

COLLINGWOOD'S GOO

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for Richard Gilmore: friend, mentor, hero, and überpunk

...problem, problem, problem, the problem is you, problem, problem, problem, what you gonna do...?

Sex Pistols, "Problems" (1977)

I was gonna call this short essay "Collingwood's (S)punk." Then I would've had a hip parenthetical mixed with a topical pun mixed with a spurt of sexual irreverence. But *goo* is better. Collingwood liked goo. Goo is good.

...there's one thing they can't teach you: how to feel free ...

Sex Pistols, "Schools are Prisons" (1979)

R.G. Collingwood is the patron saint of punk archaeology. That's why his goo is relevant here. We punks are his daughters and sons, his progeny unknown. Collingwood and his goo made us possible. Or, rather, he helped make the celebration of the metacritical dialectic possible – before it was hip. Because we punk archaeologists are all meta-critical, dialectical hipsters. We punks revel in the self-conscious study of historical processes. (As did Collingwood.) We punks revel in archaeologies of human action. (As did Collingwood.) And we punks see our body of evidence as a dynamic, reflective detritus, the detritus of dynamic human minds and dynamic human intentions. (As did Collingwood.) As emotional, subjective, and imaginative entities, we punks never study the "unfiltered past." (Whatever the fuck that's supposed to mean.) Rather, we read and create our histories through our own known and unknown presuppositions. The proto-punk, Collingwood, called this the second degree of reflective philosophy, and we punks dig it. We dig thinking about our own thoughts about our own histories. We dig the eternal regress created therein, the mirror within a mirror within a mirror, the infinite reflection of process, of a mind studying itself. And we dig the fact that the colors of our mirrors are tinted by the biological, social, political, cultural, and philosophical frames that hold them. Goo is good.

...now I wanna know, now I wanna know...

Sex Pistols, "Liar" (1977)

“But why not just invoke Nietzsche here?” You might be asking yourself. (Because you remember that Michael Hinz has demonstrated some important similarities between the Nietzsche and Collingwood’s views of history, specifically their entwined views of agency and transformation; or maybe because Mark Sinclair has shown that Nietzsche conceived the practice of history as being both fundamentally creative – as did Collingwood – and partially subjective – as did Collingwood.) But Nietzsche won’t do. He wasn’t an archaeologist. He was half mad. And Germans don’t know shit about punk. You ever try listening to German punk? Big Balls and the Great White Idiots? A bunch of pseudo-Nazi’s screaming Sex Pistols covers? Pathetic. The patron saint of punk archaeology has gotta be an archaeologist. He’s gotta be at least half sane. And he’s gotta be British. (That Collingwood was heavily influenced by both Kant and Hegel doesn’t disqualify him.) Triple check. Goo is good.

...turn the page and it's the scoop of the century...

Sex Pistols, “I Wanna Be Me” (1979)

As a goo-loving, goo-spewing proto-punk, Collingwood rejected the flaccid inductive generalizations so common in the lamest of histories and archaeologies. And we punks follow him. Part of our punk project is to try to recover potential meanings, to battle against entropy, to both generate and reflect cultures *and* the minds that generated and reflected them. Our project is not to prove claims “true” or “false” or “wrong” or “right,” or to look for mere facts. Epistemologies and motivations are held by all past, present, and future peoples – even when they are poorly understood by themselves, by ourselves, or by other historical agents. Yet, the possibility of historical and archaeological understanding for Collingwood and for punks *does* exist – insofar as we can (dare to) step behind the eyes and into the shoes of our subjects of study and (dare to) debate, approximate, and synthesize within the ever shifting boundaries of the evidence. *Archaeological understanding is possible by way of the archaeological imagination.* Does this mean that we punks somehow mystically channel or magically commune with past agents? Hardly. (Jean Rudhardt’s famous remark regarding ancient Greek religion – “Le difficulté principale de l’étude des religions me paraît être celle de la compréhension d’autrui” – can apply with equal force to the study of all archaeologies.) Does it mean that we just make shit up? Hell no. It just means that Collingwood and we punks believe that all human-historians share some conceptual common ground that we often (self-consciously or not) evoke when we try to understand each other. We punks, following our patron saint, simply own this reality, a reality that we believe to be inherent in our processes. Of course, we know that this common ground is gooey. This was why punk archaeologists love the recovery, description, and analysis of physical evidence. Whatever common human

goo may exist across time and space, the physical data provides a boundary and a means by which we can explore this goo's meanings without letting the archaeological imagination completely off the chain. We punks share Collingwood's passion for the concrete and his belief that the concrete both generates and reflects its meanings in juxtaposition with goo. Goo is good.

...your future dream is a sharpie's scheme...

Sex Pistols, "Anarchy in the U.K." (1977)

Action – both for punks and for Collingwood – is key. Action – both for punks and for Collingwood – is a necessary mode of being *and* the subject of the historico-archaeological project. Punk archaeology rejects the traditional academy insofar as it is committed to a culture of privileged, solipsistic navel gazing. (Privileged, solipsistic navel gazing is “action,” to be sure, but it is the limp action of a castrated intelligentsia rendered incompetent by their own flaccid habits.) Punk archaeologists embody theory in deed. Punk archaeologists merge idea with praxis. Punks make history. Punks *are* history. Punks act. Punks do. Punks kick ass. There is little doubt that Collingwood was a doer, a man of action, but he also believed that we are all historical agents, that we all make things happen. (And by “all,” I mean *all* humans, past, present, and future.) “When we think of history as merely a trade or profession, a craft or calling, we find it hard to justify our existence as historians,” Collingwood writes in *The Philosophy of History*. “What can the historian do for people except turn them into historians like himself? And what is the good of doing that? It is not simply a vicious circle, whose tendency is to overcrowd the ranks of the profession and to produce an underpaid ‘intellectual proletariat’ of sweated teachers. This may be a valid argument against the multiplication of historians, if history is merely a profession, but it cannot be if history is a universal human interest; for in that case there are already as many historians as there are human beings, and the question is not ‘Shall I be an historian or not?’ but ‘How good an historian shall I be?’” In other words, to be human is to be a historian. To be human is to act, to make, to record, and to frolic in the goo of the past. Goo is good.

...oh God save history, God save your mad parade, oh Lord God have mercy, all crimes are paid...

Sex Pistols, “God Save the Queen” (1977)

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All Sex Pistols lyrics: <http://www.azlyrics.com/s/sexpistols.html>

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