

Russ Bestley

Editor of
Punk & Post-Punk

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Russ Bestley is a reader in graphic design and subcultures at the London College of Communication, editor of the journal *Punk & Post-Punk*, series editor and art director for the Global Punk book series and a founder member of both the Punk Scholars Network and Subcultures Interest Group.

What first sparked your interest in punk as a subject of study?

Well, I first encountered punk as a teenager back in 1976 and became a keen punk fan and follower from then onwards, though I never considered it a 'subject of study' and would have been pretty shocked at the suggestion. I went to art college as a mature student at the end of the 1980s and it was there that I encountered a small number of books that touched on the idea of punk as a subject – Hebdige, a few contemporary art histories etc. In short, I was closely involved in punk for around twenty years before I became involved in 'academia'. I guess my interest was sparked by the disconnect I felt between most of these 'framings' of punk history and my own lived experience.

How has punk scholarship changed over time?

It has evolved into a dedicated field of study, with its own foundational library and a historical and critical context that can be extended and built upon by researchers. Punk studies, and what might more broadly be called punk scholarship, has expanded hugely over the past 25 years and particularly the last 15 years – I'm proud to say that *Punk & Post-Punk* has been at the front and centre of that development.

What topics feel most important in punk research right now?

Punk histories are always important – and they are a particular personal passion of mine, since my interest lies largely in archival research and expanding our knowledge and understanding of punk's myriad historical voicings, impacts and legacy around the world. But we are also seeing a broadening of the canon toward hidden or emerging 'punk' identities and 'punk' approaches to research methodologies, pedagogies and philosophies that it appears are gaining traction among parts of the research community.

How does academia engage with punk's anti-establishment roots?

It varies. I think many in 'academia' like the frisson of danger associated with an anti-establishment stereotype, though punk always was broad, expansive and contradictory – its anti-establishment sentiments are sometimes a bit of a rhetorical cliché. I do think the idea of criticality, or at least a kind of measured cynicism and a sceptical attitude toward all forms of convention, sits at the heart of 'punk' for many who have been involved for a long time. That attitude isn't actually entirely detached from traditional notions of academic objectivity and critical positioning.

What kinds of submissions would you like to see more of?

I'd like to see some more global punk histories, some more archival research and work that reveals previously uncharted or hidden ground.

How global is punk scholarship today?

In short, very... hence the success of the Global Punk book series and the international reach and scope of *Punk & Post-Punk*. There's a degree of overlap in global punk timelines, of course, but also a very broad range of cultural and political positions and disparate attitudes toward what are by their nature very varied parent cultures.

What are common misconceptions about punk?

That it is a fixed set of stylistic conventions (fashion, dress, visual or musical aesthetics, attitudes or political/ideological values) that can simply be adopted or replicated to create a 'punk identity'.

How does visual culture connect to punk studies?

Very closely, as punk has had a strong visual element right from the outset. Obviously, I have a keen personal interest in punk graphics – or, more broadly, in punk visual aesthetics and punk art and design – and punk visual culture clearly occupies an important position in the art (and design) historical canon.

What do you see for the future of punk and post-punk research?

It's hard to say. Given the current media circus around the 'fiftieth anniversary of punk' and the ageing demographic of those of us lucky enough to have witnessed that initial cultural moment firsthand, I guess research in the future will split between archival historical research that sits beyond the frame of lived experience and ongoing research into punk's myriad extensions into global cultural arenas well beyond a small number of narrowly defined times and places, where 'punk' still exerts agency, relevance and value to younger generations of scholars.

