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"No More Heroes Anymore": marginalized identities in punk memorialisation and curation

The 40th 'anniversary' of punk in 2016 was marked by various events in London including museum exhibits. Missing from far too many of these events has been the voice and experiences of marginalized punks. Was the subversive nature of punk being undermined by the realities of a display space that must cater to a wide range of users and stakeholders? Or is the inclusive platform that punk sells itself on a well –disguised miasma that arises from its perpetuation of (and belief in) troubling norms such as sexism, ableism, racism and homophobia? This article will argue that it was a combination of both. Utilising interviews it will demonstrate the impact that the exhibit had on marginalized groups within punk and their reflections on whether it reflects wider norms within punk. Relying on the stranger fetishization theory of Sara Ahmed, this article will examine how punk's memorialization of itself forces marginalized groups within it to be used as a means of bolstering a particular narrative of inclusivity that in reality ensures they remain strangers within their own subculture.

Introduction

2016 was to be a year-long celebration of punk in London for punk's "40th Anniversary". The celebrations were based around specific institutions; the British Fashion Council, British Film Institute, British Library, Design Museum, Doc 'n Roll Films, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Museum of London, The Photographers' Gallery, Rough Trade, PYMCA, Premier and On|Off, Roundhouse and Universal Music Catalogue. It was funded via a £99, 000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and was officially supported / sponsored by the Mayor of London, the BFI and the British Library's exhibition. (ER1) The main event, and focus of this article, was the exhibition held at the British Library and curated by Andy Linehan that focused on 1976 – 1979. The exhibit consisted of seven-inches, magazine articles (in particular the NME), radio interviews and videos from the period, tour posters, official tour pictures of well-known bands such as The Clash, the Sex Pistols and the Buzzcocks, clothes from Sex and samples of fanzines such as "Sniffin' Glue".

The exhibition had to cater to a wide range of clients, spanning from those who would come to see and relive aspects of their past / current life, some of whom would want to show their children or grandchildren something that was important to their youth, to those engaging in a little cultural nostalgia or history, and tourists. It could not assume that those attending the exhibit would be, or have been, involved with punk or have an in-depth knowledge of its history. Therefore the exhibit would, to some degree, create a version of that history that may remain unchallenged by some of its viewers. It also had the opportunity to consider which aspects of that history it would focus on and to be creative in its presentation of same.

The exhibit strongly favoured black billboards with white writing, and the glass topped cabinets, standard in many museums for display. In terms of content, there were large photographs of iconic bands and well known personalities and a display of fanzines, records, tickets and clothing. There were also screenings of the infamous Bill Grundy interview with the Sex Pistols which descended into a profanity laden exchange unheard of on British television at the time. (ER2) and extracts from diaries written by The Bromley Contingent. This is followed by a section devoted to the 'Rock Against Racism' concerts, the beginnings of Do-It-Yourself record pressings and John Peel's beloved

copy of "Teenage Kicks" by the Undertones. The final section was devoted to the fanzines and a display of over 100 record covers from The Ramones to Joy Division.

Fig 1. A Section of the exhibit that focused on The Ramones, photograph taken by author.

Notably largely by their absence in the content of the exhibit is references to women, disabled people, people of colour, and LGBTQIA individuals. Punk was never solely the domain or identity of white, cis-gendered, able-bodied, heterosexual men. (O'Brien: 169; Ambrosch: 250) The rise in global accounts of punk demonstrates the variety of individuals who were involved or self-identified as punk, including individuals of varying ethnic origins, women, disabled people and LGBTQAI individuals. (Dunn, 2016; Leuschner, 2013; Dines, Gordon and Guerra, 2017) This raises an important question about why such groupings remain marginalized within this exhibit, and other punk memorials.

Punk and marginalisation

"Some people think little girls should be seen and not heard …" (X-Ray Spex, 1978)

Within mainstream society, LGBTQAI individuals, people of colour, and disabled people are commonly marginalized and under-represented in many facets of life. Punk is supposed to be different according to many of its commentators and participants, it is supposed to be a "social revolution" (Reddington, 2012: 15) based on "egalitarian principles" (O'Hara. 1999: 120). It behoves us to ask has punk managed to achieve equity and a real space for anyone to take part, or does it merely enable a hollow performance of an expected stance on issues of racism, sexism, homophobia and ableism? If the former, how has that worked in praxis? If the latter, what does that mean in lived experience for those who are marginalized within punk? Finally what does the curation of punk in public spaces by non-punks reveal about cultural messages and attitudes that punk has somehow articulated about itself? These are the questions that this article will seek to engage with and begin to answer. To do so it will draw upon an analysis of the exhibit created in London as part of the 40th

anniversary of punk in 2016 and multiple interviews of women from Northern Ireland (NI) who travelled over specifically to attend the exhibit.[1]

Punk in NI is often ignored in memorials, and those that do include it tend to only focus on punk during The Troubles and predominately on the experiences of men during those times.[2] (McLoone, 2004; O'Neil & Trelford, 2003) Therefore focusing on the experiences and reactions on women and their identity as punks over a longer period of time, including into the present, enables a more accurate and fuller picture of punk more broadly and specifically within the context of NI for others to draw upon. It also address, to some extent, the concerns raised by scholars of NI in various fields who note that the paucity of research into the experiences of women there forces them to remain the assumed or designated silent victims in both academic research and general public awareness. (Sullivan, 1999: 3; Nic Craith, 2003) Part of the purpose of focusing on women from NI is to demonstrate the rich and varied experiences that make up their individual and collective lives; to bring traditionally overlooked and marginalised accounts of punk into focus; and to use their voices and stories to demonstrate that victimhood and its designations are themselves linked to societal and academic patriarchy.[3]

As part of ensuring that their stories are told in their way, interview quotes, while admittedly selected, are not edited or tidied up. Pauses, self-corrections, word repetitions and sometimes body language are all intentionally included in interview quotes as well as subcultural argot, NI idioms, and profanity. Interviewees all chose to have their own name used to retain ownership and responsibility for their voices and stories or to further emphasise the importance of listening to traditionally marginalised voices within our subculture. Anonymising interviewees is the default position in qualitative work, but can be interpreted by the participants as paternalistic (Moore 2012) or result in underlying power structures being unchallenged or even unacknowledged. (Baez, 2002) As this article is focused on already marginalized groups who are often subjugated by multiple power structures, but risk greater threat by being identifiable the decision on anonymity could not be solely mine. Interviewees were offered a choice, all selected using their own name on the basis that they

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[1] Each interviewee was individually interviewed three times – once for a separate project on squatting and animal advocacy in Northern Ireland, and twice in specific reference to this project on memorialisation and marginalised voices in punk. The second interviews took place between December 2016 – April 2017, the third between August 2017 – February 2018. All interviewees self-identified as women, some as LGBTQAI and some as disabled. In total 23 women were interviewed, all between the ages of 35 – 55. Information such as where they live in Northern Ireland and their job has been removed as the community is so small they could be easily identified. The low ethnic diversity of Northern Ireland and the reality of a lack of immigration during The Troubles (1969 – 1998) means that there are no black or minority ethnic punks within this cohort and for that reason it felt inappropriate to examine the attitude to difference in regards to 'race' in this article, but it remains an issue that needs significant attention and analysis. To do it in this article without voices and experiences from those who are racially marginalized within punk would be to repeat and reinforce the oppression they already face.

[2] The Troubles are the name that local people gave to the civil war that raged from 1969 – 1998 in Northern Ireland. This was a time of bombings, shootings, army checkpoints and people 'disappearing' at the hands of paramilitary groups. 'The Troubles' as a terms was intended to both deflate and drawn attention to the seriousness of what was occurring, in many ways it was an important coping mechanism.

[3] That is, who gets to decide who is a victim and why, what are the power relations between the (often male) researcher on Northern Ireland and those they are interviewing and presenting. Victim status is often assigned to women in NI rather than being a self-assigned descriptor. Such assignation repeats and reinforces the patriarchal role of men as dominant, powerful and protector and refuses to allow that women can, and do, hold such qualities and roles.

wanted ownership, acknowledgement, responsibility and visibility. This is compatible with the empowering effect that can be created or recaptured through participant identification by choice noted by Giordano (2007) and Grinyer (2002).

In addition to drawing on interviews with NI women, the analysis in this article will also be combined with personal experiences of the author as a disabled punk woman from NI. Autoethnography is a growing, if contentious, methodology within qualitative based research that uses "the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding." (Sparkes, 2000: 21) Autoethnography is being used in this article because it directly challenges the academic form of power (writing conventions) that silences some voices and lauds those who 'fit' (Reed-Danahay, 1997). It is also being used to enable a broader understanding of the punk experience within NI. Punk within NI is relatively small compared with the rest of the UK, and the cohort of women smaller still. I am one of those women, I attended the exhibit and so I have included my experiences within this account, they are valid in creating as broad a range of knowledge as possible. (Denzin, 2003: 137) Finally it is being used to honour the courage of my interviewees in rejecting their opportunity to be 'protected' through anonymity, they choose to be potentially vulnerable. I owe them the same risk to myself if I am to honestly consider, as I do, that punk is capable of more in regards to equity and accountability, and that taking part in research like this will help to ensure it reaches it potential capability.

Punk is supposed to be a celebration of deviance and difference. It is supposed to be oppositional, but as Russ Bestley notes "what it opposes varies across the wider culture and contexts that it operates within. As a result, it is not always inherently progressive and at times may be reactionary, orthodox or politically ambivalent." (2015: 119) A celebration of difference necessitates multiple variances and effective communication of said celebration and the ideal from which it is either drawn or aspires to. If nothing else the failure of the punk exhibit, while not directly the fault of punks, indicates the failure of punk writ large to effectively communicate outside of itself it's supposed position on difference. Of course we must acknowledge that such a communication would likely be insufficient to overcome unconscious bias in the selection and curation of the exhibit by the museum staff. However this article wants to go further and suggest that actually the deviance, difference and opposition within punk is both carefully controlled by the rigid perspectives and superficial or instrumental inclusion of marginalised groups with punk. It aims to do this by working with Sara Ahmed's thesis that the factors that make an individual different in some way can be fetishized whilst simultaneously hold that individual in a position of a perpetual stranger.

Sara Ahmed notes "bodies are gendered, sexualized and raced by how they extend into [a] space" (2006: 5) Space is not itself neutral, choices are constantly made within it that mean we have to navigate it in multiple ways – physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually and how each of those relate us back to ourselves as a self, a subject. Finding oneself in a space utilised to celebrate an important aspect of one's identity but finding that choices have been made that negate your presence or belonging makes that space very difficult to navigate and uncomfortable to remain within. In effect one is rendered a stranger or interloper within that space, and perhaps, by extension, within one's own subculture, as we can see in the reaction of Marie:

> *Yeah I really struggled with it to be honest, it actually did my head in so it did. It was only*
> *afterwards that I realised why. It was because I couldn't see myself in it at all. No women,*

not really beyond a few that look good and no-one in a wheelchair or with any kind of visible disability. It was like taking the feeling of going into a venue and realising that the only place you can go is right up the back end away from everyone else and timesing it by 10. Your heart just sinks, you know. You're in a wheelchair so you can't really be a part of the crowd, you're just on the edge. It hit me on the boat on the way home, the exhibit had done the same so it had. Those of us with bodies that don't work properly, we don't fit in their idea of punk. I cried my eyes out all the way home after that so I did. (Marie)

Punk speaks for the stranger

Sara Ahmed's fluid concept of 'the stranger' focuses on the tensions and contradictions implicit within the instrumentalization of 'stranger-ness' in the production of embodiment and community. Beginning with the concept of the alien she notes:

> The alien is not simply the one whom we have failed to identify ('unidentified flying objects'), but is the one whom we have already identified in the event of being named as alien: the alien recuperates all that is beyond the human into the singularity of a given form. The alien hence becomes a fetish. (p. 2)

She then develops the notion of 'Stranger fetishism' in an attempt to highlight how many aspects of society are contingent on a process through which the stranger becomes an abstracted, universalised figure: "Stranger fetishism is a fetishism of figures: *it invests the figure of a stranger with a life of its own insofar as it cuts 'the stranger' off from the histories of its determination.*" (p. 5 Ahmed's emphasis). That is, a fetishization of 'strangers' that serves to bolster Western agency and identity- construction at the expense of strangers, who are thereby rendered as static, lacking in agency, and as pre-existing objects (rather than subjects) of knowledge.

What this article will demonstrate is that marginalized groups within punk could be considered as fetishized strangers both within the exhibit AND even more so within punk itself. That is, they are represented or sometimes forced to experience punk in such a way as bolster white, working class, cisgendered, heteronormative, abled bodied male agency and identity. They are fetishized as an example of how punk rejected or broke barriers of social division, yet they remain the strangers in the pit. Their experiences are sublimated for a standard narrative of equity that strips them of their agency other than as something that can be fetishized and, ultimately, still conforms to the agency and identity of the dominant agents. Thus within their own subculture they are rendered as strangers, spoken for not conversed with. We can see this in texts such as "The Philosophy of Punk" by Craig O'Hara, a text much used by punkademics (Furness, 2015: 8). In his section on gender issues O'Hara writes:

> There is no denying that sexism exists within the punk community, but it is on a smaller level than in the mainstream, and more importantly, it is discouraged and condemned by many active participants. This is contrary to mainstream society where it is rarely condemned or even discussed by anyone other than feminists. Instead of dealing with the negative attitudes similar to those in the mainstream, it is more productive to discuss the views of the active majority of Punks who claim to be anti-sexist…Men's voices have often joined or even out shouted the women's in condemning sexism (1999: 103)

O'Hara is implying that the sexism (or other forms of discrimination) experienced by individuals within punk are not as important as highlighting the actions of the male punks who oppose it in some way. There appears to be no awareness of how this not only shuts down the opportunity for marginalized voices to rise to the fore, but actively seeks to drown them out in favour of a narrative that bolsters the normative male. Telling is the statement that men 'out shouted' the voices of women, this silencing is perceived as something to be celebrated rather than understood as an example of male dominance, positionality, privilege – in other words, patriarchy. It also does not correlate with the lived experiences of many which are replete with male protectionism, aggression and assumptions, women often performing on stage to shouts of "get your tits out". (Thiberts:2017; O'Brien:1999) This adds a melancholy tinge to what John Robb asserts in relation to punk when he writes:

> Everyone decided what punk was to them. There were endless arguments about what we were fighting for, what we should be wearing on our feet, what we should listen to and how we were going to change the fucking world. (2006: 3)

Melancholy because they didn't "change the fucking world", those arguments ended when the normative male recentered the focus of punk on himself and used the experience and existence of others to ensure his continual centrality. We see this in the exhibit at the British Library and its focus on the 'canon of punk'. Canon formation is a discourse of power that reinforces the values of the canonizer by creating a hierarchy formed on the principle of 'founding fathers', with other performers placed into a hermeneutical circle that ensures discrete elements fit into a complete whole. (Dougan, 2006) This will be examined now in relation to three areas – disability, LGBTQAI struggles and women.

<u>Punk and difference – disability</u>

As a punk woman with a number of invisible physical disabilities I have often struggled to figure out where I belong in a punk show, especially larger ones. I don't require the use of supportive aids to move so I don't belong in the area for wheelchairs and yet standing on the floor without supports (wall or a pillar) quickly becomes painful so I can't be in the throng of people. My feet are deformed and significantly limited in range of movement so forays into the pit have to be brief for safety and pain reasons. I want to be a part of the show, and I often feel a part of the community, but physically I am side-lined where I am often not noticed and will frequently be walked into, tripped over, pushed out of the way, or have my head used as a drinks holder. I have never explicitly been told I don't belong, but the message is there implicitly and, as Marie indicated above, is significantly amplified for those with visible disabilities.

Visible and non-visible differences caused through disability remains "one of the most foundational – and yet one of the least explored – representational tropes of the punk mileu." (Church, 2013: 28) The notion that you didn't have to be able to play an instrument perfectly (or even particularly well) nor move or look a certain way should have resulted in a punk scene that was appealing and conducive to the bodies and needs of disabled peoples. Indeed there were a number of individuals and bands that one could point to as examples of this succeeding – Ian Curtis, Helen Wallington-Lloyd, Ian Dury, John Lydon and the members of Pertti Kurikan Nimipaivat. The reality is that these individuals are the very few exceptions that proved the rule – wheelchairs were not 'marketable' and so many found punk to be as exclusive as other music scenes.

"For some disabled people, punk offered expression, empowerment, visibility, humour, bad taste, and attitude, and all in a zone of socio-cultural liberation, as much as (even, more than) it exploited disability or used it as a marketing strategy." (McKay, 2015) However, for many disabled people they found that they could not or were not allowed to transcend their disabled status and take on a 'freak' status that other punks could, especially through mimicry of disabilities such as jerky dancing similar to an epileptic fit, without any of the risk or side effects. Their mimicry gains them "subcultural capital" (Thornton 1995:158) in the forms of increased sales, marketability, seeming authenticity or notoriety. Despite the capital gained in such mimicry, the use of it does not raise awareness of, nor remove the stigma of disability, "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" remains unaltered. (Goffman, 1963:9) This is because the disabled body, especially the visibly disabled body, remains one "primarily marked by adversity and lost / unattainable social status" (Garland-Thomson1997: 113) and thus is marginalized as it makes for an uncomfortable intrusion or reminder for abled bodied punks.

The exhibit in London did not feature disabled punks beyond pictures of Ian Curtis and John Lydon, and those two men were not discussed in relation to the disabilities each had. Interviewees noted this, with Natalie commenting on how it caused her to reflect on her own able bodied assumptions.

> *I'm not disabled but I've a child who is and that's made me much more aware now everything they are forced to contend with. And hold my hands up, I am as guilty of that as the rest. It never occurred to me at the time that like Ian Curtis was actually having epileptic fits on the stage, I just thought it was weird dancing you know. Like I am really ashamed of that now. At the exhibit, I remember looking at his picture and the many they had of Rotten and thinking about the assumptions we all make and really that punk is no better than the rest in regards to disability. There was nothing in that exhibition at all to indicate that anyone was anything but perfect in terms of how their bodies worked – what message does that give people, especially young people, who might be encountering punk through that exhibit? It's not good enough.* (Natalie)

Cultural capital is being sought by the British Library in curating the exhibit on punk, alongside other factors within their remit. The lack of representation in regards to disabled punks, especially visibly disabled punks, represents the influence of social norms and biases created through structural oppression of the stigmatised.

It is evident from the display that accessibility was considered by the curators in terms of wheelchair users, but not for other disabilities. For example, the design choices for the displays made reading the boards incredibly difficult for individuals with dyslexia, dyspraxia, visual impairment or tracking difficulties. As someone with dyslexia and additional eye problems I found them physically painful to read, requiring substantial levels of concentration just to stop the letters moving. The reality of museum spaces is "that not all access issues are immediately visible or obvious [and] accessibility for everyone is rarely achieved."(Lisney et al, 2013: 355) Therefore greater inclusion in curation design of disabled people is needed at all levels to enable better awareness of just such issues. Is it possible that consideration of the role and inclusion of disabled punks within the exhibit might have led to greater awareness of the accessibility issues faced by visitors? (Poria et al, 2009: 122) In thinking through how one displays disabled bodies one might consider how others can be impeded in viewing or accessing that display.

<u>Punk and difference - LGBTQAI</u>

I can still vividly recall the first time I was made aware that an individual's sexuality could be enough to dismiss and ridicule their creative outputs. As a child I was watching a recording of Queen's Live Aid performance at Wembley Stadium when a parent walked through the room and stated "Good songs, but turn it off." When I protested, probably at length, I was told "You can't listen to them, he was gay" and the discussion was ended. I really struggled to understand the connection between the two and why either mattered, especially as I knew this parent liked and would sing bits of the songs around the house. I wasn't old enough to articulate my confusion or challenge the position being taken by that parent, but it has become a strong memory of a sense of injustice and prejudice.

There is a tangled history between punk and LGBT(QAI) [4] history and rights. A key part of punks origins was the subversion of sexual identities. The influence of gay clubs (especially in London) cannot be overstated in relation to exposure to musical styles, fashion and raising awareness (to some extent implicitly) of gay rights issues in the 70s. (Wilkinson, 2015) The development and proliferation of fanzines raised further awareness and debate about the political issues facing LGBT(QAI) individuals and communities and helped to make clear that "the personal is political." (Hanisch, 1970) During the mid 1980s queercore (initially called homocore) developed as a particular branch of punk that focuses on queer politics and lifestyles with particular tropes being, "unashamed sexual representation, confrontational politics and 'shocking' embodiments, including those related to size, ability and gender variance." (Nault, 2017: 3) The linking of AIDS and HIV with homosexuality during the latter part of the 1980s, especially amongst men, added new layers of prejudice, fear and hatred for the already marginalised LGBT(QAI) community and individuals, and queercore was an important factor in ensuring sustained community and support for its affected participants. [5]

Today punk still, generally, seems accepting of LGBT(QAI) individuals, bands and experiences. Following her transition in 2012 / 13, Laura Grace has continued to perform with the successful Against Me and the band have now released two albums, "Transgender Dysphoria Blues" (2014) and "Shape Shift with Me" (2016) whose content deal with the multiple issues Laura and other transgendered individuals have faced. Chicago based band Rise Against included the song "Make It Stop (September's Children)" in 2011 as part of their 6th album "Endgame". The song highlights homophobic bullying in high schools (a significant demographic of their fans) and movingly lists the names and ages of children who committed suicide because of such bullying, and points directly to charities aimed at helping young people deal with their sexuality and homophobic bullying.

In reality, of course, punk is a multi-faceted beast and there is still a lot of homophobia and ignorance within it, as evidenced by the sentiments espoused by bands such as, Fear, the Angry

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[4] QAI has been a recent, and indeed much needed, addition relating to Queer, Asexual and Intersex. It was not used or widely known at the emergence and for much of punk's history and particularly not during the time period that the exhibit focuses on. To denote this brackets have been used to indicate what was focused on, but to ensure that the wider identities are also seen and included as they existed at the time and experienced as many, if not more, struggles and prejudice as the LGBT community.

[5] There were numerous punk responses to HIV and AIDS outwith the queercore community, as for example the 20 year project set up by Mat Sargent (Chelsea, Sham 69 and others) called "Sex, Drugs and HIV". Sargent is interview in detail about this project by Anita Raghunath in Punk & Post-Punk Vol. 4 No. 2 & 3: 175 - 184

Saomans and the advertising image for the Meatmen's "Blood Sausage" EP.[6] (Ensminger, 2010: 53) LGBT(QAI) individuals are still forced to "come out" either in person or in song lyrics with the default assumption that they are cisgender and/or heterosexual until they perform that act of coming out and thereby offer themselves and their identity up for the consumption, judgement and potential ridicule of others. Heteronormativity dominates throughout punk, but especially within the various strands of hardcore punk, which is drawn more from the norms of the suburbs than from the earlier mixing in large cities of the first and second wave of punk. Threaded through this is, as with disability, the status and subcultural capital of 'the freak' status that can be adopted or even desired by performers that belies the real struggles of being a 'freak' when one does not have the performative power, when one has to return to a tense home situation, or daily bullying. Likewise, fans can enjoy the performance of gender bending or even calling out homophobia on the stage but still indulge in homophobic acts or violence towards LGBT(QAI) individuals.

The links with and to the LGBT(QAI) community /cause / identity and the punk community were not acknowledged or demonstrated at the exhibit in London. Individuals such as the late Pete Shelly (The Buzzcocks) who openly identified as bisexual for most of his adult life where featured in photographs, but no mention was made of his experiences of punk as a bisexual man. There was no consideration of the early connection between punk and the gay scenes, and no acknowledge of the existence of queercore. The curator Andy Linehan was open about not being connected to punk so he may have been unaware of the significance of pointing out such diversity and identities, in which case, that is a significant failing of punk in regards to making their connection to it known. Admittedly it is also a failing of the curator as cursory research would make the connection clear. The interviewees noted its absence and all but one raised it as a key issue during their second and third interviews.

> *It broke my heart, it really did walking round that exhibit. I had been so excited to see it and especially because it was something that I was sharing with my partner. She is into punk now through me, but wasn't back then so it was like showing her a part of me that is usually only verbal. Anyway it was bullshit. There was so much missing and I just kept thinking {anonyomised} says I mumbled it but I can't remember, em yeah thinking "where am I? Where are the people like me?" There was nothing about gay rights or using the clubs or anything. There was pictures of [Pete] Shelley [The Buzzcocks] and others who were gay but there was nothing mentioned about it or what they experienced. Heartbreaking.* (Julie)

> *The laws round here on gay marriage and rights are bad enough without then being erased from the history of punk as well. That takes away so much of who we are, what we struggled for and with and just says we don't matter. Fuck that and fuck them for selling out and just turning it into a bullshit sanitised window dressing of punk. (Triona)[7]*

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[6] The image features a man wearing an anti-TSOL tshirt shouting "Fucking Faggot" while he visibly and graphically slices up the genitals and anus of another male figure lying prone and outstretched in front of him. In addition to the violence against the victim, there is a coded violence in the tshirt as TSOL's Jack Gresham frequently wore dresses and make up and played a lot with sexual ambiguity and gender boundaries.

[7] Triona is referencing the marriage laws in NI which do not legally recognise or allow same sex marriage unlike the rest of the UK. Civil partnerships for same sex couples were legalised in 2005. Same sex marriage has been voted on 5 times, but each time vetoed by the Democratic Unionist Party on security and safety grounds.

Julie and Triona highlight the personal impact that can occur when the politics, activism and wider community influences are removed from exhibitions and memorialisations of subcultures such as punk. As two women profoundly impacted by the laws and attitudes of their nation towards their sexuality and gender, they are expressing how much they have to rely upon other facets of their identity – in this instance being punk – to create a sense that they are seen, exist and have a validity that heterosexual people in NI can take for granted. To ignore that in favour of an exhibit that simply celebrated the existence and visual impact of already well known bands such as the Sex Pistols, The Clash and the Ramones gave a distinctive message to these women that their lives and struggles were not worth documenting, were not really 'punk'. Although she doesn't identify as LGBTQIA, Aoife made a significant point on its erasure from the exhibit and many other memoirs.

> The thing is though, like I've heard some of them [other punk friends] talking about how it was fine and all because it was only focused on London so of course it's just going to be the big bands. All well and good for them, they are white men they can see themselves in those bands. But they are wrong, bang out of order actually 'cause here's the thing of it, they included The Ramones. A fucking New York band. So there was deliberate selection going on, a choice made over what was punk and so what isn't. Being a women, being gay they seem to think that means you're not really punk. (Aoife)

The importance of recognising oneself especially when choices of representation have been made cannot be emphasized strongly enough. The very nature of LGBTQAI and 'queerness' may have been too difficult for the British Library to contemplate allowing to disrupt their spatial arrangement of punk. However such a decision serves to highlight the social construction of 'normalness' that exists within those institutions charged with curating what matters to a society. It also has significant consequences for those erased or not included by both adding to their invisibility within their own subcultures and dearly held identities. It reinforces the performative nature of 'freak' while side-lining the very real consequences of being unable to remove such a status in everyday simply for being different, for not conforming to heteronormativity.

Punk and difference - women

"Here hold my coat, would ya" he yelled at me as he threw the coat in my direction. I assumed he was going to the toilet. I was wrong. He didn't head to the bathroom, but to the pit that was beginning to emerge in front of the stage. A few songs later he came back, smiled and said "it's great this one". I looked around and noticed a few women doing what I was, holding coats and clothing of their male counterparts and responded "aye for you, maybe" which he didn't hear. He went off again into the pit returning covered in sweat, and grinning. He pulled off his shirt and threw it at me at which point I lost my temper and yelled "I'm not a fucking coatrack", threw the clothes on the floor and stomped off, that was the end of that date. I have never forgotten the looks of disgust, shock and confusion from people around me nor the guilt that was already seeping into me by the time I got to the bottom of the stairs. The feeling that I was somehow in the wrong.

The perception that men do the dancing, women hold the coats has been in punk since its beginning. It was even addressed in songs such as "Coatrack" by Kill the Man who Questions (1999) and highlights that women are often viewed as an object for the agency of the man. (Stewart, 2017; Avery-Natale, 2016) Therefore the women who refuse, the women who enter the pit or play on the stage are the 'strangers' as they do not support the agency and identity of the male figures.

'Strangers' in that their bodies, their identity is considered transgressive, not belonging and sometimes not welcome. I am using 'stranger' as Ahmed does, meaning that which is recognisable as trespassing, not belonging. (Ahmed, 2000) Lauraine Leblanc notes:

"[P]unk is constructed and enacted as a discourse of masculinity: a scene that is male-dominated by numerical preponderance; a subculture whose norms are constructed to be 'masculinist'; and a group in which punk girls [and women] are constrained within male-defined gender expectations." (1999: 105)

Leblanc recounts how this occurs in relation to how punk women often have to navigate a path through embodying both masculine punk expectations of women (especially punk women) and qualities of femininity constructed by society to arrive at some notion of being able to perform themselves. (1999: 137) Interviewees have recounted both overt forms of sexism within their experiences of punk ranging from sexist comments and jokes they are expected to laugh at to sexual assault (Stewart, 2017b: 23 -30) and covert forms such as women being expected to take on the domestic roles in shared squats or being told "you play well for a girl" (Stewart, 2017). Often times the latter is done in a very unaware form and thus, perhaps, disguised even from the perpetrator. For example, the Rise Against song 'Make it Stop' mentioned above. A song with an incredibly important statement, yet in the accompanying video when the three bullied children make the decision not to kill themselves their eventual futures are shown, the two males futures show a successful career, friendships and relationships, the female students only focuses on her marriage to another woman. A, likely unaware, reinforcement of gender norms, expectations and roles that punk is supposed to resist and challenge.

Helen Reddington notes that most accounts of punk are metrocentric and male focused, not just memoirs but academic and journalist analysis as well. (2012: 5)

> Such histories [that] deal exclusively with women artists, they might well be regarded as irrelevant to the rock discourse and be left on the shelf. (Reddington, 2012: 9)

> Male gatekeepers are mainly interested in disseminating ideas about a particularly limited range of stereotypical female forms, especially if they are tragic. (Coon, 1982)

Both of these writers are pointing to why the exhibit curators failed to recognise the role and participation of women in shaping punk. The exhibit was created by men (for men) and while a celebration of punk it located women within stereotypical forms – tight clothing, revealing or provocative poses that cater to the male gaze and serve to highlight how 'progressive' punk was in 'allowing' women to be a part of it. This so incensed Viv Albertine that she defaced the exhibition by scribbling out the names of male only bands and writing in the names of female bands The Slits, X-Ray Spex, Siouxsie and the Banshees and in large letters the phrase "what about the women!!" Her comment was both an act of feminist protest but also a rejection of the dominant narrative of women found within the memorialisation of punk.
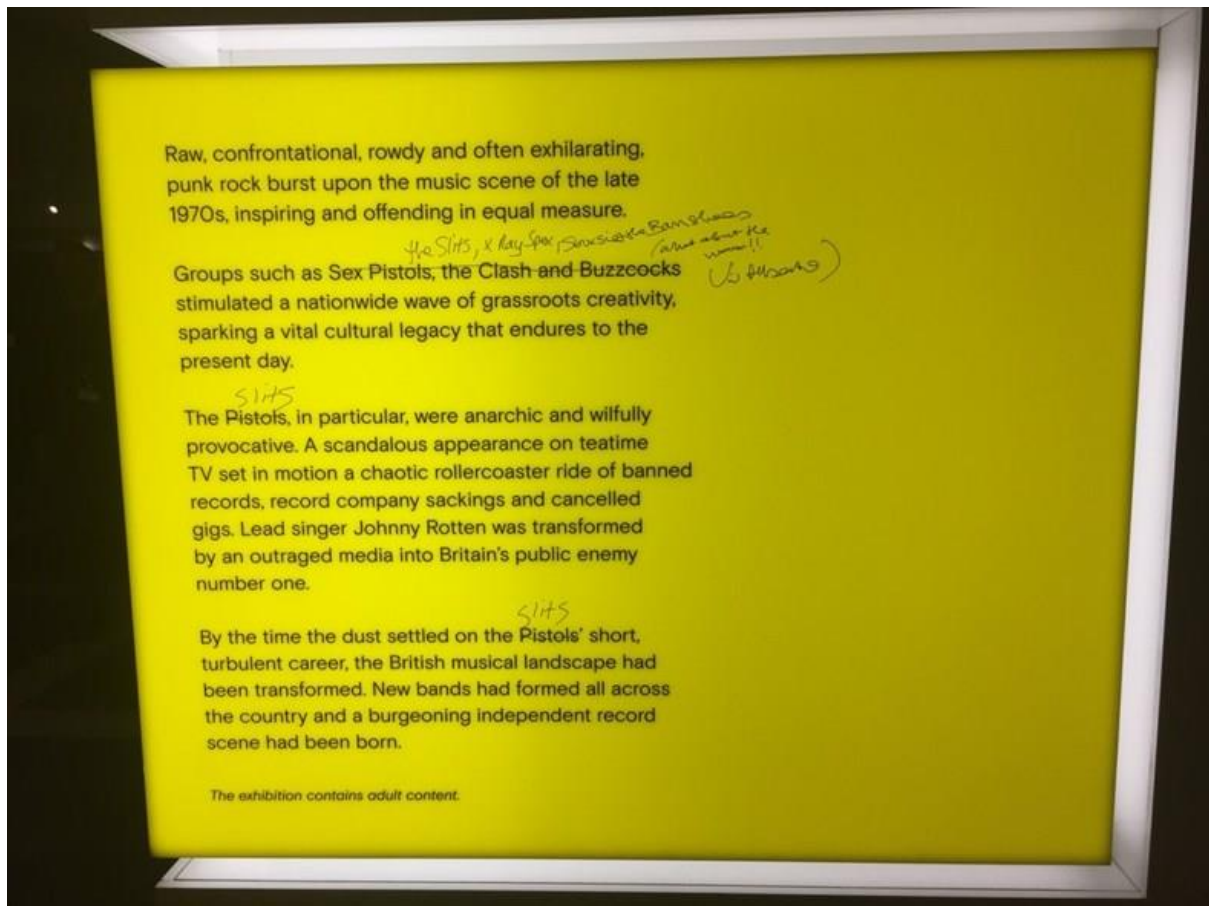
Fig 2. The sign defaced by Albertine, photo taken by author

Interviewees commented at length on the portrayal and erasure of women from the exhibition with a variety of reasons emerging from their reflections.

> *Leaving women out of the punk exhibits shows they weren't being made for us, it wasn't a celebration of our subculture. Just chancing their arm, make, making a bit of money. Shows how little progress we have made for women and our place in society you know.* (Sarah)

> *They got the look, they didn't get the message at all. They fucked that up entirely. You can't celebrate a subculture if you don't understand it just like you can't really represent another culture or country.* (Niamh)

> *You're either Debbie or Nancy[8] - sex siren or whore - that is all we are allowed to be. Punk gets held up as this great equalizer and in some regards it really was, is, but there are elements within it that cannot get rid of their misogyny cause they don't even realise they have it. They think cause they're punk they're not sexist. I've said that to you before, but thinking about this exhibition more and with greater time after seeing it, like, yeah um, it really reinforces that unhelpful thinking in a way. You know what I mean? Like women weren't being celebrated for their own achievements, they were just in the cases to show*

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[8] Emma is referring to Debbie Harry, from the band Blondie and Nancy Spungen, the girlfriend of Sid Vicious the bassist of the Sex Pistols. Debbie was repeatedly referred to in the music press as a 'sex siren' or similar while Nancy was frequently denigrated as a whore for her behaviours and for making a living as a prostitute.

> *how 'progressive' the men supposedly were, but they still had to conform to certain ideals of I dunno women as available or desirable or a symbol, you know. I think that exhibit did more damage than it did good now that I think about it.* (Emma)

The interviewees are noting a disconnect between how they understood their experiences and struggles as women within punk and how it is being served for consumption and consideration in the exhibit and indeed in other memorializations.[9] They felt excluded and cheated but proffered different reasons as to why it had happened – financial, ignorance, history and misogyny. Punk is often lauded for the roles women played within it, yet those roles serve more often than not to bolster the male and reinforce the masculine authenticity of the subculture and so appear in forms that reduce women to objects, supporting characters or stereotypes. (Leblanc, 1999)

The issue is that in such exhibits there is a level of translation required – the curators cannot assume that the viewer is punk or knows it in detail. However all translation is a matter of selection and choice, and what the interviewees are beginning to draw out in their reflections on the exhibit is that those choices are often made through lenses that draw upon centuries of social construction shaped by colonialism, patriarchy, and norms created through modernity that assume that "whilst thought and reason are identified with the masculine and western subject; emotions and bodies are associated with femininity and racial others." (Ahmed, 2014: 170) It is important to state that these are not conscious factors in making the translation choices, but that in no way negates the responsibility the translator / curator has in making themselves aware of them and the consequences they carry for those already marginalized. There is a responsibility in such a curation role to consider how the representations "reopen prior histories of encounter." (Ahmed, 2000: 8) and to ensure that groups are conversed with not spoken for. Equally, though there is a responsibility on punk to ensure that their memorial in the forms of memoirs, documentaries, interviews and fanzines do not reinforce the problematic norms of dominance and marginalization.

Conclusion - No more heroes anymore

The supposed celebration of punk's 40th anniversary was in many ways the ultimate acknowledgement of the power of corporate co-option and capital control, it really demonstrated the capacity and willingness for "turning rebellion into money." (The Clash, 1978) More so, it reveals the capacity to do so at the expense of those already marginalized within punk. Their stories and experiences are only included in both a peripheral role and at the benevolence of the normative male thus confirming Ien Ang's assertion that "othering can take place by acts of *inclusion*." (Ang, 1996: 37) That is, the means by which those traditionally understood as 'other' (or marginalized) are included in the narrative of a culture or exhibit, but in such a way that the effect is to transform them into fetishized strangers. They are not included on their own terms, or through their experiences but rather as a means of demonstrating the benevolence (or social awareness) of the already dominant.

The sections on disability, LGBTQAI and women experiences within punk and how they have been represented at the British Library exhibition indicate that similar is happening with them. Their

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[9] See for example, Jon Savage's England's Dreaming in which female punk bands based in London are not included; Marcus Griel's Lipstick Traces in which Viviane Westwood is not mentioned compared to Malcolm Maclaren's 26 mentions.

experiences and anartives are being included, but in a way that still renders them as other, it fetishizes their 'strangeness' as not representative of the dominant group but fails to acknowledge the subcultural and cultural capital gained by that dominant group for including them. Similarly it fails to recognise how their experiences and position can, and is, used by the dominant group to gain further capital through mimicry as a 'freak' whilst not having to deal with the very real consequences of such a status outwith the performative aspects of punk. The marginalized within punk remains marginalized, a stranger spoken for and over, not welcomed as they are.

The choices made by the curators of the punk exhibit in London reveal the implicit troubling norms that surround the experiences of being marginalized. They reveal the deception that runs through the punk community about its own liberal attitudes and understanding of marginalized 'others' and how those attitudes can be concealed from the very people who perpetuate them. The interviewees for this article, and myself, don't need or want to be 'saved' or included by virtue of a perpetuation of a saviour or liberal narrative. We can, and do, do things for ourselves, we are punk and have our own experiences to tell. We don't need any more heroes (to slightly bastardise the lyrics by The Stranglers) but rather spaces conducive to the shapes and orientations our lives take. A shared space, that we have already earned, not one given to us (and thus just as easily taken away) otherwise punk does not move away from the social constructions it was supposedly challenging, it merely becomes an echo chamber of virtue signalling. (Irons, 2001)

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