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Expression Through a Lens: A Critical Analysis of “Alternative TV: Mark Perry interview”

Alternative TV: Mark Perry interview is a one-on-one conversation between Mark Perry, frontman of punk-rock band of Alternative TV and founder of popular punk zine *Sniffin’ Glue* and Jason Gross. The interview covers in detail Perry’s early inspirations, his own breaking free of a rigid, rather bureaucratic way of life, and the emergence of punk culture during a period of dissatisfaction with governmental organizations. He describes how his handmade zine, *Sniffin’ Glue*, was the product of his realizing that nothing like it existed at the time. It swiftly became a pillar of the punk scene and a source of inspiration for scores of self-published zines to come. Embracing the DIY spirit in every sense of the word, Perry got the first issue out within a week, and he asserts that the zine changed his life almost overnight. Its reporting of things in the moment, from an insider’s point of view, immediately captured the eyes and minds of its nascent audience and music personalities alike. It paved the way for a flood of punk zines that followed with identifiable, signature cut-and-paste imagery, typewritten or sketched-out text, and deliberate misspellings. *Sniffin’ Glue* was vital in demonstrating that just about anyone could easily, cheaply and quickly produce a fanzine.

While punk zines were not just a means for propagating their way of existence, but also a tool for members of the subculture to voice their opinions – be it sentiments on music, decidedly anti-governmental slogans, essays on feminism, or proclamations against war – it is fascinating

to note that their content often veers into more personal territory, and hence accounts of the time are written with an opinionated pen and ought to be consumed with a grain of salt.

Sniffin' Glue and Other Rock 'N Roll Habits was one of first punk zines that provided the budding British punk rock movement with a print forum and its immediate success turned its creator Mark Perry into something of a celebrity. First and foremost a music fan, Perry worked as a bank clerk and describes his state of mind at the time as being 'resigned'. Nineteen years old and being as passionate and devoted as he was to the changing trends of rock music at the time, Perry began to notice a disconnect between the music he loved and the audience it was being played to. There was an overdramatic flair that came with showmanship, and the lyrics didn't really speak to him on a personal level. The bands he was so dedicated to were too far detached from reality – they were writing and singing about things that weren't relevant, and Perry, dissatisfied as he was in his professional role and affected by the bleak political climate of the time, was 'ready for something to grab him and shake him.'

Economic recession at the end of the Labor government's regime, including a garbage strike, instilled great dissatisfaction among the youth of industrial Britain. In Mark Perry's own words, "The country seemed like it was going down the pan. It felt bleak." And through the darkness came change, in the form of punk: something that seemed more *real* than anything else before, an escape for an army of enraged youngsters who wanted nothing more than to break away from their mundane lives.

Although it is undeniable that Perry's work performed well as a means of uniting a community and spreading news of the subculture, it also is a fact that most classic and well-known punk bands tended to be mostly white and male, and Perry fell right into their core audience. *Sniffin' Glue's* content, hence, while remaining a key source of information about

contributors to the subculture even to this day, also inadvertently supported the direct erasure of female, black and brown punk groups who also made great strides in promoting punk, and whose influence on the subculture is indisputable.

Perry's inspirations were largely white-male-centric – in fact, the title *Sniffin' Glue* is a direct reference to a Ramones song, "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue." His other favorites – which include Gentle Giant, the Steve Gibbons Band, and the Sex Pistols – provided a great deal of creative motivation, but his focus on this specific category of band meant many female-led bands such as Bikini Kill and The Runaways slipped beneath the radar of many fans, Perry included. While he does credit Patti Smith with penning many a thought-provoking lyric, *Sniffin' Glue's* covers more often feature male groups – this is surely due to Perry's own partiality in regards to music, but it does make one wonder of the impact his work could have had in the propagation of music groups heralded by minority groups. Bands formed by people of color – dubbed Afro Punks – such as Bad Brains, Fishbone, and Pure Hell continue to remain unsung heroes of the subculture: in fact, it can be argued that these minority groups had twice the battle to fight compared to their white counterparts. They were faced with the challenge of carving out their own space in the punk community, as well as inside black culture.

It is evident that zines are stories told by people, for the people, expressed in a way that they want to tell them. They are not bound by a fixed art, photography, or typographic style, and they deliver key information on culture in a way that is reminiscent of capturing time, providing a physical imprint the likes of which mainstream means cannot hope to achieve. However, the fact remains that they are a single product of a sole creator, and no author is free from personal bias. Hence, while zines provided a creative outlet that offers complete artistic freedom to its inventors, and truly brought together a band of people in a community of shared values and

ideals in a time before social media and the internet, they are irrevocably bound to their creator's whims and fancies. This also indicates that they do not report all the facts: their content is limited in being as idiosyncratic as their individual publishers choose – and so, while providing an alternate point of view, it must be observed that they do so through a narrowed lens.

References

Gross, Jason. "Alternative TV - Mary Perry Interview." Alternative TV- Mark Perry Interview, Feb. 2001, <https://www.furious.com/perfect/alternativetv.html>.