Bachelor Thesis

Punk: History, main features and subculture

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Acknowledgements

Declaration

I declare that I wrote the bachelor thesis, *Punk: History, main features and subculture*, on my own under the guidance of the supervisor, using the cited sources and literature. I further declare that this thesis has not been used to obtain different or the same title.

Prague, April 18, 2012   ……………...

signature

Abstract

The bachelor thesis deals with music history of punk and the main participants of the first punk generation, especially with the band the Sex Pistols, it provides comparison of the contemporary and the former punk followers, it creates the overview of the main features and activities related to punk, it examines definitions of the word 'punk' and describes how members of punk subculture act. The thesis is also concerned with connection of punk and political opinions, which is crucial for this music genre. The beliefs of the literary authors are contrasted with experience of the author of the thesis. The content of the thesis is comprehensive; it covers the most essential attributes of the punk movement.

Key words: punk, the Sex Pistols, band, music, fan, subculture

Shrnutí

Bakalářská práce pojednává o hudební historii punku a o hlavních představitelích první punkové generace, zejména o kapele the Sex Pistols, poskytuje srovnání současných a původních punkových stoupenců, vytváří přehled hlavních znaků a činností spojených s punkem, zkoumá definice slova 'punk' a popisuje, jak členové punkové subkultury jednají. Práce se zaměřuje také na propojení punku a politických názorů, což je v tomto hudebním žánru stěžejní. Názory autorů literatury jsou porovnávány se zkušenostmi autorky práce. Obsah práce je komplexní, zahrnuje ty nejpodstatnější rysy punkového hnutí.

Klíčová slova: punk, the Sex Pistols, kapela, hudba, fanoušek, subkultura

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1. Introduction

Punk is a popular music genre which originated in the United Kingdom and the United States in the 1970s. Since its inception, punk has spread out over the world and it still interests many minds of teenagers. I have chosen this topic because it influenced my life as well which means that I can make use of my own experience and also because punk attracts mainly young people who are eager to live under its unwritten rules.

The bachelor thesis will examine and give a definition of punk because in spite of the amount of punks, many of them tend to say or think that they are the real punks, but in fact they are not. It will clarify who were the main participants that are responsible for the birth of punk and which main events led to the extension of punk. It will examine the main features and activities associated with punk and describe what impact punk has on youngsters.

Scientific methods used in the thesis are a theoretical research based on the literature, an empirical research based on experience of the author and an analysis of the texts and interviews and a qualitative research based on the unstructured participant observation.

The first hypothesis which supports the thesis is that punk is a means of growing up, creating personality and demonstrating opinions. The second hypothesis is that punk induces the young to think about politics of their country and encourages them to make an effort to face it if they do not agree with it. The main and last hypothesis is that punk enriched music by adding opinions of social and political issues and due to this, young people have started dividing themselves according to music which they listen to rather than according to their gender, class, race, religion, etc. and this lasts up to now.

Expected results of the thesis are that the hypotheses will be confirmed and that a new definition of punk will be produced.

2. Theoretical part

2.1. What is punk?

As it was mentioned before, many people are only acting as real punk rockers. But what is punk in fact? Before punk music emerged, the word 'punk' had already existed. It was used rather in American English and according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, it stands for "a young man or boy who behaves in a rude or

violent way" (1232). It is not a coincidence that punk music is named after this definition. As a matter of fact, punks very often behave rudely; however, this is not a basic rule. Many of them make noise, roar with laughter, drink or lie around on public places but only a few of them are truly violent. It is the same as in every social group – there is always possibility to found somebody who is a troublemaker.

Another definition which gets closer to the meaning of punk is taken from *The Free Dictionary* and it says that punk in slang means: "A young person, especially a member of a rebellious counterculture group". This is completely true. Punks are strictly young people who rebel primarily against politics and traditional conservative culture. This desire to rebel frequently disappears with adulthood and therefore a fifty-year-old punk is not a usual phenomenon.

A website of *The Free Dictionary* includes also a very offensive definition, which says that punk is: "an inferior, rotten, or worthless person or thing". This definition is suitable for the people who condemn punk and look at the adherents of punk with contempt. If there in the 1970s the snobbish people rejecting punk had not lived, punk probably would not have got such a name. Nevertheless, punks are rather fond of indignation they arouse because they are delighted to provoke a straight-laced part of the society. John Lydon, the singer of the former punk rock band, the Sex Pistols, used as a pseudonym name "Johnny Rotten" to show irony of this exaggerated bigotry towards punk.

In the 1960s and 1970s, popular music was undergoing huge changes. On the one hand, there were the "decent" bands like the Beatles, ABBA, or Queen, "which were internationally successful at the time" (Griffiths 557). On the other hand, some rock bands separated themselves from mainstream, which they considered to be a populist affair, and began to play harsher, harder and more impudent music. These bands were a precondition for the birth of punk because in connection with such a band, music journalists started to use the word "punk" in order to criticise it for its sound: "The word "punk" first made an appearance in music journalism in a 1970 essay, "The Punk Muse: The True Story of Protopathic Spiff Including the Lowdown on the Trouble-Making Five-Percent of America's Youth" by Nick Tosches in *Fusion*" (Van Dorston). Lately, with arrival of the first punk rock bands, the word "punk" became a label for the whole music genre, lifestyle, subculture, fashion and art.

2.2. Punk is...

Definitely, punk means the provocative, the rebellious, to be outside of mainstream culture, but more importantly it means something original. Kurt Cobain once said: "Punk is musical freedom. It's saying, doing and playing what you want. In Webster's terms, 'nirvana' means freedom from pain, suffering and the external world, and that's pretty close to my definition of Punk Rock." (Hiebert) and he was absolutely right. Punk musicians wanted to persuade their fans to make their own personality and not to copy them, they tried to show their admirers that their individuality should not be bounded by restricted rules: "Punk became a circus didn't it? Everybody got it wrong. The message was supposed to be: Don't follow us, do what you want!" (Hiebert) demanded John Lydon. He was exaggerating it a little by the word "everybody", but there is no doubt that the majority of young punk fans merely bought the same clothes and acted as if they were the real Sex Pistols.

So, in this sense a new definition of punk can be represented by the motto: 'If you love punk, be original because imagination has no limits!'

2.3. History of the birth of punk

2.3.1. The beginning

As it was mentioned before, the 1970s personified the shift in music. During the decade, music bands were building up their profile and they gradually divided themselves into two sides. Their repertoire became full either of melodic rhythm with lyrics, mainly about love, sung in a soft voice or of hard rock riffs with rather explicit politically incorrect lyrics screamed by front men who typically appeared as if they were not sane. It appears that the most important band that can be seen as a connection piece between these hard rock and punk bands is Iggy Pop and The Stooges. This American band was not very successful at the beginning, however, many punk rock bands were influenced by their music and – probably as a consequence of referring to The Stooges – the band lately became extremely popular and nowadays they still keep performing concerts. The influence was enormous, rock journalist, Nick Kent, provides a commentary for it: "For punk purists, The Stooges were the first and the best because their music was as deep, dark and brutally honest as the classic blues masters. All the bands that followed – from The Ramones to The Damned – revered and ransacked The

Stooges' albums" (14). Therefore, Iggy Pop got the nickname he deserved: The "Godfather of Punk" (Vouras).

The 1970s really meant a boom of punk bands. At that time, bands like the Ramones, The Clash, the Sex Pistols, Siouxsie and the Banshees, the Buzzcocks, etc. came into existence. All these bands were creating new genre together and all of them were doing it with great enthusiasm, but the most influential musical formations were the Ramones in the United States and the Sex Pistols in the United Kingdom – without them, punk would not be ever so unique and appealing.

2.3.2. The Ramones

The Ramones' debut album called simply 'Ramones' was recorded in very short time: "They entered Plaza Sound Studios on 2 February 1976 intending to record their set in chronological order, and were done 17 days later" (Edmonds 54). 'Ramones' seems to be the first punk rock album ever and nowadays it should be in possession of every proper punk fan. Nevertheless, the album contains the lyrics dealing with drug issues, prostitution and the Nazi imagery, which was shocking for the American society: "Today, it's easy to see the album as a world-changing debut. On its release on 23 April 1976, however, the LP was met with overwhelming hostility in America" (Edmonds 54). Appreciation did not come until the 21st century began when Jeffry Hyman aka Joey Ramone, the front man of the band, was already dead: "in 2002, the band were inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, they had been retired for six years" (Edmonds 57). When the Ramones were touring, they were popular rather in the UK because that was the place where teenagers were going crazy about punk.

2.3.3. Malcolm McLaren

Unless Malcolm McLaren had been born, the Sex Pistols would have never been so much adored and detested at the same time. It was he who was pulling the strings. He was born in London and he left his home as a teenager to study art. Unfortunately, he was not a successful student: "He attended more than half a dozen art schools. At none of them did things go smoothly. He was expelled from Chiswick Polytechnic, and the Croydon College of Art tried to have him transferred to a mental institution" (Grimes). After that, he met his future girlfriend Vivienne Westwood, today's famous fashion designer, and they "took over a store on King's Road in Chelsea called Let It Rock and began selling hipster Teddy boy fashions" (Grimes). These clothes can be described as

an excessive Elvis Presley style. When McLaren started to be bored by this style, he renamed the shop with the title "Too Fast to Live, Too Young to Die" (Grimes) and began to sell "motorcycle clothing" (Overbury 208, translation by A.Š.). Once, the boutique was visited by the rock band New York Dolls and McLaren, still trying to break through in art, "followed the group to the United States and became its manager. He dressed the band members in red clothing based on the Soviet flag, placed politically provocative slogans onstage and presided over their swift demise" (Grimes). When he came back to the United Kingdom, he renamed his store again. Now, it was called "SEX" and it specialised in provocative fetish clothing because "fetishism was hot" (Overbury 209, translation by A.Š.). McLaren had already worked with an English band called the Swankers, but he had been unable to find a proper singer. A member from the Swankers once brought John Lydon along to McLaren's shop to persuade McLaren that Lydon best fits to the band. Steve Overbury describes the meeting in this way: "Lydon came in his T-shirt Pink Floyd with scrawled "I hate" above the band's name. Instead of microphone, he grabbed an old shower head. Then somebody switched on the jukebox and played "I'm Eighteen" by Alice Cooper. John began to jump, shout and break stuff" (213, translation by A.Š.). McLaren was fascinated.

2.3.4. Johnny Rotten

John Lydon aka Johnny Rotten has been a very specific type of teenager. He was born in London in a family of Irish immigrants, which was not an advantage. His "childhood was scarred by poverty, illness and brutally strict schooling" (Doyle 19) which does not bode well. The English Protestant children discriminated him because he was studying a Catholic primary school. When he was seven, "he was diagnosed with meningitis" (Doyle 20) and due to this, he "was hallucinating" (Doyle 20) and "slipping in and out of consciousness. Eventually he fell into a coma lasting six months. When he awoke, much of his memory has been erased." (Doyle 20) Since that, he has been suffering from the aftermath, he had to learn how to read again and "the disease left him with a permanent hunch" (Doyle 20) and "impaired eyesight that gave him a manic stare" (Doyle 20). Due to all the sorrows, he has been full of hatred against anybody and anything since he was young but his anger was being suffocated in him and has not been released until he became a singer of the Sex Pistols. Having joined the band, John Lydon turned from a child without opportunities into "Johnny Rotten, punk icon and Public Enemy Number 1" (Doyle 23).

2.3.5. 100 Club Punk Festival

Music event, which caused that punk moved from the underground and became famous, was the punk festival held in London's 100 Club in Oxford Street on 21 and 22 September 1976. The concerts were performed by "all the principal early British punk bands, with most everyone else who mattered in the audience" (Smitham). Among the bands, there were the Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Damned, Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Vibrators etc. and among the audience, there were eminent managers and music journalists, but mainly punk devotees who were impressed by vigorous music. Yet, as it was mentioned before, there is always a troublemaker among the crowd: "Unfortunately the venue stopped punk performances immediately after a glass throwing incident on the second night" (Smitham). The boy, who threw the glass, was the Sex Pistols' future bass guitar player – Simon John Ritchie called Sid Vicious – who later became very famous and still he is despite he was an offensive, foul-mouthed, outlandish and drug addicted person.

2.3.6. Sid & Nancy

The last important people in punk history appear to be Sid Vicious and his girlfriend, Nancy Spungen. Sid was a friend of Johnny Rotten and since the first Sex Pistols' song was made he was also their fan. He travelled with the band around clubs and "Encouraged to run wild, constantly drunk, he became the figurehead of the new movement, inventing the pogo dance and coming out with pithy, nihilistic statements that defined the new age" (Savage). In 1977, Sid became a member of the Sex Pistols and afterwards he met Nancy. "They genuinely loved each other, but Nancy had a disastrous effect on Sid" (Savage). She introduced him a drug called heroin and they started committing together their self-destruction drive. Both died young and Nancy's death has been covered in mystery till now. Dai Griffiths writes that their life had an "ultimate Romeo and Juliet script" (557). In October 1978, Nancy was murdered and after several weeks later, Sid committed suicide by heroin overdose. There is not much evidence of the crime; the police have never resolved who actually was the killer. On the one hand: "there are plenty who believe that the belligerent punk rocker (i.e. Sid, note by A.Š.) from the Sex Pistols was responsible for the stab wound that led to Spungen bleeding to death" (Brown, M.), on the other hand, there are many different theories which say that the murderer was a drug dealer or a drug addicted "friend" or it

is also possible that Nancy cut herself. It is hard to discover the truth, because the couple lived permanently among community of drug users and these people are not very reliable. Sid had never confessed to the murder, however, it is widely believed that "Vicious, even if he did not know what he was doing, killed Spungen" (Brown, M.). Nowadays, this heartbreaking love story still makes people sad.

3. Main body

3.1. Features and activities of punk

As a matter of fact, punk not only does include music, it is associated with the whole lifestyle and subculture. Punk rejects all of the trends (in relation to the current age), therefore punk had to come up with its own particularities and ideology. Nonetheless, opinions of the individual punks can differ because punk acknowledges originality as the highest value, whereas several punk attributes keep persisting and could be labelled as the punk main features and activities.

3.1.1. Features of punk rock music

Punk rock is energetic and attention-getting music although it is very easy to play. 1970s' punk music developed from rock and rock'n'roll to "a construction which took a basic version of the rock sound, mediated through heavy metal" (Griffiths 559), however, today's punk music is divided into many subgenres which either differ a great deal from the first punk sound or they maintain the original style.

Generally, a genuine punk music is based on three chords only and most punk musicians do not even know the music stave or they began to learn how to play an instrument after they had joined a band. *Sideburns*, the 1970s' punk fanzine, enriched its first issue with three pictures of A, E, G chords and the sentence: "This is a chord, this is another, this is a third, now form a band" (Moon et al.) which signifies that everyone can do it.

The bands, such as Green Day and The Offspring, which appeared in the late 1980s, play a different type of punk which can be called pop punk or incorrectly neo-punk. This subgenre is also based on simplicity but a real punk fan would never listen to such a band because it does not follow punk ideas – pop punk is popular and widespread, mainstream and commercial – so, in this sense it cannot be considered to be

punk at all. Yet, the overwhelming majority of people believe that these pop punk bands are number one in punk.

3.1.1.1.   Why is neo-punk being misinterpreted?

Nowadays, neo-punk is the term used equally to pop punk, but the former meaning was different: "When on the British Isles the first wave of punk faded away, presented by the bands such as the Buzzcocks, The Damned and the Sex Pistols, new punk generation came. It was more radical and aggressive and it had not much in common with the previous one. It was simply new punk. The bands like The Exploited, G.B.H. and UK Subs therefore began to be referred to as neo-punk" (Bláha, translation by A.Š.). That is all. Lately, the term disappeared simply because it lost sense. Today, this more aggressive punk is called hardcore punk which is absolutely right categorization. In the 1980s and 1990s, music journalists probably did not know how to call an emerging kind of punk (i.e. today's pop punk) so they used the term neo-punk and unfortunately, it expanded through the world due to TV and journalists who wrote about music they did not listen to. Thus, the term neo-punk should not be used to classify a genre, it is better to use pop punk even if it is an oxymoron.

3.1.1.2.   Types of punk rock

Punk rock can be categorized in several different subgenres, here is the scale of some of them, it begins with the softest genre and ends with the hardest, characterization of the subgenre and the examples of the bands playing the subgenre are written in brackets: pop punk/skate punk/mall punk (something between pop and rock with punk lyrics, it can be broadcasted by TV or radio, punks usually do not listen to it, e.g. Green Day, The Offspring, Blink-182, Simple Plan, Avril Lavigne), ska punk (something between ska and punk rock, but there are different instruments such as saxophone, trumpet and trombone, plus usual punk rock instruments such as electric guitar, bass guitar and drums, e.g. Ska-P, Totální nasazení), Celtic punk (punk rock which includes Irish or Scottish folk lyrics and melodies and is played not only with usual punk rock instruments, but also with instruments such as bagpipes, fiddle, banjo and whistle, e.g. Dropkick Murphys, Pipes and Pints), "pure" punk rock (the bands of the first punk wave, music is based on rock'n'roll, e.g. the Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Ramones), electro-punk/synth-punk/techno-punk (something like techno music with punk scream, it uses sound synthesizers, e.g. The Screamers, Nervous Gender, The

Prodigy), hardcore punk (faster, harder and more aggressive punk rock, it gave rise to thrash metal, e.g. The Exploited, Dead Kennedys, Black Flag, Chaos UK, G.B.H.), crust punk (something between hardcore punk and extreme metal, e.g. Amebix, Dystopia, Doom).

3.1.2. DIY

DIY is the acronym for 'Do it yourself' and it is a phenomenon connected to punk. History of the phenomenon is probably as old as humankind itself, because our ancestors had to know how to make instruments or useful things needed in household, however, after the industrial revolution, most people forgot it simply because they could buy the needed things, which was easier, faster and sometimes also cheaper. But for the ordinary people, who had not so much money to buy every month something new, conditions were hard therefore after the WWII, various manuals how to improve the living appeared and the term 'DIY' started to be used in connection with them.

In the 1970s, western countries were not very prospering mainly because of two oil crisis which happened in the decade. It was a period of high inflation and unemployment and for the United Kingdom; it meant the end of welfare: "By 1973 the long period of economic prosperity was coming to an end. By the spring of 1975 unemployment had climbed to 1 million. It was over 5% of the workforce" (Lambert). For a young working-class punk teenager, it was a time of no opportunities to buy new clothes in McLaren's boutique, so they had to 'do it themselves'. Deborah Harry, although she is American, was not much wealthier too when she was interested in punk: "Nobody had any money, so the look was all about creating a personal style" (8). Besides clothing, punks were creating underground music magazines called fanzines which were made by fans for fans.

3.1.2.1. Fashion

Punk fashion is very specific because it is rather anti-fashion. It was hugely influenced by Vivienne Westwood and the shop SEX, in which she and McLaren sold mainly her artistic merchandise, and also by Johnny Rotten, who by destroying his own clothes created indispensable punk accessories.

Johnny Rotten made from a safety pin punk accessory number one, he: "began slashing cheap suits with a razor blade and piercing them back together with safety pins" (Doyle 23). Since that, every punk, who has been once born, wears at least one

safety pin somewhere on the clothes. His numerous walks through the London's King's Road resembled small fashion revolution: "he (i.e. Rotten, note by A.Š.) and his mates would parade up and down the street in their disassembled suits and skewed hairdos "just to annoy people", all too aware that they stuck out among the soul boys with their pleated trousers" (Doyle 23). When he came to SEX, he was astonished: "I loved a rubber T-shirt. I thought it was the most repulsive thing I'd ever seen" (Doyle 23).

As it was mantioned before, McLaren's boutique had been renamed for several times and with new names came also new clothes, but the aim of the shop remained always the same – make original artistic clothing for the angry youngsters. After SEX, the store changed name to Seditionaries and after that it has changed to World's End and the boutique still exists with this last name, even on the same place on the King's Road Street. Among the most famous punk clothes designed by Westwood belong e.g.: chequered bondage trousers, T-shirts or shirts depicting encircled anarchy 'A' or swastikas, spiked dog collars and mohair jumpers. These clothes were rather expensive in the 1970s, however, today complete imitations of bondage trousers are sold almost everywhere, "although neither Westwood nor McLaren has ever shown the slightest inclination in claiming copyright infringement on what is now a worldwide multi-million pound trade in their astounding designs" (Gorman 87), this means that they were really punk Queen and King. These imitations are even more expensive than the originals of the 1970s, which means that punks rather cannot afford them. Therefore punks still make use of DIY technique and they e.g. tie-dye their old clothing or some of them even get to know how to sew.

Punks wear a special type of shoes as well; however, at the beginning of the punk era, the type of boots was not so strictly determined. In the 1970s, punks were usually the working-class people therefore they wore usually the work shoes or a kind of the trainers. Already at that time, the *Converse* trainers were and still are popular among punks. In the past, the *Converse* shoes were a cheap alternative for the ordinary people, whereas nowadays, they are more expensive and more mainstream as well. Thus, punks rather buy a cheaper imitation of *Converse*. On the contrary, there exists a type of punk shoes which nearly every punk has in spite of the high price. The boots can be labelled as combat or military boots and among them, the most favoured type is a pair of leather combat boots with steel toe covering.

As far as the contemporary punk fashion is concerned, a typical punk wears a leather jacket covered with metal spikes, a T-shirt depicting a band, a pair of chequered

trousers with three-quarter legs and a pair of military boots. The accessories such as patches depicting the favourite bands, various badges, pyramid belts, spiked wrist bands, spiked collars, safety pins and piercings should not miss. A typical punk girl often wears a chequered flared miniskirt and a pair of netted stockings instead of a pair of trousers.

3.1.2.2.   Fanzines

The term 'fanzine' was firstly used for magazines concerned with science fiction literature but with punk they "experienced a big boom" (Vedral and Vyhnálek 49, translation by A.Š.). "One of the first fanzines was directly named *Punk* and its first issue was released in January 1976, New York" (Vedral and Vyhnálek 49, translation by A.Š.). Fanzines were an alternative to more expensive mainstream magazines and usually cost no more than one Pound or one Dollar. They were generally related to a local region where they were being written. Among punks, fanzines were preferred to the official press because they were cheaper and because they were being compiled by young people who listened to punk and knew the vicinity and what punk teenagers wanted to read: "The most well-known British fanzine was named *Sniffin' Glue* and was in its time more influential than great musical journals" (Vedral and Vyhnálek 49, translation by A.Š.). If a fan wanted to make a fanzine, he or she would have to manage to have access to two necessary objects − a printer and a photocopier. Then, it was needed also to have talent for writing and graphic design. Many fanzines were in fact collages created from the newspaper cuttings and simple pictures and articles made by fans. Some fanzines did not use the prefix 'fan' because they were more concerned with politics and according to them, the prefix "refers to pop culture and dull cheering" (Vedral and Vyhnálek 49, translation by A.Š.), so they preferred to use the term 'punkzine'. Nowadays, most new fanzines are accessible from the internet, so they have lost their paper form and turned into e-zines.

3.1.3. Pogo

Pogo is a punk dance which can be described in the same way as punk fashion. As a matter of fact, pogo is rather an anti-dance than a real dance. It is claimed that pogo was invented by the former Sex Pistols member, "Sid Vicious himself" (Vedral and Vyhnálek 49, translation by A.Š.). Nevertheless, this information is probably not absolutely correct, because punk rock (or rock or metal, simply any music during which

pogo is danced) is perfect for that dance due to its energy and aggression, so it is possible that the idea of an anti-dance occurred to more than one person simultaneously. Pogo is danced during concerts or festivals in mosh pits, which are the areas near the front of the stage, thus pogo is sometimes also called 'moshing'. The rules of the dance are: hitting oneself against the other dancers and if anyone falls on the ground, people around put the dancer upright. So this means that pogo is not based on violence which somebody unfamiliar with this fact could expect. These unwritten rules are indeed valid; the author of the thesis has experienced the fall and immediate picking up countlessly. It is also true that it is almost impossible to get injured during the pogo dancing, although it appears that harm is the only pleasure you will take in pogo. It is not, the author of the thesis has suffered only from bruises several times and has never witnessed any kind of injury including blood or breaking bones etc. It may seem that it is possible to dance pogo entirely for boys and in fact, it is danced rather by them: "The carnivalesque qualities endorsed through punk aesthetic and music are decidedly masculine in nature" (Hickman), however, when girls are involved, boys pay attention to them and pogo is considerably less furious. While Hannah Hickman has a different opinion: "Arenas of punk like the thrash pit and pogo dancing included women, however many felt threatened or unwelcome in such male dominated spheres" (Hickman), the author of the thesis has even experienced to be the only one girl among boys in pogo for a couple of times and she cannot claim they were not careful.

3.1.4. Punk hairstyles

At the beginning of the defining of punk subculture, hairstyle was not as distinctive as it is nowadays. Punk rockers of the first generation, including the Sex Pistols or The Ramones, wore mostly ruffled or spiked short hair or simply long hair. Most people who wore long hair were not only influenced by punk but also by heavy metal or hippie movement.

With the second punk generation a mohawk (or British: mohican) haircut emerged. The haircut is formed as a stripe of hair which usually stands erect in the centre of the head and the areas around it are completely shaved. The hair is often dyed in unnatural colours, such as green, yellow, blue, purple, pink or red. The singer of the band The Exploited, Walter "Wattie" Buchan, and also the band's mohawk skull logo made the mohawk famous.

The hairstyle is definitely inspired by the Indians, however, the mohawks were not actually worn by the Mohawks but by the Pawnees because they used "the peculiar manner of dressing the scalp-lock, by which the hair was stiffened with paint and fat, and made to stand erect and curved like a horn", which is written in *Handbook of American Indians: North of Mexico*.

The mohawk, however, cannot be easily made only by use of a styling mousse or a hair gel as it is written in the *Filter* magazine under the heading "*Guaranteed maintenance tips*", which is paradoxical: "Besides strong hair gels and sprays, there can be used": "polishing agent, toothpaste, glue, egg white, corn flour, soap, beer" (Vedral and Vyhnálek 50, translation by A.Š.) – it is clear, that the editors do not know what they write about. Why should rational beings put on their hair a polishing agent or a tube of glue? The editors can be defended only by the circumstance, that they use the word "allegedly" (Vedral and Vyhnálek 50, translation by A.Š.) before the list. There is also written, that "Preparation of a good mohawk takes about 20 minutes" (Vedral and Vyhnálek 50, translation by A.Š.) – this is true only with very short hair, with hair of approximately shoulder-length, it takes at least two hours. Furthermore, the editors omitted the essence of a good mohawk, which is the fact, that it must be backcombed, otherwise it is not able to stand properly.

Today, there exist several variations of the mohawk, still, every mohawk is based on the stripe of hair in principle. For instance, there are dreadhawks (the stripe made of dreads), lazy hawks (the haircut is the same as a typical mohawk, but the stripe of hair does not stand erect, it simply lies on the head), reverse mohawks (the stripe is shaved and the areas around are covered with hair), faux hawks (these mohawks are rather included in fashion of mainstream people or worn by the punks who do not dare to shave the side areas, because they are not shaved, they can be shorter than the mohawk or of the same length, the mohawk stands erect, the contemporary name for the type is also 'David Beckham faux hawk') and liberty spikes (this is the only kind which does not have to be formed in the stripe, but the spikes can cover the whole head as well, the spikes are likely to resemble the spikes of the Statue of Liberty, generally, there is the applied rule: 'the longer spikes, the better spikes').

3.2. Punk subculture

3.2.1. General introduction

Whenever teenagers start to listen to a particular music genre, they in most cases start to recreate their personal image as well. It is practically inevitable due to the fact that most music genres include distinctive fashion, opinions, ideologies and lifestyles. As a result, every musically decided youngster is engaged in specific subculture. It is widely recognised that there exist roughly eleven main music subcultures among the young, namely: punk, metal, techno, hippie, emo, hip hop, disco, goth, rockers, skinheads and neo-Nazi skinheads. Most subcultures are subdivided into even more specific groups as it is in punk (e.g. hardcore punk, pop punk, etc.). There is no doubt that some subcultures either do not sympathize with or do sympathize with some of the others. For instance, punks, skinheads and hippies despise neo-Nazi skinheads and vice versa, but e.g. metalheads are rather neutral and most of them probably would not have a problem to speak with anybody belonging to the four subcultures mentioned above. Yet, this does not mean that there are not metalheads who disdain neo-Nazis or on the other hand, who dislike hippies, but metal subculture is classified into a large number of subgenres whose lyrics can highly differ in opinions.

3.2.2. Uniformity

In fact, since people belong to different subcultures, they must be able to identify its members in order to find the others with the same opinions. For this reason, subcultures are interested in different fashion which causes the representatives of one group to wear the same "uniform". The uniformity can serve as an opportunity to find new friends, but it is also responsible for conflicts. For example if a group of punks meets a group of neo-Nazis, they will fight. Nonetheless, it was not always like that because as it was mentioned before, the first punks even wore swastikas on their clothes, but it was only a matter of provocation. As a matter of fact, the second generation of punks protested against neo-Nazi symbols and beliefs.

Among the different uniforms, one paradoxical coincidence can be found. It is the fact that all punks, skinheads, neo-Nazi skinheads, goths and metalheads are fond of the same kind of military boots.

3.2.3. Delimiting punk ideology by the Sex Pistols

In the beginning, punk meant simply rebellion against contemporary popular music and parents, but lately, punks began to protest against politics too. As it was mentioned before, the United Kingdom was experiencing hard times in economy during the 1970s. Such conditions were arousing misgivings about the future of the young. Johnny Rotten experienced these conditions himself, therefore he started to despise the British government and even his own life there and as a result, he expressed it in the lyrics. In America, the young were outraged by the Vietnam War; however, they had not large economic problems like the UK. Deborah Harry comments her 1970s' visit to England: "A great percentage of people were on the dole, and there really was no future for these kids. People forget what a wreck the place was in the early 1970s" (8). She also mentions the difference between punk art in America and the United Kingdom: "In the UK, the punk movement was much more political, and we could see it as soon as we got there. Everybody was very outwardly driven and politically minded and it was all in the music" (8).

The first Sex Pistols' album, *Never mind the bollocks here's the Sex Pistols*, is widely believed to be the most influential punk album ever or at least in the 1970s. In fact, it was the only studio album they have made because their other albums are compilations or live recordings. In the lyrics, they rebel against e.g. the Establishment, the British Queen, mass media and consumerism, yet they also keep saying that they are lazy, they have no future and they do not care. According to Deborah Harry the Sex Pistols: "weren't worried about having credibility or not; they existed entirely in their own realm, and their whole thing was to do with anarchy" (8). Thus, the Sex Pistols joined punk with anarchy, although it is evident that they and the other British young lived in a kind of anarchy because due to the economic issues, chaos, which was destroying the dreams of a better future, reigned in the British streets: "The "no future" punk ideology shows signs of being close behind in a recession-hit nation where youth are the biggest economic losers" (McVeigh).

The Sex Pistols really succeeded in promoting anarchy. Before the album was compiled, the single, *Anarchy in the U.K.*, had already been famous. Owing to the single and uncontrollable behaviour of all the Sex Pistols' members, newspapers were filled with "screaming and condemning headlines" (Overbury 222, translation by A.Š.). The song was released under the auspices of EMI, a British record company, and its release

was accompanied with controversies: "The workers who packed the recordings refused to pack *Anarchy in the U.K.*, so management had to persuade them to do it" (Overbury 223, translation by A.Š.). Shortly after that, EMI terminated a contract with the Sex Pistols. Eventually, the album was released by Virgin records; however, the most controversial affair preceded it.

The scandal which exasperated the British general public was the release of the second record, *God Save the Queen*. It is not a coincidence that the record has the same title as the British national anthem, although, the lyrics definitely do not celebrate the Queen like in the anthem. Since the beginning, the song was accompanied with similar problems as the first record. Chain stores refused to sell it, radio stations rejected to play it, e.g. it was "banned by the BBC" (McVeigh), and the press published many disgusted articles. What is more, the Sex Pistols' manager thought even a more shocking idea up: "Situation was aggravated when McLaren hired a steamboat on which the band was playing (i.e. the song, *God Save the Queen*, note by A.Š.) during the cruise on the Thames – it was an obvious parody of the river trip of Her Majesty" (Overbury 228, translation by A.Š.). Moreover, it was all managed during the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977.

What has to be taken into account is the fact that at that time, to offend the Queen was unthinkable and the British were not accustomed to improper behaviour of punks in public thus punk was so much scandalous in the 1970s. Today, when you travel to London, you see punk legacy everywhere, but in 1977, the cruise ended with arresting of several people. Tracy McVeigh writes about Jon Savage, "respected music writer and film-maker" (McVeigh) who was also on the boat that he said: "That boat trip was a protest against the awful nostalgic way the jubilee was being celebrated, in a way that we felt had nothing to do with Britain in 1977. It was pretty gutsy" (McVeigh). The result of the fuss about the Sex Pistols was that "While rebelling British youth found their new heroes, authorities discovered a new scary public enemy" (Overbury 228, translation by A.Š.).

By way of illustration, see Appendix which contains the lyrics of ***The Sex Pistols:*** **God Save the Queen***.*

3.2.4. Diversities in punk subculture

3.2.3.1. Punk and splitting of the former skinhead subculture

Until the Sex Pistols and other punk bands started to tend to the left wing and anarchism, all skinheads and punks used to meet each other in the same clubs. Skinhead subculture had been already established in Britain for about ten years and these first skinheads were interested in Jamaican reggae, ska and rock from which they lately originated their own skinhead music genres. With punks, skinheads had the same roots – they were all the young working-class people with the same economic hopelessness. Musical genres which both subcultures listened to were also rather similar. As soon as music became politically influenced, the relationship between the groups deteriorated. The skinheads who appreciated the original Jamaican style accepted punk political opinions because they had left-wing views as well, but a huge number of skinheads found punk music unimpressive, dull and ill-advised thus they separated themselves from their essentials and gradually became the very opposite of punks and the earlier skinheads – neo-Nazis: "its rebirth (i.e. the rebirth of the original skinhead subculture, note A.Š.) later in the decade under the influence of punk rock, opened the way for new influences. Not only did fresh musical genres arise around which skinhead identity could coalesce--above all so-called "street punk," or "Oi!" music—but, [...], right-wing politics became fashionable and were embraced by increasing numbers of skinheads" (Brown, T. S.). Nowadays, the situation is similar, on the one hand, there are fellowships of the left-wing antiracist skinheads and on the other hand, there is a right-wing racist community of neo-Nazis.

3.2.3.2. Following generation

The differences appeared also between the punks who were interested in punk bands of the first generation and the punks of the following second generation. The Sex Pistols became very famous and influential, they earned a great amount of money and their photographies kept filling up newspapers. Thus they became a part of mainstream which was not good because they became something they had rebelled against. Some punks started to blame them for the popularity and by this blaming they created conditions for a new development of punk in the 1980s. Newly formed bands tried to preserve the original punk ideas; they did not want to turn into commercial celebrities like the Sex Pistols did: "In the early '80s, punk music went underground, but its

influence remained. Its DIY ethic lived on in the indie scene (i.e. independent scene –
the bands who cooperate with low-budget record labels and try to keep their autonomy
from big corporations, note by A.Š.), which maintained an 'us and them' relationship
with the pop mainstream" (Chick 278). Moreover, punks witnessed how were the Sex
Pistols destroyed by their own fame, how did the members become involved in a
lawsuit with their manager and how were Sid and Nancy spending money on heroin, so
the new bands tried to avoid that. Besides street punk and Oi!, hardcore punk emerged
in the United States as a response to the first-generation punk and quickly and easily
spread out to Europe.

3.2.5. Today's punks

Today, most punks respect the original attitude, they do not listen to famous and
rich bands, they are not materialistic and they support non-profit institutions engaged in
activities which they like. Nevertheless, there are punk teenagers who do not work, but
they spend their parents' money on expensive clothing and accessories that look like
they are punk but in fact they rather are not punk because of the high price. Such young
people also visit punk concerts often, but they usually stop listening punk before they
become adult. In fact, most punks stop listening punk before they become adult because
punk is obviously tied to youth, however, in this modern capitalistic consumerist
society, punk is a good way to start maturing because it shows to the young that they do
not have to be dependent on big corporations, if they do not want to, and that they
should start to think about the government because when they become adult, they will
feel the effects of ill-considered actions of politicians. To conclude, it does not matter
that punk is related only to youngsters in most cases because they are the people who
can change the future. It is their future and punk really bid them to make it better and
put their own opinions across.

3.2.6. Problems of punk subculture

There is no doubt that punk is associated to many problems as well. Punk
approach to duties is rather careless, punk teenagers tend to neglect studying by late
arrivals at home which is naturally unpleasant for their parents. In better case, the
laziness disappears simultaneously with the end of puberty. In worse case, a teenager
encounters a bunch of drug-addicted punks and becomes one of them. Punk drug users
are generally older than punk teenagers because they are living on the street for a long

time and they are usually males. These older homeless punk guys frequently infatuate teenage punk girls who want to defy their parents however they can and who lately become the drug addicts as well under bad impact of older punks. Teenage punk boys also look up to older punks and they often run away from home in order to live on the streets with them. Living on the street and drug addiction, of course, produce other and even much worse problems, but a young person, e.g. a fifteen-year-old person, does not think things through enough, so he or she can completely change the way of life in a very short time.

3.2.6.1. Drug addiction of punk fans: The reasons

Punk symbolizes the protest against the authorities and due to the fact that punks are mostly the young, the authorities are predominantly their parents. To rebel against your parents when you are young is absolutely normal, it is a part of puberty, however, to rebel against parents by taking drugs is not normal at all. There are believed several reasons why punks tend to taking drugs, for instance: boredom, unwillingness to study or work (punks take drugs in order to get the satisfying feeling that normally people get e.g. after they have completed a task or passed an exam, etc.), obsession with punk rockers and their lifestyle, especially Sid Vicious, an effort to annoy the greatest possible number of people, rebellion against parents, but also a bad example in the family (e.g. father alcoholic, etc.).

A large number of punk girls fall in love with their idol, Sid Vicious, in spite of the fact, that he was a thug and a drug addict. They even dare to take drugs only because Sid had took them as well and because Sid is for them somebody like god, they think that taking drugs is "cool". Furthermore, the girls are not frightened of Sid's and Nancy's tragic end which was discussed earlier and which is well known by punks.

3.2.7. Equality in punk community

There is evidence that punk tend to be left-wing. Among the punks, people are more sympathetic, they do not make the differences because they do not care about your job, education or practically your whole social status. Due to the fact that punk embraces individuality, it is able to accept many kinds of truths, points of view and personalities: "Punk very often ignored and transgressed the gender, sexual, class, racial and aesthetic norms of mainstream society; it created a safe space in which individual expression and diversity could be given free reign" (Adams). In gender and sexuality,

punk resistance to standards is expressed by "creating boys who looked like girls, girls who looked like boys, and more defiantly, people who looked like neither" (Hickman). It is common that when you visit a punk concert as a punk, the others talk to you, buy you a beer or ask for one without knowing you at all, so it is obvious that punk crushes the barriers established by the society. Punk is often related to the certain smaller areas like the suburbs, parks, neighbourhood of a punk club or a shop or in the Czech Republic, the smaller place means even Prague because there exist about 10 to 20 punk clubs and the concerts are usually attended by the very same people so the participants know each other. Consequently, every punk fan can become involved in punk delimiting: "DIY also meant punks participated in a culture created by and for them, with no rules except what organically developed from the interactions of participants in the punk community" (Hickman). All in all, it seems that although punks are more or less young and inexperienced people, they are more able to respect each other than our today's ruling elites.

4. Conclusion

The bachelor thesis deals with the birth of music genre punk which was subsequently transformed into a huge movement and subculture. There are mentioned the consequences which led to creating of distinct opinions of punk fans. The work depicts the participants who were and still are important for punk community, mainly the Sex Pistols and their attitude. The thesis investigates the hobbies and attributes related to punk subculture; however, it looks into some issues of punk as well. It also provides a comparison of the punks of the 1970s and the following punk generations. The definitions of punk were examined as well and the author specified one own definition by the motto because it was found that punk emphasize the originality which is included in the motto. All results have been obtained by reading the articles, essays and books and by the fact that the consequent findings were compared with teenage experience of the author.

On the whole, all the hypotheses have been confirmed. The first hypothesis is true because punk is tied mostly to the adolescents who are really eager to be a part of an interesting community where they can express themselves, show their qualities and create their own image. The second hypothesis is definitely truthful, a large part of punk is based on political beliefs; music lyrics often contain political opinions of the bands and punk subculture as a whole forms definite political views that have a left-wing

characteristics. By DIY attitude and anti-consumerist lifestyle punk provides alternatives for people who disagree with the present capitalistic system of government. As far as the third hypothesis is concerned, it is true that punk music integrated political and social issues into music, although punks were not the first who did it, their near predecessors were the first but it is important that punk rebel against politics, so punk rockers started to use music as an instrument of proclaiming convictions. The statement that nowadays young people divide themselves into subcultures according to music which they favour is correct as well. This division can be considered as a product of punk because immediately after punk emerged with its ideology, other music subcultures started to define their own ideology as well. For instance, punk caused the splitting of skinhead community. It is obvious that today's teenagers do care about music very much and that it is one of the main way they use to define their personality.

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Appendix

The Sex Pistols: God Save the Queen

"God save the queen
The fascist regime
They made you a moron
Potential H-bomb

God save the queen
She ain't no human being
There is no future
In England's dreaming

Don't be told what you want
Don't be told what you need
There's no future, no future,
No future for you

God save the queen
We mean it man
We love our queen
God saves

God save the queen
'Cause tourists are money
And our figurehead
Is not what she seems

Oh God save history
God save your mad parade
Oh Lord God have mercy
All crimes are paid

When there's no future

How can there be sin

We're the flowers in the dustbin

We're the poison in your human machine

We're the future, your future

God save the queen

We mean it man

We love our queen

God saves

God save the queen

We mean it man

And there is no future

In England's dreaming

No future, no future,

No future for you

No future, no future,

No future for me

No future, no future,

No future for you

No future, no future

For you"

(Cook, Jones, Matlock, Rotten).