

# Co is for Counter-Culture: Experiencing Punk

## Brianah Droubay

The Evergreen State College

*"It was not a genre of music, it was more discontent with how things had flowed and unemployment in the U.K. at that time." Quinten Butler.*

*When looking at the term "Punk" what comes to mind? Is it a fashion? A culture? A type of music? Maybe it's just the grimy kid sitting on the side of the street smoking a cigarette in a studded vest. When going through an exploration of punk music you begin to realize and understand that it is not just a song, it's a statement. In every chord there is a story, in every word spoken there is a history. The deeper you get into this type of counter-culture the more you understand what things like Anarchy for the U.K. really mean. Establishment controlling society to the point of forcing the development of this counter-culture is where punk really came from. It wasn't music; it was a movement against the establishment.*

## Beginnings: Anarchy for the U.K.

In the beginning, punk music derived from a time in the United Kingdom somewhere between 1974 and 1976 when massive unemployment rates gave birth to a movement that was up raised by music from the standpoint of someone who was living in poverty because of the control the establishment posed upon everything. In 1977 the only studio recorded album produced by the Sex Pistols was released and entitled *Never Mind the Bullocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*, the release of this album made a statement to society and to the government that things needed to change. One of the most recognizable and possibly the most famous was Anarchy for The U.K. This was a pivotal kick off to the punk movement in the way that it stated perfectly clear that the everyday people of society did not want the government to have the amount of control that it had. Strict regulation on media as well as rising unemployment rates

played a huge part in keeping the musically oriented revolt alive against the establishment. The biggest factor I can see that seemed to be a huge part of the punk movement was when unemployment fully swept through the U.K. it was soon regulated; the people would use something called a ub40 form so they could collect unemployment benefits. But by the way unemployment benefits were designed was that they didn't calculate by the amount of able-bodied unemployed workers in the household, it was only the head of the household who collected the money. So you can see how poverty was thrust into the U.K. and without a good future for the growing youth they became angry and very anti-establishment because of what it had done to directly affect their lives.

*"It wasn't a choice or not to live the punk lifestyle, it was around you." Quinten Butler*

## Delicate Empiricism: What Punk Means to Me

Textbook definition, empiricism; practice based on experiment and observation. To really grasp the delicate empiricism of punk music and culture you need to experience it yourself. Placing definition on a word used to represent many different meanings is a daunting task to achieve; punk, usually by general consensus, is what the user of the word defines it to be. Trying to force your own opinion of what punk means upon another person is directly contradictory to the entire principle of the culture. Yes, you can define it as a type of music or fashion statement, but after being involved and engaged in the question of what this word means to me, I feel like I would never explain it the same way as somebody else. Through the exploration of the history of the word I have found the answer to what it means to me. In the simplest terms I would say punk is freedom. P u n k i s m y r i g h t t o w r i t e t h i s

s e n t e n c e   a n y   w a y   I   f u c k i n g   w a n t   t o. You could say that grammar itself is just structure posed upon our brains at an early age in attempt to mold us to the way society wants us to communicate based on the general way of understanding, but what if I don't understand the way you do? Who cares if I put a comma in somewhere it looks strange to you? You got the gist of it, didn't you?

### **Listening to Punk music taught you what?**

#### **1. Engage Yourself.**

A huge part of what punk is today in my mind is definitely about believing in what you say, do or feel. If you are going to preach about something, you sure as hell better believe in it. Stand up for yourself in a compromising situation, but never compromise yourself in a situation; these are two different things entirely. Own up to your short comings and improve. Be the best you can to all of your abilities. You are a person, you are valid, and don't let anybody tell you that you're not.

#### **2. Engage the Music.**

Punk music can be very forward, loud and eccentric; let's not beat around the bush, it's not for everybody. The real embodiment of the punk genre however, is based around feeling, good or bad. The point is that if I like it, you don't have to. The ideal emotion trying to be evoked is an uplifting, adrenaline filled, and hopefully stimulating your body enough to make you move and make your mind to really think. Feel the music through your body, as well as your mind. Let it

speak to you in ways of recitation, try and think of what it means to you, moving through you.

3. Find the Feeling.

The idea is when approaching and engaging in something as wild as punk you need to find your way by feeling through the music. Punk is a sort of unspoken brotherhood that comes from within the people who are in kin-ship with the mindset of anti-establishment beliefs. In order to truly immerse yourself and understand you must put yourself inside what it feels like to have that belief system. Punk is not a genre, it is a feeling.

4. Express yourself.

Who can tell you that you can't? Like I made note before, you are a person and you are valid in your opinion. Freedom of expression is a great way to feel whole inside yourself. Being a part and in tune with yourself is a big part of what keeps you developing as a person, and I think that sort of intelligence will continue to help you engage with the world around you better.

5. Engage life.

Life is short, and the day is long, do something with it! Be productive in all your endeavors. You have to keep the ball rolling in the areas of life you hold close to you. Believe in what you are doing and why you are doing it. Life is a very simple thing if you let it speak to you in the language you speak. If you want to do it yourself, get out there and do it yourself. You control the way you're dealt your hand in life. Be conscious of your decision making process.

## 6. Engage the World

When walking down the street alone, what are the thoughts that stream about your mind? Engaging with the world around you can seem like a very hard thing to do when you write it down on paper. The truth is, is that all people on the planet earth subconsciously know how to accomplish this. To tell you the truth, the secret is being intuitive and trusting your instincts. If something feels like it is unsafe or a bad idea, it probably is. Feel your way through life physically as much as intellectually. Combine common sense and street smarts and you are bound to be unstoppable.

## 7. Converse and Reflect

At the end of the day, what did you learn? What did you accomplish and was it important to you? Having a conversation with yourself and the world is important to staying on your toes and succeeding in your environment.

# Punk as a conversation

**Punk:** can you see how the government directly affects your lives in a negative way?

**Society:** well for me, the way I see it, the regulations and restrictions placed are there for a reason, just like laws.

**Punk:** sure, but could you tell me those reasons right now? Laws are put in place to protect people, the media is regulated to brainwash its watchers. Think about the recitation of ideas; if the media is feeding you propaganda and controlling all of your raw ideas, how are you supposed to come up with your own morals and ideals? Maybe ignorance is bliss, but when things that the government can change, like unemployment, directly affect your life in a negative way things start to not be so blissful anymore.

**Government:** The laws that we write are in place for many reasons which are not always black or white. They are designed, by you, for you, to insure your safety and well-being. We dedicate ourselves to protecting the lives and futures of our precious children. Don't accept these lies from extremists who are notoriously known for criminal activity and promoting violence and disorder. It's easy to blame us when your life becomes difficult but do we get thanks for all that we do and have done to better your lives or the massive role we play in its continuing existence?

**Society:** These are all good points. Without Government there would be chaos, without set rules and guidelines the whole system would collapse, and I believe that. Why work against a system that supports you? Maybe a culture that is anti-establishment would be dangerous.

**Punk:** Before you step on my toes, take a look at everything that government does for you. Yes, the establishment is needed to bring order and keep peace, but there are only so many levels of power one can reach. You say that government is by the people, for the people. Controlling the environment in which people live will alter the way they think to what you want them to instead of their own formulated opinions. People in a crowd are more likely to conform to something if they believe they are singled out. Regulating areas in which you have no experience living in is not by the people or for the people. People in positions of power will forget what it's like to be at the bottom. Like, who is to say I can't graffiti this wall because its public property, if it is not offensive and it is a statement of art, a beautiful mural, why is it illegal? I am starting to believe that Society has become lazy and caught up in so many different distractions that they no longer wish for their freedom. They would rather just roll over and not even try to peel the carpet back on the uprising of government power. How many dust bunnies do you think are hiding?

*"If you want to call it politics call it politics, but it was mismanagement of their future" Quinten Butler*

## Engaging the conversation

When speaking in terms of punk in relation to society and government I take the deepest thought and consideration as to how they can affect each other. How is a subculture created? If a sub or counter-culture is considered the opposite of society why is it that way? What has birthed this rebellion against the norm? My conclusion comes back to the government. Revolt is often caused by the feeling of the power position overstepping its boundaries. And if counter-culture is opposite of society it had to be driven out of society. Counter-culture is like a rogue society, if you will. Some questions posed when thinking about these things are; if counter-culture is derivative of society and out cast, what is the difference between what society sees as right and what counter-culture sees as wrong? Does counter-culture affect the government as the government affects counter-culture?

## Exact Sensorial Imagination and living understanding

### THE PUNK PIT

we dance like animals fighting,  
kicking and screaming in close quarters.  
the group smells of stale beer, cigarettes  
and anything else we're wearing that doesn't get washed.  
boots clash on boots  
and spikes scrape together in a violent love affair, mashing and molding  
into each other's crevices,  
tearing at clothes not equipped with such armor.

Our bodies slam like ocean upon rock, creating a spray of sweat cast from our brows.  
sometimes there is blood, and you may get it on you  
but don't complain because when you decided to come to a punk show  
you should have known what you were getting into.

This poem is a representation of the experience of being thrashed around in a mosh pit. I would describe the feeling to be one of the best experiences I have ever had in my life. I think the feeling is some percentage excitement and another percentage blissful, almost. The chaos becomes beautiful in the midst of violent movements, yet everyone in the room, in this moment of what looks like violence is really cascading the feeling of brotherhood.

Punk is the freedom to write this fucking poem any way I want to,  
Who are they to try and tell me I can't?  
Does it threaten ones sensibilities so much?  
They're just frightened because I'm free.  
Punk is the graffiti littering the public land walls,  
because this is a statement of the freedom to express art,  
not throwing an advertisement in your face for "the next big thing."  
Yet, it is considered vandalism and therefore illegal, even if preaching peace.  
They are just trying to tie me down because I'm free.  
Punk is knowing when you are being undermined and over powered  
and standing up for yourself, even if it seems like you can't fight this fight.  
Being knocked down again and coming up stronger and smarter than you were before  
They just want to drown me out because I'm free.  
Punk is protecting your family at all costs



Who are they to tell me I can't carry a deadly weapon?

When you are on the streets

Sometimes all you can do is fight fire with fire.

They are just threatened because I am free.

Punk is selling 5 grams to make twenty bucks

Who are they in their corporate mansions?

I am not going to get nor take handouts,

I look out for myself

They are just jealous because I'm free.

Punk is taking out your rage on your friend's face in a fair and organized fight  
without the gloves on.

Who are they to tell me who and where I can fight?

With all that is unjust in the world

Maybe all I need is a couple of stitches and a small concussion.

They just hate me because I'm free.