

Why Punk is Dead, And What This Means for Music

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I dare to utter the blasted phrase: Punk is Dead.

I know that right now, some individual is reading this and saying, “How dare you!?”

Saying this person is steamed puts it mildly. This person is irate. How could anyone claim such a thing, when new punk bands are being formed every day in basements across America, across the world?

Clearly, I must have blasphemed, no?

Well, at least hear me out.

I came to this conclusion subjectively, not objectively. I came to this conclusion as a young kid with an Internet connection. I recall, back in the day, visiting various message boards. Whenever, on these message boards, the phenomenon of punk was raised, the most-banded-about term was “poseur.” But this term carried with it a certain implication, one that led me invariably down a path that has since prevented me from ever calling myself a punk.

Punk is supposedly either a sub-cultural or musical phenomenon. Usually, it is viewed as both—separate, yet intertwined. The music is characterized by fast beats, usually, although there’s always been a wide variety in punk style, and even this rule of thumb is disregarded. As a sub-cultural phenomenon, the key concept had always been individualism—each person is an end within him- or herself. Given this radical individualism, punk was supposed to eschew externally-imposed rulership. Each person is left free to live as he or she sees fit, not imposing his or her subjective whims on others and not suffering their subjective whims being imposed upon him or her.

However, with the word “poseur” being bandied about over every tiny perceived-indiscretion, I could hardly see anything about this thing being called “punk” that actually lived up to its own ideals. The absurdity of this was clear: punk, a sub-cultural phenomenon expressly against the imposition of rulers, was dead, and in its place rested a carcass in which people desperately fought each other over tiny perceived-indiscretions.

Supposedly, at some point in the evolution of the sub-culture, certain rules were created and foisted upon the participants. It had become so absurd that if you seek any form of fame or profit, you were immediately labelled a sell-out and excommunicated from the movement. Conformity had replaced individualism as the name of the game. It dawned on me that any “true punks” (whatever that means) had long abandoned this sinking ship.

I never had much invested in the sub-culture, and thus felt perfectly at ease abandoning it. I am an individualist, not a punk, and I will happily defend the freedom of the individual.

There are two more things that need to be addressed: the subjectivity of this position, and the musical phenomenon.

Earlier, I pointed out that I arrived at my position subjectively. What I mean to say is, if you're like me—an individualist who will happily defend the freedom of the individual—yet wish to continue calling yourself a “punk,” more power to you. I'm not here to say that you must reject the term, or conform to my standard; far from it! I merely intended to explain my own position, why I gained it, and why I feel comfortable with keeping it.

Still, another point is probably nagging at you: “What about the music?”

Indeed, there are still bands being formed that grew up on the Ramones, Circle Jerks, or Sonic Youth. There are still young women and men who dye their hair or don the traditional mohawk. There is still fast music. Surely I cannot mean to say that punk *rock* is dead, can I?

I cannot. Punk, as a musical form, is unlikely to ever die. I, for one, will continue listening to it. I love Bad Religion and Bikini Kill as much as the next guy. And if the music is all that really matters to you *vis-à-vis* punk, then you can rest easy, for the music is alive and well!

