versatile definition can be found in the *Cambridge Dictionary*: “[a subculture is] the way of life, customs, and ideas of a particular group of people within a society that are different from the rest of that society.” Nevertheless, putting emphasis on the prefix and stressing the difference from the main society often leads to the presumption that the term *subculture* carries a negative meaning. Hence, it is often “positioned ... as deviant and debased ... and as lower down the social ladder” (Gelder and Thornton 4). Still, many sociologists argue that the prefix *sub-* indicates only a subcategory of culture and not necessarily a derogation (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 95).

Although neither of the definitions specifies what age should a member of a subculture be, some authors restrict the term only to young people: “[subcultures are] ... groups of youths who practice a wide array of social dissent through shared behavioral, musical and costume orientations ... involved in dramatically reshaping social norms ...” (Clark 223). However, such a narrow view is debatable, for it excessively restricts the meaning of the term and to some extent negates the definitions coined by the other authors.

Thus, *a subculture* can be defined as a group of people, either young or not, derived from another, larger culture and – although being its integral part – it differs in some ways which are not necessarily negative. For the sake of this thesis, the above-mentioned *larger culture* is understood to be British or/and American culture.

## 1.2 Punk

Any attempt to describe or define the term *punk* may seem futile and lead to its partial or complete destruction. What is more, before the 1970s the term carried multiple meanings, all of them negative, e.g. a worthless person, a homosexual or a young criminal (Online Etymology Dictionary). Since then, the meaning has significantly changed and the most

respected dictionaries today define *punk* as: “a culture popular among young people, especially in the late 1970s, involving opposition to authority expressed through shocking behaviour, clothes, and hair, and fast, loud music” and *a punk* as “a person ... who likes punk ...” (Cambridge Dictionary). *The Oxford Dictionary*, similarly, characterizes *punk* as “a loud, fast-moving, and aggressive form of rock music, popular in the late 1970s” and *a punk* as “an admirer or player of punk.”

Key punk protagonists and members of the punk subculture coined their own definitions ranging from positive to negative. Although each of the definitions is unique, most of them put emphasis on two aspects. The first of them is freedom. “Punk was like, this is new, this is now, the apotheosis, powerful. But it wasn't political ... It was about real freedom, personal freedom. It was also about doing anything that's gonna offend a grown-up. Just being as offensive as possible” (McNeil and McCain 299), stated Legs McNeil, a writer and co-founder of *Punk* magazine. The second aspect is the fact that punk is accessible to everyone. “You don't have to be a great musician. We literally picked out our instruments and started playing” (Heylin 229), said Andy Shernoff, the bass player of the Dictators.

Close connection can be found between *punk rock* and *rock & roll*. Several authors and musicians, e.g. Lester Bangs, the godfather of punk-journalism, and Eliot Kidd, the lead singer of the Demons, even use them almost interchangeably<sup>1</sup>. However, it would be more accurate to claim that punk has its origins in rock, but the genres are not the same. The first one to join these words to coin the term *punk rock* in the contemporary sense is believed to be Dave Marsh: “... punk was introduced into the lexicon of rock discourse by Dave Marsh in 1971 after

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<sup>1</sup> See Heylin 3: “[Bangs:] ... [in] rock & roll, or punk rock, or call it any damn thing you please, there's only one thing you need: NERVE.”; and see McNeil and McCain 260: “[Kidd:] ... I mean, basically punk rock was just rock & roll.”

reviewing a Question Mark and the Mysterians show for Creem magazine: Marsh called their performance ‘a landmark exposition of punk rock’” (qtd. in Habell-Pallan 151). Yet the Marshal’s review lacked any definition – it was provided by Lenny Kaye, a music writer and musician, one year later, in 1972, in the liner notes to the album *Nuggets: Original Artifacts from the First Psychedelic Era (1965 – 1968)*. Kaye wrote, “[the bands] are young, decidedly unprofessional, seemingly more at home practicing for a teen dance than going out on national. The name that has been unofficially coined for them – *punk rock* – seems particularly fitting in this case” (Hannon 3). Nevertheless, it took 3 more years until the term was established and widespread by Roderic Edward McNeil (nicknamed Legs) and John Holmstrom, the founders of *Punk* magazine. All of a sudden, punk was narrowly defined. The magazine was supposed to focus on everyday activities adored by the authors: “television reruns, drinking beer, getting laid”, ... and, above all, the “weird rock & roll that nobody ... seemed to like” (McNeil and McCain 203-204). McNeil suggested the title *Punk*, for it summed up everything they adored: “drunk, obnoxious, smart but not pretentious, absurd, funny, ironic, and things that appealed to the darker side” (McNeil and McCain 203-204).

### 1.3 Punk subculture

One of the possible definitions of *punk subculture* could be: a group of youths within a society that is different from the rest of that society, for it celebrates personal freedom and practices a loud, fast moving, and aggressive form of rock music involving opposition to authority expressed mainly through shocking behaviour, clothes and hair, and which was popular especially in the 1970s.

Most of the definitions of *punk*, *a punk*, *subculture* and *punk subculture* provided in Chapter 1 are based on dictionaries and theoretical works<sup>2</sup>, for hardly any author or protagonist, who played an important role in the history of punk, strictly distinguishes between the terms, nor between the history of *punk as a music genre* and *punk as a subculture* (or *movement*). Predominantly, only the word *punk* is chosen to refer to all the categories, and although some writers do occasionally make such a distinction, e.g. Lauraine Leblanc cited in Chapter *Difference between the US and the UK punk subcultures*, they tend to use all the terms interchangeably with *punk* (or even *punk rock*) in the rest of their works. Kristiansen, Blaney and Simons, authors of the book *Screaming for Change*, subchapter *Punk Rock – A Definitional Nightmare*, states: “*Punk and punk rock* have come to carry similar, possibly even synonymous, meanings, and they both relate to subcultural practices, music ..., and oppositional ideas,” and perceive the term *punk subcultures* only as “observable manifestations of an oppositional philosophical system” (Kristiansen, Blaney, and Simons 6, 9). John Savage, one of the most respected authors dealing with punk in the UK, moreover, sees little difference between the Sex Pistols and the British punk subculture at the time when it first emerged in the UK in the mid-1970s, for – as he claims – the band “created the British punk movement” (Savage, “The Sex Pistols: British rock group”). The excerpts illustrate how fragile and debatable the difference between *punk music* and *punk subculture* (or *movement*) is.

The reason for this is that unlike the majority of other subcultures, such as the hippies and the skinheads, punk cannot exist without music. It is necessary to take into account that the whole phenomenon started as a new music genre, an experiment of several bands, and

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<sup>2</sup> Compare *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, written by Dick Hebdige, a sociologist, media theorist and a Professor of Art and Media Studies.

the label *punk* was chosen retrospectively out of an urgent need to call it somehow. Therefore, the whole movement is based on music and despite the fact that in the following years it has, indeed, evolved into something more – a subculture with its own values and fashion, music constitutes the most important and essential part of it and the two terms can hardly be separated. Hence, the history of the punk subculture is inevitably based on punk music and this thesis is bound to reflect the fact.

## 2. Main thoughts of punk

The term *punk* is highly personal and every single member defines it in a different way. Some people supporting punk ideas even deny being punks, for the subculture despises labelling and categorizing: “No subculture has sought with more grim determination than the punks to detach itself from the ... normalized forms, nor to bring down upon itself such vehement disapproval” (Hebdige 19).

The punk subculture has always been open to all people whose aim is to be different, innovative and rebel against mainstream society, regardless of their sex, religion or any other considerations – under the condition that they are willing to respect the opinions of others. Hence, punk attracts members from many other movements opposing the system, ranging from the far-left anarchists, through the peace-oriented hippies together with mainly neutral Afro-American and feminist movements, to the far-right nationalists (as described in Chapter *Movements related to punk*). Although punk tried to reject the most radical of them, each of the groups has had some impact on forming its basic values. Thus, an agreed answer to what the punk ideology is does not exist. Some people see it in “rebellion against conformity ... parents, school, work, and society”, while others believe that the main idea of the punk movement is “taking control of your life and getting things done without waiting for someone to help you or approve your ideas” (Hannon 1-2). Richard Hell, the front man and lead singer of the Voidoids, in addition, defined the nature of punk as “anti-authority, independent ... subversive, guiltless ... [and] not accepting the ordinary terms of behavior” (qtd. in Hannon 1).

Most of the main thoughts and values of the subculture can be found in lyrics of punk performers which serve as a manifesto for the movement. The two most famous slogans were coined first by the Sex Pistols: *No Future*, used in the song *God Save the Queen* in 1977, and

then by the Exploited: *Punk's not Dead*, used as a title for their debut album and the first song on the album in 1981.

Punk values have evolved together with the society it aims to criticise. While the first bands, in the 1970s, focused on such topics as communist regime, the rise of supermarkets and plastics, unemployment and police brutality, the contemporary punk subculture deals with social networks, globalization, violence, animal-testing and ecology. Many topics, however, seem to be timeless – wars, human rights violations, corrupted establishment, commercialization, conformity, racism, (neo-)Nazism etc.

The punk ideology and its values also differ in accordance with the varieties of the punk subculture, “it is well-known that preachy and opinionated bands do not get radio airplay or sell large quantities of records” (Kristiansen, Blaney, and Simons 52). Therefore, the originality of opinions appears to drop in direct proportion of the popularity of a particular movement related to punk. *Pop punk*, accepted and consumed by the mass society, has adopted pop rhetoric and abandoned the original punk ideas, or at least turned them into clichés: “Here comes the rain again, falling from the stars, drenched in my pain again, becoming who we are” (Green Day, “Wake Me Up When September Ends”).

On the other hand, the marginal movements, such as *hardcore* and *Oi!*, trying to purify punk from commercialization, and existing voluntarily out of the mainstream, have significantly sharper, more up-to-date and opinionated attitudes: “Russian antifascists keep the fight. Let’s keep the fight all day and night!” (Stage Bottles, “Russia”), or “The six o’clock news on my TV screen is driving me insane if you know what I mean. For rape and murder you’re just allowed to go free ... I can’t believe what I see!” (Discharger, “Our Society”), or “Sometimes I believe they're all in this together. We can smell the rats, and they're everywhere – bankers and the bosses, and the politicians. Those donkeys get away with the

lion's share" (UK Subs, "Workers Revolution"). These marginal movements do represent the traditional punk values upon which its ideology was based when it first emerged, unaffected by pop trends.

### 3. History of punk subculture

#### 3.1 The roots of punk subculture

Many authors have tried to trace the roots of punk and the subculture associated with punk.<sup>3</sup> None of them, however, have found a universal answer to the question where and when punk emerged. Except for some marginal opinions, represented by Jonathan Watts and Dan Collyns, most of the authors locate the birthplace of punk either in the USA, New York, Manhattan – the place where the legendary club CBGB<sup>4</sup> was established; or in the UK, London – the place where the Sex Pistols were formed. It is no surprise that American historians tend to prefer the first opinion, while British writers advocate the second point of view.

Hence, Roger Sabin, an English writer, accepts that punk originated in America around 1973–74, yet, he says: “if we accept that one of the key defining elements of punk was an emphasis on class politics, then it could only have begun at one time and in one place – Britain in the late 1970s” (Sabin 3).

On the other hand, Clinton Heylin, an American author, suggests: “Though the history of British punk continues to intrigue sociologist in music critic’s clothing, its elder New York cousin ... has received scant attention ... American punk predates British punk” (Heylin xi).

Punk also predates *the New Wave*, a movement formed in the USA and the UK in the late 1970s. Much as the movements have a lot of in common and some performers, such as Blondie and the Modern Lovers, drifted between them, it is essential not to confuse these two. Both of them endeavoured to create something new, provocative and accessible for

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<sup>3</sup> See Sabin, especially Introduction and Part I, Chapter 1; for another view see Stalcup; Donaghey; Clark.

<sup>4</sup> In full: CBGB – OMFUG, i.e. Country, bluegrass, blues and other music for uplifting gourmandizers.

everyone, but the New Wave was less raw and politically critical, and at the same time far more “commercially viable” (Ray 210).

Both the American and British scenes were particularly defined by musical groups and solo performers, for “punk started out as a music-based subculture” (Leblanc 33).

### 3.2 The US punk subculture

Despite the controversy over its geographical roots, hardly anyone can deny that the first precursors of the punk subculture emerged in the USA, albeit they were exclusively music oriented (Leblanc 36). The first bands, and thus the first members of the subculture, often referred to as *proto-punk*, appeared between 1964 – 1971 and were closely connected to both New York (the Velvet Underground with Lewis Allan Reed (nicknamed Lou Reed), the New York Dolls with John Anthony Genzale (nicknamed Johnny Thunders), the Modern Lovers etc.) and Detroit (the MC5 and the Stooges with James Newell Osterberg (nicknamed Iggy Pop), the godfather of punk). They used innovative and at the same time provocative lyrics, outfits and composed songs with names such as Heroin, I Want You Right Now, I Wanna Be Your Dog and the Black Angel’s Death Song. Their members laid the foundations of punk fashion, for they used to wear leather clothes, extravagant hairstyles, and the most daring of them dressed like women, with sparkling clothes and glitter, which was something unheard of in the era of the Beatles and hippie love songs. Lenny Kaye, an American musician, depicted the atmosphere in one of his interviews: “There was a direct line from the 'Nuggets' groups to the Stooges, the Dolls and the glitter bands: there was an alternative recognized music scene ... [but] the Velvet Underground were certainly the most important band” (qtd. in Heylin xiii-xiv). The Velvet Underground were able to combine pop and rock in a way nobody else had ever done before (Heylin xiv). The next bands to come were the MC5 and the Stooges.

Apart from New York and Detroit, the proto-punk wave had a significant influence on Cleveland. In 1972 - 1974, the local punk scene was established by three underground bands – Electric Eels, Mirrors and Rocket from the Tombs (later Pere Ubu). Although all of them disbanded by 1975 (or re-formed into new groups), their importance is seen in the fact that the bands were able to attract people from the same social environment as their members came from, i.e. mostly educated young individuals from middle and upper-class who became typical representatives of the future US punk subculture.

One of the milestones in the history of the punk movement came in 1973, when Hilly Kristal opened a club called CBGB, on the Bowery in the Lower East Side of New York City. Numerous groups started to perform there and it quickly became the centre of the local underground community. In the same year, bands, such as the Dictators and Television, were formed and, later on, they helped to pass on the heritage of the proto-punk bands to the upcoming new generation of future punk followers as well as to the world-famous groups established between 1974 and 1977: the Ramones, the Patti Smith Group, the Dead Boys, Blondie, Misfits, the Voidoids, Talking Heads, the Heartbreakers etc. Most of them either came from middle-class families or studied art, or both of it. Later, they become known as the *blank generation*, a term coined by Richard Lester Hell. Although most punk members refuse any labels, included *the bank generation*, the phrase became associated with the first generation of the punk subculture, for it was cynical, full of contradictions and uncertain of its values. On the one hand, they refused to take part in social actions such as the anti-war movement and the civil right movement. On the other hand, the generation “shunned the easy-going escapism they saw in many of the hippies’ remnants” (Wolf 256).

The newly born subculture was officially labelled *punk* in 1975, when McNeil and Holmstrom founded a new magazine of the same name. To promote the magazine, they

created posters that said, “Watch out! PUNK is coming!” and plastered them all around the city. “Everyone who saw them said, ‘Punk? What’s punk?’ John and I were laughing. We were like, ‘Ohhh, you’ll find out.’ .... [Debbie Harry:] We thought, ‘Here comes another shiny group with an even shittier name ...’” (qtd. in McNeil and McCain 207-208). At that time *punk* was a suitable enough definition of nothing more than the small, alternative rock scene based around CBGB, bands performing there and mainly young people attending their concerts.

Most of the CBGB’s performers became world-known, but the Ramones are considered to be the most influential band of the era – jeans, leather jackets, long hair and short songs with incredibly fast three-chord music were typical of them and brought many people to like punk and become the basis of the punk movement. Although the band’s importance is sometimes exaggerated<sup>5</sup>, it was confirmed beyond any doubt by Rolling Stone Magazine in 2004 when the Ramones were put on the 26<sup>th</sup> place in the list of the greatest artists of all time. Two years before, they were also inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Their minimalist garage sound has inspired many famous (not only) punk rock performers all over the world, e.g. the Clash and the Damned. Thus, the term *punk* spread across the Atlantic Ocean to the UK where it gained its fame and developed into the punk subculture. It is a paradox that British punk consequently returned to the USA, mainly with the Sex Pistols tour, to be copied by local punks and to encourage punk scenes in many US cities – Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington etc.

### 3.3 The UK punk subculture

Unlike American punk, British punk rooted in class antagonism, immigration crisis and decline of the British economy causing unemployment and social turmoil. Thus, it was rowier,

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<sup>5</sup> The liner notes to the CD re-edition of their first album *Ramones* states, “With the Ramones, punk rock was born. ... All subsequent punk bands, from the Sex Pistols down, owed allegiance to the Ramones.”

more spontaneous, spread very quickly and was able to catch the attention of the media all over the country. It was then that *punk* became a world-known music genre and, consequently, a subculture. “What we had done as a joke in New York had been taken for real in England by a younger and more violent audience” (qtd. in McNeil and McCain 244), uttered Mary Harron, a former feature writer for *Punk* magazine.

The birthplace of British punk was London, more precisely London clubs, especially the Roxy, the Vortex and the 100 Club. Although the UK punk scene was, at least in part, inspired by the American movement, it had its own precursors – first, the old bands already performing in the 1960s, who introduced “a keen pop sensibility with ballsy rhythm & blues the early Stones and Who, the Small Faces, the Yardbirds”, and then the Seventies bands bringing “noise back to teenagers ... - T. Rex, Slade and Roxy Music” (Heylin xi - xii).

It is impossible to deal with the UK punk subculture without focusing on the most influential and famous band of that time – the Sex Pistols, with Johnny Rotten<sup>6</sup> and Sid Vicious<sup>7</sup>. In the mid-1970s, the two performers attracted more teenagers to join the punk movement than all the other British groups of the time together. Vicious and Rotten, as the nicknames suggest, were the embodiment of what young people desired to be – impudent, wild and uncontrollable. What was more, they were able to show these qualities on a state-wide – and later international – scale. So, everybody, including the Queen, authorities, and parents, were faced with the punk fury.

The Sex Pistols were officially formed in 1975 and it is hardly deniable that no other musical group has ever had a greater impact on the punk subculture, as most people understand it today, both in good and bad ways. “[The Sex pistols] established punk as a

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<sup>6</sup> Full name: John Joseph Lydon, the front man and lead singer of the Sex Pistols.

<sup>7</sup> Full name: John Simon Ritchie, the bass guitar player and co-singer of the Sex Pistols.

national style that combined confrontational fashions with sped-up hard rock and allusive, socially aware lyrics that addressed the reduced expectations of 1970s teens” (Ray 181). John Savage even defined the band as a “rock group who created the British punk movement of the late 1970s” (Savage, “The Sex Pistols: British rock group”).

In spite of the widespread perception that the American punk scene was the main source of inspiration for the nascent British punk subculture, Johnny Rotten refused that the Pistols would imitate New York punk in his autobiography - *No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs* “[The Ramones were] of no interest to me. I didn’t like their image, what they stood for, or anything about them. They had absolutely nothing to do with life in Britain. ... [and] I only found out about Richard Hell when he came over to England ...” (Lydon, Zimmerman, and Zimmerman 118). American punks, however, saw the situation in a different way – Marky Ramone in his autobiography, on the other hand, compared the influence of the US subculture to “schooling British punk wannabes on England soil” and called it “the British invasion in reverse” (Ramone and Herschlag 118). Hence, the truth seems to be in the middle.

Provided that a typical British punk could be described as an “unemployed guttersnipe mythologized by the Clash” (Reynolds 26), Rotten did not match the definition. He worked as a banksman and he was even admitted to Kingsway College, together with Sid Vicious (Lydon, Zimmerman, and Zimmerman 46, 63). Being employed and educated was rather typical of American punk subculture, where punk emerged as a music experiment more out of boredom rather than as a working-class rebellion trying to criticise the regime. However, at the end of the 1977, the UK punk subculture underwent a schism and divided into “arty bohemians”, influence by the US subculture, and truly British “working-class street toughs” (Reynolds 26). The first group was prone to commercialization and popular music and later partly disappeared in the mainstream and newly formed *pop punk* subculture. The second group, on

the other hand, created movements and sub-genres such as *Oi!* and *hardcore punk* to liberate punk from commercialization and to take it back to its underground roots. All the movements will be described in detail in Chapter *Movements related to punk*.

Malcolm Robert Andrew Edwards (nicknamed McLaren), the former manager of the New York Dolls, was another important person who played a vital role in the history of punk in the UK, for without him, punk would hardly have addressed so many young people first in the UK and then in the whole world. He is even believed to form the Sex Pistols after he met Johnny Rotten in a London clothes shop called SEX owned by him. The truth, however, appears to be different. "Who put the Pistols together? Not Malcolm, really ... That's the pop myth." (Lydon, Zimmerman, and Zimmerman 2), recalled Rotten. Both the youth and the media in the UK were interested in anything the band and McLaren did, since their lyrics reflected the tense atmosphere of the 1970s and their provocative behaviour was unprecedented and, to most people, outrageous. Hence, overnight, the group, and thus the nascent punk movement, became a sensation, after their live interview with Bill Grundy for London Weekend Television's program called *Today*, broadcast on 1 December 1976. Steve Jones, the guitar player, together with Rotten used the words *shit* and *fuck* during the interview. Rotten described the situation: "Grundy was filthy dead, pissed drunk ... We had also Siouxi ... contingent with us ... [and] Grundy started coming on to the girlies ... [and] more or less told us we were all filthy scum ... [so] Steve jumped in with whatever he said" (Lydon, Zimmerman, and Zimmerman 127). Nothing could be a better advertisement for punk and more attractive to the youth in the conservative United Kingdom. So, one year later, the single *God Save the Queen*<sup>8</sup> reached number two on the charts and its popularity even spread when it was banned

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<sup>8</sup> Excerpt from the lyrics: "God save the queen, the fascist regime. They made you a moron - potential H-bomb. God save the queen, she ain't no human being. There is no future in England's dreaming ..."

by the British media, since it intentionally coincided with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the throne (Ray 184). All the scandals made the UK punk subculture famous. Ever since *punk* has been in the eyes of the world identified with course words, safety pins, provocative hairstyles, torn clothes, alcohol, drugs and scandals.

Many punk members, however, did not share this view, especially the American scene was surprised how the music movement, as it originally began, they labelled *punk* had changed when it arrived back to the USA. "After four years of doing Punk magazine ... suddenly everything was 'PUNK' ... as the Pistols made their way across America, and the hysteria was broadcast on the news every night, ... the rest of the country were suddenly transforming themselves with safety pins, spiked haircuts, and ugliness" (McNeil and McCain 329), recalled McNeil. The punk subculture became commercialized and McLaren was one of those to be blamed, for he used it primarily to promote his clothes shop. He arranged many scandals at any cost, which, in the end, damaged the reputation of the whole movement and led to the disbanding of the Pistols too, after their biggest, albeit unsuccessful, show in the USA in 1978. Many authors, i.e. George Marshall, believe that this was the moment when punk ended, as described in Chapter *The end and resurrection of punk subculture*.

The Sex Pistols presented themselves as anarchists angry at the system and willing to destroy it. On the other hand, their lyrics called the attention of the punk movement to many problems of that time, e.g. "the Berlin wall ... cheap holiday in other people's misery<sup>9</sup>" or "there's no future in England's dreaming<sup>10</sup>", albeit they offered little or no solution.

The Clash, the second most influential British punk rock band, on the other hand, brought to the subculture some aspects of left activism and, for the first time, even suggested

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<sup>9</sup> Excerpt from the song Holiday in the Sun.

<sup>10</sup> Excerpt from the song God Save the Queen.

some solutions to what they criticised. Viv Goldman, a rock writer, compared the two lead singers, “While ... Johnny Rotten had a rage against the system, Joe Strummer had a more evolved, more finely tuned sort of political awareness ... He regarded himself as a leftist. Whereas John probably regarded himself as a ‘Johnnist’” (Seven Ages of Rock Pt. 3 - Blank Generation). The Clash tried to awaken the youth from a long lethargy and passive listening to angry lyrics, and encourage them to manifest their opinions in the streets. When Strummer wrote a song titled *White Riot*, he uttered: “The song was about white people getting up and doing it for themselves, because their black neighbours were doing it for themselves... it was time for the white people to get on with their own situation, which I suppose was the beginning of the punk thing” (Seven Ages of Rock Pt. 3 - Blank Generation).

Strummer highlighted an important feature of the punk subculture, both in the UK and in the USA – punk began as a white movement, yet not as a racist or Nazi movement (see Chapter *Nazism and the neo-Nazis*). McNeil in an interview with Savage described the situation as follows: “... we were all white: there were no black people involved with this. In the sixties hippies always wanted to be black. We were going: ‘Fuck the Blues; fuck the black experience!’” (Savage 136). Still, punk itself, as well as many subgenres and movements closely related to punk, such as the skinheads, were influenced by music of Afro-American origin – soul, blues, ska and reggae, as referred to in Chapter *Movements related to punk*.

It cannot be forgotten that the British punk movement was formed also by many other well-known bands, such as the Adicts, the Damned, U.K. Subs and the Vibrators, who came into existence in the UK in the mid-1970s. Nevertheless, none of them acquired such fame, nor had such influence on the subculture, as the Sex Pistols and the Clash.

### 3.4 Differences between the US and the UK punk subcultures

“Punk as a music scene may have originated in the United States, but punk as a subculture gelled in mid-1970s Britain” (Leblanc 36). The US punk scene predated the punk movement in the UK by several years and thus influenced its formation, albeit the impact is often overestimated. When the UK punk subculture began to be apparent, i.e. when the Sex Pistols first appeared, the only American punk band available in the country was the Ramones. “Few punks recognized the rest of the American bands ... [and although they] liked Patti Smith ... they probably saw Patti as an old hippie” (Lydon, Zimmerman, and Zimmerman 118), remembered Chrissie Hynde, a singer of the Pretenders.

While the UK punk subculture was closely connected to the working class, frustration with high unemployment and the low British economy, in the USA punk was a middle-class movement of the youth rebelling against the consumer way of life and boredom (Young 69). “You don’t sing about love to people on the dole”, summarised the difference Johnny Rotten (qtd. in Szatmary 259). Hence, British punk is said to be rawer, more straightforward and anti-intellectual, at least as far as the first punks are concerned. Charles Shaar Murray, a famous English music journalist, compared the subcultures: “The New York punks were bohemians or aspired to be, and the London punks were yobs or aspired to be” (Seven Ages of Rock Pt. 3 - Blank Generation). The New York punks adored irony and an opulent lifestyle, “if you acted ... and looked like a star – you were one, at least for fifteen minutes” (Curtis 310). In London, the social and economic situation was too serious for that. For the British punks, it was a chance to try to protest against poverty, corruption and unbearable life conditions. Moreover, being closer to ordinary people, the UK scene managed to catch the attention of the media, and thus the whole country. American punk has never received such attention.

Last but not least, American performers were generally older, which was one of the reasons explaining their above-mentioned intellectual direction. “New York punks are mostly in their mid-20s. .... the new British punk bands squirm if they have to tell you they are over 18” (Heylin 245). Both Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious were about 19 years of age when they joined the Sex Pistols. The youngest of the Ramones, Dee Dee, was already 23 years old when the band was formed, and McLaren, who came from the USA to manage the Sex Pistols, was a generation older than the band and thus the first generation of the UK punks.

### 3.5 The end and resurrection of punk subculture

For many people, the split of the Sex Pistols marked the beginning of the end of punk rock and thus the punk movement. Rotten’s last words on the stage in San Francisco in 1978, “Ever get the feeling you’ve been cheated ...”, have become legendary and summarised the situation of that time. He later noted, “I felt cheated, and I wasn’t going on with it any longer; it was ridiculous farce. Sid was completely out of his brains. ... The whole thing was a joke at that point” (Lydon, Zimmerman, and Zimmerman 4). By 1978 the Sex Pistols, who set the course of the whole subculture, had become hardly anything more than puppets in the hands of Malcolm McLaren, a parody of themselves. Their fight against mainstream culture had gradually changed into trying to be accepted by the main culture and to become as famous as possible, often at any cost.

Furthermore, times were changing – Sid Vicious died of a heroin overdose (1979), *Punk* magazine released its final issue (1979), in the UK, Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister (1979) and in the USA, Ronald Regan won the 1980 presidential election. The changes were quick and although a lot of punk bands were still in existence, both the followers and performers were, all of a sudden, left in a vacuum and felt confused and even betrayed. “Yeah,

'course I feel betrayed. It's like everything's gone back to what it was like in '74 and '75" (qtd. in Marshall 67), said Micky Geggus, the guitar player of Cockney Rejects. As if the whole rebellion against society was in vain due to the fact that punk became part of the society, "another bastardised feather in the music industry's cap," wrote Marshall in his book *Spirit of '69: A Skinhead Bible* (Marshall 68).

Commercialization, indeed, constituted a serious problem. On the other hand, it cannot be overlooked that the music genre called *punk* has survived through to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some bands have been performing since the 1970s, e.g. the Adicts, the Damned and UK Subs, some have re-formed and disbanded (often several times), even the Sex Pistols and the Stooges, and many new bands emerged in the 1980s, the 1990s and 2000s. Since the *punk subculture* is a music based subculture, it has not perished either. The other way around, many new movements and music genres related to punk appeared and not only adopted it but – to some extent – absorbed it and carry its legacy (see Chapter *Movements related to punk*). What is more, nowadays it is easier than ever before to buy punk clothes, create web sites and paper zines, share ideas and hold concerts. Dylan Clark noted, "Punk faked its own death so well that everyone believed it ... it bequeathed to its successors – to itself – a new subcultural discourse" (Clark 233).

Contemporary *punk music* is based on small, independent scenes and labels, hardly ever played on the radio, and together with the *punk subculture* opposes wars, conformity, human rights violations, animal testing and most forms of -isms, such as communism, Nazism and racism.

## 4. Movements related to punk

### 4.1 Skinheads

The roots of the punk and skinhead subcultures are inseparably linked. The beginnings of the skinhead movement can be divided into two parts. The first part predates punk and can be traced back to the post-war England of the 1950's when *mods*, a group of youths devoted to fashion, came into existence. The skinheads in contemporary sense of the term, however, appeared as late as the end of the 1960s as a mixture of working-class Englishmen, above all Londoners, and immigrants from former British colonial territories, most of which were of Jamaican origin. Thus, the first skinheads were represented by both black and white people whose concern was rocksteady, reggae and SKA music, and fashion based on short hair, tight trousers, Harrington jackets, shirts, braces and leather boots. This wave reached its height in 1969 and nearly disappeared a few years later (Mashall 63).

The second part of the skinhead history is closely connected with punk, for the movement was revived when punk rose to fame in the United Kingdom in the second half of the 1970s. The fuss coming with the new-born punk subculture encouraged both the former and new skinheads to take their part in the rebellion. However, unlike the punk subculture, skinheads were much more successful in separating from their music roots and developed into an independent subculture engaged also in politics, football matches, street violence (often referred to as "aggro"), exclusive bars and clubs, nationalism etc. At the end of the 1970s new genres and movements, such as *Oi! (punk)* and *street punk*, appeared and brought together the punks, the skinheads and other working-class youths (Bushell 10).

#### 4.1.1 Oi!

*Oi!* originated in punk music and is based on hard rhythms and lyrics depicting true stories from lives of ordinary (mainly) working-class people. "If punk had originally been about opening a few doors ... then Oi! was about ripping their hinges" (Marshall 108). As such, it was quickly adopted by skinheads, too. They became so attracted to the new punk genre that in the 1980s many people started to use the terms *Oi!* and *skinheads* synonymously. Some authors even call it "the skinhead version of punk rock" (Timothy S Brown 158).

The Oi! subculture was formed for more and more punks were disgusted by the commercialization of the early punk bands and, consequently, the whole punk community, and so they were determined to start a different, more honest and tougher movement. Micky Fitz, the singer of The Business, defined Oi! as: "nothing more than punk without poseurs" (qtd. in Marshall 116). The label was coined by Garry Bushell who found inspiration in the group the Cockney Rejects using *Oi!, Oi!, Oi!* at the beginning of each song instead of the customary *one, two, three*.

Oi! united punks and skinheads, both in lyrical topics (workers' rights and street violence together with sex and alcohol) and fashion (heavy boots and braces accompanied by longer hair and spikes). Yet, the relationship of the two groups and their further coalition were not always ideal. "During the summer of 1977 ... battles between teds and punks were a regular tourist attraction ... the original skinheads ... often fought alongside the teds, while the new breed sided with the punks" (Marshall 72). Nevertheless, in the course of time the idea that "if the kids are united, they will never be divided" (Sham 69, "If the Kids Are United") prevailed, at least as far as the later generations were concerned. Although Oi! attempted to avoid any political affiliation, it was soon subject to a heavy right-wing politicization, as referred to in Chapter *Nazism and the neo-Nazis*.

In the 1980s Oi! experience stagnation, but since the second half of the 1990s there has been a revival of interest in the movement.

#### 4.1.2 Street punk

*Street punk* developed from the Oi! movement at the turn of the 1970s and the 1980s. Similarly to Oi!, it was based on disillusionment with what had happened to punk in the years before. Street punk, too, attracted both punks and skinheads, but with the former being in the minority.

This movement is louder, faster and far more ostentatious than Oi! – most followers and performers, such as The Exploited and The Casualties, sport Mohikans and flamboyant clothes full of colours and spikes. To some extent, street punk meant coming back to the roots of punk – i.e. being against the mainstream, not part of it – and it even exaggerated the ostentatiousness of punk. Never in the history of the punk movement, have hairstyles been longer and leather jackets more decorated. Paradoxically, for this reason, the punk movement caught even more attention of pop culture.

## 4.2 Hippies

The origins of the hippie subculture can be found in the USA at the beginning of the 1960s as one of the precursors of the punk movement. As the hippies promoted free love, taking drugs, freedom and peace, soon after the subculture arrived in the United Kingdom, it was confronted with another movement – the first wave of skinheads. “Hippies were [a] ... soft touch. They were seen as nothing more than dirty, unkempt scroungers, ... and at total odds with the down to earth traditional values of the communities skinheads hailed from”

(Marshall 35). The position of hippies was even more complicated, for they were despised not only by the skinheads but, in the end, also by most punks, albeit they shared the same anti-establishment ideas and also roots – the beat generation. “The most important thing was needling the older generation. Hating hippies was a big thing ... hippies always wanted to be black ... [but] we had nothing in common with black people at that time” (Savage 138). This state of things was also underlined by Johnny Rotten’s famous quotation: “Never trust a hippy!” One of the reasons for the rivalry seemed to be the fact that the hippie culture had gone mainstream. “For the first time Bohemia embraced fast-food. It was like saying yes to the modern world” (Savage 133). The punk subculture, in contrast, focused on worshipping everything despised by the mass society.

Be that as it may, the hippies had a considerable influence on most of the subcultures that followed its existence, included punk, for they adored freedom and, at least at the beginning, they were able to oppose the system – these values and activities were adopted by the punk subculture, especially the anti-war trends have always been very popular among punk members.

#### 4.3 Nazism and neo-Nazis

Together with commercialization, Nazism represents one of the most controversial and tabooed chapters in the history of the punk movement. The most significant and, at the same time, problematic feature of punk is that it lies in its nature to challenge the system, violate social norms and adore behaviour that is disapproved by members of the dominant culture. Nazism was seen as evil incarnate after the Second World War, and thus it was the most suitable topic for the first punks to be used to taunt the 1970s society, albeit they had little idea of what the Nazi symbols stood for and hardly any of them knew anything about Nazi

ideology. As a matter of fact, even the proto-punk bands in Cleveland, as described in Chapter *The US punk subculture*, wore “ripped-up shirts [and] T-shirts with insulting things on them, white power logos and swastikas” (Savage 135). However, Charlotte Pressler, an American writer, adds: “... but I don’t think they were exceptionally racist, they were being obnoxious and outrageous” (qtd. in Savage135). Taking into consideration the fact that Cleveland had, and still has, a large Afro-American population, this pseudo-racist behaviour was more than controversial – exactly what proto-punk intended to be.

Legs McNeil described the 1970s as “based on being ‘nice’. You had to be nice. ... So when the Ramones sang that they were Nazis, they were really saying, ‘We refuse to be nice ...’” (McNeil 234). Chrissie Hynde confirmed the words when she compared such behaviour to “two fingers up against the Establishment” and punks to “teenagers who were just trying to say, ‘Funk you!’” (qtd. in Lydon, Zimmerman, and Zimmerman 71). A music producer Genya Ravan, who was born in Poland and whose parents were interned in a concentration camp, even recalled a recording with one of the first punk bands, the Dead Boys – the musicians had swastikas everywhere: “... so I said: ‘Get those fucking things off.’ ... [and the drummer replied], ‘I don’t really know what they stand for’” (McNeil 238). Punk revels in provoking and in being hated, often at any cost, and so it happened that “the signifier (swastika) had been wilfully detached from the concept (Nazism) it conventionally signified” (Hebdige 117).

On the other hand, some punk members were well acquainted with Nazism and still used the symbols. Dee Dee Ramone, for instance, grew up in Germany. For them, however, swastikas and SS memorabilia did not symbolize the ideology based on the annihilation of Jews and on German supremacy. They were fascinated with them for other reasons: “It wasn’t, ‘Oh, I’m a Nazi and all you Jews better watch out!’ It wasn’t anything like that. It wasn’t political, it was sexual” (qtd. in McNeil 236), remembered Danny Fields. However strange the

reason may sound, Wilhelm Reich, a renowned Austrian psychoanalytic, indeed claimed that “the swastika was originally a sexual symbol”, for its spokes “represent two interlocked human figures ... in a sexual act” (Reich 102). The swastika was not the only sexually attractive aspect of Nazism for punks. Joy Division, one of the first British punk bands, even borrowed its name from the novel *House of Dolls* written by Ka-Tsetnik 135633, who used the German term *Freudenabteilung* to refer to groups of sexual slaves allegedly held by the Nazis (Hall, Howes, and Shahan 66). Still, the obsession with Nazism for sexual reasons was rather marginal in the punk subculture.

In the United Kingdom, the situation was more complicated, for – unlike the USA – the country was directly involved in the Second World War, damaged by German bombs and many people died. Hence, wearing Nazi insignia in public was considered offensive or at least socially insensitive. Still, after the war neither the USA nor the UK prohibited wearing a swastika or other Nazi symbols by the law and therefore people who tried to capitalize on punk saw a great opportunity in selling clothes with those signs. “‘We're here to positively confront people with the past.’ It was something ... Malcolm told us to say” (qtd. in Savage 189), remembered Alan Jones, an employee of Malcolm McLaren’s shop selling punk goods in the UK.

It seemed to be nothing more than a rebellion without a cause and a profitable pose until 1977, when the situation in the UK became more serious with the National Front (hereinafter referred to as the NF), a far-right political organization, trying to seize power. Even though the NF had lost most of its members by 1979, it was able to take advantage of people’s fear of immigration using slogans such as: “If they are black, send them back” (Marshall 134). Confused punkers with swastikas on T-shirts represented easy targets for the Nazi supporters who attempted to make use of them. Moreover, Margaret Thatcher in a

television interview for Granada *World in Action* in 1978 claimed that “[people are] rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture” and in response to a question concerning the NF she added, “at least it’s talking about some of the problems” (Thatcher). Although the interview increased Thatcher’s popularity, the NF gained many supporters overnight, too.

At the same time, the Socialist Workers Party founded the Anti-Nazi League and consequently initiated a campaign called Rock Against Racism (hereinafter referred to as the RAR) as a response to the growth of the NF activities, especially Rock Against Communism. In the end, punk followers and performers had to choose the side and thus most of them, e.g. the Clash, Sham 69 and Generation X, abandoned wearing Nazi symbols, albeit out of fun, and openly joined the anti-racist actions coordinated by the RAR. From that time on the Nazi symbols have never gained back their lost popularity among punks. The other way around, the punk subculture has become strictly anti-Nazi, anti-racist and even labelled as leftist – as referred to in Subchapter *Anarchism*.

However, a small group of punks and – a bigger group – of the so-called skinheads chose to support the right-wing extremists and a new genre called *Nazi rock* which emerged at the end of the 1970s (Brown 157). By doing so, Nazi-rockers ceased to be part of the punk and skinhead subcultures in the eyes of most of the other members, for they perceived it as a betrayal of the values they hold dear, above all freedom. *Nazi-rock* has become an umbrella term for many new subgenres (and related subcultures) that emerged from the schism, such as *Nazi-punk* and *white power skinheads*.

#### 4.3.1 Nazi-punk

*Nazi-punk* (sometimes also referred to as *hatecore*, *hate punk*, *88 punk* or *white power punk*) has never become popular, or widely accepted. Despised by both the traditional punks and skinheads and at the same time never fully respected by the WP skinheads, Nazi-punk is to be worshiped only by a few people and to be of marginal importance (as referred to in Chapter *Survey*). As early as 1981, it was rejected by the Dead Kennedys, one of the most famous punk bands, who recorded a single titled *Nazi Punks Fuck Off* and sold it together with a free white arm bend with a crossed-out swastika. Many skinheads, too, openly rejected both Nazi-punks and white power skinheads in 1987, when the SHARP (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice) movement was established (Bonner and Clack 622).

Its ideology is based upon a combination of punk and Oi! topics together with Nazi thoughts, i.e. anti-Semitism, racism, violence and supremacy of the white race. Their fashion, too, combines all the movements – high heavy boots, short hair, spikes, violence, white power symbols etc. Still, they are more interested in music and fashion, than in seizing power and annihilating inferior races.

#### 4.3.2 The white power skinheads

*White power skinheads* (or *WP skinheads*) gained a lot of attention at the turn of the 1970s and the 1980s and the movement has been undergoing a great revival in the last years. With the growing popularity of Oi!, right-wing radicals decided to avail themselves of the opportunity to infiltrate the subculture and appropriate at least a part of its success. Hence, although Oi! was based on punk roots and considered itself unpolitical, it “provided a point of entry for a new brand of right-wing rock music ... [and] come to signify ‘white music’” (Timothy S. Brown 163).

WP skinheads cooperate with, or rather tolerate, Nazi-punks, for every Nazi movement has been in need of new members since their ideology became publicly rejected after the Second World War. Still, the collaboration is far less idyllic and solid than that of (non-Nazi) punks and skinheads. The reason for this is that the WP skinhead subculture is considered to be the most radical and violent of all those related to punk and together with anarchists, it is the only subculture with intense ambitions in politics. Nazi-punks, on the other hand, have little political ambitions; they are also far less radical, disciplined and uniformed.

The most famous and influential of all the Nazi performers is believed to be Skrewdriver founded by Ian Stuart Donaldson in London.

#### 4.4 Anarchism

*Anarchism* can be defined as a movement endeavouring to establish a “perfect, unfettered self-government of the individual, and, consequently, the absence of any kind of external government” (Zenker 10). The roots of the doctrine go back before Christ, but in the modern sense of the word it is believed to be founded by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in the 1840s (Faber 14). Due to the long history, anarchism has had a considerable impact on many modern subcultures, included punk.

Both anarchism and punk share many ideas, above all anti-establishment tendencies and individual freedom, and thus they share many followers, too. Hence, for many people there is little difference between the two. This widely spread image was even supported by one of the Sex Pistols’ most famous songs *Anarchy in the U.K.* beginning with the lyrics: “I’m an anarchist. Don’t know what I want, but I know how to get it. I wanna destroy the passers-by, ‘cause I wanna be anarchy!” Yet punk was born as a rebellion out of music, albeit directed against the system and authorities, and had no or little political ambitions. Anarchism, on the

other hand, was founded as a political philosophy attempting to establish a new system, which is impossible without participation in political life. Numerous people, indeed, support both movements, but it does not mean that they are identical. Moreover, compared to punk, the majority of the first anarchist thinkers was of noble birth – Michal Bakunin, Petr Kropotkin and Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, the founder of Christian anarchism.

The relationship between punk and anarchism is so sophisticated that some authors distinguish between the *anarcho-punk movement* (a specific subgenre existing within punk) and *punk-anarchism* (a term used to “highlight those aspects of anarchism within punk that may be considered as distinct from other strains of anarchism”) (Donaghey 2-4).

#### 4.4.1 Punk-anarchism

Donaghey adds five aspects of anarchism present in punk-anarchism: *shock tactic* (an image of danger), *hippie hangover* (influences from hippie movement), reactive anarchism (opposition to state repression), *practical necessity* and *intuitive anarchistic politics* (Donaghey 3-4).

Two categories of punks can be recognized with respect to anarchism: the “anarchy and chaos punks”, who do not care, and the “anarchy and peace punks”, who do care (Glasper 9). The second group attempt to save our planet for future generations and preserve it both healthy and free of Big Brother’s watchful eye.

On account of this close collaboration of punks and anarchists, it is often uneasy to separate activities performed by a particular person because he or she is a follower of anarchism, from other activities of the same person performed due to his or her affiliation with the punk subculture. Since punk is primarily a music-based subculture, it is more often that the former is true.

#### 4.4.2 Anarcho punk

*Anarcho-punk* can be seen as one of the subgenres of punk music which accompanies punk-anarchism. By far the most influential anarcho-punk band is considered to be Crass who introduced “a whole new concept of punk as a movement as opposed to merely an outlandish fashion statement” (Glasper 8). Anarcho-punk deals with human rights as well as animal liberation, environment protection, criticism of capitalism, globalization, war machinery and consumer way of life.

#### 4.5 Ska and reggae

*Ska* originated in Jamaica at the end of the 1950s as a music genre combining jazz and blues with Caribbean rhythms, using the guitar as a main rhythm instrument. Its name is said to be derived from the characteristic off-beat sound of the guitar and the piano in ska songs (Augustyn, Heather, and Marley 16).

*Reggae* can be seen as a slower-paced ska music (Hurwitz 38) which emerged in Jamaica, too, a few years later as “a voice of the oppressed” (Ray 148) and spread all around the world.

In the UK both of the genres underwent a revival in the 1960s and 1970s. Bringing “an authenticity and a spirituality lacking in the dominant white culture” (Duncombe and Maxwell 163), it quickly became popular among the mods and other predecessors of the skinheads. In the following years, when Oi! appeared, ska and reggae influenced the punk movement as well. “Reggae was the only other radical music that was completely underground and not played on the radio” (Lydon, Zimmerman, and Zimmerman 268), remembered Johnny Rotten. As such, it acted as a unifying genre in the 1970s UK which most punks and skinheads liked and which enriched both of the subcultures with Afro-American elements, such as Jamaican

fashion and way of thinking, which proved to be extremely important when the wave of neo-Nazism was ignited in the UK and when the whole punk movement had to choose the side.

Some punk performers, such as the Clash, even started to incorporate Jamaican beats in their music, e.g. in the cover version of the reggae song *Police and Thieves*. Thus, a new movement within punk was formed – *ska punk*.

#### 4.5.1 Ska punk

Despite its name, *ska punk* is a music based movement influenced by both reggae and ska, albeit ska elements are more apparent, for it is significantly faster than reggae. Punk ideas, however, remained and what is more – ska punk was the first punk related movement easily accessible to black people who brought to punk a highly specific fashion: hats, sideburns, suits, skirts, ties and black and white checked clothes and accessories.

#### 4.6 Hardcore punk

*Hardcore punk* (also abbreviated as *hardcore*) shared most of the history of its predecessor – punk, from which it evolved as a specific subgenre and, consequently, a subculture. Just like punk, hardcore began as a music based movement, first in the USA (played e.g. by Dead Kennedys and Black Flag) and then in the UK (represented by The Exploited), and its connection to music has never overcome. Hardcore “stripped [punk] songs to the bones – no melodies ... juts a one- or two-minute blast of raw teenage anger” (Hannon 21). Similarly to O!, the first performers sought to establish a purer movement than what punk had become, free of commerce and as simple, understandable and raw as possible.

#### 4.6.1 Straight edge

In the early 1980s, soon after hardcore emerged, a new subculture associated with the movement appeared – *straight edge* (sometimes abbreviated as sXe or just XXX). Inspired by the song of the same name by Ian MacKaye and attracted by the idea of purity, simplicity and refusal of the mainstream, the straight edge members decided not only to support the hardcore punk ideas, but to go even further. MacKaye claimed that being *straight* gave people an *edge*, “OK, fine, you take drugs, you drink, whatever ... But obviously I have the edge on you because I'm sober; I'm in control of what I'm doing” (Azerrad 136).

Therefore, the straight edge punks can be seen as one of the most radical subculture within the punk movement. However, unlike the Nazi-punks and punk-anarchists, they have no totalitarian political ambitions and the most faithful of them, apart from alcohol and drugs, despise also violence and follow a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle. “They might wear dirty jeans with bands’ logos ... and associate with punk rockers who reflect punk's original ideals such as individualism, disdain for work and school, and live-for-the-moment attitudes, yet are ardently ... vegetarian” (Heanfler 12).

#### 4.7 Feminism and women in punk

Although the first wave of feminism appeared in the 1800s (Freedman 4), when the punk subculture started to form – in the 1970s, women were still expected to stay at home to clean, cook, and raise children, while men went to work to earn money. By that time, however, the second wave of feminism had already begun and punk provided it with the social atmosphere feminism needed. “The punk movement was the first time that women played an equal role as partners in a subcultural group ... seeing women standing side by side with men

in the context of patriarchy ... was a huge step forward” (qtd. in Lydon, Zimmerman, and Zimmerman 72), stated Caroline Coon, an English artist, journalist and political activist.

Punk brought a revolution in both fashion and the way of thinking of many people and thus uprooted many stereotypes, included those historically imposed on women. All of a sudden, they were allowed to wear what they wanted to and not what they were expected to. Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, rock journalists, confirm the importance of punk in relation to women’s rights as well, claiming that “punk is regarded as liberating time for women”, as it helped to expand “the limits of permissible representations of femininity ... and to escape the chanteuse role to which they were limited” (Reynolds and Press 33).

The feminine beauty ideal radically changed, too. “It was not so much a rejection of normative beauty as an appreciation of women who looked alternative” (qtd. in Cole), remembered Karen Amsden, of the punk band Hagar the Womb.

Despite the fact that the punk movement “didn’t do much to challenge male sexuality or image” it encouraged many women, for “boy bands couldn’t play a note, so it was easy for girls who couldn’t play a note to get up on stage as well” (qtd. in Savage 418), wrote Lucy Toothpaste, who was in charge of a feminist zine *Jolt*. Many female performers, indeed, made use of the opportunity and engaged in the punk subculture, for instance Siuxie Siux<sup>11</sup>, Debbie Harry<sup>12</sup>, Viv Albertine<sup>13</sup>, Zilla Minx<sup>14</sup> and, last but not least, Petti Smith. In comparison with their male counterparts, female attitudes, music or clothes was no less provocative – women’s ferocity was often bested only by their courageous fashion. Even though the roles they chose to present were ranging from androgynous bohemians (Petti Smith) to femmes fatales

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<sup>11</sup> Full name: Susan Janet Ballion, a producer and the lead singer of Siouxsie and the Banshees.

<sup>12</sup> Full name: Deborah Ann Harry, an actress and the lead singer of the Blondie.

<sup>13</sup> Full name: Viviane Katrina Louise Albertine, the guitar player of the Slits.

<sup>14</sup> Full name: Zillah Elaine Ashworth, the singer of an anarcho-punk band Rubella Ballet.

(Debbie Harry), female punk performers and supporters have always been under more pressure as far as their appearance is concerned. In 2015, Debbie in an interview for *The Telegraph* admitted that she has undergone plastic surgery to be able to perform in her seventies and stated that “it goes with the job” (Garrat). Zilla Minx, too, confessed, “I am ... determined to keep my appearance; it is part of who I am ...” (Cole).

Still, the female and male worlds had always been mixed within the punk subculture until the 1990s, when the first purely female movement called *riot girrrl* formed.

#### 4.7.1 Riot girrrl

*Riot girrrl* is a feminist movement derived from punk which first appeared in Washington at the beginning of the 1990s (Kaye), together with the third wave of feminism. The most famous bands associated with the movement are believed to be Bratmobile and Bikini Kill, but riot grrrl is based on much more than music: “The post-punk scene was equally as anti-establishment and political as the Riot Grrrl movement. However, Riot Grrrl bands also touched on subjects like sexuality, patriarchy, rape and various types of abuse and hate” (Kaye). Although some of the topics were already covered by the first punk bands as early as the 1970s, e.g. the Sex Pistols sang about abortion in the song *Bodies*, the complexity of female oriented topics that riot girrrl introduced had been unparalleled in the history of the punk movement.

Some authors even consider riot grrrl to be a movement quite distinct from punk, for it challenged the masculinity of punk itself to such extent that women had to choose either to become *punk girls* and collude with the masculinism in punk, or *riot grrrls* and resist it (Leblanc 132).

## 4.8 Popular punk

*Popular punk* (also abbreviated as *pop punk*), however oxymoronic the term may sound, can be defined as a music genre and a subculture related to it combining both punk and pop culture elements. The movement appeared in the mid-1980s together with commercialization of punk itself and peaked in the 1990s. Due to its ambitions to be accepted by the mass society and acquire fame, pop punk is usually despised by other, older and traditional punk subgenres and movements.

Popular punk has always been aimed at teenagers and thus it deals with topics such as love and relationships, but also with more punk themes – social problems and wars. One of the most famous pop punk performers are believed to be Green Day and the Offspring. These groups introduced punk to a wider audience, for their video clips started to appear on MTV: “Punk? Forget it. It was still too extreme for mainstream acceptance ... until the happy, friendly sounds of bands like Green Day [came]” (Konow). The mainstream success of this movement encouraged many fashion producers to design and sell goods with pop punk signs and names of performers. The goods are easily available and thus popular among teenagers who buy them in shopping malls in order to pretend to be punks. So, pop punk did the traditional punk subculture a disservice.

## 5. Punk style and fashion

Most subcultures and almost every music genre have their own fashion and art styles, and punk – as a music-based subculture – is no exception. The other way around, it has developed one of the most distinctive styles ever. Punk clothes “were the sartorial equivalent of swear words, and they swore as they dressed – with calculated effect lacing obscenities into record notes and publicity releases ...” (Hebdige 114).

The main purpose of punk-styled apparel has always been to make people look different from the mainstream society and to threaten, to provoke and to shock. The first punk clothes and insignia, such as ripped T-shirts, worn trousers, and badges with aggressive slogans, were self-made, just like the subculture itself, and based on tearing, pinning and destroying. As the punk subculture rose from the working- and – especially in the USA – middle- class origins, it was significant that it managed to alter cheap second-hand things and things of everyday life, such as safety pins and bin liners, into fashion. It symbolized “transition from real to symbolic scarcity ... [and] beyond the horror circus antics ... society was being eloquently condemned” (Hebdige 115).

In the USA the first generation of punks, inspired by proto-punk bands of the early 1970s, often started with the era of women’s clothes and glitter. A few years later, when the Ramones came on the scene in the mid-1970s, it was quickly replaced by torn clothes, leather jackets and jeans.

In the UK, however, the style underwent a fast and furious evolution – long coloured hair, jackets covered with studs and spikes, t-shirt with provocative signs and heavy boots. It all happened in the late 1970s and since then the style has almost not changed. Punk fashion was so innovative and daring that even today it is not controlled by fashion trends. For this reason, some people accuse punk of hypocrisy, claiming that it criticises sameness and at the

same time it supports wearing uniforms. Nevertheless, this accusation is based on false presumption that all punks prefer the same clothes and hairstyles, which is not true. The other way around, there are many combinations and what is more any deviation from standards has always been appreciated by the subculture.

The most famous shop to sell punk goods is considered to be *SEX*, reinvented as *Seditionaries* in 1977, owned by McLaren and Vivien Westwood, at 430 King's Road in London (O'Byrne and Worsley-Taylor 27-39). The shop is, however, also predominantly remembered as a symbol of commercialization of the punk movement, for a pair of trousers "cost £50, which was twice the average young person's weekly wage" (O'Byrne and Worsley-Taylor 28).

The best-known punk characteristic has become the *Mohican* (or *Mohawk*), a hairstyle based on a strip of long hair in the middle of the head which is made to stand up and dyed with various colours. The hairstyle reached such fame that it can be found in the biggest dictionaries as an independent word entry. The name was taken from the tribe of Mohicans (or Mohawks) and similarly to the Native Americans, punks use it as a visible symbol of their membership to their tribe, and also to attract attention and to shock. The paradox is that today Mohicans, albeit in less ostentatious versions, are worn by many famous artist and sports celebrities, mainly football players, adored by the mass society.

In order to provoke, punk also broke some deep-rooted taboos, for it did not hesitate to use Nazi symbols (as explained in Chapter *Nazism and the neo-Nazis*) and to defame state symbols, such the national flag of the UK and the royal anthem *God Save the Queen*. The Sex Pistols recorded a single of the same name with offensive lyrics, "God save the Queen, the fascist regime, they made you a moron, a potential H-bomb ..." The band also liked to use the Union Jack with Queen's head in the central part with the words *God Save the Queen* instead

of her eyes and *Sex Pistols* instead of her mouth. Moreover, the flag was often torn and fixed with safety pins.

Punk has a significant influence on graphic design and typography, too. Jamie Reid, a British artist, introduced a new graphic style based on cutting up newspaper headlines into single letters and then putting them together to create new words and phrases – he used this style to do artwork for the singles *Anarchy in The UK*, *God Save the Queen*, *Holidays in the Sun* and *Pretty Vacant*. The design has become so iconic that many world-known companies, for example Vans, use it on posters, clothes and other goods to underline their uniqueness and unofficial, casual and provocative nature – paradoxically, in order to sell the products to as many young people as possible.

## 6. Punk today and future visions

The Sex Pistols believed that “there’s no future”, as stated in the song *God Save the Queen* released in 1977, and thus *No Future* became one of the most famous punk slogans. Yet, fifty years later, punk is not only still alive, but consists of more subgenres and there are more movements related to it than ever before.

With rapid globalization, the world is getting smaller and the pace of life faster. Hence, it is not complicated for potential new members of the punk subculture to quickly find enough information, download music and buy clothes related to punk. This situation, however, leads to the fact that anyone can be considered a punk, irrespective of his or her knowledge of punk ideology and values. Although this kind of people has always been a problem, the current number of *poseurs*, to use punk vernacular, has no parallel in the history of punk. “*Poseurs*’ was the favorite epithet [the first punk kids used to] express their disdain for hangers-on and those whose post-hip credentials didn’t quite make it came straight out of the authenticity movements” (Marsh). A specific type of poseurs is called *weekend punks* (Marco 387), for they wear punk clothes and believe in what punk is about only at weekends, when concerts are held.

The next aspect of globalization and expansion of the Internet, smartphones and social media, is that the regular attendance of punk meetings and concerts has been steadily decreasing, at least as far as the young generation is concerned. The youth prefer to stream or download music and watch or listen to it at home, either with friends or alone. “Fewer people go to concerts (now) than 20 years ago ... There was a time when most underground punk bands would attract a thousand people. Now, even well-established acts struggle to sell a thousand tickets”, wrote Piero Scaruffi, a historian and author of *A History of Rock Music* (qtd. in Stosh-Krause). Hence, nowadays, punk is partly caught in a vicious circle of giant

festivals whose aim seems to be to earn money first, even at the cost of mixing disparate performers (pop stars and punk groups) in order to attract a larger audience.

On the other hand, the punk subculture has always had a strong sense of self-preservation. Every time in history when it was in difficulties – threatened by commercialization, radical movements, pop culture etc., it had the tendency to return to the roots. At the end of the 1970s, the Oi! movement came to take punk back to small pubs, underground clubs and garages – just like hardcore did in the 1980s. Nowadays, too, such a resurrection appears to be in progress. Despite the low attendance of bigger concerts, and overpriced, yet overcrowded, giant festivals, many traditional punks prefer to meet in small clubs, keep the purifying movements (Oi!, hardcore and street punk) alive, and support bands often playing only for pleasure and travel expenses.

Moreover, the fury of the first punk bands showing contempt of everything and everyone has proved to be unending and is carried by their successors: in 1977, the Sex Pistols sang “Fuck this and fuck that, fuck it all and fuck the fucking brat ...” (Sex Pistols, “Bodies”), while in 2015 Discharger composed the following lyrics “Left, right, we don't give a fuck. Black, white, everybody sucks ... Nazis and Communists – fuck you, and the rest of society – fuck you too!” (Discharger, “Equally Less”). The reason for this is that the mainstream society has never been and will never be perfect. It repeatedly fails to learn from its mistakes and thus the topics to be criticised by the punk subculture seems to be eternal.

## 7. Survey

In order to illustrate some aspects of people's understanding of the punk subculture and subcultures related to it, an online questionnaire survey was conducted (see Appendix 1). It took place from June 2016 to February 2017 and 50 respondents out of 11 countries<sup>15</sup> participated in it, 40 men and 10 women. All of them were (at the time of the survey) followers of the punk and/or skinhead movement, or at least they used to be.

In connection with Chapter 3 *History of punk subculture*, Subchapter 3.1 *The roots of punk subculture*, the respondents were asked where they think the punk subculture originated (Fig. 1). Most of them confirmed the wide-spread belief that it first emerged in the United Kingdom – the influence of the Sex Pistols is apparent. However, 15 respondents were of different opinion and chose *the USA*, which, indeed, was the place where punk appeared for the first time, albeit rather as a music genre. A considerable number of the participants also voted for the option *another country*, which was a surprise, for almost all the authors quoted in this thesis locate the birthplace of punk either in the USA or in the UK.

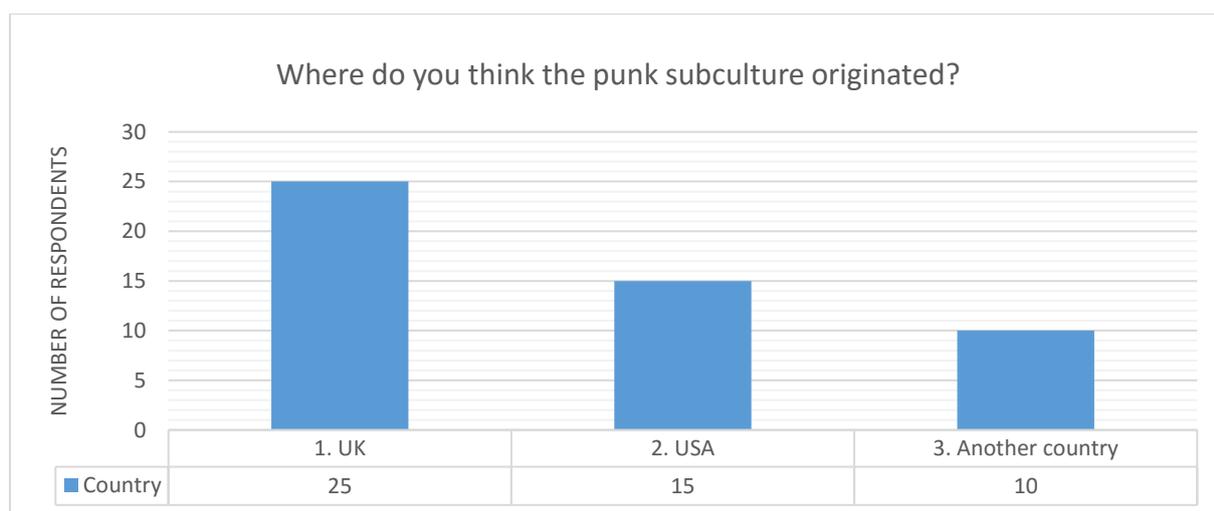


Fig. 1 The origins of the punk subculture

<sup>15</sup> Nationalities: Czech (16), American (10), French (8), British (4), Polish (3), Slovakian (3), German (2), Croatian (1), Indian (1), Italian (1) and Spanish (1)

With respect to Chapter 4 *Movements related to punk*, Subchapter 4.1 *Skinheads* and Subchapter 4.3 *Nazism and neo-Nazis*, the survey included questions aimed at the popularity of these movements (Fig. 2). Not a single respondent *liked* or *loved* the white power music genre and the subculture associated with neo-Nazism. The other way around, 72% of them *hated* it. The Oi! and street punk movements connected with true skinheads, however, seemed to be well favoured. The answers confirmed that the punk and skinhead subcultures are interconnected and their followers can coexist, while the neo-Nazi ideas in punk were rejected at the very beginning of the movement. A large majority of the respondents also proved to be aware of the Jamaican roots of the skinhead subculture, and thus they did not mistake skinheads for neo-Nazis and/or racists. “Neo-Nazism just adopted the Skinhead subculture without even knowing its origins – the ska performed by Jamaican artists ...,” wrote one of them. Another participant added: “Neo-Nazis are brainwashed skins, already angry with their lives, looking for someone/something to blame for the shitty way things are. They use race as their means of blame.” Only 4 people saw little or no difference between the movements and 4 more respondents were not sure.

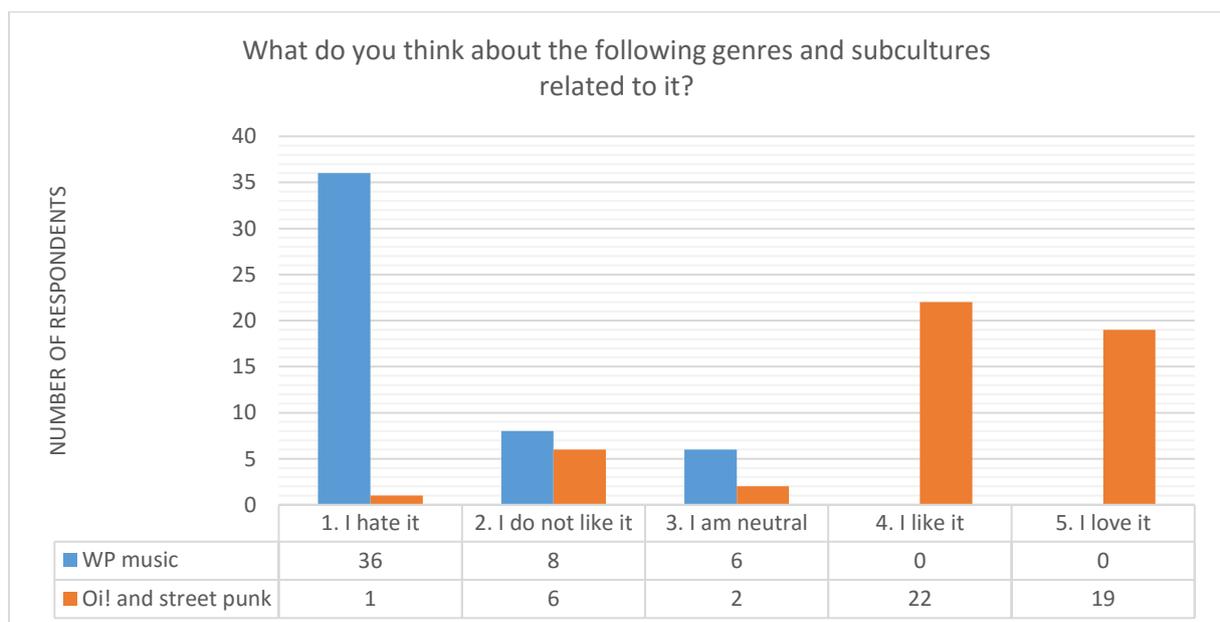


Fig. 2 Popularity of skinhead and neo-Nazi related movements

Finally, Chapter 6 *Punk today and future visions* dealt with the problem of decreasing attendance of punk meetings and concerts, typical of young members. The survey provided more detailed figures supporting the utterance. Nine of the participants were teenagers and none of them attended more than 2 punk meetings/concerts per year. The most frequent visitors, on the other hand, seem to be people at the age of 26 – 30, then at the age 31 – 35 and 36 – 40.

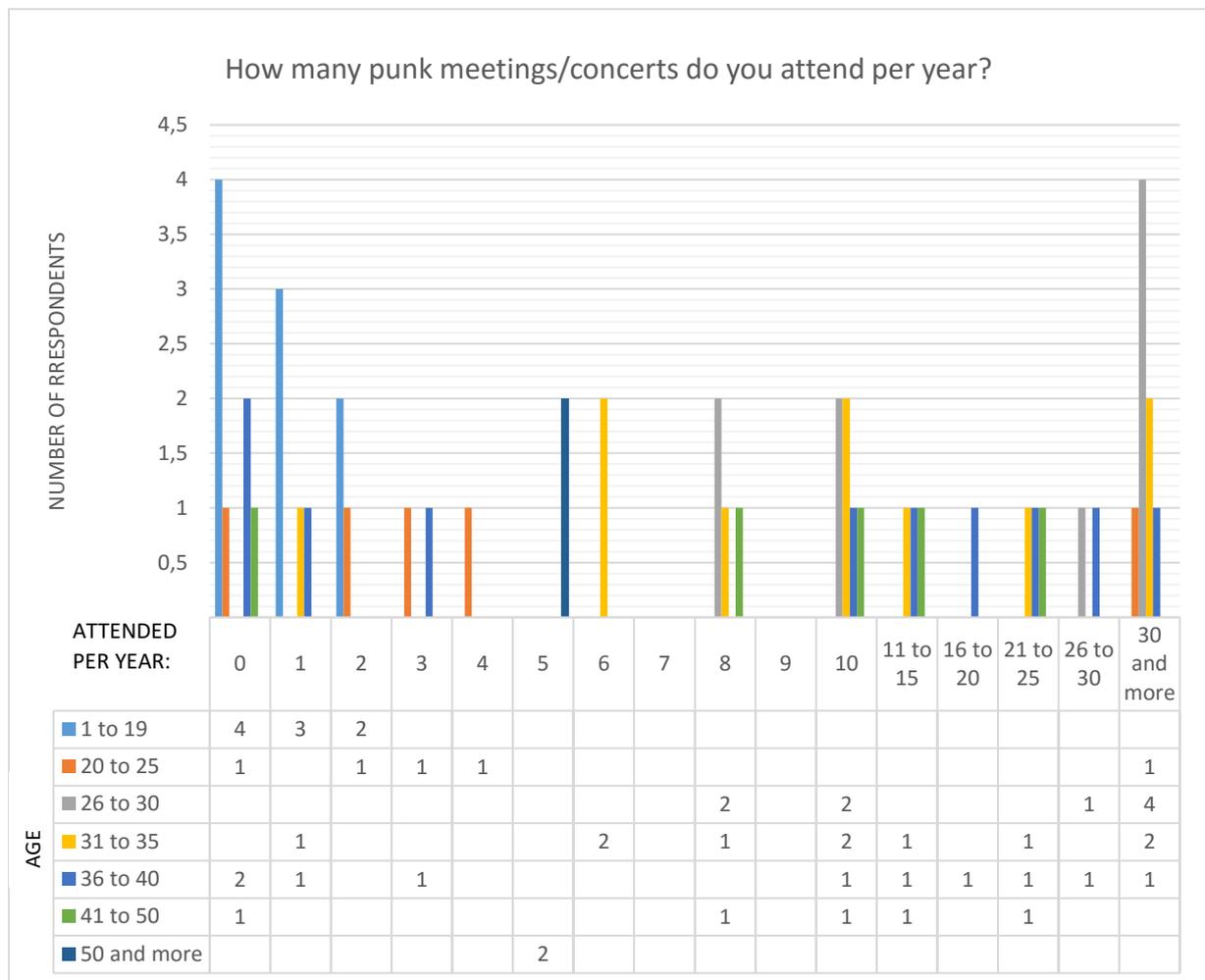


Fig. 3 Attendance of punk meetings/concerts divided per age

## Conclusion

Punk appeared as a new music genre in the USA of the 1970s, albeit its predecessors can be found as early as the 1960s, and the label *punk* was coined retrospectively out of an urgent need to call it somehow.

As the new genre spread across the Atlantic Ocean to the United Kingdom, it gradually evolved into a subculture which formed its own philosophy and style. While in the USA punk was a middle-class movement criticising the consumer way of life and boredom, the UK punk subculture was closely connected to the working class and problems of everyday life, for instance unemployment and difficult social conditions. However, both of the subcultures attracted people trying to be different and criticise the mainstream.

As the subculture did not exist in a vacuum, it has been influenced, adopted and, to some extent, consumed by numerous other movements, above all anarchists, hippies, neo-Nazis, ska and reggae, skinheads and feminists.

Nevertheless, unlike many other young subcultures, such as the hippies and the skinheads, punk was far less successful in separating from its music roots, and thus it has always been more a music based subculture than anything else. Hence, its history is inseparably connected with music. Some movements and subgenres within punk, indeed, are portrayed as having political and other ambitions, for instance *anarcho punk* and *Nazi punk*, but it is necessary to separate activities performed by a particular person because he or she is a follower of anarchism or other ideology, from other activities of the same person performed due to his or her affiliation with the punk subculture. The truth is that punk ideas are mostly liberal, and thus closer to the left-wing movements, however, punk itself is generally believed to be apolitical, rejecting both the far left and the far right.

Some authors, usually belonging to the first generation of punks do believe that punk died together with either the Sex Pistols, or Sid Vicious, at the end of the 1970s. At this point, the connection between punk as a subculture and as a music genre is evident. Nevertheless, the opinion that punk is dead is at least debatable for several reasons.

First, the punk subculture and punk music is not exactly the same, thus the end of the Sex Pistols should not be confused with the end of the whole subculture. Second, many other punk based genres and movements appeared in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, and most of them are still in existence, for instance *hardcore*, *riot grrrl* and *pop-punk*. What is more, the most famous punk slogan *Punk's not Dead* was coined as late as 1981, three years after the alleged death of punk. Third, legendary punk bands such as the Adicts and the Damned have been performing since the 1970s, while some others re-unified, even the Sex Pistols. Last but not least, the punk subculture has always had a strong sense of self-preservation. Every time in history when it was in difficulties – threatened by commercialization, radical movements, pop culture etc., there appeared an offshoot of punk whose aim was to return the subculture to the roots and start to taunt the mass society again.

Taking into consideration the imperfection and incorrigibility of mankind there is hardly any other conclusion than that punk still has much to taunt, since in the most general sense it is the imperfection and incorrigibility of mankind, i.e. never-ending wars, all-pervasive consumerism, recurring totalitarian regimes etc., that punk is determined to criticise. The subculture may have changed, but punk is not a static, immutable entity – everything changes and so does punk. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the subculture is not alive. For those reasons, I do believe that punk is not dead.

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## Appendix 1 – Survey (transcription)

### Punk and Punk Subculture

Hi! Thank you for coming to fill in my short survey on PUNK for my bachelor thesis. Of course, it is completely anonymous!

NOTE: This survey is intended for people who do listen/used to listen to punk (and Oi!).

There are no correct and incorrect answers. It is just about your own opinion!

\* - *Required questions*

**Please choose your gender: \***

Female

Male

**Choose your age: \***

1-14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, 71 and more

**What is your nationality? \***

Afghan ... Zimbabwean

**What is the highest level of education you have completed? \***

Less than high school

High school, no diploma

High school graduate

College, no degree

Trade/technical/vocational training

Associate's degree

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Ph.D., law or medical degree

Other advanced degree beyond a Master's degree

**How long have you been listening to punk/did you listen to punk? (in years) \***

1 ... 40

**What is your relationship to punk? \***

*(You can choose more than 1 option.)*

I listen to it.

I used to like it.

It's my favourite genre.

I've got a band.

I've got a webpage.

I've got a (maga)zine.

I've got a shop.

other

**How many punk meetings/concerts do you attend per year? \***

0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, more than 30

**What do you think about the following genres? \***

	<i>I hate it</i>	<i>I do not like it</i>	<i>I am neutral</i>	<i>I like it</i>	<i>I love it</i>
Emo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hardcore	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Metal (any kind)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oi! and Street punk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pop punk (Blink 182...)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reggae	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SKA and SKA punk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Techno (and other el. music)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traditional punk (1970s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
White Power music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**How did you get into punk? \*****Where do you think the punk subculture originated? \***

the USA  
 the UK  
 other

**What do you think was the first punk band/musician ever? Why? \****(The answer is completely up to you - I'd like to know your own opinion, no Googling please.)***What do you think was the first punk record ever? Why? \****(The answer is completely up to you - I'd like to know your own opinion, no Googling please.)***What do you like about punk? \****(Try to make a short list of 1-4 word phrases - e.g. rebellion, freedom of speech, the Mohawk hairstyle ... )***What do you dislike about punk? \****(Try to make a short list of 1-4 word phrases - e.g. too much commercialism today, ... )*

**What do you think about relationships between the punk and skinhead subcultures?  
Should they cooperate/not cooperate ... ? \***

**What do you think about neo-Nazism? Do you think that skinheads and neo-Nazis are the same people? If not, what's the difference for you? \***

*(The survey is absolutely anonymous. Just write your own point of view.)*

**Do you have any comments/Would you like to leave me a message?**