

# Negotiating the Revolt: Punk in Times of Political Transformation



Photographed by: Lubomír Kotek

The conference is organized by the Institute of Czech History at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University alongside the project *Negotiating the Revolt in Czech and Slovak Postsocialist Transition*, which is supported by the Czech Science Foundation and carried out in collaboration with the Archive of Czech and Slovak Subcultures, the Centre for the Study of Popular Culture and the Punk Scholars Network Slovak and Czech.

**Date:** May 16 – 18, 2025

**Venue:** Eternia, Nádražní 3, Prague 5, Czech Republic: <https://www.eterniasmichov.com/>

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## **Call:**

The fall of communist rule in Central Europe has often been interpreted as a long-awaited renaissance of civil society, a national emancipation or “rebirth of Eastern Europe” characterised by a state of euphoria, at least during and immediately after the political upheavals. Artists and intellectuals who had participated in the broadly contextualised cultural opposition often believed that democracy would bring the creative freedom they had been longing for. Transformations in politics and the economy affected the institutional background of the music and entertainment industry and brought new challenges to social hierarchies by redefining categories such as “alternative”, “underground”, “official” and “unofficial”. With the opening of post-socialist countries to global cultural trends and markets, the youth began to be seen as a key marketing demographic and a target for both material and nonmaterial cultural production.

As Katherine Verdery has pointed out, people in socialist countries had built up a great illusion – a myth of the West, which they saw as a land of unimaginable prosperity in contrast to their lives under socialism. The collapse of the socialist system led them to expect that now, overnight, their lives would become like those in their myth, and westerners encouraged this idea. Cultural production in the transition era and 1990s, which has been described by economists through the processes of liberalisation, restructuralization and privatisation, reflected and represented these meanings, and new political, economic and other conditions and values were embodied in social life.

Regime changes were quickly followed by disillusionment and systemic criticism directed against the new political elites – often former dissidents, current state policy or popular culture production, as well as against the commodification of subcultures – especially in the punk and hardcore milieu. In fact, some alternative and punk bands and musicians became mainstream stars, regularly appearing in the media, making records and music videos, and ranking high on the charts. Although they were presenting their genres to the public and gaining recognition and new fans for them, this also required a certain degree of adaptation to the needs of the emerging decentralised music market, for which they often faced criticism “from within” for “selling out themselves and the subculture”. Hand in hand with this criticism, new activist platforms and movements were also emerging.

The overall aim of the conference is to provide an understanding of cultural production, consumption, dissemination and circulation in transforming societies. Research of the transitional period can help to better understand the role of culture in different political regimes and the cultural consequences of political change as well as its role in establishing new models of societal and economic organisation.

**Thematically**, we seek to cover the meanings and actions connected to “punk” on five levels:

- a) **Punk as discourse practice:** performances, locations, texts and clubs. How did different punk actors (individual and collective) present themselves and argue their liminal position towards the mainstream culture and other communities of style?
- b) **Punk as mainstream:** music charts and labels, propagation and TV appearance. How did punk manage to enter the wider pool of mainstream popular culture practices at the turn of the 1990s?
- c) **Punk and politics:** activism and expert approaches, which are also connected to new social movements (vegetarianism/veganism, animal and human rights, anti-capitalism, anti-racism, racism and nationalism, neo-Nazism, ecology, feminism etc.). How were these activist agendas received in the subcultural milieu? How was the approach towards politics negotiated?

d) **Punk as a personal issue:** individual revolt, hybridity, lifestyle issues and autonomy. Despite understanding the “personal as political”, certain practices have pointed more to the individual than a collective practice. How did the psychology of different actors relate to their “punk revolt”? How did the “punk revolt” relate to different ecstatic practices and aims to achieve personal autonomy?

e) **Punk as retro:** *Long durée* reflection, ageing, remembrance, disenchantment, disillusionment, nostalgia, idealising the 1980s and 1990s. How is the “punk revolt” evaluated ex-post? How are punk actors using their punk histories to achieve legitimacy and subcultural capital?

**Abstract deadline and submissions:** December 20, 2024. The submission by e-mail to [punkconferenceprague@gmail.com](mailto:punkconferenceprague@gmail.com) must include the following: abstract of 1,600-3,000 characters including spaces; keywords; curriculum vitae; one paragraph of short introduction including name and surname, affiliation, main research topic.

**Evaluation date:** January 10, 2025

**Language:** English

**Papers:** In the future, we would like to submit a selection of conference papers to an international publishing house and/or academic journal. To enrich the discussion, we would like to kindly ask you to send us the preliminary version of your papers by 30 April, 2025. These papers will be made accessible to all conference speakers. The time allotment for presentations at the conference will probably be 15-20 min. + follow-up discussion.

**Additional program:**

- excursion to the Archive of Czech and Slovak Subcultures
- punk gig
- film presentation and discussion on making of the DIY documentary *Garáže (Garage)* on a significant site of the punk scene in Bratislava (SK)
- exhibition of early 1990s punk and hardcore posters in the Czech Republic and Slovakia
- roundtable discussion on punk and transition.

**Conference fee for 3 days of the conference:** 500 CZK / 20 EUR (covers coffee breaks and snacks during the conference; lunch, dinner and entry to the gig are not included)

**Entrance fee for visitors per day:** 50 CZK / 2 EUR

**Accommodation:** at the participants' own expense (we will provide basic information and support in this process)

**For further information, please follow our Facebook event:** <https://fb.me/e/fmpBH6K4D>