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Hey you, standing there, what you got to stare at?
The punk and post-punk female in British film: *Breaking Glass* (Brian Gibson, UK, 1980)

The liberating impact of punk rock for young women, their high visibility on the late-1970s British punk scene and their forceful creative contributions across many areas of punk and post-punk culture have been widely acknowledged. As Simon Frith and Howard Horne have observed, punk from the start raised questions about sexual codes (*Art Into Pop*, 1987: 155), opening up an expressive space which women felt able to enter on their own terms, unconstrained by narrow norms of femininity or acceptable sexuality – a trend which continued as punk segued into post-punk / new wave from 1979 onwards. By contrast, women were surprisingly marginal, or marginalised, in most of the key British punk-related films. The two exceptions were Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* (1978) – a Swifitean vision of a near-future London, centred around a collective of post-sexual, nihilistically violent female protagonists (a reversal of gender power relations part-inspired by Valerie Solanas's 1968 *The SCUM Manifesto*) – and *Breaking Glass*, an unpretentious fiction feature tracing the rise, exploitation and crash of a spikily idealistic young post-punk female singer-songwriter, Kate (played by the unknown Hazel O'Connor, who also wrote and performed the songs and enjoyed brief stardom and chart success as a result of the film).

Where *Jubilee*'s critical stature has been consolidated by Jarman's status as art-cinema auteur, *Breaking Glass* – unapologetically mainstream, conventionally filmed, and consciously conceived to bring the current volatile and explosive trend in rock music (to quote its press notes) to a younger audience likely to have missed the original punk scene – has, by contrast, generally been dismissed as inauthentic: a highly conventional backstage musical story dressed up in punk apparel, according to Kevin J. Donnelly (*British punk films*, *Journal of Popular British Cinema* 1, 1998: 110). It nevertheless remains significant as the only feature film inspired by 1970s British punk and post-punk culture to centre on a sympathetic female protagonist who might be construed as a role model, and to address a non-X-certificate audience. This paper will focus on *Breaking Glass* as both female-centred narrative and youth film, and its representation of the post-punk female in relation to the wider place of women in punk. Of particular interest is the question of how 1970s punk's gender-neutral ethos, notions of post-punk (anti-)femininity and female agency are negotiated in the context of a conventional genre narrative which requires the exploitation and downfall of the female protagonist.