

Research in Practise Proposal

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This proposal intends to explore the intersection of queer healthcare, DIY Activism and Punk aesthetics through zines, illustration, and socially engaged design. Drawing from the raw confrontational language of punk and the action based DIY culture, the intended practise will aim to create accessible visual tools that challenge systematic failures in queer spaces, especially in healthcare. The three keywords being explored are Queer Healthcare, DIY Activism and Punk Aesthetics, through the research compiled and this essay the aim is to marry these words together and make a comprehensible proposal that successfully projects the importance and value that not only queer spaces benefit from activism but also the raw power of Punk.

Queer Healthcare

In the United Kingdom, accessing NHS and private trans healthcare arrangements involves “long waiting times and subjection to a psychiatric power within conservative gender clinics” (Raha, N. 2021. P. 189), creating arbitrary and unjust barriers to queer healthcare. In response to this, trans communities have built alternative support systems similarly to their queer predecessors of the punk era with methods like zine-making. Pure, unfiltered trans zines in a conservative country “propose the importance of activating agency and building bodily autonomy among trans, non-binary and genderqueer people through community and collective practices” (Raha, N. 2021. P. 189) cultural empowerment in queer spaces stems heavily from acts like these, not only do they help inform those in need of information based

around their healthcare, identity and community but it also in itself is an act of defiance, a raw response that attempts to deconstruct institutional frameworks through “assembling new dialogues” (Raha, N. 2021. P. 193) born from necessity; “trans survival under devastating economic conditions and within the context of the gender binary as a regime of oppression remains challenging and at times exhausting” (Raha, N. 2021. P. 189) within the community, there are identities like ‘non-binary’ that need highlighting, just as identities before got their movements, with them often being regarded as ‘lesser’ and many people, even within the queer community seeing them as a ‘stepping stone’ as part of a process of negotiating identity between man and woman. (Vincent, B. 2019)

Conditions such as these make it abundantly clear that trans wellbeing and healthcare is not just about access to hormones but about building systems of emotional and mental support. Those that are active in queer activist spaces understand that “trans, non-binary, and gender-nonconformist lives are built through mental support and that gender expression and embodiments manifest more fruitfully under collectively supported conditions” (Raha, N. 2021. P. 189). By having these lived experiences surrounded by advice and solidarity, community made support zines “attend to the extremities of mental and psychical distress faced by many trans people” (Raha, N. 2021. P. 193)

In queer spaces, it’s a well-known fact that the most consistent and most importantly reliable support system emerged within the community. As one quote highlights, “it’s held true enough that the most reliable resources for a trans person are fellow trans people” (Shanker, A. 2020. P. 51) however as much of an asset this is to the community and those within, it also acts as a detriment as “most trans and non-binary “mentors” or influencers are young adults...” (Shanker, A. 2020. P. 51) this strongly indicates that there is a substantial

gap where professional support in these healthcare areas is urgently needed, especially as requests for non-standardised hormonal treatments are increasing (Cocchetti, C et al. 2020) and “clinicians dealing with transgender health care will have to face these requests more frequently and be aware of the need to implement truly individualised hormonal treatment” (Cochchegti, C et al. 2020) with these requests and various new identities finding words to define them, clinicians gaps of knowledge could lead to misinformation, mistreatment and distrust. Queer people cannot afford this as having a negative experience during this time from a health care provider would be detrimental to their well-being as it’s vital to patients to feel fully comfortable enough to share information, especially about medications, with their clinicians (Shanker, A. 2020. P. 14)

Together, these quotes pin the tension in queer healthcare and highlight the vital lifelines of community based information systems that are critical yet these cannot replace the need for educated, informed and ethical healthcare provisions. Strengthening both areas of this essential to improving the survival of trans and non- binary people.

DIY Activism

Activism in the do-it-yourself format is a form of resistance that privileges personal agency, full creative autonomy and in the context of zines, engages with lived experiences over

institutional or traditional forms of political engagement. The principles of do-it-yourself emerged from Punk with its own graphic rule that reinforced punks newfound political voice. The period in which fanzines were born was 1976 to 79 during a time of substantial cultural, social and political change where punk reacted against the modern world (Triggs, T. 2006. P. 70) DIY efforts tended to be much more basic, with limited use of colour (Bestley, R. 2007) as they needed to be for urgency and necessity purposes.

Those in need of the political power of zines, especially in the context of this proposal, are the under dogs of society. Those that don't receive the same treatment as the more normal considered population, this treatment means the lack of insistence to fight against the wrong doings put toward them. "Freaks, geeks, nerds and losers- that's who zines are made by" (Janice, quoted in Duncombe, 1997, p. 22.) not to be mistaken with insults, this primarily takes meaning toward the type of people discussed, societies 'losers' that build community spaces for other 'losers' through zines, but the success in zines for the under dogs aren't copies that print reams of statistics on class in-equality, discrimination and prejudice against the LGBTQIA+ community, or political view. Instead these zines are means to tell stories (Duncombe, 1977. P.34) done in a way that the information is preserved rather than being lost in a cluster of statistics. Here is where the outsiders gain a sense of value from their place in society, knowing others share the same traits that ostracise them and while there is very little to be done about how the masses receive difference or being different, spaces that zines and activism create are spaces where 'losers' can redivide the value of being a loser, and turn what was once a deficit into a valuable asset to their new community (Duncombe, 1977. P 24)

“Zines also function to raise the consciousness of individuals who do not belong to any set group. Reading the range of opinions and lifestyles, the probing search for authenticity, and the depth of the rage against society in zines encourages readers to think about who they are and what they believe in” (Duncombe, 1977. P. 190-91)

Duncombe discusses the underpinning of what zines can achieve, activism in zines offers space for introspection through “the probing search for authenticity” and “the depth of rage against society” this reflects the strategy of activist art collective like Gran Fury and the ACT UP campaign, who used the campaign to provoke viewers to anger and political action (Felshin, N. 2006. P. 54-56). Relating to Duncombe, the campaign was intended to encourage viewers to think about and challenge their beliefs, to challenge themselves to question what is it they were told about the AIDS crisis, the success of this was done through the means it was displayed, similarly to the zine’s intent, it was the stories being told. “There was no way we were going to make victim photography” or extend “the dominant representation of aids as pathetic images of people dying in hospital beds” (McCarty M, quoted in Felshin, 2006. P. 56) this emphasises the point that there are more to stories than what the masses believe,

understanding that AIDS go beyond dying in a bed solidifies the narrative that zines succeeded in doing.



Figure 1 . Members of ACT UP during the pride March in New York City on 26 June 1988 (New York Historical Society/Getty Images, 1988, Cited in The Guardian, [11 October, 2023].



Figure 2. *You've Got Blood on Your Hands, Ed Koch* (Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, 1988)

Understanding the impact that activism unbound by institutional limitations, the raw power of zines becomes clear- mirroring the energy found in bold, unrestricted campaigns like those of 'ACT UP'. The movement of zines is one that operates in a space largely free from political and commercial restrictions, the content is unfiltered and this offers readers a very different experience to that of a commercially approved piece of information, these have depth, and in the queer sense can be thoroughly more inclusive than the heteronormative material ushered into the public now- "a freedom that many writers and readers would like to see replicated in society at large" (Duncombe, 1997) when creative media's function in the political sphere it can be difficult to establish where it's transformative potential lies"(Hartle and White, 2022, p. 9) unrestricted material is crucial to the queer community especially, as prevailing, long term campaigns of transphobia in the uk newspapers and television (Raha, N. 2021) threaten the viewpoint on those who fall under the trans umbrella, underground methods like zines could help bring back a previous solution to a problem that, as time has gone on, it has adapted to be much more inclusive now and that mean the narrative changes so that more people are impacted. People political through a socialisation process (Duncombe, 1997. P 190) and the understanding from zines to readers is not you should do this, but instead it's: look what I've done. Change ourselves so others can change"(Duncombe, 1997. P 35).

Punk Aesthetics

As both a cultural movement and visual language, 'Punk' emerged in the 1970s where the developed world had manoeuvred itself into an economic and social dead end. Punk was a

moment marked by mass unemployment, class division and overall political unrest, in its time it was not so much an ideology as a resistance to the matter. (Miessgang et al, 2008, p. 6) yet beyond its historical origins, punk's core values- defiance, DIY ethics, anti-establishment rhetoric, and radical self expression- have endured as a potent visual and ideal framework for activism. These principles resonate powerfully within contemporary struggles for queer liberation, particularly in this context in spaces of spaces for queer healthcare, where systematic neglect, hate keeping and institutional erasure demand fierce resistance. Punk's refusal to polish offers a mode of visual protest, that is accessible, unapologetically angry, and more importantly- its immediate. The same rebellious force that once disrupted the political world decades ago can now be seen as a toolkit for visual and cultural activism regarding modern evolutions of past matters.



Figure 3. Reid, J. (1977). Sex Pistols. God Save the Queen.[Photograph]. London: Virgin Records.

The key visual style of Punk has a plethora of depth to it, when the visuals of punk were still being defined, Jamie Reid and his work for Sex Pistols set the band apart from many others

with the success of his work "God Save the Queen". Mainly because it's visual impact, random note typography accompanied with staple visuals of safety pins, razor blades and even swastikas- these among many others became key visuals of Punk that and metaphorical to early UK punk in the mainstream media. (Bestley, R. 2020, p 7.) Expanding from this, visual semiotic design choices were not the lone amplifier of the Punk Aesthetic, the simple act of the process that went into making these aided in the well known aesthetic, this is primarily down to the evidence of hand crafting that shows imperfections and texture, "Reid used the same letters, cut from newspapers, to imitate the style of blackmail letters. The idea behind this was Punk as an ambush on the consciousness of the masses" (Miessgang et al, 2008, p. 15) This quote explores this aspect of producing in Punk highlighting the textured, imperfection areas of this image, along with the more alternative ideas behind the work. The idea of defacing an image of an official state portraiture of the Queen of England by obscuring her face with ransom note typography evokes aesthetics of criminal activity and kidnapping, Reid's method here shows great examples of punk methodology- Reid was appropriating symbols of national power and corrupting that idea. The ransom letter typography wasn't merely stylistic; it spoke to the visual language of political ransom and dissent.

"The natural limitations of simple tools, and materials, as well as quick production of graphic work of untrained designers, led to repetition of certain graphic connections: simple black and white or two-colour artwork for print reproduction and the final artefacts that resulted from the painting and manufacturing process" (Bestley, R. 2020. p. 4)

This quote summarises the fundamental core to the workings of not just Reid but other punk artists during this time, it unifies varies works of art with connections to their styles and

graphic imagery, making these connections and knowing they're associated with punk aesthetics, morals and political stand points is the reason this style of work would suit the proposed project. Another intended technique used here is one that alludes to the rejection of mainstream commercial design, aligning with punks anti-establishment values is the simple use of collage and low-of photocopying of textures, these capture the spirit of the moment (Miessgang et al, 2008. P, 97.) which aligns with the previous deconstruction of the keyword "DIY Activism", the noticeable sense of quickness to the process and how unpolished it is not only speaks on urgency to get a message out but immediacy of the process, the moment is captured and a sense of personality is gained, a sense of uniqueness that couldn't be captured if these designs were filtered through a mainstream media check that would remove the grit, the uniqueness and make it more suited to a wider, less alternative audience.

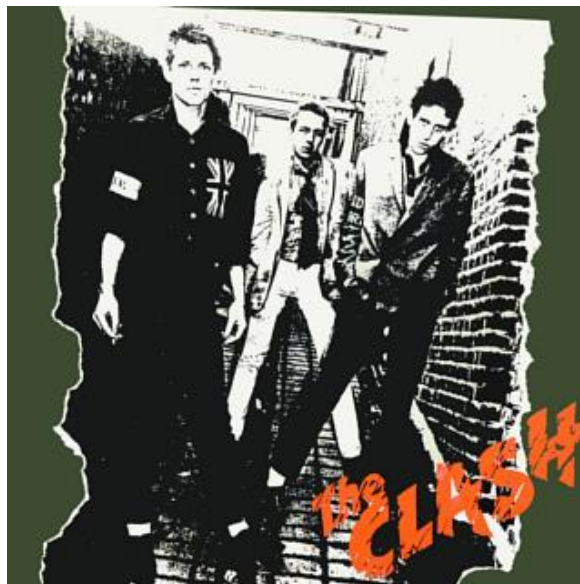


Figure 4. *The Clash- London Calling*, album cover, CBS Records, 1979.

The Clash's 1977 self titled debut album cover established the defiant tone of punk with its black and white photograph of the band against a brick wall, with vivid orange blotchy text

depicting the rawness of the style this was designed for. The dirty- low budget visuals aligns with the idea that “it [punk] was an undefined, idealistic , and almost naïve moment, when pop, abstraction, conceptual art and hard edge lived side by side...” (Miessgang, et al, 2008. P. 94) the album design captures the naïve moment, the design is visually unsophisticated yet its conceptually unique, even the lettering, while it’s not the well known ransom lettering, it maintains the imperfect textured or weathered look to it. This all paired with its use of collage adds that extra detail of texture and grit to the background, which this is a key part of punk aesthetics.

Through this collective research, the proposed research question is “How have Punk aesthetics and practises influenced queer resistance movements, particularly in the development of community based care and DIY healthcare practices” which i will further study into with questions such as how did punk’s rebellious visual and cultural language inspire queer activism and survival strategies? What role did zines and DIY media play in building networks of care among queer and trans communities? How can punk aesthetics be understood as both a mode of protest, protection and a blueprint for alternative support systems?

The proposed practise-based project I intend to create will consist of a series of handmade zines and printed materials inspired by punk aesthetics, focussing on queer resistance and community care for issues arisen recently for trans and non-binary people. Through collage, cut-and-paste layouts and use of many punk methods, this project will explore how DIY methods have supported queer survival and aided in achieving a sense of community and

change. The project will blend research findings in a visual language that directly translates to the raw, powerful energy of Punk design.

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