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"Sounds, Styles, Customs": A Conversation on the Ethnographic Journey of Subcultures

"Sesler, Tarzlar, Gelenekler": Altkültürlerin Etnografik Yolculuğu Üzerine Bir Söyleşi

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Hüseyin Serbes:

Stuart Hall argues that "no archive arises out of thin air" (2001, p. 89) and sees the archive as a creative entity in an unending state of becoming. For some time now, I have been researching in the London College of Communication's special archive at Elephant and Castle, a collection that constantly encourages new work in a dialogical relationship. In the library and private archive, the first part that caught my eye and excited me in the 'living archive' as theorised by Hall was 'subcultures'. How would you define subcultures?

Matthew Worley:

'Subculture' is a contested term. Indeed, an academic industry has developed around defining the word, taking issue with the early analyses presented by scholars associated with the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies from 1964.[1] In their classic essay 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class', John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts related the term to 'youth culture' and thus to 'the cultural aspects of youth'. 'Culture' was defined as 'the level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life, and give *expressive form* to their social and material existence'. They further suggested that the culture of a particular social group or class reflects a peculiar or distinctive 'way of life', with 'meanings, values and ideas embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems of belief, in mores and customs, in the uses of objects and material life'.[2] This the CCCS applied to various 'spectacular' forms of youth culture (i.e. teds, mods, rockers, skinheads etc), which they defined as subcultures concentrated on specific 'focal concerns' (i.e. sartorial style, music, activities, locales etc). In relation to the wider socio-political culture,

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[1] For a good overview, see Bill Osgerby, 'Subcultures, Popular Music and Social Change: Theories, Issues and Debates, in Subcultures Network (eds), *Subcultures, Popular Music and Social Change* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), pp. 1–45.

[2] John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts, 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class', in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1976), p. 10.

youth (sub)cultures were typically seen through a Marxist or Grampian lens, whereby they represented a way of adapting to or *resisting* hegemonic class relations and the prevailing cultural norms and customs of their parental generation. In such a way, youth—and, by extension, music-based—subcultures were given meaning, while also recognising their continued place within prevailing and evolving socio-economic structures. In effect, subcultures became what Phil Cohen described as a magical or illusory 'solution' to the shifting dynamics of class and generational relations over the post-war period.[3]

Such analysis proved influential, helping denote 'subculture' as a popular and widely-recognised term to distinguish various youth cultural forms.[4] The CCCS refrained from ever developing a unified set of arguments or approach; they recognised the evolving nature of their analysis and the need for additional context and perspectives. Nevertheless, such a conception of subculture was soon criticised for an array of perceived misdemeanours, primarily being overly determined by class and concentrating on spectacular forms of male cultural activity.[5] From the late 1960s, the emergence of a 'counterculture' located outside—and in direct challenge to—the mainstream suggested that the political contours of youth- or music-centric cultures could take on a more deliberate form. By the 1990s, as the socio-economic processes of deindustrialisation, consumerism and technological change continued to transform, cultural anthropologists and sociologists increasingly rejected the term 'subculture', preferring instead to explore 'post-subcultural' 'scenes' and 'neo-tribes' that constructed identities within the post-modern 'supermarket of style' first denoted by Ted Polhemus in 1978.[6]

For us, however, 'subculture' still resonates as a meaningful term. It remains—as Paul Hodkinson suggests in relation to goth—applicable to those committed to or ensconced within distinctive music- and style-based cultures that give expressive form to a person's or group's social and material existence.[7] Perhaps the 'youth' dimension is not always now to the fore. And a mix of technological and socio-economic change has indeed further scrambled peoples' perceptions of themselves and their place in the world (a fact the CCCS were effectively grappling with). However, rather than reducing 'subculture' to a generic or archaic term, we use it as an evolving an amorphous idiom that reflects the evolving and amorphous sounds, styles, customs, language, institutions and demographics that formulate around music, fashion and performance.

Edward Avery-Natale:

The most obvious answer would be that a subculture is a smaller culture that manifests within the confines of a larger culture. As such, subcultures are both global and local. For example, if we consider punk, it is obviously a global subculture with some most vibrant punk scenes existing today in Indonesia. However, all subcultures will also actualise in their local context. This is obvious in the case of early punk, which emerged uniquely in London as opposed to New York City. So, first, subcultures are a local manifestation of sometimes global manifestations.

[3] Phil Cohen, 'Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, No. 2 (1972).

[4] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

[5] See, for example, Gary Clarke, 'Defending Ski-Jumpers: A Critique of Theories of Youth Subcultures', *CCCS Sub and Popular Culture Series*, 7 (1982); Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, 'Girls and Subcultures: A Exploration', in Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals*, pp. 209–22; Angela McRobbie, 'Settling Accounts with Subcultures', in Tony Bennett, Graham Martin, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott (eds), *Culture, Ideology and Social Process: A Reader* (London: Open University Press), 111–24.

[6] Ted Polhmeus and Lynn Procter, *Fashion & Anti-fashion: Exploring Adornment and Dress from an Anthropological Perspective* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978); Steve Redhead (ed.), *Rave Off: Politics and Deviance in Contemporary Youth Culture* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1993); Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (London: Polity, 1995); Andy Bennett, 'Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship Between Youth, Style and Musical Taste', *Sociology*, 33: 3 (1999), 599–617; David Muggleton, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (eds), *The Post-Subcultures Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003). For a critique, see David Hesmondhalgh, 'Recent Concepts in Youth Cultural Studies: Critical Reflections from the Sociology of Music', in Paul Hodkinson and Wolfgang Deike (eds), *Youth Cultures: Scenes, Subcultures and Theories* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 37–50.

[7] Paul Hodkinson, *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

However, there have been ample criticisms of the term "subculture," claiming that it implies a stability to identity and a Marxist class-centric perspective that does not reflect the reality of postmodern cultures. However, in my opinion, this is not necessarily the case. While there certainly is some postmodern fluidity to subcultural identification, I think it is a mistake to assume that earlier subcultural assemblages were ever as "stable" as their mythologies might imply. Furthermore, I think it is also a mistake to assume that there is no real stability to [post]modern subcultures. Ethnography have made clear that, in at least some cultures, there remains an interest in some stability and authenticity (even if these are, in some way, illusory).

Russ Bestley:

I think the definition and wider connotations of the term "subculture" have changed over the last fifty years. Hall and the CCCS researchers used Marxist theory to position youth subcultures as a manifestation of political opposition, particularly in relation to mainstream, late capitalist, and consumer culture in the United Kingdom, the United States and Western Europe. I think the definition becomes a lot more slippery when we consider the further evolution of youth and music cultures since the 1970s. Youth and class were obvious markers of distinction that could be seized upon by researchers studying post-war style-based scenes, from rock'n'roll fans to the beats, hippies, the underground counterculture and punk. However, since that point, we have seen a range of developments that run counter to a simple age- or class-based binary: the emergence of youth cultures in wider global contexts, whereby some of the mainstream authorities and political cultures derive from the left, rather than the right; youth/style/music cultures that are consumer-driven and not explicitly 'oppositional' in nature; the maturing of some subcultural scenes into commercial styles; the ageing of participants well beyond 'youth'. I think a number of theorists have tried to introduce new terms to the debate, though I am personally still happy enough to use 'subculture', while at the same time acknowledging it as a more complex term that merits unpacking.

Hüseyin Serbes:

Pete Dale says (referring to Hebdige's Subculture[8]) that "one of the greatest strengths of the study is that it does not romanticise the object of study, as I have argued in some work on Punk" (Dale, 2000, p. 84). How does the tendency towards 'romanticisation' in the study of subcultures affect our object of study?

Edward Avery-Natale:

Whether or not ethnography and other studies of subculture romanticise the object of study is, I think, open to debate. Certainly, there are ample counterexamples, including my own work (though in no way limited to my own work, as I can come up with many, many works that do not romanticise subculture). So, first, I would question the premise of the question. However, with that being said, there certainly is some danger to romanticisation. Ironically, I would potentially accuse Hebdige's *Subculture* of this flaw. Hebdige sought to find a kind of working class, Marxist or post-Marxist action in punk and other subcultures that I am not convinced the subcultural members themselves would have recognised. This is a kind of romanticisation of the subcultures. The effect of this kind of romanticisation some what is really continuing. For example, there was, as I said above, more fluidity to these early subcultures than Hebdige's wok implies. The romantic image of working-class subcultures produces a myth of stability that may have never been more than a myth. Furthermore, the very idea that these subcultures were working-class assemblages is itself mythological. In reality, the class dynamics of subculture have always been complex. So, in short, a romanticisation closes off our understanding of subculture (or anything else) too soon: it imagines what will be found and finds what is sought, rather than closing off the nature or reality later after having seen what is. This limits us and reduces what we might learn.

[8] Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Routledge.

Russ Bestley:

I assume it's difficult to avoid for many of us. Subcultures (as youth/music/style-based scenes where people identify with a larger group) are inherently emotional and tied up with a sense of personal identity and group affinity. It can be difficult to adopt a 'pure' sense of rational critique or objective analysis when the researcher feels the need to promote or defend their 'tribe'. I think Pete is referring to the way that scholars who are also longstanding fans or participants are sometimes swayed to emphasise the positive aspects of their lived experience. Equally, there is a huge amount of mainstream journalism and other publications (such as popular histories) that, again, leans towards the positive, and it can be difficult for academic researchers to avoid the impact of that work, because it forms a significant part of the wider corpus of related literature and received or accepted knowledge. While academic researchers should set out to challenge orthodoxies and question stereotypes, we do have to start somewhere to express our arguments and construct new readings. Audience or reader familiarity with 'romanticised' histories presents both an obstacle and an opportunity to researchers.

Matthew Worley:

It mythologises and herbicides it and can also turn subcultures into heritage rather than history. I think the study of subcultures should recognise their contested nature and the contradictions almost always inherent within them.

Hüseyin Serbes:

In the meantime, Hebdige mentions that 'Cultural Studies' has never had a comfortable place within the 'Academy'. Naomi Klein (2007) draws attention to the effects of the neoliberal transformations of the last few decades on cultural communication. Joost Smiers and Marieke van Schijndel (2009, p. 8) also argue that these cultural markets are increasingly diminishing our right to structure and organise in such a way that the diversity of forms of cultural expression can play a meaningful role in the awareness of a large number of people. How would you interpret producing in Cultural Studies today, especially considering neo-liberal academic impositions?

Russ Bestley:

I'm not sure I agree with that Hebdige statement, particularly in relation to contemporary academic research. 'Cultural studies' has expanded enormously over the past two or three decades, and I feel it goes well beyond sociology and ethnography to encompass, for instance, elements drawn from art and design history, film studies, media studies, fashion studies, popular culture, comics, literature, fan studies and many more. Neoliberalism has hugely impacted education, of course, but it has also opened up opportunities for new fields to emerge that centre on student (and academic researcher) areas of interest, including popular culture and subcultures. In fact, the intersection between neoliberalism, consumerism and what were formerly called subcultures offers a rich field for future research.

Edward Avery-Natale:

I come at this from The United States rather than Europe, so this might influence the question and the answer. Neoliberalism is certainly at its height here in the United States where the academy is being reimagined as strictly vocational, with its end goal being in service to the enrichment of a capitalist owner class as opposed to the universal good of people. This is no more and no less of a risk in cultural studies than in any other discipline.

However, cultural studies and other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities face some unique challenges. Specifically, the one-to-one skillset model that neoliberalism demands (meaning the way in

which the skill learned in the classroom should have an obvious and immediate application to a job in a corporation) is not a part of these disciplines.

With that being said, it is also the case that the skills that cultural studies and other related disciplines encourage do, in fact, have important applications. Learning how to think, how to critically engage with media and culture, and so on are pivotal to our modern world. Furthermore, as we've seen a resurgence of tendencies towards fascism, [ethno]nationalism, jingoism, and so on, the kinds of thinking and learning that are prevalent in cultural studies give us the skills to defend against these attacks. Neoliberal and neoconservative thinkers may not want such skillsets, but they are pivotal.

Matthew Worley:

I'm a historian, so not just if best placed to answer this. Cultural studies seem as important as ever to me. People like David Wilkinson are doing excellent work. I have not read the Klein book, so I am unsure as to her argument. I'm not sure if neoliberalism affects the work being done. However, it may impact the way it is disseminated and often perceived. I would hope that good cultural studies will offer a robust critique of neoliberalism.

Hüseyin Serbes:

Let me talk about the methodology in the youth subcultures. Haider (2020, p. 123) points out that "one of the key factors in this state of change is race and ethnicity, especially as migration, diasporic processes and the increasing speed of global communication affect contemporary urban environments" and states that the exploration of race and ethnicity as both a source and inspiration has paved the way for many important studies based on the everyday experiences of young people's creativity and identity formation. Returning to Hebdige (2020, p. 254), he states in an interview that he has written a "retrospective ethnography of the pubs in Fulham where he grew up". How do you assess the place of such ethnographic studies based on everyday experiences in youth subcultures? Does it excite you?

Edward Avery-Natale:

I must admit that I am not really sure what is being asked here. However, with that being said, I certainly value the significance of race and ethnicity in the study of subculture (and has always been an important piece of my own work). Early works on subculture too often privileged the place of white and male subculture members, while in reality there have always been people of colour, women, non-binary, and trans people participating, and often at the forefront, of cultural developments.

However, in developing such approaches, it is also essential that we avoid romanticising subculture (as mentioned above). There is the risk of presenting subcultures as a means of escaping the confines of society's white supremacy, patriarchy, transphobia, and so on. In reality, even though some subcultures, like punk, may criticise these ideologies of oppression, they do not escape them. While we can understand subculture, using the Deleuzian language, as assemblages engaged in territorialising lines of flight, we must remember that every territorialisation also territorialises. As such, we expect to see that even the most spectacular and radical of subcultures still have components of the dominant culture emerging, if sometimes uniquely, within the culture. Studies of subculture should pay attention to this.

Matthew Worley:

I think ethnography can be useful and insightful, mainly when done and/or presented in comparison with others. I tend to be less inclined to read accounts in which the author takes centre stage, often fearing that subjectivity is presented as if universal. But that may be my problem.

Russ Bestley:

Ethnography is not my field, and I think a balance needs to be struck between personal, 'lived experience' or the knowledge (or subcultural capital) that entails and academic research. Race and ethnicity are obviously important factors to consider in the study of youth subcultures, as are migration, globalisation and the cross-cultural pollination of ideas between cultures.

Hüseyin Serbes:

Each of us is, in Bourdieu's words, "encumbered by our own past, and this social past is particularly burdensome and obtrusive when one is engaged in social science" (2003, p. 291). Against the methodological orthodoxy in the academic world (provided by punk), I wonder about the relationship of the past with the experience of research actions, because, again, Bourdieu says that he "believes that the researcher can and must mobilise his experience, that is, this past, in all acts of research". I wonder if we can produce 'more liberating' work when we mobilise experience?

Edward Avery-Natale:

We have no choice but to engage in our own subjectivities. The myth of the objective observer seeing from the god's-eye view is best left in the past. Therefore, while we may be "encumbered by our own past," there is no way to totally disencumber ourselves of this weight. It is simply the reality of our human experience. Therefore, Bourdieu is quite right that we must mobilise this past (personal and social, if we can even separate those two). In fact, this past *will be* mobilised—it can never not be! Thus, we are better off acknowledging our pasts and engaging with them than presenting a myth of objectivity.

Can this be more liberating? I suppose it depends on for whom we mean to liberate. Surely, it is more liberating for the researcher! But what of our subjects? Recognising and acknowledging their pasts is necessary. If we do not do that, what are we doing? We should be careful though, as this does not guarantee a liberatory outcome. Should the researcher simply appropriate the stories of our subjects for our own academic benefit, then we have done little to liberate the marginalised.

No methodology will guarantee liberation. Liberation, and especially liberation for marginalised and oppressed subjects, must be always worked towards.

Russ Bestley:

As you mentioned, I think a balance needs to be struck between 'mobilising experience' and the avoidance of subjective definitions based entirely on that experience. Many of us do study subcultural themes that are close to our own experiences, and I do think it does add something of value (passion, commitment, excitement, the potential for collaboration). Orthodoxies need to be challenged to develop new methodologies, but at the same time I think they emerged initially from consensus and cannot be dismissed too lightly or without strong, academic rigour.

Matthew Worley:

Not sure I understand what the methodological orthodoxy is. I tend to keep my own 'experience' out of it and concentrate more on archival traces of experiences recorded at the time. Fanzines are especially good for this I find, being written close to and/or in the moment of discovery, action or feeling.

Hüseyin Serbes:

[9] Barry Phillips' book, which tells the story of the closure of a short-lived punk rock venue in 1979 and traces the later influence of one band's record in Yugoslavia, brings together the Tito era and punk culture. Phillips joined the punk band Demob, formed in late 1978 in Coney Hill, Gloucestershire, away from the uber-cool and punk rock hubs of London's Kings Road, at the suggestion of school friend Robert 'Miff' Smith a few months before recording 'No Room For You' in late 1980.

Well, about punk... I'm curious about your first meeting or contacts. Barry Phillips says in his book[9] "as testosterone-fuelled teenagers from a coal-mining culture, we were no strangers to resorting to fists and boots" (Phillips, 2023, p. 2). I wonder if punk and protest behaviour played a role in your lifestyle?

Russ Bestley:

I grew up in Southeast England and first encountered punk through stories in the newspapers in 1976 and then some early records on the radio, early 1977. It hit me at the right time (I was fifteen) and had a huge impact on my life from then on. I don't think I'd ever make a claim to 'protest behaviour', since I tend to associate that with political organisations and activist groups, which I have always avoided, although punk taught me a natural scepticism towards authority and a critical outlook in relation to all aspects of my life.

Matthew Worley:

I found punk through Adam and the Ants on *Top of the Pops*, then reading about them and their connections to Jordan, SEX and the Sex Pistols. I've always been more interested in the ideas and creativity of punk than in the lifestyle, which often seemed very affected to me.

Edward Avery-Natale:

Yes, it certainly did. I actually discovered politics before I discovered DIY punk (though I was already familiar with bands like Green Day, The Offspring, and to some degree, Refused). I first became interested in radical politics and protest activity through the band Rage Against The Machine. When I got into punk, it was political punk bands such as Bad Religion, Propagandhi, Crass, Born Against, Black Flag, Dead Kennedys, and more that were most appealing to me and the punk scene that I became involved in (in West Philadelphia in Pennsylvania in the USA) was very "political" with many anarchist and socialist ideals espoused. This led to participation in protest activities, educating myself about politics, and so on. This also led to my eventual interest in sociology and philosophy. Today, I still participate in political and protest activities in various ways and, whenever possible, this is incorporated into my life in more personal ways (such as being a vegetarian).

Hüseyin Serbes:

Again, please allow me to proceed from Phillips' prologue. At the Fourth Punk Scholars Network Conference in Bolton, Greater Manchester, England, he established that "punk is not dead, it just got a Ph. D" (2023, p. 6). How would you look at the marriage of punk and academia? What led you to punk and academic productions?

Russ Bestley:

I was a punk fan and active participant for many years, going to gigs, buying records, reading fanzines and the music press, working in record shops, working as a crew for bands and playing in my own bands, where I wrote original material and designed flyers, record covers, etc. I had originally dropped out of college in 1980 and, after many years working in a variety of dead-end jobs, I returned to education as a mature student in the 1990s. 'Punk scholarship' wasn't a thing at that point, though I found that I could embrace opportunities to use my own experience and background as a route into new areas of enquiry. My undergraduate studies focused on graphic design, the politics of visual communication, the influence of earlier countercultural artists (Dada, Surrealism, the Situationist International) and punk. I then became a researcher at a university and focused on the intersection between agit-prop graphics and punk, completing a Ph.D. on UK punk graphics in the early 2000s.

I met a few like-minded people in other academic fields, which led to the launch of the journal *Punk & Post-Punk* in 2011 and then the Punk Scholars Network in 2012 (initiated by Mike Dines and Alastair Gordon). Since then, the journal and the PSN have developed and grown rapidly, including the launch of a book series,

Global Punk, in 2019. I have been at the centre of many of these developments, and my lifelong punk attitude towards DIY and having a go/getting on and doing it have underpinned all my work.

Edward Avery-Natale:

First, it is impossible to live a compromise-free life under capitalism and the state. Academia, like any other profession, requires compromises to systems of power that punks are commonly critical of. This is unfortunate, but true. With that being said, I find that academia is a good fit for my punk style. It allows me far more freedom in my schedule, for example. I have worked in "9 to 5" jobs and I never found that it suited me as well as academia does. Further, the DIY and anarchist versions of punk that appeal to me most encourage reading, learning, criticising, and so on, and these are all things that, at its best, academia also allows for. What other job would allow me to spend my days railing against racism and other inequalities while reading and writing about punk, racism, sexism, and so on?

Matthew Worley:

I think punk was/is full of ideas and so lends itself perfectly to academia. I wanted to look at punk academically because I was aware that it shaped my ways of seeing and thinking. It also offered me alternative insights and perspectives … or, to nod to Malcolm McLaren, it provided me with a critique that I've retained from my youth.

Hüseyin Serbes:

How would you interpret the dialectical relationship between the modes of production in academic journals and the modes of production of punk?

Edward Avery-Natale:

I'm not sure about the notion of there being a dialectical relationship between the two at all. While those of us who are punks in academia surely think about these things, I don't think punk, on the whole, gives a shit about academic production methods and I don't think academic journals give a shit about punk production methods. As such, I'm not so sure there's a dialectic present at all. There certainly can be a contradictory relationship between the two. Punk, at its best, emphasises DIY production methods with the goal of escaping the power structures of capitalism and the state. Academic journals are, in contrast, a part of those same power structures and are surely not DIY.

Matthew Worley:

Not sure I would do really—I publish on punk as a historian and not as a 'punk' (even if the way of conceiving and understanding my work might be viewed through a punk lens). When I started writing about punk in a scholarly fashion, my objective was to get the subject taken seriously within the academy, which meant aiming at the heart of it.

Russ Bestley:

Well, obviously academic publishing exists within a highly structured commercial marketplace, with journals seeking institutional subscriptions and books targeting what is in practice quite a small number of academic libraries and institutions, largely in Europe and the US. Given the limited sales potential for 'academic' publications, retail prices tend to be set quite high to cover production costs. Bear in mind, too, that the production of academic texts is often more intensive and laborious than journalistic or 'trade' publications, involving multiple rounds of peer review, cross-checking, copy editing, proof reading and indexing etc as well as the more universal stages of typesetting and print. The (often overstated) 'DIY' ethics of punk might suggest a disconnect between the world of academic publishing and the purity and authenticity of the punk 'message', with most published material leaning more towards the popular and

trade market, where, coincidentally, margins are higher and sales greater, allowing producers to sell their books or magazines at lower prices.

I think some of us are engaged in attempts to bridge the two worlds, even where that ambition is compromised from the outset. I certainly bring my longstanding 'punk' attitude to all my work, both pro-bono and 'commercial', and I don't really make a distinction between 'work' that I'm paid to do (a full-time job as a senior researcher in a university) and other things I do or make with collaborators, charities, 'scenes' or just friends. I write stuff, I make things, I teach people... some of it I get paid for, a lot of it I don't... but I don't really see a hierarchy between the stuff I do voluntarily or out of interest/enthusiasm and the stuff I'm supposedly 'contracted' to do.

I arranged a deal with Intellect Books for the Global Punk book series where I could contribute my design, editing and typesetting skills for free, with a small team including my co-series editor Mike Dines, who was directly involved in the pre-production processes, including proofing and indexing. In exchange, most of the books are published in paperback format immediately, with lower retail prices for buyers and, we hope, a better crossover between 'academic' and 'trade' markets and readerships. We were lucky, though, in that Intellect is a small-scale independent publisher with a mission to take risks and seek out new and developing fields of research, less driven by the existing academic market. Our ethos, as 'punk scholars', seems to be fit quite well with their agenda, and I think the collaboration works well. I know from experience that it is much more difficult when working with some of the other 'big name' academic publishers, where the position of the author or editor feels a lot more compromised.

Hüseyin Serbes:

Anthony Smith (1980), when talking about a book review, uses the expression "distilling a small phial of knowledge from the huge mound of speculative and contradictory material which constitutes communication studies". For me, this distillation is done by micro-media. I am talking about fanzines: publications that are the opposite of professional, commercial and legalised magazines, and that can be produced by anyone who wishes, whether it is a personal publication or one created by a few friends. When we think in terms of communication sciences, where do fanzines stand in these studies? How do you assess the future of fanzines in the age of digital production?

Matthew Worley:

Fanzines seem to be doing very well in the age of digital production. The process of making fanzines—and the material trace they leave—still seems to be of some importance to people, allowing both collaboration/interaction in person and better control of distribution/dissemination. Personally, I think fanzines are best read in multiple issues than looking in single issues or small numbers. That way, a sense is gained of how representative—not to mention speculative or not—they might be.

Russ Bestley:

I think fanzines hold value and academic interest for two main reasons: the often-unfiltered voice of the author/editor/producer in documenting a contemporary scene and the principles of visual communication, from origination (making the artwork, layout) to reproduction (print, photocopy etc). I don't see fanzines or what you term 'micro-media' as something more pure, honest or credible than the mainstream media – they occupy a different space and project different agendas, while being less regulated than official channels, but subjective bias and personal opinions are not necessarily more 'honest' or truthful when the rules of traditional journalism aren't applied. However, I do worry that the 'fanzine aesthetic' has been fetishised and is often reproduced unthinkingly as a stylistic trope with little or no understanding of process, technology or material constraints that may have (and almost certainly did) influenced those original outcomes. Digital production should allow producers to move into new spaces for communication—producing a printed

'fanzine' with a kind of 'retro' visual aesthetic is a conscious choice and it needs to be contextualised and problematise as such.

Edward Avery-Natale:

As a sociologist, I'm not sure if I can speak to the communication sciences. I can say that sociologists are interested in zines as loci of personal production and that they are of particular interest in understanding the thoughts and concepts of those who are often marginalised from mainstream production (the zines and writings of young girls being an obvious example). However, it is likely that these are of less importance in the digital age when anyone at any time can produce information in the form of social media. In some ways, perhaps zines are a precursor to social media: unofficial, uncontrolled, often created by amateurs with their peers in mind, and so on.

Hüseyin Serbes:

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the relationship between aesthetics and politics in contemporary youth scenes. How would you interpret the concept of 'resistance', which is "used to describe a form of political culture expressed through the use of ostentatious objects and performances linked to anti-aesthetic canons against the bourgeois dominant taste" (Ferreira, 2016, p. 66), within youth subcultures? Can we consider this as 'the arts of existence' by thinking Foucaultian? Is the power of punk or other subcultures enough to transform individual beings, especially in the flowing processes of life?

Edward Avery-Natale:

First, I'd argue that resistance, obviously, need not only be aesthetic . However, to the degree that this is our focus, I think it is a complicated issue. Surely, aesthetics can be used as a form of resistance (punk is an obvious example of this, but hardly the only one). However, the emphasis on ostentatious symbols can be a mistake. For example, we see with anarcho-punk (beginning with Crass) a less ostentatious approach to punk fashion that is, nonetheless, directly linked to their resistance (for example, the use of similar clothing to breakdown the hierarchy of the band as opposed to its vocalist).

Further, I would argue that emphasising the bourgeois dominant taste is also a mistake. If we look at early punk in England, for example, there is as much opposition to the symbolic tastes of the working-class parent generation, which was surely not bourgeois, as there was opposition to other taste makers. Furthermore, the intersections of taste with not only class but also gender and race cannot be understated and are ignored in this definition.

I would say that the punk surely does have the power to transform individuals. However, I do not want to focus on this only in the context of fashion. The changing of the self is cognitive, ideological, habitual, and, yes, also aesthetic. But punk, at its best, does not only change the fashion of the person, but also changes the person on a deeper level. This is especially important today when we consider that punk fashion has been appropriated by capitalism repeatedly. It is questionable whether punk fashions are still the "threat" in places like the USA and England that they once were (however, if you look to Jakarta, Indonesia, you can tell a different story of that threat remaining).

Russ Bestley:

Going back to our earlier conversation about the CCCS and (perhaps outdated) definitions of 'subcultures', I'm sceptical about the notion of 'resistance' through style/music/fashion/'youth' scenes, as I think much of the political or oppositional language is rhetorical and performative, rather than meaningful or effective. This has become even more pronounced over the last thirty years, in my view, as commerce has become inseparable from the production of 'culture'. That was always largely the case, obviously, and all subcultures

and countercultures have been exploited, repackaged and resold, but the 'spectacle' does feel all-consuming in the modern era, in a more explicit way than before, I think.

In terms of 'punk', it's pretty safe and unthreatening to the status quo for groups of young (or not so young) people to dress up in flamboyant outfits, dye their hair and proclaim their opposition to 'the system', at least in most western, 'liberal' democracies. It's still more of an issue in deeply conservative and authoritarian cultures—one of my Ph.D. students is writing a critical history of the punk scene in Singapore, for instance, where notions of dissent and youth degeneracy are far less tolerated, and where the local punks had to adapt more subtle and nuanced visual and verbal languages to express themselves.

At the same time, I'd argue that there is now a pretty universal set of aesthetic conventions that have come to denote 'punk' around the world, largely drawn from a mid-1980s UK stereotype (studded jackets, colourful Mohican hairstyles, heavy boots, patches and badges), and that is so tired, so 'accepted' and so mainstream as to negate any sense of threat or 'resistance' those styles might, once, have engendered.

Matthew Worley:

I think you can resist in many ways or forms. I do not believe that subcultures need be or are inherently modes of resistance. However, they do provide a sense of agency and/or autonomy, which for me offers a more positive direction to take.

Contributor Details

Hüseyin Serbes is deeply involved in academic research and productions centred around youth subcultures and the radical, autonomous media experiences within these movements. His doctoral thesis is a genealogical analysis of punk fanzines in Türkiye, and his research focuses on radical and autonomous media experiences in youth (sub)cultures. Dr Hüseyin Serbes draws his inspiration from punk, Dada and Situationist ideas, auto-ethnographic theories and research in what Stuart Hall calls 'living archives'. In addition to working as an independent academic based in Istanbul, he teaches at schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Türkiye.

Russ Bestley is the lead editor of the academic journal *Punk & Post-Punk*, the series editor and art director of the Global Punk book series published by Intellect Books, and a founding member of the Punk Scholars Network. Dr. Russ Bestley is a Reader in Graphic Design and Subcultures at the London College of Communication. His areas of expertise include graphic design, popular culture, alternative music scenes and subcultures, comedy and humour. In 2013, he established the Graphic Subcultures research hub at the London College of Communication, before continuing to form the UAL Subcultures Interest Group in 2022.

Matthew Worley is a scholar whose main interests are twentieth-century British culture and politics. Prof. Worley's early research focused on the interwar years, with a particular interest in the British labour movement. He has also written on communism in Britain and Europe, and his research on Sir Oswald Mosley's New Party led him to study the far right of the British political spectrum. He co-founded the Subcultures Network in 2011, creating a network of academics, writers, artists, musicians, criminals, pub bores and poets interested in cataloguing and researching the history of British youth culture.

Edward Avery-Natale teaches introductory sociology courses as well as classes on race and racism. He has since published articles on topics such as racism, Black Lives Matter, identification formation, gender, religion, punk rock, Deleuzian approaches to sociology and identity, and more. Dr. Avery-Natale is looking forward to publishing several new books about punk after the success of his first book, *Ethics, Politics, and Anarcho-Punk Identifications: Punk and Anarchy in Philadelphia*.

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