
No Future in Retrospect

On Punk Memoirs

ABSTRACT Life-writing by punks has grown at a remarkable rate and constitutes a significant new addition to the canon of punk cultural production that deserves an equal place alongside music, fashion, and zines. Punk has always sought to document itself in the form of recordings, film, photography, fanzines, and video. It is time to add memoirs to these archival impulses and examine how punk culture is now mediated and sustained by autobiography. Whereas punk life writing might be dismissed as so many nostalgic trips down memory lane, this article begins from the premise that writing about a life involves more than nostalgia. Considering punk memoirs as works that offer new ways of thinking about a life attached to punk, this article surveys a broad range of punk memoirs and asks questions that reframe some punk scholarship by emphasizing how individuals live within and outside of punk simultaneously. What are some of the dominant features of punk memoirs? What kinds of interventions do they make? How do they introduce and develop particular ways of documenting and thinking about punk culture and its legacies? How does life writing about the past transform punk in the present? What ways of thinking, lines of inquiry, understanding, and feelings do memoirs establish and examine as central to the thought of punk, in particular, and the study of culture more broadly? The article seeks to demonstrate how these trajectories might shift and renovate work undertaken by scholars of punk.

KEYWORDS punk, memoir, life writing, cultural memory, autobiography, post-punk

In a moment of exasperation familiar to anyone who has been dismissed because of their gender, Nancy Barile addresses “two out-of-touch academics, Kevin Egan and Maren Larsen” whose published research “denigrated the women who made up the infrastructure of the Philly punk scene”¹ when they claimed that women “worked in the shadows” and “operated privately to uphold [a] public sphere” dominated by “masculine performance.”² Barile counters that women “were up front, literally, physically, and symbolically, as integral, important, and necessary orchestrators of the scene,” and she ought to know; she was there.³ *I’m Not Holding Your Coat: My Bruises-And-All Memoir of Punk Rock Rebellion* powerfully documents her role establishing punk culture in Philadelphia at the start of the 1980s.

1. Nancy Barile, *I’m Not Holding Your Coat: My Bruises-and-All Memoir of Punk Rock Rebellion* (Brooklyn, NY: Bazillion Points, 2020), 91.

2. Kevin Egan and Maren Larsen, “Philly Punk: Gender politics in the City of Brotherly Love,” *The Smart Set*, accessed December 12, 2023. <https://www.thesmartset.com/philly-punk/>

3. Barile, *I’m Not Holding Your Coat*, 91.

Barile's critique is not unusual. Passionate critics disagree all the time and while her scathing infantilization of academic research is memorable—"Eagan and Larsen's careless and poorly researched article was a disgrace and, as an educator today, I would not have accepted that kind of sloppy work from a fourteen-year-old"—it is not extraordinary.⁴ What is unusual is that this critique of scholarship takes place in a memoir. Barile makes explicit what has been happening for some time. Although academics and cultural commentators are documenting the history of punk and theorizing the effects and meanings associated with various global and local manifestations of the subculture, punks have always been writing their own history and memoirs have become a significant new addition to the canon of punk cultural production that deserves an equal place alongside music, fashion, zines, and other expressions of punk culture. Because this is the case, it is worth examining the nature and range of punk memoirs and what kinds of interventions they make. How do they introduce or emphasize particular ways of documenting and thinking about punk culture and its legacies? How might these trajectories differ from existing perspectives and shift the work undertaken by scholars of punk?

As an expression of one individual's experience, life writing documents a time and place and offers an intimate firsthand perspective that responds to intentional and unintentional forms of forgetting and erasure while also contributing to a broader project of punk cultural memory. Memoirs take a long view of punk and reflect on its meanings and enduring effects. They can also expand the territory of punk by considering the fullness of a life and examine topics that may not be present in punk music and ephemera. Yet little attention has been paid to punk life writing despite its surging popularity among writers and readers and, more surprisingly, despite its capacity to frame punk culture in new ways.

Authors may make claims to historical accuracy and veracity as Barile does, but their memoirs are never simply records of the past. They are narratives and as such they involve an "act of remembering" that is shaped by personal decisions about how to tell stories, as well as by social priorities and conventions of storytelling.⁵ As Nancy Miller notes, memoirs are creative acts of remembering that construct and reconstruct events and thus demonstrate "the shape through which memory enters narrative," as well as the extent to which any understanding of history is conditioned by the kinds of stories one tells.⁶ Punk memoirs are not unique in their capacity to document how writing shapes a life or how one might try to speak about music. In a study of autobiographies of female country music stars, Pamela Fox explores how authors produce an authentic "narrative form and voice" by emphasizing a folksy "'ordinary' identity for their star-authors" despite the reality of a "private, domestic life" that has been "pre-empted and compromised, if not erased entirely, by their 'unique' status as successful performers."⁷ Punk memoirs might be less concerned with tensions between where one came from and who one is now, but they

4. Ibid., 92.

5. Nancy K. Miller, *But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 14.

6. Ibid., 22.

7. Pamela Fox, "Recycled 'Trash': Gender and Authenticity in Country Music Autobiography," *American Quarterly* 50 no. 2 (1998): 248.

are certainly conditioned by norms of punk culture in ways that are similar to country music memoirs. Punk memoirs pursue unique paths, too. Where Fox saw country music stars work to maintain a singular sense of identity, punk memoirs are often premised on having some distance from an earlier period in one's life in order to explore who one was then and is now. Such differences matter, but the overall project of writing a life in punk shares much in common with life writing more broadly.

Never exactly history and never sheerly idiosyncratic, the individuality of a memoir draws together the art of "life writing, ethics, and politics more intimately, inextricably, and significantly together" simply by registering how an individual exists in the world.⁸ This is significant because it insists that one does not exist alone: one is part of a larger world. Dominant modern conceptions of subjectivity are rooted in two paradoxical experiences: the perceived autonomy of oneself under neoliberal assumptions of personal responsibility "that disavows all that sustains" a life, including the natural environment and the "human arrangements" of the social world; alongside a civilizational despair that stems from economic arrangements that replace "the project of individual or collective mastery of existence" with an unshakeable sense that "markets decide our present and future."⁹ Modern conceptions of oneself subtract the world and isolate individuals as powerless to respond to their circumstances except in the form of limited acts of personal decision. In response to this reality, life writing remembers that a life is always lived with others and in the midst of unchosen social realities. The decision to tell that story is imbued with the ethical authority to address one's reality and, as Marianne Gullestad notes, "the rising importance of this ethical task helps explain the popularity of life writing."¹⁰ More, the tensions that emerge between narration and the reader's own experience make more visible how a self is imagined and how each of us is differently shaped by a world larger than ourselves. In the case of punk memoirs, works are shaped by the author's sense of responsibility to an institution loosely called punk. Like most life writing, punk memoirs reveal that looking back involves a process of selection, conscious or not, that helps to determine how a story is told and the relative priorities assigned to past events. This might reflect new concerns in the present or the enduring presence of past preoccupations. By exploring a decisive set of circumstances and how one was shaped by them, these memoirs are a form of cultural memory rooted in "appeals to experience" that constitute a kind of "moral argument" about punk rock itself.¹¹ Punk life writing examines what punk can be and how the crucible of individual experience shapes how it will be known.

What this means now is that punk memoirs have begun to play a role in crafting punk, using the tools of narration and memory as well as the longstanding punk practice of

8. Craig Howes, "Afterword," in *The Ethics of Life Writing*, ed. Paul John Eakin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 259.

9. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Zone Books, 2015), 103, 221.

10. Marianne Gullestad, "Tales of Consent and Descent: Life Writing as a Fight Against an Imposes Self-Image," in *The Ethics of Life Writing*, ed. Paul John Eakin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 223.

11. Paul Lauritzen, "Arguing with Life Stories: The Case of Rigoberta Menchú," in *The Ethics of Life Writing*, ed. Paul John Eakin, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 37.

critique and self-reflection. This social function of shaping punk in the present is distinct from some traditions of life writing that are anchored primarily by notions of posterity or the prospect of the author's death, a tradition that dates back to antiquity in which "narration compensates the hero for his mortal fate" with an enduring story.¹² Perhaps because punk "faked its own death" or maybe just because it is haunted by surviving every declaration that punk is dead, these memoirs infuse it with life, for now and for the future, as if written by a mohawked Scheherazade who "seeks to postpone her death until the following day" with the vital work of storytelling.¹³

Memoirs do not memorialize something dead and gone, whether mournfully or celebratory. They are new original compositions, not found footage of old events. As such, life writing develops new interests in cultural memory for punk in the present. As Barile combatively demonstrates, this new retrospective energy addresses the present as well as the past. And in so doing, memoirs join the still thriving underground do-it-yourself punk culture that continues to create culture by hosting gigs, starting bands, touring, swapping zines, posting online, and sharing a vibrant marketplace of ideas. From Kenya to Indonesia and from Russia to Peru, punks "across the globe create scenes and cultural forms that reflect their local struggles" and explore ways of living that are not readily endorsed by the culture at large.¹⁴ It might appear as if memoirs exist in a space apart, removed from the raucous noise in the club, no longer really in the scene. Such a view would suggest that punks are not readers and that how we understand their impact is limited only to what is most visible. I much prefer Janice Radway's enlarged scope of punk effects that she developed in her analysis of riot grrrl zine-makers: when one thinks about the temporal effects of subcultural activities, one needs to take a long view that includes the "afterlives of zines" such that their effects "continued to live on in a number of different venues and forms, as a result of the actions of numerous former zinesters who were profoundly changed by their zine-ing."¹⁵ Memoirs attest to such afterlives: one does not write a book about something that has ceased to matter, after all. And because they are books, they will affect more than just their authors, circulating among readers and contributing to punk in the present.

Punk memoirs capture an author's attachment to punk that continues to reverberate, suggesting that the periodization of punk far exceeds initial periods of youthful intensity. As Larry Livermore states in his personal history of running Lookout Records:

Everyone knows about the Lookout alumni who went on to sell millions of records, win Grammy awards, and reshape popular culture, but as proud as I am of them, I'm just as proud of the professors and urban planners, the social workers and shopkeepers,

12. Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 120.

13. Dylan Clark, "The Death and Life of Punk, The Last Subculture," in *The Post-Subcultures Reader*, ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers, 2003), 234; Cavarero, *Relating*, 120.

14. Kevin C. Dunn, *Global Punk: Resistance and Rebellion in Everyday Life*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 125.

15. Janice Radway, "Zines, Half-Lives, and Afterlives: On the Temporalities of Social and Political Change," *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011): 143–44.

the scientists, artists, writers, and engineers who crawled out of our tempestuous little tide pool. And the mothers and fathers, citizens, idealists, and activists, all of whom carry some mark, some life-changing memory from the work we did and the fun we had together. It might have been the time they saw an amazing band at Gilman and thought, “Hey, maybe I could do that!” Or the moment they slipped the needle into the groove of a mail-ordered 7”, or opened the pages of a hand-xeroxed zine and understood that they were no longer alone in the universe. Some still proclaim themselves “Punk Till I Die,” while others chuckle indulgently at the crazy stuff they did before they “grew up.” And there are those—myself, for example—who walk both sides of that street.¹⁶

As life writing, these narratives are a community-driven mode of reflecting on punk and they illustrate and theorize its many and varied effects upon a life. In the end, that means they are almost always about more than punk; they are narratives that consider how punk intersects with one’s life and everything outside of punk.

Given the richness of this form for thinking about cultural memory, I want to explore how life writing by punks can return to the past and reframe axiomatic assumptions or develop new vocabularies for old ideas by engaging in what Andy Medhurst calls “retrospective thinking.”¹⁷ Memoirs are premised on the author’s historical distance from the subject of the book and how their recollection is conditioned by a new and distinct vantage point acquired over time. But to treat them as a provocation to thought may seem odd, given that many read them in order to return to the past. Memoirs can certainly prompt nostalgic trips down memory lane. Music, maybe along with taste and smell, is a remarkably efficient vehicle for nostalgia, with an old song transporting listeners across time and space in the span of a few notes. Nostalgia is often viewed with suspicion, at least since the musician Orpheus looked back at Eurydice, and backward glances have come to be associated with hazard, impropriety, advanced age, withdrawal, and loss. Punk life writing finds that looking back involves much more than whatever anxieties are named by the term nostalgia; it can be a mode of thought that opens up ideas and reflects on what it means to remain attached to punk and what its continuing effects involve. What are some of the dominant features of punk memoirs? What kinds of questions and concerns matter most and how might these transform punk in the present? What ways of thinking, lines of inquiry, understanding, and feelings do memoirs establish and examine as central to the thought of punk, in particular, and the study of culture more broadly? Asking this last question, I am interested to respond to Barile and consider some of the central concepts and approaches that memoirs introduce for readers and reflect on how these might shape scholarly and popular conceptions of punk moving forward. That said, genres always have exceptions, and memoirs are always potentially out of step with any single claim I might make. Every example I offer here of how punk memoirs unfold and what they might do is conditional and provisional. The primary aim of this paper is not to define the genre

16. Larry Livermore, *How to Ruin a Record Label: The Story of Lookout Records*, (Don Giovanni Records, 2015), 276.

17. Andy Medhurst, “What did I get? Punk, Memory and Autobiography,” in *Punk Rock: So What?* ed. Roger Sabin (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 219.

exhaustively but to sketch some of the opportunities for thought that emerge from scholarly attention to this growing archive.

Cultural memory has been part of punk from the start. Medhurst wrote about punks reflecting on the past almost 20 years ago. In the 1970s, Penelope Spheeris was already filming the first wave of punk that would be memorialized in *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981). Record labels such as Dischord Records documented a local scene from the start and has kept much of its catalogue in print, ensuring that Minor Threat continues to awaken teenagers to new possibilities for self-expression much like it did more than 40 years ago. Punk has always sought to document itself. It is time to add memoirs alongside these other punk-generated archival impulses and recognize that punk culture is now mediated by autobiography. Life-writing by punks has grown at a remarkable rate recently. On my bookshelf, I can count more than 25 books written by members of bands such as Black Flag, Sex Pistols, Born Against, The Locust, Spitboy, D.O.A., Against Me, MDC, Cro-mags, Bad Religion, Sick of it All, T.S.O.L., and The Pretenders. Beyond works authored by well-known underground figures are a growing number of memoirs by participants who never achieved any kind of underground celebrity. Punk memoirs are published by international conglomerates such as Random House and Hachette, as well as independent presses with connections to the underground, such as PM Press and Feral House. More than half of the memoirs on my shelf have been published since 2015.

Punk memoirs are part of a twenty-first-century surge in life writing by popular musicians that, until recently, has been largely neglected by scholarship. Oliver Lovesey has begun to map the relationship between writing and popular music, and if “recent critical interest in life writing” has largely “overlooked the growth in autobiographies by artists of popular music,” imagine how much less scholarship is devoted to life writing by artists of unpopular music!¹⁸ Scholars of punk culture have only very recently acknowledged select memoirs, and no attempts have yet been made to look at what an archive of life writing by punks might offer. Lovesey recognizes that memoirs humanize music at a time when capitalism has transformed it into “intellectual property” and “strings of zeros and ones blowing in the wind or stuck inside a cloud.”¹⁹ Life writing reminds us that music is a “human activity” first.²⁰ Now, punk has never forgotten that music is a human activity that depends on forms of communion, so I want to appreciate Lovesey’s insight by reframing it slightly: at a moment when the digital realm has lowered the bar for entry into the underground, memoirs create and illustrate many of the forms of intimacy that have always defined punk experiences in person. Like the basement concert, memoirs treat personality and intimacy as key catalytic agents for punk culture, which is important at a time when anyone can discover the underground without leaving home. Beyond Lovesey’s concern about the impersonality of digital music, his larger claim that

18. Oliver Lovesey, *Popular Music Autobiography: The Revolution in Life-Writing by 1960s’ Musicians and their Descendants* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 2.

19. *Ibid.*, 204.

20. *Ibid.*, 204.

there are differences between music and the stories we tell about those living a life in music is a valuable insight for punk criticism. These differences are a key reason why I think memoirs need to become part of the archive that scholars consider when seeking to understand punk. They supplement music. Memoirs provide a language that appreciates the emotional power of music or wonders how one can ever fully capture the magical energy of a concert. For those who have “frequently criticized” punk scholarship “for placing too little emphasis on punk rock music,”²¹ memoirs find ways to appreciate how music can be a gravitational force that organizes entire lives in all kinds of remarkable ways. This is not the sort of scholarship that trained musicologists such as Evan Rapport and David Pearson are undertaking when they annotate and analyze punk music, but it does remind us that what we call “music” is a form of being with others at least as much as it is a soundwave.

Because punk memoirs tend to emphasize the life of the author and assume that one is already familiar with the music, they differ from what Brent Edwards has examined in his study of writing about jazz—a varied archive that encompasses a variety of forms including autobiography—by Black musician-writers. Where jazz writing theorizes the “interface between sound and writing” by treating “multiple media . . . not as autonomous areas of activity but in conjunction, insistently crossing circuits, rethinking and expanding the potential of each medium in the way it is like and unlike the other,” punk memoirs, perhaps especially because they are memoirs first, tend to use writing as a means by which to describe how a life has been anchored by punk rather than investigate punk music itself or the tonal capacities of writing to speak—in new tongues—about punk music.²²

Lonely Boy by Steve Jones is written like a conventional autobiography, loosely following the structure of bildungsroman, unfolding chronologically and sharing ever greater insights about Jones, with clear themes struck by each chapter. The voice is crass and punk, artfully co-written with Ben Thompson, and it is carefully plotted to suit Hachette and the conventions of life writing. I suppose it should not be surprising that even in retirement, the Sex Pistols keep going mainstream. There are punk memoirs that are more playful and daring in form and execution. Justin Pearson’s *From the Graveyard of the Arousal Industry* is written with the hasty charm and irreverence that always made *Do It Yourself* punk special. His short chapters recreate the bursts of noise associated with The Locust. Stories hit fast, and the narrative can be abrasive one moment and touching the next. When I included this book in a first-year course on narrative, it was remarkable how seriously students engaged with it; they appreciated it precisely because it felt like something they could write. More, it showed them that lives as messed up as their own were worth discussing and that anyone could share their story. Punk memoirs take great skill to write, don’t get me wrong, but they also begin with the freedom to decide how “skill” will be judged, as punk always has.

21. Lucy Wright, “Enjoy It, Destroy It?” 40 Years of Punk Rock Scholarship,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Punk Rock*, eds. George McKay and Gina Arnold, accessed November 13, 2023. doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190859565.013.1.

22. Brent Hayes Edwards, *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 20, 19.

As different as they are, punk memoirs are beginning to show some patterns and some consistent touchstones. Frequently, authors begin in childhood and consider why they found themselves out of step with social norms. As outsiders, authors examine what punk offered them. They might share some of the crazy adventures that kids get up to and discuss how life felt once they were part of a tribe; reflect on some of the conflicts and challenges involved in the punk community; and assess how punk contributed to an informal process of education that included unlearning social convention. Every author recognizes in one way or another that punk profoundly altered the path of their life. What this looks like varies, which comes as no surprise because there is no single way to inhabit the culture. Pearson, for example, describes how punk culture introduced him to progressive ideas about “social revolution” and supplemented a failing public school system that offered him a “meager education” at best.²³ If punk was a life raft that offered intellectual stimulation and radical ideals, then it was especially jarring when Pearson learned harder lessons about the “bastardization of punk culture” during the 1990s that included the normalization of homophobic violence within some parts of punk.²⁴

Reading across numerous memoirs, one quickly discerns some of the differences between local scenes and historical eras. Where Pearson confronted hypermasculinity in 1990s California punk, Alice Bag describes how women, gender-queer, and racialized folks defined LA punk in the 1970s, establishing many of the social-justice ambitions of punk. Well before riot grrrl, Alice and the Bags and Castration Squad—among other bands involving Alicia Armendariz—were giving “feminism and femininity a much-needed punk rock make-over.”²⁵ The diversity and variation endemic to punk is a key interest of these memoirs, even if it only emerges most clearly when comparing works from different times and places.

Punk memoirs, like many zines before them, make personal experience central. They do not claim to tell the story of punk and tend to be uninterested in defining it too carefully. I have yet to read a memoir especially interested in debating what is or is not punk. Sam McPheeters is the most explicit on this point when he epitomizes the deconstructive impulses that have always made defining punk impossible. He notes it is a concept built on water, endlessly shifting its meanings and aims: punk is “a lifestyle; cosplay; design element; powerful ideal, lazy cliché; magical realism; badge of authenticity, pantomime social movement; withering mockery; ironclad conviction; lucrative career; vow of slovenly poverty; incubator of brilliance and/or mediocrity.”²⁶ When memoirs characteristically ignore the conceptual slipperiness of punk, they are proceeding as McPheeters does: one knows what it is and can claim an attachment to it without ever being able to control how or why someone else does the same. It is the author’s experience of punk that matters and whatever punk means is realized in that experience.

23. Justin Pearson, *From the Graveyard of the Arousal Industry* (New York, NY: Soft Skull Press, 2010), 47.

24. *Ibid.*, 48.

25. Alice Bag, *Violence Girl: East LA Rage to Hollywood Stage, A Chicana Punk Story* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2011), 342.

26. Sam McPheeters, *Mutations: The Many Strange Faces of Hardcore Punk* (Los Angeles, CA: Rare Bird, 2020), 17.

One obvious implication of this practice dovetails with a claim that is easy to forget: memoirs cannot provide the truth of punk. While any single memoir can create the impression of authoritative knowledge, that impression tends to last only until one encounters another perspective from a different author. Even coming from the same time and place does not guarantee similar perspectives. This is what Anita Raghunath found when exploring how early punk memoirs from Viv Albertine and John Lydon both build a sense of national identity by juxtaposing life in the UK to the United States but then arrive at very different assessments of exactly what the looking glass of American culture represents for UK punk.²⁷ Or, take the subject of violence in US punk memoirs. Henry Rollins writes about the terror of running battles with police who started riots by invading punk shows in LA in the 1980s, arresting kids and calling “them every name in the book and beat[ing] the shit out of them.”²⁸ In a very different vein, Bag appreciates the non-police violence that lived within the punk scene, including the consensual violence of gigs and the opportunity to physically defend her friends, which “was intrinsically pleasurable for me.”²⁹ There are others who write about the “‘supportive’ hostility” that can define the intensity of combative concerts.³⁰ If episodes of violence from within punk could be ordinary and even welcome, they could also upend people. Dave Dictor from MDC discovered this when he found himself unable to “truly process” what was happening once HR from Bad Brains—“my song-writing and musical hero”—began “spewing simple vile sexism and misogyny” on tour.³¹ There is no single experience of violence for punks; it is always individual and shaped by context and circumstance. Memoirs cannot offer a guidebook to “punk” because variation is a feature, not a flaw. Moreover, memoirs show that the deconstructive instability of every experience of “punk” is a source of creative energy. Authors discover that punk is held together by tendencies, shifting ideals, affinities, and individual attachments, not the least of which is the desire to reinvent punk and dig new channels through which it might flow. Can scholars also do without stringent definition, I wonder? Those writing the histories of punk in the first person displace a focus on punk and provide instead a focus on individual experiences of punk, and the results are especially compelling because they make space for exploring so many new questions.

Authors will discuss their love life before they will reflect on how punk has been shaped by national politics and memoirs are distinguished by this uniquely personal focus. That is their charm and one significant way they can shift scholarly conversations about punk. By documenting individual experiences, memoirs insist on a nominal attention to *these* local circumstances and *this* punk in ways that are distinct from criticism that makes punk its focus. They treat punk as a human activity, first and foremost, characterized by all of the messy ways one lives attached to others and in the midst of a social world and its

27. Anita Raghunath, “I’m So Bored with the USA: Reflecting America in British Punk Memoirs of the 1970s,” *The European Journal of Life Writing* 11 (2022): 72–3.

28. Henry Rollins, *Get in the Van: On the Road with Black Flag*, 2nd ed. (2.13.61, 2004), 26.

29. Bag, *Violence Girl*, 234.

30. Pearson, *From the Graveyard*, 134.

31. Dave Dictor, *MDC: Memoir from a Damaged Civilization* (San Francisco, CA: Manic D Press, 2016), 68.

curious designs upon us. Where an oral history collects personal voices and aggregates them to tell a representative story of a place or an era or a topic, a memoir offers an account of an individual whose experiences may not apply to anyone else. One of the immediately provocative dimensions of this focus is that one cannot be sure of the worth of the object of study anymore: is this even a book that tells us something about punk, in general? Asking such a question can't help but pose additional questions, such as: why would answering "yes" be sufficient to proceed any more than "no" would be a reason not to? Memoirs have, in my experience, proven especially effective in generating questions about scholarly value because they wonder what discussions about punk are meant to do. If memoirs can prompt broad questions for scholarship, they can also prompt quite specific ones, as I have found.

When publishing research on memoirs, I often encounter questions about whether a first-person account can have the same authority to speak about punk that is presumed to be present within academic ethnographies and punk-authored oral histories. The direct reviewer might ask, "Does anyone care about this writer?" The more patient reviewer wonders, "Can you actually make claims about punk on this basis of only this account?" If an oral history or ethnography is fairly representative—and to be sure, some punk-created oral histories have emphasized similar experiences of relative social privilege and ignored experiences of marginalization within punk culture—the assumption guiding this question is fair: a wider truth emerges from a diversity of voices. What is the value, then, of *this* single voice? One voice alone might need special purchase in order to overcome its particularity, and some certainly do. Let's call this the "what would Ian Mackaye say?" rule. But most single voices are not recognized as the voice of the subculture and to be clear, Mackaye has certainly said that he is not that voice. There are several matters that are forgotten by a critique that suggests memoirs are limited by their particularity. The first is to recognize that valuing individual voices is part of punk's community standards and that knowledge-keeping is a DIY economy within punk, even if it has never escaped the gravity that culture likes to assign to expert and "celebrity" voices. Second, the particularity of a single voice is a strength: a singular voice is valuable not because it fully represents a moment in time; it is valuable because it doesn't. A memoir recognizes that every experience of punk is an experience for this person, at this time and place. Third, the particularity of an individual voice is valuable especially because it exceeds a focus on punk. A memoir includes so much more about how a life in punk is lived. A memoir richly documents how fully punk might penetrate a life and define someone, as well as how punk depends on what is outside of itself. Barile, for instance, discusses how the ethics she learned within the Philadelphia and Boston hardcore scenes at the start of the 1980s would come to guide her teaching practice and strengthen her convictions when advocating for her students.³² The actual effects of punk may not be especially well represented by oral histories that focus only on what is obviously punk. Fourth, memoirs can engender critique in ways that other narratives may not, and that is a good thing. Sarah Attfield recognizes that any account of punk can naturalize "hierarchies of power"

32. Barile, *I'm Not Holding Your Coat*, 16.

and that one should interrogate how and why one account might be “privileged (published) over another.”³³ Any representation of punk is a partial representation, and this is obviously true in the case of memoirs that, by definition, foreground individual experience.

As a matter of storytelling, representation is something every writer considers. How one tells a story is more than a matter of preference. It is always, in part, a matter of what one chooses to say, can say, and what one will be heard to say, all of which involve social norms and conventions. Memoirs are perhaps best labelled “true fictions” because they take the haphazard events of the past and fit them into a coherent narrative that makes sense according to convention methods of telling a story.³⁴ To call them fiction is not to imply they are wholly invented; they are fictional in the sense that they assemble an author’s life and experiences into recognizable events and categories and create a story with protagonists and challenges overcome or reversals of fortune, and so on. This applies to any story. What is stranger, I wonder: that I might say “punk led me to become a teacher” or that music makes me feel alive in a way few other things do and this leads me to describe it as a causal effect for the structure of my career? I live in a disenchanted world where curious feelings and binding attachments usually need to be explained rationally, so I say that punk made me a teacher. It is a story that makes sense according to our ideas of cause and effect and individual agency. But I don’t think it is the whole story. I am never fully or even adequately represented by the ways I have of speaking about my attachments to punk. Judith Butler describes how representing oneself involves the unchosen “norms through which the ‘I’ becomes intelligible,”³⁵ and this can explain why I discuss career outcomes when I should really risk more curious claims about aesthetic enchantment. Stories emerge from the friction between personal experience and given ways of organizing that wild material into a narrative form. This might strike some readers as “unpunk” and that is fair because the early success of punk music lay in its ability to shock and offend authority figures. It flipped off convention and treated norms as opportunities for rebellion. Is it surprising, then, that punk memoirs may not follow suit?

Laura Jane Grace, for example, interlaces first person narration addressed to the reader with excerpts from private journals to heighten the intimacy and apparent truthfulness of *Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock’s Most Infamous Punk Rock Sell Out*. Are these journals edited? I don’t know. Certainly, they are selectively chosen and integrated into the narrative in artful ways that amplify moments of clarity and confusion in a voice that is distinct from the retrospective knowledge gained over time and distance by the older, wiser narrator. The effect is a true fiction that has been carefully arranged. Grace inserts the first entry with no special explanation, noting only that when the opportunity to address “my gender confusion” proved especially elusive, “I’d sit and drink and write in my journal.”³⁶ Many readers will feel as though they are discovering the unbridled truth in

33. Sarah Attfield, “Punk Rock and the Value of Auto-ethnographic Writing about Music,” *Portal* 8, no. 1 (2011): 8.

34. James Clifford, “Introduction: Partial Truths,” in *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 7.

35. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005), 135.

36. Laura Jane Grace, *Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock’s Most Infamous Anarchist Sellout* (Paris: Hachette Books, 2016), 37–38.

what follows, which is probably important in a work co-authored by Dan Ozzi. This storytelling strategy emphasizes Grace's longstanding desire to transition and the obvious agony involved in living as a man. By juxtaposing present-day narration and the confidence and dignity Grace experiences now against earlier days of restless longing, the memoir further humanizes the author and responds directly to public protests that demonized her for selling out when *Against Me!* signed with Warner Records. But it is hardly iconoclastic storytelling. The book is artfully crafted and designed to make readers feel they know who Grace really is. It provides the sort of intimacy and access one expects of the memoir genre.

Despite being written by musicians who have established records as aesthetic innovators who have defeated any and all conventions associated with musical theory, punk memoirs are, in my experience, pretty conventional in form. They recall the past and are interested in explaining the present with recourse to childhood, significant relationships, and life events, and almost always arrive at some sense of ending. Does the use of conventional narrative strategies reveal something significant within punk memoirs? I tend to think so because the "failure" to be iconoclastically punk might be a crucial part of what makes them such a fascinating part of punk culture. For example, consider how Grace's journals also reveal surprising insights and explore how "selling out" is a complicated matter enmeshed with her individual experiences of love and pain, gender dysphoria, tactics of self-medication, and addiction: "I find the major label world attractive in the way that I do any other vice. It makes you feel great while making you hate yourself at the same time which makes you need it more until you can't remember any other way to feel love."³⁷ The conventional form of narration is complemented by something much less conventional in punk culture: the recognition that the punk world and the world outside of punk are complexly interwoven, and the emotional realities of both are lived simultaneously. A life in punk depends on more than just punk, and the conventional ways of writing a memoir make plain some of those divergent attachments and conflicting values.

Such a dynamic is clearest in *Red Paint*, Sasha taq̓səb̓lu LaPointe's account of her life as a punk *and* a Coast Salish Indigenous person. The book explores the overlapping, intersecting, and diverging realities that she lives. Her memoir ends with a ceremony that is drawn from Coast Salish culture and traditional Indigenous practices of knowledge. The narrative recounts this ceremony performed on stage with her band Medusa Stare and connects this moment to another in which she first earned the right to perform a ceremony wearing the red paint of her ancestors. She explains that this was a "ritual of healing" to "honor my ancestors and myself" that acknowledged the pain felt by "women in my family" and celebrated their capacity to heal: "medicine was in our blood" she proudly declares.³⁸ It is a powerful ending to a narrative that celebrates Indigenous survival and resurgence and explores how LaPointe blends Coast Salish traditional

37. *Ibid.*, 101.

38. Sasha taq̓səb̓lu LaPointe, *Red Paint: An Ancestral Autobiography of a Coast Salish Punk* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2022), 215-216.

knowledge with punk. But this is not a punk rock ending, even if the live performance would have brought these traditions together. In the book, this ceremony is an opportunity to accentuate her Coast Salish culture. LaPointe is not unique in deciding that punk and its logics do not provide an effective conclusion to the story. Pearson and Grace each construct a narrative climax around the end of a marriage. Like LaPointe, they leverage a significant life event in order to create a sense of ending. What is striking about such moments is not that the authors have failed to embody a punk spirit or revealed some latent commitment to convention. No, what is striking is that for each of them, a punk memoir is more than just a story of being a punk. These authors all signal something not always noticed by scholarly and popular accounts: that punk is part of a larger social and cultural ecosystem and conventions and they foreground that reality as defining features of their narratives in the climax to each book. The conventional narrative tactics of many punk memoirs emphasize that a life lived in punk is one that remains tethered, in difficult, wonderful, and challenging ways to norms that may seemingly have no place or corollary in punk. How one navigates such a reality is a consistent topic of memoirs.

By making an author's participation in a larger social world central to the story, punk memoirs test the fantasy of a restricted economy that celebrates punk as if it were a separate world. They are not the first to do so. When I read the zine *HeartattaCk* in the 1990s, Felix Von Havoc taught me how to buy a used Toyota pickup truck, and Chris Jensen encouraged me to wonder what a career in education might look like for a punk kid. Zines have long explored what it means to be punk in a world hostile to punks and punk ideals. Zines are discursive institutions that link the punk public sphere to a wider world within which we all live, a tradition of writing that implants us in a social world "stretching back to Thomas Paine and other radical pamphleteers, up through the underground press of the 1960s, and on towards the internet."³⁹ Punk memoirs intensify this characteristic attention to the interface of punk and life by telling the stories that begin after the gig ends and the lights come back on. Like zines, memoirs are active interventions that shape what counts as the politics of punk and, as Miller describes, are characteristic of the intervention that memoirs make in culture broadly, with its capacity to blend personal and social impacts:

memoir encompasses both acts of memory and acts of recording—personal reminiscences and documentation. The word record, which crops up in almost every dictionary definition of memoir, contains a double meaning too. To record means literally to call to mind, to call up from the heart. At the same time, record means to set down in writing, to make official. What resides in the province of the heart is also what is exhibited in the public space of the world.⁴⁰

Memoirs insist that punk cannot be restricted only to what is officially "punk" and this is a powerful provocation for some strands of criticism that, understandably, attempt to

39. Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (London: Verso, 1997), 19.

40. Nancy K. Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 2.

build conceptual fences around an object called punk in order to study it. What might a punk scholarship look like that begins with the boundaries enlarged by memoirs? It is a topic that some are approaching, though perhaps not in the way that memoirs call for when they make the official record of punk intimate, personal, and social at the same time. For example, Ensminger stitches together a vast array of precise examples to explore the politics of punk, wisely recognizing that politics means, in this context, “an ecosystem of constant effort, of boiling sympathies, of pithy pretensions” more than a unified doctrine of rebellion.⁴¹ Punk has thousands of faces and its politics are always being realized in the activities of individuals whose tactics, desires, and conception of punk vary widely. Ensminger knows this, as does David Pearson, who studies how punk became a “conduit to protest movements” and “provided practical training in collective action, DIY activity, and (sometimes violent) confrontation.”⁴² Pearson likewise appreciates that many of the effects of punk are less countable: while “most people touched by this music in the 1990s have little to do with punk today, something fundamental about their way of being in the world has been deeply impacted by punk music.”⁴³ Where scholarship often arrives at an understanding of punk’s social impact, memoirs begin from this stranger insight that music can reorient a life, breezing past claims about the “breaks and contradictions” of style⁴⁴ or the cultural significance of establishing underground networks and economies that would “establish trading and communication pathways” or even “the wider historical and political context needed to understand what [punk] was about.”⁴⁵ Memoirs focus on a life first and foremost, and while they are fascinated by many of the same trajectories of social and political thought pursued by scholars of punk activism, they filter these subjects through the lens of personal experience.

Consider Larry Livermore’s account of the rise and fall of Lookout! Records, which he started in Berkeley, California. Rather than explore the social and economic politics surrounding the popularization of punk at the start of the 1990s, Livermore tells a harrowing story of how unbearable life became in the wake of the mainstream success that the label experienced during the pop punk explosion marked by Green Day and others. At its height, he walked away from the label he founded, unable to find any fulfillment in what it had become. He was unable to articulate why he needed to leave and it was only later that he would come to “fully accept where I’d been at fault, how my cowardice and weakness had led me to abandon one of the best and most amazing things I’d ever done.”⁴⁶ *How to Ruin a Record Label: The Story of Lookout Records* is a painfully honest account of frustration, depression, restlessness, and disappointment and expands discussions of the impacts of punk record companies. Stacy Thompson has noted that while

41. David Ensminger, *The Politics of Punk: Protest and Revolt from the Streets* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 4.

42. David Pearson, *Rebel Music in the Triumphant Empire: Punk Rock in the 1990s United States* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2021), 219.

43. *Ibid.*, 226.

44. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1979), 127.

45. Kevin Mattson, *We’re Not Here to Entertain: Punk Rock, Ronald Reagan, and the Real Culture War of 1980s America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), 81, xiv.

46. Livermore, *How to Ruin a Record Label*, 275.

punk failed to abolish capitalism, it has successfully established a “socialized and collectivized system of production and exchange” that is built on ethics and a love of music rather than profit and exploitation.⁴⁷ Justin Pearson describes the reality of running a record label in less idealistic terms: “you just did what you did, lost your ass financially, and benefited in ways that had nothing to do with monetary success.”⁴⁸ Livermore and Lookout achieved unparalleled underground financial success while remaining independent. And yet, Livermore was desperate to escape this reality: “I honestly believed my sanity was at stake, and perhaps even my life. Whether that was really true, or if I was being over-dramatic and self-indulgent, I’ll probably never know. But when people ask, as they often do, how such a shining success story could have gone so horribly wrong, I’m pretty forthright about admitting: ‘I gave up, walked away, and let it’.”⁴⁹ Livermore reminds readers that success for punks does not look like success to outsiders. More, he notes that the story of punk rock success—of lives transformed, of culture created with shoestring budgets, of whole new worlds of possibility being realized—is fragile and sometimes dependent upon unyielding personal sacrifices. It involves more than just beneficial social outcomes. His memoir underscores the compounding stress involved in trying to realize social success when money is involved. These stresses are just as life-altering as any other effect generated by punk culture. His memoir challenges romantic vows of punk rock poverty by depicting some of the personal turmoil generated by punk.

By telling stories about how an individual lives within punk and a wider world, memoirs appreciate that punks always travel on multiple passports. We might share tattoos or be able to sing the same songs, but we come from so many different worlds, then and now. Memoirs celebrate the incredible power of solidarity in the face of difference. And they record how that solidarity sometimes comes at the cost of ignoring important differences. Authors routinely explore what it means to come from a particular home, neighborhood or community and also live a life in punk. In the case of Phuc Tran, punk is at the heart of a story of what it means to be a refugee from Vietnam growing up in the United States in the 1970s and ’80s. *Sigh, Gone: A Misfit’s Memoir of Great Books, Punk Rock, and the Fight to Fit In* explores how punk became a home when Tran did not feel at home in his skin, his culture, or with his family. Punk gave him a vocabulary for feelings of dislocation and was a salve to its worst impacts. Punk might have a sound and a politics, but for Tran it was a means of escape from unbearable conditions at home and at school. For others, the promise of punk is a story of promises broken. *The Spitboy Rule* recalls how the punk scene in the bay area in the 1990s was unable to comprehend the realities Michelle Cruz Gonzales knew as a Xicana woman raised by powerful women. What started with the conditional acceptance she received from punk rock boys who thought she was a good drummer *for a girl* became even more fraught when Gonzales realized that the colorblind feminist politics of riot grrrl “did not see me, who I really was

47. Stacy Thompson, *Punk Productions: Unfinished Business* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 179.

48. Pearson, *From the Graveyard*, 82.

49. Livermore, *How to Ruin a Record Label*, 275.

at the core, the face and body through which I experienced the world.”⁵⁰ Punk was inhospitable for Grace, too, when she found herself abandoned by punk culture when she needed community most. In the words of Carella and Wymer, “Having embraced punk as an ethical philosophy that espoused freedom of expression and opposition to establishment oppression, Grace found instead that the real-world punk community” was unable and unwilling to recognize the dignity of trans lives.⁵¹ Both Grace and Gonzales tell stories of being marginalized within punk and identify the incomplete disavowal of many mainstream relations of domination within punk. In this way, memoirs have proven themselves to be especially responsive to the call from Kirsty Lohman and Anita Raghunath to examine how the “inclusivity that was present in early punk” was compromised by the “social inequalities of racism, sexism, homophobic and ablest norms” imported into punk beginning in the 1980s and 1990s.⁵² Reid Chancellor’s graphic memoir *Hardcore Anxiety* contributes to this project as well, blending a personal perspective with a social history of mental illness in punk. Chancellor tells his own story and considers how punk has, from the very start, taken up the cause of mental health even if that is not always how we have told the story. For Chancellor, punk has always involved suicide, anxiety, extreme emotions, substance use, and the mood-altering capacity of music. Memoirs develop new insights and vocabularies to track and understand the achievements and failures of punk thanks, in large part, to the time and distance involved in retrospective thinking.

When memoirs develop new modes of thought they move from being recollections to interventions that can transform what punk is in the present. They enlarge our understanding and imagination of what can and should be possible, and they can provide inspiration to those who want to re-establish past legacies, whether those are the proud traditions of punk culture built by the marginalized or traditions that we might rather not see return. Given this reality, the content of memoirs matters. As Bag recalls, “We were a band of misfits” for whom there “was no white, male hierarchy” because “early punk was as much a rejection of the status quo as it was the product of the rejects of the status quo.”⁵³ Michelle Habell-Pallán remembers things differently and is skeptical of such claims because they can appear to support a “discourse of inclusion” that was complicit in erasing “the presence of women of color.”⁵⁴ Such debates are vital and remind us that there are multiple ways to tell the story of punk and even that scholarship may sometimes be life writing by other means. When an account of oneself becomes a foundational part

50. Michelle Cruz Gonzales, *The Spitboy Rule: Tales of a Xicana in a Female Punk Band* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), 23, 90.

51. Kristen Carella and Kathryn Wymer, “‘You want me to surrender my identity?’ Laura Jane Grace, transition and selling out,” *Punk & Post-Punk* 8, no. 2 (2019): 203. doi.org/10.1386/punk.8.2.193_1.

52. Kristy Lohman and Anita Raghunath, “Notes in the margins,” *Punk & Post-Punk* 8, no. 2 (2019): 190. doi:10.1386/punk.8.2.189_2.

53. Alice Bag, “Work that Hoe: Tilling the Soil of Punk Feminism,” *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 22, no. 2–3 (2012): 236–37. doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2012.721079.

54. Michelle Habell-Pallán, “‘Death to Racism and Punk Revisionism’: Alice Bag’s Vexing Voice and the Unspeakable Influence of Canción Ranchera on Hollywood Punk,” in *Pop When the World Falls Apart: Music in the Shadow of Doubt*, ed. Eric Weisbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 266.

of cultural memory generating effects for the present and future, it demands active reading and careful reflection for what it might do now. Some of the rock-star memoirs of first-generation punks celebrate philandering misogyny and debauchery, for example. The work of memory always implicitly poses questions about the future one desires.

Beyond their capacity to stir debate, write history, and mould the shape of punk to come, memoirs are personal works, and authors often take the opportunity to do some accounting in public. For example, Jones acknowledges that even though the iconoclastic nihilism of Sex Pistols was “part of the darkness I felt,” he is now unwilling to excuse his decision to wear swastikas: “I hadn’t really got my head around the concept of the concentration camps by the time the Sex Pistols were happening.”⁵⁵ Looking back makes Jones “cringe,”⁵⁶ and that is the same word McPheeters uses when recalling a poster he created for Born Against that featured a newspaper image of a dead African American man: “I have a bad feeling I am going to be meeting this guy in the afterlife, and he’s not going to be pleased to see me. Who can blame him? You get beaten to death on a crowded street corner and some whiney college boys from New Jersey use a photo of your corpse to advertise their band? What the fuck is that?”⁵⁷ When punk life writing recalls the past, it does so with a new critical distance. Does this suggest that memoirs are working toward more ethical futures for punk? Or are they providing a necessary supplement for a punk culture that has always been willing to make mistakes? McPheeters and Jones are ready to acknowledge what was unrecognized in childhood: that so many of us who are white live in ways that engender tremendous suffering, and we are all too ready to ignore it.⁵⁸ The effects of punk memoirs are as varied as the needs and desires of their writers and readers, but it is clear they do so much more in the present than sing siren songs of nostalgia and “return . . . to a fanhood unsullied by intellectualisation.”⁵⁹

Chancellor survived attempts at suicide and declares to his readers, “You will make it out alive.”⁶⁰ It seems obvious, but it is worth remembering that memoirs are written by those who survived, and they often memorialize those who did not. The live-fast-die-young norms romanticized by stories about Sid and Nancy are transformed by memoirs into touching accounts of mourning and what it means to confront loss. More than any other form of punk culture, perhaps, memoirs provide a space to remember those who are gone. This attention to grief suggests that punk can sustain people during unimaginable loss in ways that may be so much more important than its political ambitions.

Punk has long been grounded in personal artistic expression, whether one is writing a zine or creating music or dancing, and memoirs are the most recent manifestation of this tradition. Perhaps it is surprising that punks are writing memoirs at all, given all the

55. Steve Jones, *Lonely Boy: Tales from a Sex Pistol* (Paris: Hachette Books, 2017), 221.

56. *Ibid.*, 221.

57. Sam McPheeters, “Untitled,” in *Punk is Dead, Punk is Everything*, ed. Bryan Raymond Turcotte (Encinitas, CA: Gingko Press, 2000).

58. Emily Ogden, *On Not Knowing: How to Love and Other Essays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 59.

59. Medhurst, “What did I get?” 229.

60. Reid Chancellor, *Hardcore Anxiety: A Graphic Guide to Punk Rock and Mental Health* (Portland, OR: Microcosm Publishing, 2019), 183.

other modes of self-expression they have developed over the past 50 years. This suggests to me that memoirs must do something not available in these other forms of expression, even if punk's emphasis on individuality and self-expression have prepared authors for exactly this kind of undertaking. These books invite new critical attention to punk as something unique that is lived individually and imbricated in the choreographies of the outside world. They take seriously the ineffable feelings of punk—the intensity, joy, risk, promise, love, and frustration—that make it what it is, even and especially if that makes punk harder to define. They likewise transform the youthful intensity of punk culture's willingness to experiment and offer an opportunity to reflect on what worked and what needs to be challenged, revised, and rethought. They are an archival force and a sign of the capacity of punks to write their own history in ways that kindle longstanding habits of self-critique. They mobilize hindsight to develop punk in the present. With such a range of operations, punk memoirs create new possibilities for thought that are not developed elsewhere.

Some might suggest that these new stories about punk are important because “we live according to the stories that we have read or heard.”⁶¹ Punk memoirs amend this claim slightly: we live according to the stories we have heard and the stories we create in response to existing narratives. This is why punk has remained vital for nearly 50 years and why writers share stories about the lives they have built and why a life attached to punk is wonderful, frustrating, inspiring, hard, and worth it. They give voice to some of the many ways that readers have likewise been upended by punk. As a mode of punk cultural production that now deserves to be counted alongside music, zines, fashion, and design, memoirs archive the power of punk to captivate and enchant individuals across the span of a life. Like Orpheus, they look back, but they are not trying to rescue something beloved, and they do not lose what they love by returning to it. Aware that punk has survived every death ascribed to it, memoirs look back to keep the spirit and potential of punk alive, allowing it to become attuned to new realities in the past and present while recognizing that whatever punk becomes next, it will be shaped by the hearts and hands of those who carry it forward because it is enmeshed with the complications of their lives. “For years, hardcore punk was the best game in town,” writes Sam McPheeters. But “I’ve now spent as much time outside this world as I did as a touring band member” and the more “time passes, the less the whole thing feels like nostalgia than it does a prelude. But to what, exactly?”⁶² ■

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61. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton Press, 1988), 36.

62. McPheeters, *Mutations*, 18–19.

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