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Queering Community Development in DIY punk spaces

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Introduction

Do-It-Yourself (DIY) approaches, which place artistic value on participation, have a long history in community organising and cultural production. From the 1970s, punk offered a new subcultural context in which DIY approaches were revisited, reinvented and reinvigorated.

Recent turns to intersectional feminist, queer, trans, race and disability politics have resulted in some punks questioning whether the value placed on participation might be exclusionary. In numerous collectives and spaces, this has resulted in a rethinking of DIY approaches to community development, arising from a growing recognition of the need for active work to empower marginalised groups.

In this chapter we show how queer feminist approaches to punk politics enable DIY collectives to prefigure the creative communities they wish to see. Analysing a study of UK punk against literature on prefiguration and community arts, we highlight how queer feminist punks can disrupt the dominant norms that marginalise their cultural contributions, while also facilitating the creation of new spaces, community groups and cultural artefacts.

Prefigurative social action

In this chapter, we position queer feminist punk organising as a form of *prefigurative* social action. As a concept, 'prefiguration' has been used to examine the politics and practices of predominantly leftist movements through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially in the Global North. Broadly defined, it describes 'activities that embody and enact the way in which one envisions a future (better) world' (Guerlain and Campbell, 2016: 221). Activists and social theorists position a

wide variety of ventures as prefigurative, from 19th Century anarchism (Boggs, 1977), to US anti-WWII pacifism in the 1940s (Polletta and Hoban, 2016), to community gardens in East London (Guerlain and Campbell, 2016), to the Indignados and Occupy movements of the early 2010s (Burgum, 2019).

In 1977 Carl Boggs used 'prefiguration' to distinguish between 'old' and 'New' left politics in Europe and the United States. In the context of rising Cold War tensions, growing suspicion of Soviet communism and/or socialism, and the authoritarianism of many Communist Parties, the New Left emerged in the late 1950s. It 'affirmed the importance of generalizing the struggles for self-management *beyond* the point of production' (Boggs, 1977: 119). Examples of this included seeking to enact new modes of organisation, integrating countercultural arts movements, and incorporating a range of 'social' issues alongside class struggle, including demands from the civil rights, feminist and gay liberation movements. Prefigurative movements may involve modelling an 'alternative' *within* wider society, aiming to influence wider society towards change, and/or focus on developing *processes* of exacting social change (Polletta and Hoban, 2016).

Whilst the New Left sought to model forms of radical equality, the movements themselves were still riddled with entrenched inequalities. In many leftist groups, white men dominated leadership and decision-making processes, leading to a prioritisation of class-based struggle over racial equality, gender equality or any other forms of struggle. In the Civil Rights and other racial equality movements, the role of women's oppression was often marginalised in favour of men; similarly, Black women found racial struggles were sidelined in many feminist groups (hooks, 1981). In 1977, Boston-based Black feminist lesbian group the Combahee River Collective implicitly acknowledged the limits of prefiguration within New Left, Black liberation, and feminist groups:

Many of us were active in those movements (Civil Rights, Black nationalism, the Black Panthers), and all of our lives were greatly affected and changed by their ideologies, their goals, and the tactics used to achieve their goals. It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was anti-racist, unlike those of white women, and anti-sexist, unlike those of Black and white men (Combahee River Collective Statement, 1983 [1977]: 265)

This statement resonated with Black feminist groups in the UK, as did Kimberlé Crenshaw's writing on intersectional oppression (Mirza, 2015). Crenshaw (1989) drew on case studies from US courts to show how neither the concept of race discrimination nor that of sex discrimination is sufficient to

account for Black women's specific experiences of oppression, as the impact of each is compounded by the *intersection* of racism and sexism. UK-based groups such as Brixton Black Women's Group therefore developed forms of prefigurative social action that were built on a recognition of intersectional oppression.

Similar critiques have been made of 21st Century protest camps associated with the global justice, counter-globalisation and Occupy movements. These campaigns targeted existing economic and political structures, modelling forms of 'horizontal' organising and consensus-based decision-making. Yet, decision-making was often ineffective or unrepresentative. Kyoko Tominaga (2017) draws on the example of the 2008 anti-G8 protests near Sapporo, Japan, to show how minority groups such as women and LGBTQ+ people felt marginalised in camps that reproduced traditional gender norms. Through modelling the Japanese camps on previous global justice protests, especially the 2007 anti-G8 protests in Germany, 'experienced' protesters took leadership positions, and Eurocentric behaviours were imposed in new spaces. One protester commented:

[I] was extremely irritated to see all the infrastructure in the protest camp. A room was for 'staff only', lavatory rooms were for only females and males, and other spaces were also full of discrimination and prejudice. Although meetings should have been bottom-up style, organizers often determined important issues by themselves with top-down management. (Nojiren, 2008 cited in Tominaga, 2017: 2077).

These critiques bear a striking resemblance to those levelled by the New Left at the 'old', and indeed by Black feminists at the New Left, showing how new modes of organising tend to replicate existing inequalities.

However, as noted by Polletta and Hoban (2016) a key feature of prefigurative organising is the importance of *process*. The difficult negotiations which took place in Japan's anti-G8 camps ultimately resulted in productive discussions and changed behaviours. For example, non-gendered toilets were introduced alongside female and male facilities. Through building community with others and working through their collective limitations, activists might therefore show that 'another world is possible' (Tominaga, 2017: 280).

Prefiguration, community development, and community arts

While discussions around prefiguration focus predominantly on political movements, the notion of prefiguring the world that you wish to see has clear implications for community development and community arts. Throughout the twentieth century there was a growing recognition that artistic practices have a role in community development and political struggles. Lee Higgins argues that the cultural and political upheaval of the 1960s gave rise to a new wave of UK community artists who 'had an emphasis on group collaborations and the obliteration of the distinction between performer and the audience. [...] [C]ommunity arts challenged the status of the individual artist, actively eroding the dominant [elitist] notion of artist as genius' (2008: 25).

Many understandings of community art from this period position artists as a sort of vanguard for their community, acting 'as conscious facilitators for people to express themselves through artistic means' (Higgins, 2008: 25). Annie Sloman (2012) shows that such initiatives have the power to bring communities together to identify important issues (e.g. water sanitation), to provide educative programmes (e.g. HIV/AIDs) and/or to engage in political protest (e.g. at anti-war rallies). In this way, community arts programmes work by 'expounding community visions and wishes – validating beliefs and sharing ideas, stories and aspirations' (Abah, 2007: 437).

Community arts may be prefigurative in that the act of creation is linked not only to imagining different futures, but also to the *process* of enacting social change through art. Jennifer Spiegel and Stephanie Parent's survey of participants in a community circus initiative in Quebec showed how socially marginalised participants were inspired to pursue work and/or education, and overcome personal trauma. Spiegel and Parent describe these as 'micropolitical revolutions' which alter 'power relations and feelings of collective worth' (2018: 602).

However, as with many community development initiatives and, indeed, other prefigurative movements, there are questions to be raised around 'top-down' versus 'bottom-up' work in arts programmes (Abah, 2007). Of particular concern is the potential for attempted community pacification, serving the interests of corporate bodies, governments and/or colonial powers rather than the community itself (Carpenter et al., 2016). Spiegel and Parent (2018) observe that through moulding 'productive' neoliberal citizens, the Cirque du Monde potentially depoliticised the community, drawing attention away from structural factors that cause marginalisation and harm in the first place. Sloman (2012) suggests that for community cohesion to be built properly in a way that allows for the potential of real change, creative arts project design should be participatory. We would

add that communities should be involved in deciding whether or not they want an intervention to occur in the first place.

Lee Higgins (2008) notes that there are forms of artistic community development which are both 'bottom up' in terms of their emergence, and which retain - indeed foster - political consciousness and activity. He suggests that the punk movement fulfils these criteria.

Punk music, style and art emerged in the UK in the 1970s. It was an explicit response to the glamour and elitism of 'mainstream' music such as stadium rock, with an underlying DIY ethos; the idea that anyone could and should be able to express themselves creatively, irrespective of formal musical/artistic training. Higgins observes that this created new forms of community between punks, accessible to anyone who wants to participate.

Many punk 'communities' have been explicitly political. Working class, leftist, and/or anarchist politics have been particularly prominent in art and lyrics; gigs are often used as 'benefits' to raise money or awareness for one cause or another. Higgins (2008) argues that this combination of political activism, consciousness raising, and 'bottom-up' community-building positions punk as an embodiment of artistic community development, highlighting the similarities between the aims and activities of punk communities and Mark Webster's community arts principles:

- the promotion of participation regardless of skill or 'talent';
- the work is undertaken by a group who have the same or collective identity; and
- the work is developed primarily to provide opportunities for people who through social or economic circumstances have little opportunity to participate in the arts (Webster, 1997 cited in Higgins, 2008: 27).

Queer/punk praxis

There is a long history of overlap in community experiences and rationales for 'punk' and 'queer' politics. In the UK, the 1970s were a time of growing visibility and possibility for people with non-normative genders and sexualities, some of whom were drawn to punk: prominent examples include Jayne County and Tom Robinson. Punks sometimes found they were more welcome in gay bars than mainstream pubs and venues, leading to overlap in social spaces and social relationships (Wilkinson, 2015). Through association with marginalised groups who 'defiantly confronted and dismantled stereotypes', punk gained a countercultural and political legitimacy which distinguished it from many

other youth styles (Lohman and Raghunath, 2019: 190). Yet, like other subcultural styles, mainstream and underground punk nevertheless remains dominated by white, cis, heterosexual men.

In the 1980s, a specifically *queer* politics emerged. Queer activism (e.g. Queer Nation and ACT-UP) celebrates difference, diversity, and change, while questioning liberal politics of tolerance and inclusion. Queer theory aimed to build on this through ‘queering’ knowledge, an approach which aims ‘to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimise, to camp up – heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them’ (Sullivan, 2003: vi). Queer feminists have expanded queer theory through incorporating analyses of gender inequalities and intersectional oppression (e.g. Ahmed, 2017).

Tenets of queer theory can be read as tenets of punk: both are intentionally confrontational, and often intentionally difficult or strange. In this sense, queer theory, queer feminist politics, and punk align around an active and ongoing rejection of ‘old’ ways of living, attempting to instead actively imagine and build the ‘new’. Both are prefigurative in that they seek to enact a constant process of renewal and change, calling the present into question and seeking always to manifest new futures.

In practice, neither punk cultures nor queer feminist activism and theory always live up to these ideals. For example, in both there is often an overwhelming, usually unreflexive centring of whiteness. The discipline of queer theory replicates structural racism within the education sector that upholds whiteness and systematically creates barriers for people of colour (hooks, 1994). Punks of colour, similarly, often struggle to gain the subcultural capital and creative recognition that white punks do, and those who *are* part of white-centred scenes are often subject to racist microaggressions (Phillips, 2017). Whilst queers, feminists, and punks (and community development workers) may ‘talk’ intersectional politics, this does not always translate to enacting them. This has consequences for who exactly is perceived as being in ‘the community’, and what exactly is being prefigured.

Contemporary DIY communities in the UK have attempted to address such issues through queer feminist punk praxis (see Lohman, 2021). Collectives in many major cities and some smaller towns put on gigs and festivals, providing platforms for bands and other artists (including poets, zine makers, and visual artists) to gather and share their creativity. This draws on the legacy of punk as open and inclusive, and pushes against exclusionary punk scenes in a manner similar to riot grrrl and queercore in the 1980s and 1990s (Lohman, 2021). In our discussion below, we show how queer/feminist DIY collectives do this prefiguratively through creating space for those marginalised in other creative cultures, focusing primarily on the example of the First Timers initiative.

Our arguments draw primarily on the findings of the *Queer/Feminist Punk* project undertaken by Kirsty from 2017-19. This was a socio-historic ethnography which produced rich qualitative data: approximately 400 hours of participant observation at a range of events, including gigs, festivals, meetings, and zine fairs. She further undertook 20 interviews with scene participantsⁱ, an analysis of websites and social media pages associated with events and punk collectives, and archival research of zine collections.

For this chapter, Kirsty shared preselected interview extracts (from 7 pre-coded interviews) with Ruth to contribute to a 'duoethnographic' analysis (Vincent and Erikainen, 2020). We jointly re-coded and analysed these extracts alongside two further data sets:

- The *Trans Music Communities* project: a small-scale ethnography undertaken by both authors in 2012-13. For a full discussion, see Pearce and Lohman (2019).
- Informal autoethnographic reflections: the authors have performed at gigs across the UK in queer feminist punk bands (Not Right, Dispute Settlement Mechanism, and wormboys) and organised events in Coventry, Leamington Spa, and Leeds between 2012 and the present day.

Queer/Punk prefiguration

First Timers is a London-based, collective-led community-building initiative that has run sporadically since 2013. Through a programme of events over several months, participants meet prospective bandmates and take part in workshops to learn the basics of playing instruments, song writing, and performance. This culminates in a festival where the new bands perform their songs for the first time.

First Timers is part of a wider constellation of queer and/or feminist DIY punk events in the UK and beyond. The person who instigated it, Bryony Beynon, described how she was inspired by Not Enough Fest in New Orleans and Portland, and First Times the Charm in Philadelphia. In turn, First Timers directly influenced similar events, e.g. Bristol's Eat Up For Starters, plus the creation of the venue DIY Space for London (aka DIY Space), led by Bryony. First Timers has also provided important opportunities for scene participants who have gone on to create influential events such as Decolonise Fest, the lessons from which feed back into community activities. Therefore, while our analysis here focuses on First Timers, it necessarily draws in other events and bands from queer and feminist DIY punk communities.

To register for a First Timers festival, prospective bands must meet a set of criteria to demonstrate their commitment to countering structural marginalisation within punk and DIY communities. The most recent signup document states:

First Timers is about getting new faces and voices in bands, and doing something about the lack of diversity in the make-up of our music community. The criteria below aren't intended to exclude anyone, but are [a] direct way of addressing this. As such, your band must be able to collective[ly] say YES to at least TWO of these statements about your band to be true. If you want to state anything else about the make up of your group that you feel meets [the] criteria, put it under 'Other.'

- One or more of us has never played in a band before
- One or more of us identify as one (or more!) of the following: a woman, a trans, queer, non binary or gender-non conforming person, LGBTQIA+, a person of colour, a person with a disability (visible or non-visible)
- One or more us is playing something in this band that they have never done before
- Other: (First Timers website)

Collective member Jodi suggests that the effects of these criteria are substantial: 'it's a very inclusive criteria [...] but what that means by explicitly stating that, is that it ends up that actually most of the people identify with one of those things' (First Timers Facebook Page, 06/10/2019).

Analysed against Webster's community arts principles, we see a strong rationale for understanding First Timers as a form of prefigurative arts-based community development. Webster's first principle emphasises the promotion of participation regardless of skill or 'talent'. First Timers' reason *for* existing is to promote participation, and to value this above any form of musical proficiency. Research participant Colette described it as

really awesome because people are playing for the first time, and there's that energy that's got a bit of that sort of high school talent competition [vibe], where everyone's parents are cheering each other, like their kids on or whatever (Colette).

This focus on communitarianism is a direct contrast with the competitiveness that underpins many other events such as 'Battle of the Bands' showcases, or festivals where there is prestige associated with how 'high up the bill' (how late in the night) a band performs. This community-oriented spirit,

supportiveness, and emphasis on participation provides space for people to experiment and 'fail' in a way that works against the capitalist logics that underpin commercial arts worlds. A crucial initiative facilitating this in London is DIY Space: a social centre run by and for its members (annual cost of membership £2), which opened in 2015.

DIY Space does allow for so many things to happen. In a really nice way, it means that if you're putting on a show for the first time and you don't know what the hell you're doing and you make loads of mistakes, there's people very quietly giving a bit of a guidance behind you, as opposed to, [if] you put on a gig in a[nother] bar, and they'd be like, "well we made no money on the bar tonight and you overran, so you're never allowed to do anything here ever again" (Colette).

The second of Webster's suggestions is that the work of artistic community development should be conducted 'by a group who have the same or collective identity'. First Timers founder Bryony had long been a member of punk and DIY scenes, where she saw first-hand how sexism and internalised misogyny dissuaded women - including her - from forming bands. When she eventually did so, there was a negative reaction from close friends in the scene:

like when we had a good show, he was like "people only like it because it's a girl band, so it's a novelty". And when we had a bad show, he was like, "well you know like you should learn to play your instruments". So either way you can't win here! (Bryony).

Many research participants described how their direct experiences of sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, classism and/or ableism *within* the cultural scenes they were part of spurred them to work with First Timers or other initiatives. They wished to create cultural space and provide platforms for others with similar experiences.

Jodi further explained how it was important that the workshops themselves were led by people from within the punk community who had experiences of marginalisation. Many are first-time teachers with no formal musical background:

the more relatable [tutors] are the ones who are just like, "oh yeah, I don't know any music theory but this is what I do when I write a song" (Jodi).

In this way, events such as First Timers offer an example of community members identifying their own needs and taking action collectively to address these for themselves, similar to those described by writers such as Oga Steve Abah (2007) and Annie Sloman (2012).

Lastly, Webster's third criterion suggests that community arts should provide for those who don't otherwise have the opportunity to participate. First Timers conceptualises 'opportunity' in a broad sense. A lack of representation and visible role models, as well as negative reactions to new musicians such as Bryony, are in this sense understood to form structural obstacles. By explicitly inviting those who may not otherwise think they *can* participate in DIY music making, the collective creates a needed opportunity. As musician and organiser Cassie A explained in her interview:

Initiatives like First Timers and in Bristol, Eat Up for Starters (which is set on a really similar model) have made huge headway in opening up the scene, making it less exclusive and less about white dudes. It's really about saying, "you can do this too". Come and learn how to play drums or come and learn how to [anything else] (Cassie A).

However, the contribution of First Timers goes beyond the three principles described by Webster. On their website, the First Timers collective assert that 'you can't be what you can't see', a popular phrase commonly attributed to children's rights activist Marian Wright Edelman. This perspective underpins their rationale for creating opportunities; however, the implications reach considerably farther than the bands created in any given year. The opening up of possibility through First Timers can have long-lasting and ongoing influence: this can be seen in the example of the band Big Joanie.

Big Joanie formed in 2013 through the first First Timers event. Guitarist and singer, Steph, had prior experience of queer and feminist punk/DIY scenes with her band My Therapist Says Hot Damn, and was frustrated with racism in these scenes. First Timers provided a necessary opportunity for her to form an explicitly Black feminist band.

I don't think I would have started the band without it. Even though I'd already been in a band, I think I always look for someone to invite me in, and [First Timers] was kind of like an invitation (Steph).

Following a successful first gig at First Timers, Big Joanie went on to receive national radio airplay, release multiple records, gig across the UK as well as in mainland Europe and the United States, and play London's Brixton Academy alongside veteran riot grrrl groups Bikini Kill and Sleater-Kinney. Big Joanie have consistently used these platforms to encourage other Black women to form bands.

I always thought there must be more people like me and I thought that we just need to create space for it. That was like the idea behind Big Joanie, just kind of being honest and true in ourselves. And making more space for ourselves to make some space for other people (Steph).

Steph reflected on seeing the effects of this at their gigs, and beyond throughout the community:

Kirsty: Were you seeing more people of colour coming along [to shows] than earlier?

Steph: I think slowly, yeah, slowly. I think over time, in terms of what other bands as well have done and what the scene's done. Now you look at the scene, it's completely different to when I first joined.

Kirsty: In terms of racial diversity?

Steph: [...] In terms of racial diversity but also in terms of people's attitudes [and accountability] to making sure that [...] people can access this kind of music and feel comfortable. It's not 100% perfect but it's a lot better than it was.

The success of Big Joanie, which sat alongside continued experiences of racism, inspired Steph to call out for other Black punks to come together to run their own festival. For Steph this was a logical extension of developing her community:

I posted on Facebook and asked, "if you would like to see a punk festival for Black punks, you know who would you like to play?" [...] People really wanted it to happen and like DIY Space was asking when I was going to put it on. [...] It was] creating more of a community, extending out beyond the band, finding people I hadn't met before that were in the community (Steph).

The collective that was formed, DIY Diaspora Punx, eventually took a broader remit and worked to support all punks of colour. Their Decolonise Festival has run at DIY Space annually since 2017. This also has an influence beyond the event itself, as seen in Cassie A's comment regarding how it marks out what is possible in the face of white promoters' inaction on including punks of colour in other events:

Whenever any promoter's like "oh it's just really hard to diversify my line-up", I use Decolonise Fest as a reference point. Because I'm like, "well if they can fill a whole weekend full of bands that will have at least one person of colour in, then you can find one band to put on your line-up" [...] they're showing that it is possible (Cassie A).

Events such as First Timers and Decolonise Fest, and bands such as Big Joanie, extend notions of prefigurative possibility by changing norms and expectations within broader punk scenes and beyond. For Steph, the racism and marginalisation that had made participation uncomfortable was therefore more likely to be recognised and addressed within community spaces.

Colette similarly comments on changing norms in regards to ableism brought about by First Timers and the accessibility regulations at its current venue, DIY Space. She says these have transformed her attitude to ensuring accessibility when running *any* event:

I used to, you know, just think that people in wheelchairs didn't go to gigs. Now I'm frequently at gigs with people with visible disabilities. And I never want to do something in a venue again which means that people couldn't go, you know? It's absolutely unnecessary (Colette).

Furthermore, community organisers regularly contemplate how they could 'do' better. While Big Joanie were to form through the 2013 event, in her interview Bryony reflected - with some regret - on her initial decision not to explicitly include race in the eligibility criteria of First Timers:

If I'm honest, the first one, I was thinking quite narrowly about gender and gender diversity in the scene. [...] This is embarrassing [...] but I didn't feel confident [to] put on the guidelines something around race and ethnicity. I [wondered], oh is it my place as a white person to be like, "I'm inviting you to come and do a band" [that's] really patronising [...] I had those anxieties around getting it wrong (Bryony).

Bryony described how by 2016, the second First Timers, she had learnt to better make space for punks of colour:

[There's a] progression that happened in broader punk and DIY communities between 2013 and 2016. [...] I reflect on I suppose my own decision, now, absolutely as a white woman, it *is* my place to be like "we need to make more room" [for punks of colour]. [...] By 2016, absolutely, I was like "yeah, hell yeah, [race] is one of the criteria, of course!" (Bryony)

Similarly, as abled and white people, we (the authors) have also found ourselves productively challenged by the contributions of disabled punks and punks of colour. This led us to reflect on the whiteness and inaccessibility of gigs we organised and played. When organising events, we always sought to be inclusive; however our achievements were inconsistent. For example, we changed our approach to designing events such as Revolt! (Coventry, 2012-17) shifting from avoiding booking all-white lineups, to avoiding line-ups with a single tokenistic performer of colour. However, we went little beyond this (still tokenistic approach) in terms of reaching out to punks of colour and remained an all-white organising team. In running Revolt! we sought a venue that was wheelchair accessible, had handrails, and described the access provisions of our events in advance. In 2014 we pushed for

the venue to make their stage wheelchair accessible; yet in 2015 we chose to run Femmington Spa Queer Fest in a basement venue without a proper lift (Leamington Spa, 2015).

These reflections highlight how the process of prefigurative community development is - like queerness and like punk - necessarily continual, uneven and messy. For each improvement that is made, there remain issues and failings. Reflecting on her experiences in Bristol (a very racially diverse, but divided city) Cassie A said:

I think the biggest changes that I've seen in the punk scene have definitely been around our understanding of gender, and the spectrum that is gender and the spectrum that is sexuality and identity more broadly. Our support and respect for trans people and gender non-conforming people and queer people. It's not to say that we are perfect at all, because we're definitely not. I still think we've got a huge way to go in terms of representation for all those people, and in particular people of colour. There's still a massive lack of representation in terms of people of colour on the stage, behind the scenes, promoters, and in the audience. Like I'm still usually the only person of colour at the show (laughs) sometimes, depending on how big or small the show is. Usually the only person of colour performing (Cassie A).

For Cassie A, the work of Eat Up for Starters is ongoing and needs to consistently improve. She identified how they must do better at reaching out to Bristol's communities of colour. She further discussed improvements to their skill-sharing provision; beyond the basics of learning instruments, they began working to provide workshops on sound engineering and technical equipment.

Successful prefigurative communities do not rest on their laurels, but instead consistently look to ensure the longevity and continuation of their work. Steph reflected on the future in regards to Decolonise Fest:

I'm struggling to see how to make lasting change, how to make this kind of like ... so it's not just these three festivals, and how do we make sure that more festivals happen? (Steph)

Other projects have also grappled with this, with participants commenting on the importance of bringing in new generations and new voices to learn from. Cassie A described how much she has learnt from younger punks that have come into the community, in an example of cross-generational

exchange. By the second First Timers, Bryony was joined in the organising work by a collective of those who had participated the first one:

it was all people who had been in First Timers bands [that] approached me[...] “we want to take this on”. And you know who better to run the thing than the people who know how impactful it could be (Bryony).

Reflecting on leaving London, and with it her involvement with First Timers and DIY Space, she noted that:

the mark of a successful project is being able to completely remove yourself, and the thing still stays standing, like Jenga (Bryony).

Conclusion

Queer feminist punk community initiatives, such as First Timers, provide for a cultural politics of the marginalised. As Cassie A observed:

music is the perfect outlet for feminism. Writing and reading and all those things are really important, but as an activist tool, [a] creative tool for activism, [it] is so expressive. [...] The establishment is scared of angry women, and to channel it through music that can reach a lot of people is a really good way of organising and building community (Cassie A).

In this chapter we have shown how First Timers prefigures a desired future through valuing *participation* above and beyond elitist or capitalist logics. It relies on community members to identify their own needs and concerns, and to use DIY skill-sharing techniques to provide and extend creative opportunities to others. The effects of these practices have norms and expectations within and beyond their communities. Most importantly, community members engage in self-reflexive processes to recognise their mistakes, and welcome new voices that challenge the community to continue to improve their development work. They evidence a commitment to socio-political renewal and change that looks inward as well as outward, calling the present into question while seeking to manifest new futures. Cassie A succinctly summarised this ethos:

do you not find that when you’ve found community that’s positive, that’s trying to be better, there’s like [a] beacon of hope in a really shit world? [...] The world is crumbling, we’re all going to burn in a fire from the heat of the sun probably,

but before that happens, we can enjoy a punk show and support each other and watch people grow and watch people start bands and become happy and find their people (Cassie A).

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ⁱ Participants were offered the opportunity to use a pseudonym where desired. Some opted to use their name in recognition of their 'public' role as creative community members.