

PUNK



Why PUNK?

If nearly ten years of Trumpian reality have produced anything of value, it is **radical disillusionment**. The pretense that the Western-led global order was uniquely moral has become increasingly difficult to maintain. International law turns out to apply depending on who breaks it. The rules-based order is being dismantled by the same hands that built it.

The cynical interests underneath are now visible enough that Western power can no longer claim a different category from any other.

As various old men are bombing places to avoid legal prosecution, young men are smashing their bones instead of going to therapy, young women are readily embracing gender norms that took generations of political action to push back on.

We live in times of cultural regression and reemerging feudal economic dynamics. It might be fair to say things are not “ok”.

Being subjected to this crumbling hegemony might eventually bring us much closer as human beings, once we realise that the barriers that divide us have been constructed all along. But we're still mid-process it seems.

In times of severe injustice, being neutral becomes a crime.

At the Berlin International Film Festival this year, even renowned artists felt unable to take any position on matters of humanitarian dimension, not to compromise their accessibility as a brand.

Have we become unable to risk anything? Has postmodernity finally succeeded in fully neutering any meaningful spirit of resistance?

We have become so divided along aesthetics that it's become very hard to see whose intererests we actually share. We build communities based on vibes, not economic situation, not even moral conviction.

This is the right moment to look at the concept of punk. Not as a historical reference. Not as a costume. But as a cultural concept that has always emerged in response to exactly this kind of condition.

When the gap between official narratives and lived reality becomes too wide to ignore, when compliance is dressed up as common sense, and when the cost of having an actual position starts to feel too high. The punk spirit has been periodically reborn and reinterpreted by youth cultures across five decades. The question is whether it can be again and what that would actually require.

CHAPTER 1

When did rebellion
start to feel so
lame?

“It’s easier to imagine the
end of the world than the
end of capitalism.”

Mark Fisher, Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?

Gen Z is visually highly trained
and socially very conservative:
they know exactly how far they
can push the envelope while pro-
fitting from the valor of cultural
subversion, without risking real
economic opportunity.

Rebellion has been
replaced by
moodboard capitalism.
Choose your fighter.



*From Dark Academia to Tarot Mystic, Fasting
Ascetic to Blue Collar Cosplay: your algorithm
suggests an array of personas, that are safe to
adopt.



You can live out the fantasy of a subversive identity, while keeping it surface-level enough to remain employable.

Essentially, this is postmodern capitalism doing what it does best: hollowing out working-class resistance until it no longer poses a threat

Capitalism has become disturbingly good at absorbing and neutralizing dissent*



*Postmodernity references itself. It absorbs every critique and re-packages it as a new aspirational trend cycle. Marketing systems don't suppress subcultures anymore. They extract them and integrate them into brand positioning.



Examples:

- * "Rebellious" fashion becomes Zara-ready in three weeks
- * Luxury sells "distress" and industrial workwear (see recent collections by Prada)
- * Art school functions as an economic filter
- * Subcultures come visually pre-packaged on Pinterest

Mark Fisher's concept of „**depressive hedonia**“* feels like an apt description of GenZs compulsive pursuit of pleasure. There are more aesthetic options than ever before, while offering less sense of meaning than many generations before.



*Mark Fisher (1968–2017), cultural theorist and author of *Capitalist Realism* (2009). Fisher coined „**depressive hedonia**“ to describe not an inability to experience pleasure, but an inability to experience anything else — compulsive stimulation that produces only numbness.

The curated aesthetic version signals:

- carelessness
- depth
- authenticity

But while remaining optional - that's the difference



working class aesthetics are shaped by

- limitation
- necessity
- material
- constraint
- improvisation



Only if we learn to see the gap between real substance and aesthetic simulation can we learn how to choose substance again.

CHAPTER 2

Reinventing compliance

Capitalism does not persist
because people love it.

It persists because every generation invents a new way to live inside it.

Different generations have developed different coping mechanisms that make participation within the system feel

Boomers ---> institutional ambition
[Climb/Accumulate/Stabilize]

Gen X ---> irony
[detach/mock/survive culturally]

Millenials ---> hope+hustle
[optimize/personal brand/side projects]

GenZ ---> disillusion + opportunism
[signal critique/curate dissent]

Somehow we have pushed these coping mechanisms so far that it feels almost impossible to refuse the system at large.

PUNK proposes refusal, opposed of molding itself to a problematic framework.

We all carry the mini surveillance computer in our pocket. We all have to remain employable in cities that grow increasingly expensive.

Optimization has become the default setting. But sometimes we have to remind ourselves: it is not the only option.



The perfect symbol of this reawakening of resistance is the fictional character Bartleby in **Bartleby, the Scrivener** by Herman Melville.

Bartleby works as a copyist on Wall Street, reduced to a human machine. Faced with a system that strips him of his humanity, he begins to refuse it.

Not dramatically.

Not heroically.

He simply says:

“I would prefer not to.”

Bartleby's quiet withdrawal becomes a form of non-violent resistance against societal expectations and economic conformity. The sentence was later echoed in movements like Occupy Wall Street, proving that resistance does not have to be loud or spectacular.

It can begin with quiet refusal. This is the difference between identity performance and actual resistance.

Bartleby's refusal was quiet. But he clearly took a stance against something. That clarity feels almost radical today. The pressure to perform under the constant public gaze of social media has made it much more difficult to stand with your true values. It creates a climate that is much more prone to personal attacks, corrections and unolicited advice than any face-to-face interaction.

We have adopted ironic distance as self-protection, afraid of appearing cringe or naïve.

Even worse: both the center-left establishment and the right have framed the term "radical" as irresponsible, naïve, and destructive.

When in fact it simply means thinking problems from their root, as symptoms of the systems that gave birth to them.

In times of foggy economic prospects, the rise of global fascism and feudal lords owning the infrastructure we live and work within, being perceived as radical can carry real economic and physical consequences.

The result is that no one says what they really think anymore. It's just vibes. But maybe we can't afford that escapism anymore.

Maybe the situation is too grim to put on your €90 vintage worker's uniform and harvest the vibes.

Maybe the missing step is not a new look.
But a real moral stance.

CHAPTER 3

We are all Hipsters

The Hipster* is maybe the most hated cultural archetype of the 21st century. But the disdain we feel for him makes it hard to grasp how deeply he has shaped modern consumption

...and how much we have all followed in his footsteps.

*The Hipster, a typically white, cis male, urban, millennial figure, has essentially created the postmodern lifestyle economy we take for granted today.

The Hipster has single-handedly created an enormous diversity in the beverage market, made our need for purpose accessible for clickbait-activism, streamlined all our daily chores through apps and gentrified our more deprived neighborhoods.



No wonder we hate him. But as a pre-Hipster-reality slips more and more out of reach, we have to admit: we have all become him.

The reason this model of modern living has proven so extraordinarily successful and is very hard to shake is rooted in how we form identity.

Georg Simmel argued in 1908 that identity is shaped between two polar human needs: belonging and distinction.

We all navigate society along those two basic drives: wanting to fit in, and to stand out. How much we lean toward one or the other is a matter of personal temperament, but everyone needs both.

Postmodern consumption gives you the ability to constantly negotiate your identity between those two poles. To morally and aesthetically signal which group you belong to, while finding small, specific touches that mark you as an individual within it. To add your particular flavored sirup to the mainstream latte you just got off Pinterest.

Even when we can see through it, even when we are aware of the scams of modern consumption.

Breaking out of the hipster mold remains so difficult because it is bound to our identity. To stop consuming in this way feels like dropping out of the conversation entirely. Like ceasing to exist socially.

*the moral weight of consumption has been strategically shifted onto the individual consumer, in a world where a person in the top 0.1% can emit more carbon in a single day than someone in the poorest 50% emits in an entire year (Oxfam, 2025)

So how, in these grim times, do we break out of the hipster habitus? How do we develop something like genuine resilience again?

The location for this existential question is not in the store, not in the media we consume or in how we encounter technology but in the way we face ourselves every day.



Source: Wikipedia - Mirror Stage, a concept in the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan



*Slavoj Žižek, photographed in characteristic contemplation. The Slovenian philosopher has repeatedly drawn on toilet design as a site of cultural analysis — most notably arguing that the traditional German shelf toilet, by depositing excrement on a dry platform before flushing, uniquely invites inspection. Some things, he suggests, are worth looking at before they disappear.

It starts with becoming sensitive to our own automatisms. To noticing the choices that feel safe, and make us seem interestingly unique. This might be the most important territory to apply all that mindfulness we have been practicing.

But not to optimize ourselves, but to honestly examine how complicit we have become, while still signaling that we are cool.

And then. Breathe in for 4, hold... release for 8, slowly pause.

Critical thinking is still within us. But it requires refusing our conditioning, or at least trying. You don't have to lurch into the opposite extreme. You don't have to quit your job or crash the car you're in. But you can find critical awareness again.

In times of crisis, most people retreat into rigid ideological frameworks — they offer orientation when everything feels unstable. Pure dogmatism is obviously a philosophical trap. But so is total freedom.

The punk exercise is something harder and more subtle than either:

To stay with the dirt.

To sit with the contradictions that our liberal consumer systems have so carefully constructed for us, and to refuse to look away.

PUNK as Strategy

So if HIPSTER subversion is:

_moral consumption

_taste culture

_irony

_moodboard subversion

_algorithm-friendly edginess

Then PUNK values must be something harder to commodify

1_Staying with the Dirt

*The refusal to resolve complexity into clean answers or comfortable positions. An acceptance that the contradictions in our systems are real, and that sitting with them honestly is the necessary starting point — for critical thinking, for resistance, for anything that follows.

2_Deconstruction

*The habit of questioning frameworks before working within them. An interest in who built the system, who it serves, and what it silently normalizes. Punk subversion operates at the level of structure, not just aesthetics. It begins where hipster irony ends.

3_Self-Determination

*The discipline of autonomy: knowing what you actually think, separate from what the algorithm rewards, and then acting on it. DIY not as an aesthetic but as a principled practice. The capacity to build from a self-determined position — without waiting for permission, without optimizing for approval.

4_The Cost of Conviction

*Active resistance as a choice with real material consequences, not a mood, not an aesthetic. The willingness to prioritize authentic position over market value, to hold a legible stance on something that matters even when strategic ambiguity would be more comfortable. A recognition that something real is always at stake, and that this is actually the point.

What 's next?

What feels powerful again is not louder signaling, but material convictions. Not aesthetic rebellion, but practiced integrity. Not the performance of a stance, but the willingness to hold one when it costs something.

PUNK as strategy centers a different set of commitments: holding a position even when it is socially inconvenient.

- *Process over performance.
- *Care even when no one is watching.
- *Active resistance rather than ironic disengagement.
- *Actual organizing and conversation instead of click-based activism.
- *The courage to displease.

This is not about optimization. It is not about personal branding dressed as conscience. It is about moral survival inside systems that reward neutrality and spectacle in equal measure.

Is the spirit of punk dead?
No, but it has been in a state of managed sedation for some time. Kept alive enough to be referenced, not alive enough to threa-

To actually revive it requires something the current cultural moment has made genuinely difficult: the willingness to risk something. To ask uncomfortable questions without already knowing which answer is safe. To refuse the next iteration of hipster subversion, however well-designed it is.

Whatever comes next has to be more than another moodboard.

It has to play out on a less performative stage, one capable of actually resisting the systems it critiques, rather than being absorbed by it before the ink is dry.

The punk spirit was never about a sound, a look, or an era. It was about the refusal to make peace with what is unacceptable. That refusal is still available. It just requires choosing it.



2026