**PUNK IS DEAD. MODERNITY KILLED EVERY NIGHT, EDS. RICHARD CABUT & ANDREW GALLIX (2017)**

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The contributors to *Punk is Dead* are in the main very keen to ring fence and define punk as a short-lived social and musical movement that happened in London, and just as keen to show how hip they are because they were there at the time. A lot of them are also invested in academia and academic writing, and one thing this book could do with is a range of other voices offering their memories and ideas. And for some reason, lots of the writers here seem to have swallowed Malcolm McLaren’s self-serving stories about himself being instrumental in causing and organising the whole punk movement, rather than questioning this.

Few authors here are keen to chart the wider influence and effect that punk had on youth, music, society or the record business, which means this book is strangely Londoncentric, homogenised in viewpoint, and unrepresentative of the wider audience that punk ultimately affected. As someone who lived in London while punk happened but did not engage until after original punk’s demise – be it late-to-the-event punk bands, or music classed as new wave or post-punk music – I resent being left out of this account (not as an individual, but as part of a wide group of young people and their response to punk), dislike the fact that even though the dangers of closing down a movement to a specific time, place and group of people are highlighted by several contributors, many authors have chosen to embrace this approach.

The editors, Cabut and Gallix, introduce and defend their book in surprising terms:

This book was partly inspired by the almost universal knee-jerk reaction against nostalgia. Without nostalgia, we would have no Homer or Proust. It is the wellspring of countless – perhaps all – great works of art. (p12)

and go on to make hyperbolic claims about punk such as '[t]he movement brought about a revolution of everyday life, turning it into a permanent adventure and abolishing the boundaries between artists and audience; art and life'. (p13) This seems to me to be revisionist, a result of nostalgia, as highlighted by Jamie Varron:

Nostalgia can rearrange your memories and make them into a picture that wasn’t true then, but feels true now, brighter somehow and better even. Our pasts are like a movie that we get to edit. (2015)

The self-editing and self-inclusion prevalent in this book (whether true or not – either way there's far too much name-dropping and self-congratulation) is not only due to nostalgia but the 'contention is that what we are commemorating is not so much punk itself as the past commemorations of punk' (Cabut & Gallix, p13), that is nostalgia about nostalgia! Thankfully, there are chapters in this book, that avoid this dewy-eyed approach.

In ‘Boom!’ (pp87-99), Ted Polhemus considers UK precedents for punk such as the COUM Transmission’s Prostitution exhibition at the ICA, Situationism, and Derek Jarman’s films, and questions ‘the way Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood told it’, namely that ‘punk was simply the creation of two extraordinarily Renaissance people’. (p98) As he clearly goes on to state,

Not only is this view a reductionist distortion of how history happens – and actually did happen in 1976 – but it also fails to give credit where credit is surely due to the startling, unprecedented creativity of hundreds and then thousands of teenagers like John Lydon, my friend Max, the always extraordinary Jordan, Siouxsie Sue, and so very many others whose contribution was great but whose names were never known to us; kids who reinvented themselves and then had the balls to ride home on the bus. (p99)

This idea of re-invention is key, I think, to understanding punk: it is only one fashion or genre, one youth trend, out of many, including others happening around the same time. The slippage from pub rock to punk rock to postpunk to new romantic, via new wave and improvisation, is blurred and hard to fathom. Polhemus underlines this reinvention in his contributor’s biography where he notes that he has been ‘a Beat, a modernist, a hippy, a glam rocker, a punk and a goth’. (p315)

Elsewhere, there is a short gem of a chapter by Mark Fisher from 2005 (pp147-150) about desire and what he terms ‘unpleasure’, which astutely links eroticism and art object, and David Wilkinson’s ‘Ever Fallen in Love?’(pp131-146) about ‘the undeniable queerness of punk’ (p131). Wilkinson is keen to think ‘about the influence of a certain strain of queer theory beyond the world of academia’(p131), and goes on to discuss sexual politics in Britain in the 1970s, various fanzines, the Bromley contingent, McLaren & Westwood, Jon Savage’s *England’s Dreaming* book, and Rock Against Racism, noting in his conclusion that ‘Trangression [...] is not automatically progressive’ (p145).

Nicholas Rombes' piece 'Punk Movies' (pp219-227) takes an oblique look at its subject matter through fiction and creative non-fiction, suggesting on the way that 'punk cinema wasn't cinema at all, but television' (p221) and highlighting (again) 'the ambiguity of punk at that time [was] that it was becoming self-aware as "punk"' (p222). Simon Reynolds takes a whirlwind shorthand trip through punk as estrangement / responsibility / style war / incompetence / outrage / pub rock that I only wish was much longer (pp263-268); Cabut pens 'A letter to Jordan' (pp119-127) celebrating her part in the proceedings; and Jon Savage offers a 'far from definitive', wide-ranging and open-ended 'Punk Etymology' to close the proceedings (pp288-307).

Penny Rimbaud’s ‘Banned from the Roxy’ (pp171-193) has traces of I-was-there-you-weren’t syndrome, but he has the grace to recontexualise his original 1977 rant, and note how sweary and discomforting he now finds his own work. However, it shows a directness and honesty that is in short supply elsewhere. A few more chapters like his and the others listed above, discussing the realities of band rehearsals and gigs, the pubs and places which accommodated punk, the relation of a more general public rather than the elite few to punk, and the fact that a lot of this happened whilst many of us were engaged with punk whilst still wearing flares and long hair, would have taken this anthology away from being the back-slapping, name-dropping, nostalgic volume it all too often is.

**REFERENCE**

Jamie Varron (2015). 'nostalgia is a dangerous game', *Thought Catalog*, 28 Feb 2015, https://thoughtcatalog.com/jamie-varon/2015/02/nostalgia-is-a-dangerous-game/ (accessed 12 March 2018)

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