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## **Imagining the scene and the memory of the F-Club: Talking about lost punk and post-punk spaces in Leeds**

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### **Abstract**

The F-Club in Leeds, UK, was a punk and post-punk night and club from the 1970s into the 1980s. Leeds as a city has a reputation for alternative music scenes, and the F-Club is part of the history recalled by musicians and fans locally. In this paper, we interview people who publicly identified with going to the F-Club back in their youth, to map connections as well as memories, identity-work and myth-making. We are interested in leisure spaces and leisure lives, as well as cultural spaces and identity-work. We explore the history of the F-Club, its place in wider networks and the memories of it by those who attended it. We explore the ways in which the F-Club is remembered and talked about by self-declared members of the scenes around the club. Our interest is not so much in mapping and understanding the identity-work and the community of the F-Club as it actually happened, but how our respondents construct these things now from their own memories. This paper also contributes to methodological and theoretical debates about network analysis against ethnography in the sociology of music, and defends the latter as a way to construct an emerging public sociology of leisure.

**Key words:** music; Leeds; identity; community; public sociology, leisure, punk

## **Introduction**

Popular music scenes have been the subject of much analysis since Cohen (2011) and Hebdige (1979). Recent years have led to a plethora of ethnographic accounts of subcultures, such as the descriptions of the identity-work in the lives goths in the work of Hodgkinson (2002, 2011), the many contributions to this journal, or the work of Kahn-Harris (2007) on belonging in extreme-metal. Such insider accounts have been criticized for their over-reliance on insider knowledge and their necessary subjectivity (Bottero and Crossley 2011; Jarman, Theodoraki, Hall and Ali-Knight 2014). That is, such qualitative, ethnographic work, while interesting, often fails to produce any generalizable conclusions that contribute to our theoretical understanding of popular culture and society. Or worse, such accounts are taken as the truth of a particular music sub-culture, and the problem of representation is elided (Bottero and Crossley 2011). More recently, popular-music studies have seen the introduction of various forms of social network analysis (SNA) used to map the connections between people, places and bands, typified by the work of Crossley (2015a, 2015b). SNA eschews reliance on ethnographic data collection for a more objective analysis of connections. But a criticism of this network analysis might be that the conclusions it constructs are empty of wider theoretical explanation about the importance, meaning and purpose of the subject matter. In popular music studies, that means SNA may well fail to produce any contribution to social and cultural theory on the intersections of power, the limits of agency and the ways in which belonging and exclusion are made. From our perspective in the sociology of leisure, we believe that the engaged and critical public sociology called for by Burawoy (2005, 2014) is constrained if one favours only a calculus of relations over a co-production of meanings. We will show in this paper that music and leisure can be explored and understood as sites for meaning-making, and as sites for public sociological engagement and counter-hegemonic resistance – but only through reading between the lines of connections.

In this paper our focus is members of a particular music scene: the F-Club<sup>1</sup> in Leeds, UK, a punk and post-punk night and club, which ran from the 1970s into the 1980s (see O'Brien 2011 in this journal for her account of Leeds at the time). Leeds as a city has a reputation for alternative music scenes, and the F-Club is part of the history recalled by musicians and fans locally. The F-Club had had, and continues to have, national and international recognition in post-punk histories, as it was the space from which influential bands such as Gang of Four, The Mekons and later The Sisters of Mercy emerged. Fans still talk to each other about the F-Club on social media, and in pubs and venues in Leeds and beyond. We set out to interview people who publicly identified with going to the F-Club back in their youth, so that we could map connections as well as memories, identity-work and myth-making. We are interested in leisure spaces and leisure lives, as well as cultural spaces and identity-work. The research project explores the history of the F-Club, its place in wider networks and the memories of it by those who attended it. We explore the ways in which the F-Club is remembered and talked about by self-declared members of the scenes around the club. Our interest is not so much in mapping and understanding the identity-work and the community of the F-Club as it actually happened, but how our respondents construct these things now from their own memories. Our aim is to make sense of how people think about this, their memories and their connections. We use discourse tracing of semi-structured-interviews to ensure we make an explanatory contribution to theoretical understanding of popular music and leisure in society.

In this paper we will suggest that societal marginality is central to the story-telling of our respondents, but that within the F-Club and the scene there were key foci of power and status, and in remembering the F-Club the majority of our respondents still see the value of punk as a space for resistance against the mainstream. That is, in their construction of the past,

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<sup>1</sup> The F-Club was not a discrete venue, but a punk night and gigs promoted by John Keenan under the banner of the F-Club in a number of venues of differing sizes in Leeds over the time of its existence. For more details see Keenan's own attempt at mapping the history: <http://www.liveinleeds.com/30jfk.htm>.

their memories and re-telling of what they believe to be true about the past, they have laid claim to what they consider to be an authentic sub-cultural capital.<sup>2</sup> The community and belonging constructed around the F-Club shows the importance of cultural capital and agency. That is, idealization of the past in the myth-making shows how important communicative leisure practices (Spracklen 2009) are for our respondents in a changed scene, city and world. Before we present the analyses, and our discussion and conclusion, we need to map put our theoretical framework, and justify and explain our methods. Before we do either of those things, however we need to give some more historical and sociological detail and context about Leeds, its music scenes, and the F-Club.

## **Leeds**

Leeds is a post-industrial city in the north of England, the centre of a wider metropolitan area in what used to be in administrative terms the West Riding of Yorkshire. It is the biggest city in Yorkshire, and its metropolitan district is one of the largest in England. Bradford is directly to the west of Leeds, and Wakefield is the old county capital to the south-east. In the 1970s it still had a large engineering industry, but this was already in decline. By the 1980s the city faced a number of challenging socio-economic problems caused by the neo-liberal transformations of the national economy: increased unemployment, crime and anti-social behaviour, urban decline and dereliction (Chatterton 2010). But the city council and government agencies worked to sell Leeds as a financial and government capital of the North, or at least the north-east of England. Gentrification started in the 1990s, but reached a peak in the 2000s (Chatterton 2010). The global recession hit Leeds and the north harder than the south of England, and in the 2010s the city is still to recover and is divided, with large numbers of

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<sup>2</sup> We follow Thornton (1996): sub-cultural capital earned as something associated with looking cool and real in a particular sub-cultural space. In our paper, this capital becomes earned by our respondents when they identify with the oppositional sub-culture they construct at the heart of punk.

long-term unemployed on council estates or in poor private housing, alongside well-off hipsters living in city-centre flats by the river.

Leeds is a student city, and its cultural spaces have long been sustained by them, though the expansion of student numbers brings with it problems of studentification and loss of residential housing to student lets (Smith 2008). With a large resident population and wider catchment area of over three million, and with a large student population brought to Headingley (Leeds 6) by three universities, Leeds is seen as a good place to do and see music. It has a strong association with an 'alternative' popular music scene, which has continued to exist since the 1979s, though it has changed shape and form, and has been privatized or eventized out of the city centre (Spracklen, Richter and Spracklen 2013). In the 1970s it became known for its punk and post-punk scene, as did other English cities at the time (Crossley 2015a). John Keenan established the F-Club as a club night where punk fans could see punk bands, and this transformed rapidly into post-punk. Keenan had a good idea of what was happening in the new music scenes, and a keen sense of self-promotion, and the club and its promoter found themselves in the local and national press extolling the virtues of the bands emerging from the alternative Leeds scene, such as Gang of Four and The Mekons. In the first half of 1980s, the alternative scene in Leeds transformed into goth rock, and launched the career of The Sisters of Mercy, whose founder members had been involved with the F-Club (according to some of our respondents). By the end of the 1980s, the scene in Leeds changed as dance music had become dominant in the alternative scene, but the 1990s saw guitar music – punk, indie and rock - return to favour (Gordon 2014). By the 2000s, metal became a dominant expression of the alternative scene in Leeds, though all forms of music genres previously mentioned had their followers (Spracklen, Richter and Spracklen 2013).

## **Theoretical framework**

Our theoretical framework is informed by structural accounts of identity and community, and uses a combination of leisure theory and cultural theory. While we recognize we live in a post-industrial society where identity might be, as Bauman (2000) suggests, liquid for those who are the failed consumers of global capitalism, we believe that the continued salience of capitalism and its hegemonic power makes post-structural theories of identity and community less relevant to understanding the forms in which leisure and cultural spaces might be sites of counter-hegemonic resistance. In this, we are following in the tradition of the work of Gramsci (1971), Hebdige (1979) and Stuart Hall (1993), using post-Marxist theories of power and intersectionality to understand the role of popular culture in belonging and exclusion. In the face of capitalism and in these contested leisure spaces, we have to be Marxists.

So our work is aligned with the work of Spracklen (2009, 2011, 2013) on the tension between communicative leisure and instrumental leisure, which draws on Habermas' (1984, 1987) model of communicative and instrumental rationalities. For Habermas, we live in a world where the instrumentality of capitalism and bureaucracies has become the dominant form of rationality and action. This is exemplified by the victory of technocracy over democracy in the European financial crisis, and the ritual shaming of elected governments such as Syriza in Greece who attempt to challenge the instrumentality of neo-liberalism (Habermas 2015). Spracklen uses the model of the rise of instrumentality and the colonization of the Habermasian communicative lifeworld to account for changes in leisure practices and spaces. For Spracklen, leisure is a universal space for humans to engage in communicative action, which helps make humans learn and be social. But since the rise of modernity, leisure has served the hegemonic powers behind instrumentality. That is, leisure (including music scenes) has been seen as a potential space for resistance by ruling elites, so it has become commodified, commercialized and instrumentalized. How and where it is possible to be communicative in leisure is important for theorizing the success of societal change.

Our theoretical framework is also aligned with the work of others in music studies and network studies of belonging, especially Thornton (1996) on subcultural capital. We use Crossley's (2015a, 2015a) idea of foci in networks, which in turn is based on a convergence of two theorists often seen as being on different sides of the structure-agency debate: Becker (1974, 1982) on symbolic interactionist accounts of how individuals make sense of their identity through their agency; and Bourdieu (1986) and the idea of the structural limitations of our habitus, and the cultural capital needed for belonging. Finally, we also draw on notions of invented traditions, the imagined and the imaginary community in memory studies (Pickering and Keightley 2013), specifically Anderson's (1983) notion of the imagined community constructed through historical myth-making. The F-Club, Leeds, and Leeds 6, and the Leeds alternative scene, are all potential imagined communities - necessarily imaginary when they are constructed through our people's stories.

## **Method**

We started out with the intention of mapping the connections between people in the F-Club scene, as well as exploring the ways in which people who had been part of the scene used their memories of it to construct their identities. As such, we realised semi-structured interviews would be the best way of generating enough data for both aims – the mapping of names and connections, and the memories of the respondents. Semi-structured questioning allowed us to retain some control of the interviews, while allowing the interviews to be as much as possible to be conversations about their memories and their involvement with the scene.

We were lucky to have two co-authors (Henderson and Procter) who had insider knowledge of F-Club and the Leeds music scene, so they guided the initial identification of respondents. We used semi-structured interviews with 15 people recruited through Facebook from the 'I Love F-Club' page, plus personal contacts and snowball sampling – all people



engaged with situating their lives and identities within the remembered habitus of alternative Leeds. This did not give us a representative sample, but of course we are not interested in finding a representative sample, only a sample of people who are keen enough to use the F-Club to reflect on their memories of it. We attempted to balance by gender, socio-economic background, and ethnicity – but ended up with a set of respondent that were mainly men (13) and all white. We know we are missing important narratives and connections from the women who report on their involvement with the scene on-line, as we did some initial work exploring posts on the Facebook page, and this needs further work. But we feel we have reached the point where we have achieved ‘saturation’ of the field – that is, we have enough data to be able to answer our research questions.

All the people we interviewed have given us informed consent for their participation, and this research was approved by our university’s Research Ethics Committee. The interviews were all recorded on digital technology, and transcribed. The interviews were then analyzed using discourse tracing (LeGreco and Tracy 2009) to construct the narratives of identity-building. This allowed us to come up with some common themes in the memorialization of the F-Club, of entering the space and being alternative, namely:

- i. finding punk and the F-Club;
- ii. alternative space;
- iii. change and stasis (being punk or post-punk or alternative or goth); and
- iv. staying alternative, going straight.

These are used in the next section, Discourse Tracing Analysis, before we turn our wider discussion and conclusion.

### **Discourse tracing analysis**

#### *Finding punk and the F-Club*

I used to go to a record shop in Harrogate called The Sound of Music where I got all my records, and they used to save me literally everything that came in. Leeds, in the '70s wasn't the genteel, European City that it is today, it was a very tough city. You had to be a bit wary about where you went, to be honest. When I first started going to Leeds, I didn't know very many people at first, but in the end I got to know people over a few years. I think it was in 1978, I started doing a fanzine, Damaged Goods, I was really into the Gang Of Four and that got me access everywhere really. I suppose that kind of chimed when I started to go to more F Club gigs, I mean I started those in '77, but really, in one year I probably went to everything, got friendly with John Keenan, when he did Futurama One. (JL)

JL's journey to the F-Club is typical, both in the things remembered and the routes to being a part of the scene. Like JL, all of our respondents found punk as new and exciting form of music, and something which they recognised as having a particular power, an a particular politics. Punk was being heard on the radio and on television (*Top of the Pops* is mentioned by two of our respondents), but our respondents also had friends who introduced them to punk. The power of punk was the simplicity of the songs, the power chords and the volume. The politics was something loosely understood by our respondents. For respondents such as JL, who were relatively young when punk appeared, the politics was a form of individualism, a form of rebellion and pride, as a well as a form of community – getting to know people in an otherwise unwelcome urban space. For respondents who were older, such as MB, punk's politics was more explicitly aligned with a left-wing and/or anarchist politics, which gave them a political alignment they retained in their entire personal and professional lives. For all of our respondents, there is a common experience of finding belonging in the F-Club and the wider

punk/post-punk alternative scene. This of course should not be surprising, as we are speaking to people who still memorialise the punk scene and the F-Club.

All our respondents came from the margins of the city or beyond to watch bands. The marginality was particularly salient in the stories we heard – the majority of our respondents lived in West Yorkshire, or on the council estate fringes of Leeds, and the city centre was the source of much excitement and fear. The city centre was seen by many of our respondents as run-down, dangerous, a place of football hooligans roaming wild. Most of our respondents were young people who left school at sixteen or after their A-Levels, and who worked in Leeds; of the two went to university here, one was still from Leeds.

The importance of John Keenan in the memories is clear. For some respondents, knowing John Keenan and being his friend all these years has remained a matter of public pride. One respondent told us that ‘Keenan is a god’. Another explained how Keenan had never given up promoting music, even though he had lost money, because he cared about putting on new bands. People were proud to show us the connections they had with Keenan, including artefacts such as newspaper clippings, diaries, lists of gigs attended, even an F-Club membership card. Having said that, some respondents thought Keenan was just lucky to be there at the moment.

### *Alternative space*

I was born in Germany, I’m an army brat. My parents came back to England, I think when I was nine, and then back to Wakefield where they came from, so literally I spent my childhood ... I was at school in Wakefield, as I say, I was born in 1961, so in terms of when I became interested in music etc. it was about 1978. I started to go to Leeds because I had heard about this club from a friend of mine. I used to go and see bands

at the Unity Hall in Wakefield. I think it was John Keenan who promoted some of the gigs. So it was like, ‘Oh they’ve got this club in Leeds,’ so my mate Phil and I went, quite scared, very underage, because I was 16. The anecdote I always remember, and I’ve told people this a few times is, I got there, down the steps into the Calls and it was dark, and it was like ... Phil and I were the youngest people there, so I bought half a lager in a plastic glass and a bag of crisps. This girl, who was this legendary Leeds punkette called Gina, who came up to me and actually looked quite frightening, said, ‘Have you finished your crisps?’ I’m like, ‘You can have them.’ She took the crisps, opened her coat, took out some glue, sniffed it and said, ‘Do you want some?’ I think that was my first introduction, I can’t remember who the hell was playing, but that was the first night I went there. It was like, ‘Whoa.’ (PH)

The alternative space of the F-Club provided strong memories and anecdotes for all our respondents. Being in this space meant having the norms and values of society challenged, while at the same time, as in PH’s case, confirming the stories about transgression they had heard about from their school friends, teachers and parents. Punk was dangerous, and being at a punk gig was dangerously transgressive – even though the shared transgression gave them belonging and community, too. There was an awareness of a split between students and locals in the scene, but different memories about the consequences of that split. For some of the respondents, the students were identified as being more ‘artsy’ or more (left-wing) political, whereas the locals were more into punk for the music. But one of our respondents suggested that punk in Leeds was initially mainly for the townies, and students only got into the scene once it had become more fashionable and respectable.

Some respondents remembered fighting occurring on the way to gigs and the F-Club between townies, locals who followed mainstream fashions, and the punks and post-punks.

Many of the respondents acknowledged that it was dangerous for them to cross the city centre, where they faced verbal abuse at the least (cf. O'Brien 2011). The gigs themselves offered a safe space and 'respite from the outside world', as one of our respondents put it. But the alternative space was also remembered as a site of tension, as well as one of belonging. As well as the stories about people drinking too much and being stupid (which could belong to any subculture, or any youth culture going out: Hebdige 1979; Hodkinson 2002), some respondents told us about the political tensions at work in the alternative scene. Leeds in the 1970s and early 1980s was a centre of extreme right-wing political activism, and the National Front were a fixture in city streets and outside the Elland Road football ground of Leeds United. Some of that extreme right-wing politics filtered into the Leeds punk scene, and some respondents recalled the presence of these neo-Nazis at gigs and outside gigs. At the same time, much of the alternative punk scene was driven by radical left-wing politics, especially associated with the students. This was the era of Rock Against Racism, when punk and reggae bands combined to fight extreme right-wing politics (Crossley 2015a; Hebdige 1979). So there was a strong awareness by many of our respondents of this left/right politics divide in the scene.

PH's story tells us something about the gender politics in the memories our respondents have of the scene. He mentioned Gina, who is 'a legendary punkette'. But later in our interview with him, he told us it was mainly young men who attended the gigs and the F-club. Perhaps Gina was legendary because there were so few female fans in Leeds. The other respondents we interviewed – including the women – agreed with this recollection. For all of them, women were treated equally and with respect, but they were few in number. PH may well be polite in his recollection and description of Gina, but some of our other male respondents have told us about the confident sexuality of some punk women and its effect on their own relationships with girlfriends. All our respondents acknowledged that with masculinity, the Leeds punk scene was essentially white. John Keenan held F-Club nights in venues in and near

Chapelton, a predominantly black-British suburb of Leeds in the 1970s, two of our respondents mentioned it being 'strange' to venture into the area and 'meet black people'. The class nature of the scene is not so clear-cut in the memories offered to us. Some of our respondents were working-class in origin and in employment status, but others had middle-class backgrounds. We heard that the scene was predominantly working-class, 'lads from council estates' but we also heard it was people 'from all sorts of places'. Certainly, the involvement of students in the scene, as it transformed from punk, undoubtedly gave the alternative scene a more bourgeois feel.

*Change and stasis: Being punk or post-punk or alternative or goth*

RT: I think a lot of the people that usually went to the F Club were more into modern alternative, all embracing scene of being more alterative and a bit more arty than this stereotypical exploited punk sort of movement, where everybody has got a studded leather jacket and a mohican, you know what I mean? So I think a lot of those people kept to an alternative tick, but that explored a broader brush, I suppose.

Interviewer: So how did you see your own alternativeness?

RT: I got quite into ... I was always quite into Adam and the Ants and all their stuff and Killing Joke and that kind of side of stuff. Then Bauhaus came along, so I was quite interested in a bit of that. Also on the post-punkier side, Magazine, so I really liked all that. I was heading more in that direction. Then I left England and lived in Spain for two years and then came back from working in tourist resorts and all of a sudden there was this band, the Sisters of Mercy, who were some sort of reasonably popular, local band, had become bloody huge. I was like, 'Oh, what's going on here?' So I came back to England and then did join some bands.

The F-Club definitely engendered a long-lasting alternative scene in Leeds. Going to events under its banner allowed our respondents to meet other fans, other musicians and fanzine journalists. Most of our respondents moved into the student centre of Leeds, Leeds 6, even those who did not come to study but to work. Leeds 6 became a centre of alternative life for most of our respondents, and some are still involved in events in the area and live nearby. Being part of this alternative scene meant adhering to the DIY ethics of punk (Gordon 2014; O'Brien 2011). Many of our respondents were involved as musicians, promoters or writers – beyond just being fans. The musicians were particularly driven by collaboration and co-operation (Gordon 2014), and many of the well-known F-Club bands reflect this in their public history.<sup>3</sup> As punk shifted to post-punk and goth, some of our respondents remained true to the original punk ethic – especially the two respondents from punk bands, who continued playing punk until the other things in their lives got in the way (one of these respondents, SW, actually became a high-ranking police officer). But most of our respondents followed the alternative scene in Leeds as it shifted from punk to post-punk. As RT suggests above, this then became the goth scene. The alumni of the F-Club continued to be active in this new alternative scene through the 1980s, and by the 1990s one had become a DJ in the alternative house scene, and another a key figure in the RiotGrrl movement. Only one of our respondents has distanced himself from the scene by listening to new music and suggesting the punk and post-punk scene was just a 'phase' of his life. But even he uses Facebook to catch up with old friends from the scene.

The Sisters of Mercy play an important role as a band that both encapsulates the importance of the F-Club and vitality of the Leeds alternative scene at the time, as well as

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<sup>3</sup> The Mekons were encouraged and mentored by Gang of Four, who shared rehearsal space with them; and likewise The Mekons supported The Sisters of Mercy through releasing the first Sisters single on their own label (Frith and Horne 1987).

demonstrating its changing nature in the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> The Sisters of Mercy are probably one of the most well-known goth rock bands in the world, and the band that led (or took advantage of) the global popularization of the genre in the 1980s. John Keenan used the word ‘goth’ to describe the gloomy, post-punk sound in published interviews at the time. The Sisters of Mercy started out claiming to a goth band. Their lead singer and songwriter, Andrew Eldritch, was a regular at the F-Club, and is described by some of our respondents being there watching bands:

Student audience, the audience in Leeds was different, because it was students, it was older ... you could see people ... people making copious mental notes for their career moves. I still remember my Andrew Eldritch anecdotes, I remember Andrew Eldritch at the F Club, so he said, ‘Well, look, that’s the guy in the sunglasses who thinks he is Jim Morrison.’ I didn’t know who Jim Morrison was at the time. Only later on I was told that was Andrew Eldritch. He was checking out the bands and watching the moves.  
(PH)

Members of the band served as roadies and staff for Keenan and other Leeds promoters. RT mentions them, but they are talked about by a number of others in our research. MB, for example, was involved in helping shoot a video for The Sisters of Mercy when they were on the cusp of their fame, and before they initially broke-up in 1985. SW played in a band with Craig Adams, the original bass player for the band. The F-Club alumni moved onto new venues and bars such as the Faversham, and the Phono when punk had shifted ground to goth, and The Sisters of Mercy were the Leeds band to follow and admire or envy, so our respondents show

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<sup>4</sup> The focus for the Leeds goth scene in the 1980s and beyond was the Phono in the Merrion Centre in the middle of town: many of our respondents crossed over into this scene and attended the Phono, including the first author of this paper.



a mix of emotions about Eldritch. So while they are criticized for making a career and signing to a major label, they are respected for initially remaining on their own DIY label.

Was there something important or unique to Leeds? Some of our respondents mention the decaying urban spaces, and the crime, which were obvious things for alternative scenes to react against (cf. O'Brien 2011). Others talk about the number of musicians and fans, especially in Leeds 6 among the student population through the 1970s into the 1980s, which meant there was a sustainable and growing alternative subculture. One of our respondents wondered whether the vitality of the Leeds alternative scene had something to do with the fact that it was ignored by the London-based mainstream music press and the mainstream music industry, and left to develop its own ideas about music and fandom. But of course the success of the Leeds bands, and the rise of goth rock, meant for a moment Leeds was the focus of the British music industry. So for our respondents there was nothing essential or necessary about Leeds and the longevity of the F-Club and its related alternative scene – despite some myth-making in the public sphere about the rise of goth rock being related to the dark, rainy streets of the deprived northern English city (Spracklen and Spracklen 2012).

### *Staying alternative, going straight*

I mean that was quite a difficult sort of time, I think punk enabled me to become the person I am. I think I am a truly alternative person in lots of way. I am absolutely bonkers. Yet I think it's what it kind of ... yes, probably just through my businesses, I have to take a commercial view point on a lot of things, but a lot of my view points are very kind of wanting to be very different and be very creative and different and make a difference. I think a lot of that was born out of those early informative years of wanting to be different as a kid and making a ... I remember being sacked from jobs because I

dyed my hair and that, and not giving a toss and that kind of instilled this thing in me, you know, you've got to be different, you've got to do different things. You've got to compromise a bit to make things work, but you've got to be different. (RT)

It is a fact of life that all our respondents have grown as social beings, and aged as mortals. Punk might never die, but punks do. For many of our respondents, the process of remembering and re-telling stories from their younger days allowed them to draw 'songlines' back to their alternative youth, or for them to bracket out their alternative past (Anderson 1983; Bauman 2000). Memories differed about the moment when the alternative scene stopped, if indeed it ever stopped. For RB and a small majority of our respondents, the alternative scene in Leeds was still thriving, even if some of its members were getting older: she still considered herself a punk even when she had to go to work in an office in an education establishment. For others, the alternative scene changed when they stepped away from it: when it turned into goth, or house, or indie, or metal. For the cynical among our respondents, punk today is a 'just another genre', and the alternative scene in Leeds had atrophied or disappeared altogether.

## **Discussion**

In asking people to share their memories with us about the alternative scene and the F-Club, we are well aware that we are receiving filtered stories (Pickering and Keightley 2013). One of our respondents still carried with him a list of every gig he ever attended, updated now in a spreadsheet; and another still had her diary which recorded the gigs she attended and her feelings about those gigs at the time. But all our respondents chose to share stories that they believed we wanted to hear. Our connection to the past is always partial, the choices we make about what to remember are always subjective, if not unconscious (Anderson, 1983); and the choices we make about what to recall to others about our past experiences is inevitably

subjective, shaped by assumptions, norms and values, prejudices and expectations. For our research, then, the fact that the respondents came to the interviews with partial memories and selected stories does not prejudice our aims (Spracklen, Lucas and Deeks 2014). What they have told us is what they think we want to hear, what they think is important to be told about this space and scene. These are the collective memories, the myths and narratives and connections, that our respondents chose to share with us, because these are the memories that are important in their idealization of their past.

Marginality seems to be a significant theme in their stories (Bauman 2000; Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1986). While the class element of that marginality is clouded by the involvement of people drawn from the local universities, and people with middle-class occupations, the younger versions of most of our respondents were from marginal, working-class backgrounds. They travelled into the city centre from towns or cities around Leeds, or from council estates on the edges of the city. That story of marginality makes the imagined community of the punk scene in Leeds more salient. These are people who are physically and culturally isolated from the places where they think things are happening, people with low hegemonic status because they are from the margins of the urban districts, and because they are young. They may be pretending to be more working-class than they might have actually been, but this is irrelevant to the story that they have told us. For our respondents, punk was the way in which they found a way to find some form of belonging, and the F-Club was the physical realization of this imagined community (Anderson 1983). The whiteness of the Leeds punk scene and the relationship it seems to have had with the politics of racism and anti-racism seems to be a function of how belonging and identity work in such imagined, imaginary communities. In the case of punk<sup>5</sup> the whiteness of the scene marked it as a potential place for

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<sup>5</sup> In Leeds and around the F-Club, as we have noted, some of our respondents recall clashes with neo-Nazi punks and other active members of the far-right. Leeds had racist punk bands. The period in which punk and the F-Club thrived was a period in UK politics where the far-right sought to use popular culture, football fandom and music to normalize their racism and fascism (Worley 2012).

alienating black culture as Other, as Hebdige (1979) noted; but it was also a place to try to build community with black people, hence Rock Against Racism and the involvement of radical-left activists. In re-calling the gender politics of the scene, there is both claims about the welcoming nature of the punk scene in Leeds, and admission of the scene's masculinity.

The importance of Leeds 6 in people's memories tells us this area (Headingley, sometimes just Hyde Park) is seen by our respondents as the focus of the alternative scene – even though the venues were in the city centre. This memory is supported by our knowledge of this area, and its continued importance to alternative subcultures from the 1970s onwards (Riches and Lashua 2014). Spracklen, Richter and Spracklen (2013) explore the retreat of four alternative sub-cultures from the city centre into marginal leisure and cultural spaces in Leeds – and most of these too are in the Leeds 6 area. Leeds 6 historically was a mixed neighbourhood, with a combination of back-to-back terraces for workers, and big houses for the Victorian and Edwardian civic elites. But the arrival and expansion of the University of Leeds, then what became Leeds Beckett University, meant this housing - big and small - was invariably converted to flats for student use. The cheapness of this housing and the social life around the pubs and bars meant many students continued to live in the area, and other young people moved into it. There is no surprise to us that this happened with most of our respondents as soon as they had the means to live there.

The ambivalence of goth rock runs through the stories provided by our respondents. Some of them became closely involved with the goth rock scene, such as MB and RT. But others such as AW and RH rejected the turn to goth by sticking with punk or moving onto other things. If all roads in the stories lead to The Sisters of Mercy (and what RH called the 'obligatory Eldritch story' there is some suspicion of Andrew Eldritch for using the scene to become 'big'. Punk's DIY ethics and suspicion of instrumentality runs through these stories. The idea that Eldritch planned his rock career is viewed by some as a betrayal of the free and

Habermasian communicative nature (Habermas 1984, 1987; Spracklen 2009) of the politics and community of punk. One does not become a punk to make money. One becomes a punk to express one's outrage at the state of modern society, however that is expressed in the scene (Spracklen, Richter and Spracklen 2013).

The suspicion of people making money, and being instrumental by using punk and alternative subcultures, does not extend to the other musicians and promoters in our research. So long as one could claim to be authentic because one had served time in the scene, it was possible to build careers like the one made by RT, who ended up owning venues and festivals (for authenticity: see also Gordon 2014). Some of our respondents recognised that John Keenan may have been driven to try to make money from promoting bands, but they did not include him in the spaces beyond the symbolic boundaries of the community. Keenan was not just seen as an authentic insider, but he has been recalled and mapped as the key focus of power in this scene (Crossley 2015a, 2015b). Keenan is celebrated and turned into a mythological hero. He was the person who made this scene happen. It was his money and risk as a promoter, but also his enthusiasm and unwillingness to give in. Our respondents show that Keenan's own taste became a key arbiter in the transitions from pre-punk to punk to goth, as he searched for the next new thing.

The importance of cultural capital in the scene is evident in the stories – passing the entry gates, paying your dues (Becker 1982; Gordon 2014; Hodgkinson 2002) – but once individuals are in the imagined community, they can debate and shape belonging and exclusion through shaping the symbolic boundaries and defining the sub-cultural capital they consider to be valid and real (Thornton 1996). This shows that within the community of punk and the F-Club it was and is possible to be an active agent, shaping the field and having a say in deciding what is important or not important. Individuals choose to be a punk or not to be a punk, or how much to be a punk, and this active shaping of one's identity feed back into the network (Becker

1974, 1982), and into our respondents' recollections. But entry into the community was still pre-defined and limited by the wider structural forces at work in society in England in the 1970s. Punk emerged into a music industry formed by post-colonial, global capitalism, and was sold almost immediately as just another genre by the mainstream music media (Crossley 2015a; Hebdige 1979). Our respondents were attracted to punk because it was about rebellion, about energy and noise – and they could learn to be punks relatively quickly and easily (by being DIY, sharing and collaborating to make the scene: Gordon 2014). This was possible, ironically, because of the acceptance of punk in society and culture in the 1970s. Punks were deviants but were not feared in the same way as young black reggae fans (Hebdige 1979).

In all the recollections and in the connections suggested in those recollections, our respondents have constructed a form of nostalgia for this imagined community. The idealization of the past is central to how these F-Club alumni identify today. Their survival, and the survival of the idealized past, are inter-connected and cannot be easily departed. What it means to be someone who remembers and follows the punk scene now, having been a part of it in the past, is to be involved in daily myth-making (Barthes 2009; Pickering and Keightley 2013). But this survival depends on and survives in communicative leisure practises today. If no one talked about the punk scene and the F-Club, it would fade away. By talking about it our respondents keep the punk spirit alive, and in doing so stand up against the instrumentality that threatens to colonize the lifeworld of modern society altogether (Habermas 1984, 1987). This community, this place of belonging and myth-making, is important in our respondent's identity-work, and their struggle for control over that identity-work.

## **Conclusion**

Our research has implications for sociology of leisure, popular music studies, cultural studies, and leisure studies. We have shown how people from subcultures continue to use their past

lives and adventures to make sense of their identity now. The subcultural field still makes communicative sense to our respondents, and their involvement in the scene in the 1970s onwards still defines who they think they are, and who they stay friends with. This is a form of symbolic constructionism at work (Becker 1974, 1982), albeit one in which the Bourdieusian cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) and habits of the subcultural scene limits the choices made in that construction. Following Thornton (1996) we can further suggest that memories of the past act as sub-cultural capital in the spaces of our self-identifying punk respondents today. They are able to use their agency now to make belonging from their past, and from the networks that formed in that subcultural space. For popular music studies, we hope that our use of ethnographic methodologies gives us a richer understanding of the scene, the structures, the networks and the people. For cultural studies, this work shows that structuralist theories should not necessarily be thrown away, because although the world might have changed and become driven more by choice and postmodern play, people still makes sense of their lives using the constraints imposed by hegemonies and capitalism. For leisure studies, this work stresses the need to accept music as a space and form of leisure.

We hope that this paper is also seen as being part of the growing movement to re-introduce and integrate theory into research, and politics into theory, and to construct a public sociology in which researchers can engage with the public sphere and alternative, marginal or counter-hegemonic communities (Burawoy 2005, 2014). We feel it is our duty to report that our respondents are still shaped by this formative leisure space, and we hope to continue to celebrate that space in continued dialogue with our respondents: one of us has been invited to speak locally at a goth festival; another is making music in Leeds; the third is still promoting gigs in the north of England. Our meaning-making maps across the space we have researched, and the people in it. Our paper demonstrates the usefulness and the need to converge theoretical frameworks to make sense of leisure, culture and society in these directionless times. Finally,

we also believe our paper shows the continuing salience of critical theory based on structuralism in music studies, cultural studies and leisure studies - and the continuing need for Marxist theory.

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